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DIVERSIFYING THE TEACHER PIPELINE: BARRIERS THAT PREVENT TEACHERS OF
COLOR FROM ENTERING THE PROFESSION

A Dissertation Presented for the Doctorate of Education Degree

Department of Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Every year the number of certified teachers entering the teacher workforce is declining across the nation. This decline affects districts across the country, but it especially affects the students that these districts serve. While there is a decline in teachers overall, there is a severe decline in African American teachers. Non-Caucasian students are the largest demographic of students that attend public schools (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). In 2001, forty percent of the students in public education identified as a student of color (Ladson-Billings, 2005a). At the same time, only twelve percent of teachers were non-Caucasian. For those diverse students that attend these schools, they do not see themselves in the faces of the teachers. These students are often left to feel as though they do not fit into the school setting. This feeling of loneliness and isolation affects students and strips them of the power that an education imparts on one's self-worth and self-esteem (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This study aims to look at the lack of African American teachers in K-12 education to determine what barriers Mississippi teacher education candidates are facing in their quest to attain certification and what measures are being taken by the teacher education programs to combat barriers to diversifying the teacher pipeline.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving mother and my grandmother. Everything that I am and that I hope to be is because I have always had the love and support of both of you. This dissertation is not a testament of my hard work, but of every sacrifice and prayer that you both poured into me. The example that you both set for me is why I grind for my faith, family, and future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This process has made me reflect on myself in every avenue of my life. First, I acknowledge GOD, whose vision for me has always been bigger than I could have ever imagined. For every door, he has closed and every window he has allowed me to pass through, I am thankful and blessed.

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Most importantly, I would like to acknowledge my husband and my daughters. Shawn Avent, I love doing life with you. You are my best friend and my biggest supporter. Being your wife has made me a better person and a better human. Aubrey and Jordyn, you two inspire me to passionately reach every child that I encounter. Thank you for allowing me to be your very first teacher in life.

PREFACE

This study involved a teacher preparation program at a selected university in Mississippi. I was inspired to write this dissertation due to my personal experiences as an African American educator who feels isolated in public education. This piece of work is important to me because it will inform other educators about the importance of having systems in place to address barriers that African American candidates are faced with as they seek certification. My target audience for this study is all educators responsible for addressing diversity in public education. My expectation from this piece of work is to inform other educators about barriers that African American education candidates face and the impact that eliminating those barriers can have on diversifying the teacher pipeline.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Schools are important. Most students attend school for seven to eight hours a day. During the week, they are in school more than they are at home. From Pre-K to 12th Grade, for 180+ days a year, students will spend fourteen years in a school surrounded by peers and teachers. This can lead one to conclude that the public-school system has as great an influence on children as students' own parents.

With that much time spent in schools with students, educators have the opportunity to be role models. Often, this role model may be lacking from the students' own homes. In 2014, the Kids Count Data Center reported that 66 percent of African American children were from a single parent home. In comparison, only 25 percent of Caucasian students were from a single parent home (Children, 2016). The differences in these students' academic experiences could be the result of single parent homes versus dual parent homes. Dual parent homes are expected to have a higher socioeconomic status in comparison to a single parent home. Family background does matter in the case of student outcome, but cannot explain the academic inequity in its entirety (Lewis & Diamond, 9). Teachers have the opportunity to become that influential role model that these students are lacking. This is especially true of African American teachers.

Positively or negatively, students are influenced by their surroundings. What happens when they do not feel like they belong in their surroundings? What happens when they feel like no one has their best interest in their surroundings? This is the case for many African American

students who are in public schools. In most schools, teachers who do not look like them are oftentimes shaping African American students.

It is hard for African Americans to believe in themselves when they do not think that their teachers believe they can be a successful student. Everybody needs somebody to believe in them. Rigza (2016) found that African American teachers are much more likely than white teachers to think a black student will graduate from high school or get a college degree, especially if the child is a black boy.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2013–14, there were nearly 13,500 public school districts with close to 98,300 public schools, including about 6,500 charter schools (Fast facts, 2016). Within these districts there will be 3.1 million full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers that will be employed by public schools in fall 2016 (Fast facts, 2016). In the last eight years, African American teachers have declined from 7.9 percent to 6.8 percent. That is a decrease of 26,000 African American teachers (Rizga, 2016). This lack of African American teachers in the school setting leads one to ask questions such as, why is there a lack of African American teachers in elementary and secondary schools? How does this shortage affect African American students?

As reflective thinkers in education, we must acknowledge that there is a need to diversify the teacher workforce. This need is greatest in areas where minorities, especially African American students, comprise the majority of the student population. Children need to see reflections of themselves in the teachers in which they spend so much time.

Statement of the Problem

Although the lack of African American teachers in public education has been identified as a cause of concern in the public education system, there is also a need to determine what is

hindering the teacher pipeline from being diversified. This is especially true in the state of Mississippi which remains in the bottom of the state rankings for education ("Mississippi," 2019).

Therefore, more research is needed to determine what barriers Mississippi teacher education candidates are facing in their quest to attain certification and what measures are being taken by the teacher education programs to combat barriers to diversifying the teacher pipeline. Teacher preparation programs are the first step in becoming a certified teacher, therefore it is the ideal place to start when addressing diversity among public education teachers.

Purpose of the Study

Further research is necessary to determine what barriers Mississippi teacher education candidates are facing in their quest to attain certification and what measures are being taken by the teacher education programs to combat barriers to diversifying the teacher pipeline. Diversifying the public schools of America is a very important task. Therefore, the purpose of this study will be threefold. The initial purpose of this study is to examine experiences of a group of African American future and current teachers to determine barriers, if any, that they faced in their teacher preparation programs. The second purpose of this study is to determine barriers, if any, that teacher preparation faculty and staff have seen students encounter and how the teacher preparation program has taken steps to eliminate those barriers. The final purpose of this study will address what steps are being taken to recruit and retain African American students into the University's teacher preparation program.

Research Questions

The lack of African American teachers in K-12 can be examined in many different ways. As mentioned previously, this phenomenon has not been studied through the lens of becoming a

certified teacher. In this study, the professional stories of teachers were solicited along with information from the preparation program. The following research questions served as a guide for this study:

1. What kinds of processes are involved in becoming a teacher from the perspective of a group of African American teacher candidates and practicing teachers enrolled at or recently graduated from the selected large public Southern university's School of Education?
2. What are the perceived key barriers to becoming a certified teacher from the perspective of a group of African American teacher candidates and practicing teachers enrolled at or recently graduated from the selected large public Southern university's School of Education?
3. What are the perceived key barriers that African American teacher candidates face from the faculty and staff at the selected large public Southern university's School of Education?
4. What kinds of recruitment and retention measures are being used to increase the number of African American students that are entering the teacher preparation program at the selected large public Southern university's School of Education?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study will be the insights gained and contributed to an increase of certified African American teachers in K-12 public education. This study will share the voices of African American teacher candidates and recent graduates. It will aid in exposing the factors that contribute to these candidates successfully becoming certified teachers or barriers that may have

led them to not becoming certified teachers.

The findings from this study may be used to assist universities in augmenting their requirements for entrance into teacher education programs. These requirements will assist African American teacher education candidates to be able to successfully acquire state certification that will result in them becoming highly qualified teachers. Studies show that by doing so, African American children would benefit greatly from it. Demographic mismatch between teacher and students leads to less than high expectations for the students than a demographic match would (Cherng & Halpin, 2016).

There is much research that is informative and useful about the retention and recruitment of African American teachers once they enter into the K-12 workforce, but there is limited research that explores the recruitment and retention methods used in teacher preparation programs. This research will contribute to the understanding of what other teacher certification programs may need to do in order to diversify their programs.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study consists of a small population and sample due to the amount of certified African American teachers and teacher education candidates that were available from the one public University that was utilized in this study.
2. This study is limited to African American teacher candidates or those who identified as being African Americans.
3. This study will focus on only one teacher education program.

Delimitations

1. This study will be restricted to African American candidates that sought or were seeking

certification in elementary or secondary education. Special education teacher certification candidates were not included in this study.

2. One public Southern university School of Education was the focal point in this study.
3. Narrative accounts were collected from undergraduate students who were enrolled in a Foundations of Education class at a four-year state university in the Southern United States during the Fall semester of 2019. The researcher individually interviewed selected participants during the same semester.
4. Narrative accounts were collected from current teachers who graduated from this four-year state university in the Southern United States about their experiences in gaining certification in the past two years. Selected participants were individually interviewed by the researcher.
5. Narrative accounts were collected from teacher education faculty and staff who worked with teacher education candidates at a four-year state university in the Southern United States during the Fall semester of 2019. Selected participants were individually interviewed by the researcher during the same semester
6. A focus group interview was conducted. During the focus group interview, participants were asked a series of focused questions relating to school experiences as an African American teacher candidate seeking certification. The questions focused on the participants' perceptions of possible barriers to becoming a certified teacher and contributions to them successfully becoming certified.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply:

African American- A person with origins in any of the black racial groups in Africa

Certified Teacher- a classroom teacher who has met all of the qualifications set forth by a State Department of Education to be assigned the professional activities of instructing students in self-contained classes or courses

Teacher Education Candidate- A student who is participating in a professional teacher education program and preparing to become a certificated educator, but is not yet graduated

Certification- qualifications set forth by a State Department of Education

Foundations of Education-a teacher education course that is taken in a teacher education candidate's junior year that is an introduction to teaching strategies

Teacher Preparation Program- a State-approved course of study, the completion of which signifies that an enrollee has met all the State's educational or training requirements for initial certification or licensure to teach in the State's elementary or secondary schools

Early Career Educator- a certified teacher in their first two years of teaching

Summary/Conclusion

Important points in Chapter 1 address the need to conduct research regarding the lack of African American teachers in K-12 public schools. The opportunity gap is widening when it pertains to African American children who are receiving a public education. This narrative case study explored and examined the specific experiences and perspectives of current African American teacher education candidates seeking to become certified teachers and current African American teachers who are early career educators. This case study will also provide insight to what steps teacher education programs are taking to recruit and retain African American students.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose statement, research question, significance of the study, limitations, delimitations, definitions, summary/conclusion and organization of the study.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework, review of literature, and research in education as it relates to the history of African American teachers in K-12 education, history of teacher certification for African Americans, and the impact of African American teachers on student achievement and the achievement gap. The literature review will focus on the historical perspective of African American teachers within public education in the United States prior to and after the litigation of Brown versus the Board of Education. Focus is also on the decline of African American teachers nationwide, especially focusing on the state of Mississippi, and an examination of the need to diversify the teacher workforce by looking at national/state teacher retention initiatives and barriers that teacher education candidates face. The procedures, including data collection and data analysis, utilized to substantiate the findings gathered during the interviews and focus group that were utilized during the quantitative study are outlined in Chapter 3. This chapter includes background information on qualitative research, case study, and the role of the researcher in the study.

Chapter 4 focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected during the study. It presents a profile of the participants who were interviewed for their intimate knowledge as African American future and current teachers in the process of becoming certified teachers. It provides information related to their personal and demographic backgrounds. This chapter presents the findings of the study. The coding process used to conceptualize themes is discussed and the interpretation is embedded throughout this chapter alternating with selected quotations

from participants' written and oral responses. The findings are organized as themes that emerged from the study.

Finally, Chapter 5 consists of a discussion of the findings in light of current teacher preparation practices. This chapter focuses on strategies and solutions that could be used by teacher preparation programs throughout the state. Furthermore, this chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the lack of African American teachers in K-12 schools in the United States. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a context that explains, by presentation of pertinent literature, the uniqueness of the study outlined in Chapter 1.

Initially, the literature review will begin with the theoretical framework of critical race theory used to ground this study. It will then focus on the historical perspective of African American teachers' public education in the United States, prior to and after the litigation of *Brown versus the Board of Education*. Next, the literature review will explore the decline of African American teachers nationwide, especially focusing on the state of Mississippi.

The literature review will then proceed to examine the need to diversify the teacher workforce, by looking at national/state teacher retention initiatives and barriers that teacher education candidates face. This exploration will lead to the questioning of how the lack of diversification of teachers has led to the opportunity gap and teacher expectations. In conclusion, the literature review will focus on the history of the state of Mississippi and its struggles with teacher shortages and diversity.

Every year the number of certified teachers entering the teacher workforce is declining across the nation. This decline affects districts across the country, but it especially affects the students that these districts serve. While there is a decline in teachers overall, there is a severe decline in African American teachers. Non-Caucasian students are the largest demographic of

students that attend public schools (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). In 2001, forty percent of the students in public education identified as a student of color (Ladson-Billings, 2005a). At the same time, only twelve percent of teachers were non-white. Many of the diverse students that attend these schools are unable to see themselves reflected in the faces of the teachers. Because there is little visual affirmation of their reality and culture, these students can easily feel as if though they do not culturally belong in the school setting. This feeling of loneliness and isolation impacts students and strips them of the power that an education imparts on one's self-worth and self-esteem (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in critical race theory recognized in 1995 by Ladson-Billings and Tate (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Critical race theory first emerged as a counter argument to the legal discourse of civil rights (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical race theory emerged in the realm of law and since then has found its way into many other disciplines, including education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory provides a theoretical lens that most effectively evaluates why African American teacher candidates are not entering into the field of public education.

Within the discipline of education, critical race theory explores the racial inequalities that are found in education (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). The three main components of critical race theory are race, racism, and law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Using those components, we can explore how acquiring an education equips a person with the power to transform their lives for themselves and their family. History supports the fact that African American students have not always been granted access to education due to their race and racism.

Critical race theory provides a way of looking at race relations, particularly within the United States, in a broader context than the traditional civil rights approach (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT has been used as a framework for examining racial inequalities in the United States and this lens can be used to examine the persistent racial inequities in education (Lynn & Parker, 2006).

Lynn's (2002) expanded definition of CRT further supports this study's basis in that theory. Critical race research and theory offers insights into: 1) the legal and social system in the United States; 2) the continued legacy of racism in American society; 3) historical measures that have been taken to block African Americans from being able to acquire an education ; 5) the use of racism and biased traditions in reference to segregating education; and 6) calls for the elimination of racial oppression in the United States through an examination of race that explores the power that exists between race, gender, and class.

Critical Race Theory supports key explanations as to why African American students have consistently been denied equal access to opportunities of growth, achievement, and advancement in public education. This theory sheds light into how race is used to attribute for the lack of representation of African American teachers in public education following the decision to desegregate public schools. Using CRT, there is a connection that can be forged between student achievement and the lack of African American teachers in public education. Taking a look at the history of African Americans and the struggles they endured to go from not being allowed to be educated, to having to fight to acquire an education that was equal to their counterparts, one can draw the conclusion that education is a form of power that African Americans are still fighting to acquire.

Prior to Brown vs Board of Education.

In the 1900's W.E.B Dubois brought attention to the fact that the African American children of America were receiving a subpar education in comparison to their white counterparts (Ladson Billings, 2009a). Teaching was considered a noble profession within African American communities. To be a teacher meant that you had some college education and that you were a part of the middle class (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Teaching was one of the very few ways that African Americans could provide a living utilizing academics. During this time, most jobs that were afforded to African Americans were either in the manner of manual labor or house staff.

Historically, many educated African Americans used their educational preparation to work in their communities as preachers or teachers. As teachers, they were generally only allowed to educate African American students in racially-segregated schools. African American and Caucasian students were segregated from the schools they attended to the busses that delivered them there (K'Meyer, 2013). At the time, the country was segregated and education was not exempted from this. African American students were not allowed to attend public schools with their white counterparts, so African American students attended schools that they had access to in their segregated communities.

These schools were usually in buildings that were not as prominent as the school buildings found in Caucasian communities. The books that the schools had were usually the cast-off books of the Caucasian schools. These schools were usually lacking in resources and money compared to schools that were in the same town, but catered to the Caucasian students of the town (Ladson-Billings, 2005a). These separate schools were not equal in the education and opportunities they offered the African American children that attended them.

In the 1954 case of Brown vs. Board, Thurgood Marshall would argue that these schools

were damaging to African American students due to their dilapidated state, but also psychologically (Ladson-Billings, 2009). One of the main arguments of the case was that by isolating African American students, a precedence was being set that damaged their confidence, ambitions, and self-esteem (Wolters, 2008). This case would be the turning point in the battle for equal education for African American students in the United States of America.

Impact of Brown vs. Board of Education.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States of America in *Brown vs. Board of Education* deemed segregation of public schools unconstitutional by a vote of 9-0 (Davis & Graham, 1995). This case was a compilation of four other cases: *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (Virginia)*, *Biggs vs. Elliott (South Carolina)*, *Belton vs. Elliott (South Carolina)*, and *Belton vs. Gebhart (Delaware)* (Davis & Graham, 1995). The commonality of all of these cases were that they were challenging the status quo that African Americans were not allowed admission to schools based upon their race. In each case, it was documented that the African American plaintiff had been denied admittance to a public school based upon race and this was a violation of their Fourth Amendment Right (Davis & Graham, 1995).

The major argument of this case was that separate, segregated, public schools were not equal (Davis & Graham, 1995). This landmark case had many positive consequences, but one of the negative outcomes of the case was the demotion and displacement of African American teachers and administrators (Lash & Ratclif, 2014). The case focused primarily on the desegregation of the schools and set no procedures for how the integration was to occur. Following this landmark case, schools, families, and students across America were left to figure out how integration looks when there had never been an example of it in history.

Post Brown vs Board of Education.

Not only did this case bring an end to segregated schools, it stated segregation of classrooms and programs was illegal and unconstitutional (Ford & King, Jr., 2014). Although the case said that it was illegal to have segregated school settings and that it could no longer be permitted, it stated nothing about how to integrate the students, staff, and administration into these newly integrated schools (Lash & Ratcliff, 2014). During this time of integration, African American teachers and administrators were fired and demoted and African American students were sent to schools where they were not wanted or accepted. Gifted African American students who excelled in school prior to the integration of schools, were now sitting in the back of classrooms scared and disengaged from an education. Even though the verdict of the court case was in support of integrating public schools, school districts and the people throughout the United States were not. Some school districts defied the verdict and opted to close the doors of the schools before they were forced to integrate (Myer, Stewart, Jr, & England, 1989).

Prior to the 1950's, teachers needed only a two-year diploma to teach and certification tests were not required (Lash & Ratcliff, 2014). The equivalent of what we now know as an associate's degree allowed teachers to teach and serve as all the certification that teachers needed. Following the decision of the Brown case, proficiency tests were used to determine which teachers would be allowed to follow the students into the newly desegregated schools (Lash & Ratcliff, 2014). These proficiency tests were supposed to be used to measure general and professional knowledge that a teacher should know, instead, they were used to limit the number of African American teachers that would be allowed into the newly desegregated schools (Lash & Ratcliff, 2014).

The lens of critical race theory can be used to explain the underrepresentation of African

American teachers and the limitation of students of color to a quality education. Although *Brown vs. Board of Education* guaranteed equal access to public education for all students, over fifty years later we are still fighting for equal access to all aspects of public education. Since the court case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, African American faces in public education have steadily decreased over the years. This shortage of African American teachers is clearly connected to the barriers put in place after *Brown*, but other factors are in play. Many of the African American teachers who are entering into the education workforce are choosing not to stay. Nationwide, according to the federal Department of Education, African Americans made up 6.8 percent of the teaching workforce in the 2011-12 school year, down from 8.3 percent in 1990. Nearly 83 percent of the teaching workforce in 2011 was Caucasian, which was a decrease from 1990. (Rizga, 2016). This data leads one to conclude that African Americans are not visible in public education, and this decline has been happening steadily throughout the United States.

United States Teacher Shortage.

There is a shortage of certified teachers throughout the entire country. In the last five years, teacher preparation program enrollments have had a decrease of 35% (Sutcher, Darling-Harmon, and Carver-Thomas, 2016). The decline of students who are pursuing a degree in education has contributed to the lack of certified teachers across the nation. Without future educators to replace those that are leaving the profession, it makes it hard to ensure a quality education for students across the country. The Learning Policy Institute reports that there is a yearly demand of around 300,000 teachers (Sutcher, Darling-Harmon, and Carver-Thomas, 2016). Right now, we are in a shortage of about 118,000 teachers to meet that demand.

Mississippi Teacher Shortage.

In Mississippi, the shortage of teachers follows the national trends. Mississippi's teacher

shortages mirror those in urban districts found in states such as: Kentucky, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Nevada, and North Carolina (Harrison-Henderson, 2015). Nationally it has been reported that teachers in schools that have high poverty and high minority percentages are leaving the classroom at an alarming rate and are much harder to replace due to these schools having fewer resources and less desirable working conditions (Sutcher, Darling-Harmon, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). In 2018, it was reported by the Mississippi Department of Education that there were 1,063 vacancies throughout the state (*Mississippi*, 2019).

Around the state, these vacancies are found in elementary, middle school, high school, and special education classrooms. According to the Mississippi Department of Education, the largest number of vacancies are found in the Mississippi Delta, with a reported 479 vacancies in that congressional district. These teaching vacancies correlate with overcrowded classrooms, increases in non-certified substitutes, and a negative impact on student achievement in the state of Mississippi. This has led to a continuous cycle of poverty and poor educational opportunities that establish barriers that are hard for these students to overcome (*Mississippi*, 2019).

National Teacher Retention Initiatives

In order for African American teachers to be retained in public education, what has been done in the past will have to be revamped in order to not only recruit, but retain diverse teachers. States throughout the country are making adjustments because of the current teacher shortage. Two major adjustments being made are teacher pay and incentives. These adjustments will help to entice African American students to pursue education licensure routes.

Teacher Salary

Many states have had to address inadequate teacher salaries. This is a valid concern when you take into consideration the decline of teachers across the United States. Could the teacher

salary be a deterrent for future educators? In a study conducted by USA Today, it was found that many early career educators cannot afford the median cost of rent anywhere in the United States (Richards & Wynn, 2019). Early career educators are usually just graduating from college and entering into the education workforce, so for many of them, they are on single salaries. They exit college with student loan debt and various costs of living, it is discouraging to imagine that they will not even be able to afford rent. Many educators turn to second jobs because they are unable to have an adequate living on their take home pay (Richards & Wynn, 2019).

This has led to many states implementing pay raises for teachers due to them leaving states and in some cases, leaving the country to teach overseas. In 2018, American teachers were paid 13% less than private-sector workers with similar levels of education (Richards & Wynn, 2019). This is extremely disheartening with data that shows that the average salary of a U.S. teacher was \$58,950 in 2016.

For African Americans, who will graduate and have to teach in high poverty districts, it is not appealing financially because to graduate college and not be able to support themselves or their families is unacceptable in their eyes. Some high-poverty districts across Mississippi offer better salaries — but the pay difference is only about \$1,200 to \$3,000 at most. The extra money comes in the form of a local salary supplement. The average teacher salary statewide is about \$41,000 (Harrison-Henderson, 2015). This has led to the conversation that in order to recruit diversity in our teacher workforce we will need to offer a more competitive salary and incentives. When a college graduate chooses to teach, it should not feel like a choice between adequately supporting your family or not is being made. Unfortunately, not adequately funding educators results in many having to seek secondary jobs to supplement income.

Incentives for African American Educators.

There is a national movement to increase the number of teachers entering the teacher workforce. Incentives that states are providing for teachers to enter into the teacher workforce have been loan forgiveness, housing incentives, stipends, and advance degree opportunities. In the state of Mississippi, teachers have been provided with opportunities such as the William Winter Teacher Forgivable Loan, Mississippi Teacher Fellowship Program (MTFP), and Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program (METP) that provide these incentives (*Mississippi*, 2019).

The William Winter Teacher Forgivable Loan is named after former Mississippi Governor William Winter. According to the Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid, this loan was established to provide an opportunity to forgo debt for a student who wanted to become a teacher in the state of Mississippi (WWTS-William Winter Teacher Scholarship). In exchange for the financial assistance that this loan provided, a teacher candidate would become employed in the state of Mississippi as a classroom teacher for each year of assistance (WTS-William Winter Teacher). Unfortunately, due to budget cuts this program was not funded for the 2018-2019 school year and has not received funding as of now. The elimination of this needed program is a financial blow to many teacher education candidates and the students they would have served.

The Mississippi Teacher Fellowship Program (MTFP) attracted highly qualified teachers to critical teacher shortage areas throughout the state, by providing them with a scholarship to obtain their Master's or Specialist Degree (Mississippi Teacher Fellowship Program). This program allowed many qualified teachers to pursue advanced degrees that financially they were unable to do without absorbing the debt of an advanced degree. A teacher who receives a higher

degree means that their licensure would change and allow them to be paid a higher salary because of it. In the Spring of 2019, budget cuts were issued that eliminated the funds for this program. This was very detrimental to African American students that used these fellowship funds to finance their undergraduate degrees. Due to the fact that repayment of this fellowship meant that the recipient had to commit to teach in a critical needs district in the state of Mississippi, many African American school children are impacted also.

The METP program stands for the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program. This program is housed between the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University. This program is used to make school affordable for teacher education majors in elementary education, special education, secondary English, mathematics, and science (Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program). The program offers students a debt free way to pay for their education in exchange for a 5-year commitment for the state of Mississippi. This program is very beneficial to native Mississippians who want to return to their hometowns to be teachers. Research says that the majority of teachers will teach within twenty miles of their own high school (*Mississippi*, 2019).

Although there are incentives to entice future educators to pursue a career in public education, there are identified barriers that are preventing African American teachers from filling the void in the teacher pipeline.

Barriers

The underrepresentation of African American teachers in the public education classroom across the country can be linked back to barriers such as: legislation, accountability, testing, and teacher certification. These barriers have hindered African American teachers from being allowed to have a presence in classrooms across the country. This underrepresentation can only

be addressed by first eliminating the barriers that African American teacher education candidates face.

No Child Left Behind.

In 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Bill that required states to administer yearly tests that indicated proficiency of subject matter by students by a school's adequate yearly progress (AYP) (Dee & Jacob, 2011). The yearly progress monitoring test that was associated with NCLB became known as "high stakes testing". The title was given because the results of that yearly test were used to identify failing schools, administer sanctions, and provide rewards based upon a school's AYP (Dee & Jacob, 2011). When NCLB first made an appearance within education, schools were not too concerned with the impact, as long as their high achieving students continued to score proficient on the test. NCLB stood on the goal that every child would score proficient in reading and math by 2013-2014 (Dee & Jacob, 2011). This caused schools to adopt a teach to the test mentality. The primary concern of schools revolved around how students would have scored on the test.

This accountability model did not leave much room for teachers to take time to individualize their instruction, reach students who were not on grade level, or address deficits in foundational core subject knowledge. One of the key justifications for dissolving NCLB was because its country wide proficiency goal could never be attained in public education (Dee & Jacob, 2011). One aspect that this accountability model did not take into consideration was that students are entering into our schools with varying degrees of education that we have to address individually, before we can see growth in our students and their achievement levels. As the demands of high stakes testing have become more prevalent in public schools, the viewpoint has shifted. There now has become a push to reach students at all levels, and the quest for

proficiency, has instead become a push for individual growth in students.

Praxis and Teacher Certification.

With so much focus being placed on testing at this time and the sanctions that could be levied if a school was found lacking on progress or growth, the legislature also wanted to place a lens upon the teachers that were teaching and guaranteeing that they were of the highest quality to meet the needs of testing. This led to the search for highly qualified teachers across the country. In order for a teacher to be qualified as a highly effective teacher, they have to be certified in the area that they are teaching.

The “highly qualified” label came into play following the induction of No Child Left Behind. This led to many universities changing their policies for their teacher preparation programs. Most states utilize the Praxis I for entrance into teacher education programs and the Praxis II test for teacher certification (Strosnider & Blanchett, 2003). The highly effective teacher label meant that teacher certification programs had to place more focus on the certification of their candidates. This led to the program entry and exit assessments that became problematic for African American and other ethnically diverse teacher candidates to pass due to the required assessment cut-off scores (Strosnider & Blanchett, 2003). These scores made it hard for students to enter and exit the programs with certification (Strosnider & Blanchett, 2003).

Schools that employ teachers that do not have the needed certifications must apply for an emergency license for these teachers with their state education departments. They must show that they have tried to employ a certified teacher for the position. If a certified teacher is found for the position, then the non-certified teacher can be relieved of the teaching position. In most cases the teacher that is relieved is an African American teacher who could not pass the licensure exam to acquire certification. These tests have been proven to be biased towards African American

teacher candidates and some researchers have found evidence that they are used to eliminate African American teachers (Strosnider & Blanchett, 2003). These barriers are keeping African American faces out of the classroom and the impact is being felt by the students.

Impact

Opportunity Gap.

Although the achievement gap can be used to compare academic discrepancies in gender, socioeconomic status, location and etc., it is most often used to describe the state of education for African American children in comparison to their peers. We have now changed the discussion from achievement to the lack of opportunities that have led to African American students not performing as well as their counterparts in public education. Milner states that achievement on high stakes testing cannot be the focus because there are much larger gaps in opportunity that affect African American students (2012). It is the opportunity gap that causes African American children to be unable to excel academically in comparison to other racial groups.

Critical Race Theory helps to shed light on why African American students are the largest group being identified in the opportunity gap. African American students have been identified as the minority student in every report that has ever been distributed about education in the United States. A race that is a minority composes the majority of the opportunity gap. African American students along with Hispanics make up the opportunity gap in greater numbers than their counterparts. Although much attention has been brought to the opportunity gap and how there is a need to close it when it comes to African American students, there has not been much attention brought to how increasing the presence of African American teachers in public education could have a positive impact on the opportunity gap of African American students.

The call for more African American teachers is often part of policy discussions

addressing the academic underachievement of black male students (Brown, 2012). It is hard to believe in yourself when you do not think your teacher believes that you can be a successful student. The opportunity gap that exists between African American students and Caucasians would decrease with the presence of more African American teachers in public education. Negative expectations are placed on African American and Latino students more than other students (Bergh & Denessen, 2010).

Ford and King Jr., state that “the inequitable or unjust resources and opportunities contribute to and promote educational disparities, and create a vicious cycle in which Black students are denied access to school programs that are essential to reaching their academic, intellectual, socio-cultural, and fiscal potential and that can help close achievement gaps” (p. 300). We must find a way to close the opportunity gap that is present in public education and if giving African American students more equitable access to African American teachers is an answer, then we must explore how this can be accomplished for the betterment of African American students that are slipping into the gap yearly.

Teacher Expectations.

In most schools, African American students are oftentimes being shaped by teachers who do not look like them, nor believe in them. Johns Hopkins researchers found that black teachers are much more likely than Caucasian teachers to think a black student will graduate from high school or get a college degree—especially if the child is a black boy (Rizga, 2016). African American students lack access to teachers who believe in them and the fact that they can be high achievers. Teachers need to embrace that all students can achieve, even African American students. They must put aside their own biases to embrace that students who may not look like them can excel. Access to a quality education could be hindered because African American

students do not have access to African American teachers who have high expectations of them. When African American students have teachers, who are not African Americans, it has been shown that they have lowered expectations placed on them (Gershenson, Holt, & Papagerorge, 2016). Gershenson, Holt, and Papagerorge state that African American students lower their expectations and change their behaviors over time to conform to teachers' negative biases (2016). The Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 stated that the low expectations that minority students had of themselves were because of teachers that underestimated their academic abilities (Chen & Halping, 2016).

The impact African American teachers can have on African American students cannot be overlooked because it can have a lasting effect on helping close the opportunity gap. The fact that their teacher shares the same racial demographic helps African American students to have a boost in their performance in both elementary and high school (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015).

Nowhere is this impact more greatly seen than in the state of Mississippi which resides in the bottom of academic achievement in public education and in allotment of state funding for public education. In 2018, Mississippi was ranked 48th out of 50 states (Mississippi, 2019). The state of Mississippi has an estimated population of 2.98 million (Mississippi Population, 2019). Of this estimated population, Black or African Americans make up 37.59% (1.12 million). The demographics of Mississippi schools has over 50% of the students being minorities who are residing in these D level schools (Mississippi, 2019).

Mississippi History with Education.

Although it has been 55 years since the landmark case of Brown vs. Board of Education, the state of Mississippi still struggles with equity issues in its public-school system. Looking at

the state rating, parallels can be drawn that students are still being left behind to fill the achievement gap that is prevalent in the state (Wright, 2019). Unfortunately, the faces of students found in the achievement gap are those of black and brown students. This racial divide of students is one that can be found in the history of Mississippi in public education and higher education. Currently the status of the Mississippi public education system is below the nation's average. The Education Counts Database cites the Mississippi Education system as being a D-, when the national average is a C ("Mississippi," 2019). The state is ranked 47th out of 50 states and the District of Columbia.

University History with Education and African American Students.

In the northern part of the state of Mississippi is home to the University of Mississippi. The University, also known as Ole Miss, was established in 1848. It was titled the flagship of Mississippi Caucasian colleges (Williamson, 2008). The University was the only public institution for higher learning in the state for 23 years (History). From 1848 until now, the University of Mississippi has been a beacon for those seeking to pursue higher education in the state. Unfortunately, that beacon was not welcoming or inclusive for all students.

Brown vs. Board of Education was the first step in desegregating the schools of Mississippi, even in higher education. In 1870, African American parents wanted some control of the teachers that would be teaching their children, this led to black legislators asking for African Americans to be admitted to the University of Mississippi (Spann, 2009). This request was denied by the governor of Mississippi, but the seed of integrating the University had been planted. The ruling in the case motivated Medgar Evers to try to enroll in the University of Mississippi Law School, one day after this historic decision (Williamson, 2008). In a state, that today still holds fast to the racist history that dates back to slavery, he was not admitted entrance.

His attempt would lead to another attempt by a Jackson State transfer student, named James Meredith, in 1962 (Williamson, 2008). Meredith's fight to enroll in the University was met with an adversary that would require the President and the National Guard to intervene (G. Adam & H. Adams, 2018). The hard-won admittance of James Meredith into the University opened doors and opportunities for other African American students.

By 1969, less than 200 African American students attended the University of Mississippi (Williamson, 2008). In 2018, the enrollment of African American students at the University was 2,527 out of a total enrollment of 20,274 (Fall). Mississippi is one of six schools who has the largest gap of African American students in comparison to its public high school graduates (Kolodner, 2018). Most Universities have a 10-point gap, the University of Mississippi had a reported gap of 40 points in 2015 (Kolodner, 2018).

The lack of African American teachers in the state of Mississippi is adversely affecting the academic gains that African American students could have across the state. The availability of certified African American teachers could greatly decrease the achievement gap that exists in this state, if there were access to more certified African American teacher educators. It is the intent of this researcher to present an interpretation of the data as it relates to African American teacher candidates and their journey towards certification within the University of Mississippi teacher preparation program.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

Although there is much research generated since the 1954 decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* about the decline of African American teachers in public education, there is a lack of research in regards to teacher preparation programs and their role in equipping African American teachers to enter the teacher workforce.

Through this qualitative study, the researcher hoped to reveal themes that determined what barriers Mississippi teacher education candidates faced in acquiring their teacher certification as African Americans. This study also sought to reveal measures that were being taken by the teacher education programs to aid African American teacher education candidates to successfully navigate their teacher education program to become certified teachers in the state of Mississippi.

The multiple purposes of this case study centered on the examination of the experiences of a group of African American current teachers and teacher education candidates. The initial purpose of this study was to examine experiences of a group of African American future and current teachers to determine barriers, if any, they have faced in their teacher preparation programs. The second purpose of this study was to determine barriers, if any, that teacher preparation faculty and staff have seen students encounter and how the teacher preparation program has taken steps to eliminate those barriers. The final purpose of this study addressed

what steps were being taken to recruit and retain African American students into a selected University's teacher preparation program.

The research design and procedures used to conduct this study included the following: (a) rationale for using qualitative research; (b) role of researcher; (c) procedures; (d) data collection and recording; (e) data analysis; (f) and trustworthiness. Data from the study will include audio taped interviews, field notes, and a focus group.

This chapter outlines the methodology for the study. It describes the theoretical assumptions or paradigms that guided the collection and analysis of data and provides a description of the research design by detailing the specific methods used in the analysis

Rationale for Using Qualitative Research

Qualitative design was chosen because it has a focus on a specific situation and emphasizes the experience, rather than numbers like a quantitative design (Maxwell 2013). This qualitative research used a case study methodology. A case study is an inquiry that investigates an identified phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 1994). The findings yielded by a case study results in new learnings that aid in understanding of a phenomena (Yin, 2012).

A case study is a detailed examination of a subject or population that has been overlooked (Boddan & Bilken, 1998). In the case of this study, the African American teacher candidates fit the criteria of the overlooked. Yin states that all case studies derive from a desire to understand a set within the real world (2012). A case study allows the interviewees to share the story of their journey to certification without feeling as though they have to give a right or wrong answer.

Role of the Researcher

Within this qualitative study, the role of the researcher is that of an instrument. The researcher was utilized to conduct the one on one interviews and a focus group discussion. I was one of the instruments in this study.

The interviews and focus group discussion served as the primary sources of direct information received from the participants' interpretation of their journey to becoming a certified teacher. I used an interview guide approach to explore each participants' interpretation relating to their certification journey. The interview was developed based upon key issues derived from the literature review. In order to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data, I asked interview questions that were open-ended in nature. Although the interview questions were developed prior to the research, I worded questions in a way that established a conversational style during their interview. This allowed the participant to relax and not feel pressured to give a certain answer during the interview process.

Background of the Researcher.

Since I am an instrument of this study, it is important that the reader understand who I am in this context. For this purpose, I provided information about myself so that an understanding of my qualities, experiences, and biases can be developed.

This is my fifteenth year in education. My career has varied within those sixteen years. I began my career as a sixth-grade science teacher. I held that position for five years and then left the classroom. For 1 year, I worked as a teacher and learner coordinator for a district. Although I worked in a public school, a curriculum company employed me.

My interest in diversifying the teacher pipeline comes from my own personal experiences as a student and a teacher. I am vested in my research in the lack of African American teachers

in K-12 education because during my K-12 years, I had only six African American teachers, and they all were influential in my life. I work in a public-school system where African American teachers make up 4% of certified teachers. At my school, I am one of two certified teachers. For the majority of the African American students that cross my path, I am the first African American teacher that they have had by Grade 6.

As a student at a predominately-Caucasian university, I did not encounter many faces that looked like mine in the classroom, nor on campus. When I narrowed my field of study to education, my interaction with African American peers and professors was even more limited.

It is because of this lack of diversity that I have sought for ways to work with emerging African American educators through various organizations to help them feel less isolated in the field of education.

Institutional Review Board.

Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Mississippi before contacting gatekeepers and participants and before collecting data. The research plan was submitted to the IRB after a successful prospectus defense and receiving written verification from the chair. This study was approved in the Fall semester of 2019.

Gaining Access.

The participants utilized to collect the data needed for this study were current students enrolled in an introductory Foundations of Education class at the University, select School of Education faculty/staff, certified teacher education candidates that were teaching in their 1st or 2nd year, and teacher education candidates who did not receive their certification.

The first step in gaining access to students who were enrolled in an identified introductory Foundations of Education class at the selected University was to submit a study

proposal to the Dean of the Education Department. The proposal included a detailed outline of the guided questions used during the focus group discussion as well as a list of procedures to ensure confidentiality of those students choosing to participate. I also outlined the rationale for using Foundations of Education students and commented on the reporting procedures for the results of the study.

After approval from the Dean of the Education Department, instructors in charge of teaching the Foundations of Education class were contacted. The proposal given to the Dean of the Education Department was also given to each of the instructors along with the guided questions that were used during the focus group discussion as well as a list of procedures. Instructors schedule a time for me to come talk with their class about my research and personally invite their African American students to attend the focus group discussion.

Since my research involves interviewing faculty and staff within the School of Education, I sought approval from the Dean of the School of Education to contact faculty/staff within the School. The proposal emailed to the Dean was also emailed to each of the faculty/staff identified. The email was a personal invitation asking them if they were willing to participate in my study.

The current teachers interviewed in my study were identified by recommendation from the faculty/staff that I interviewed. Once that contact was made and they affirmed it was okay for me to email them, I proceeded to email a personal invitation asking them if they were willing to participate in my study.

Selection for the past School of Education majors who did not continue their journey to receive their certification were made by recommendations. Their selection was made by recommendation from the faculty/staff interviewed for the study. Since they were no longer in

the education program, I utilized social media to make initial contact and introduce myself. Once that initial contact was made via social media, I proceeded to email a personal invitation asking them if they were willing to participate in my study.

Ethical Considerations.

To protect the identities of the participants that I interviewed, I used a coding system to protect their anonymity. The coding system utilized the last four digits of the participant's phone number.

All participants chosen as introductory Foundations of Education students, School of Education faculty/staff, currently employed certified teachers, and education program non-completers who are not certified received a letter of consent to read before deciding if they wished to participate in the study. The letter of consent informed the student and staff of their right to decline participation at any time. The letter outlined the purpose of the study and the steps taken to ensure anonymity. Any participant wishing to participate submitted a signed consent letter to the researcher. Participants received a copy of the consent letter for their records.

Procedures

The focus group discussion was conducted to seek an understanding of the teacher candidates' self-perception of their program and their experience as they have matriculated through the program as an African American teacher education candidate at a predominately Caucasian university. The focus group was held on campus at the School of Education.

For the currently employed certified teachers and education program non-completers who are not certified, their interviews were conducted to seek an understanding of their self-perceptions of their journey to becoming a certified teacher. The currently employed certified

teacher interviews were held in the participants' classroom or at a neutral site in the community which provided a comfortable setting for the conversation. For the currently employed certified teachers and Education program non-completers who were not certified, their interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed upon public setting. I interviewed each participant once for one to two hours total. Immediately following each interview, notes were taken, organized, and reviewed.

For the faculty/staff interviews in relation to the case study, the interviews were conducted with the participants to seek an understanding of their perceptions of the progress that had been made to assist African American teacher candidates on their journey to becoming a certified teacher. The interviews were held in the participants' office at the School of Education. I interviewed each participant once for approximately one hour total. Immediately following each interview, notes were taken, organized, and reviewed.

Organizing and reviewing the notes immediately following the interviews allowed me to recall information that I did not note as the interview was occurring. Each interview conducted had hand written notes as well as audio recordings with consent of the participants. The handwritten notes allowed me to listen carefully to the responses of the participant and make notations that I needed to pay extra attention to. The use of the tape recorder allowed me to be able to return to the interview as needed.

Research Design

To address my research questions, I conducted an in-depth case study of barriers Mississippi teacher education candidates face in acquiring their teacher certification as African Americans. This case study explored measures that are being taken by the teacher education programs to aid African American teacher education candidates to successfully navigate their

teacher education program to become certified teachers in the state of Mississippi. The site of my research was a large public Southern university's School of Education whose mission is to prepare and engage reflective professionals who create, use and share knowledge in partnership with individuals and communities to serve their state and beyond.

Data Collection and Recording

Participants.

I focused primarily on African American students because of the in-depth nature of my study. The intent of my case study was to expand the limited research relating to the underrepresentation of African American teachers in the elementary and secondary school settings. This study investigated the journey to certification that past and present African American students face at this university by employing a critical race perspective. This study also investigated retention and recruitment measures that the University is taking to increase the number of African American teacher education candidates that are enrolling in the program.

The participants of my study were three-fold. For the purpose of triangulation of data, I interviewed current African American teacher education candidates, past African American students who pursued certification from the University of Mississippi and who may be currently employed as teachers in the state of Mississippi, and University of Mississippi faculty and staff who work and interact with African American students at the University.

For the purpose of my focus group discussion, I focused on African American teacher education candidates enrolled in the introductory Foundations of Education class at the selected University in the fall of 2019. These education candidates were junior/senior level undergraduate students seeking to graduate with a degree in elementary or secondary education with state certification.

The interview participants in my study were also past African American teacher education candidates that entered into the School of Education as undergraduates seeking to graduate with a degree in elementary or secondary education with state certification. I focused on at least two of the students who had acquired their certification and were teaching in a K-12 setting, and two past candidates who did not acquire their certification. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

There were only four conditions for inclusion in this study. Specifically, all of the certified teachers were (1) African American (2) sought certification in K-12, and (3) were students of Teacher Education (4) certified teachers in either Math, Reading, Language Arts, Social Studies, or Science. For the focus interview participants that did not acquire their certification, they only needed to meet the predetermined criteria of being (1) an African American (2) someone who sought certification in K-12, and (3) students of the teacher education program.

The interviews with the School of Education faculty and staff were conducted at the School of Education. The participants had direct contact with African American teacher candidates. The participants chosen were the Dean of the School of Education, the School's Diversity Officer, introductory Foundations of Education class instructors, and Academic Advisors. There was only one condition for consideration of inclusion in this study. Specifically, they had to have direct contact with African American teacher candidates.

Data Types.

Data for this study were collected through a focus group and individual interviews. Creswell identifies these types of data collection measures as qualitative interviews (2014). These types of interviews allow the researcher to control the questioning. The focus group was

composed of current students who were enrolled in an introductory Foundations of Education course at the selected University. Individual interviews were held with select School of Education faculty/staff, certified teacher education candidates teaching in their 1st or 2nd year, and teacher education candidates who did not receive their certification.

The focus group discussion was conducted to explore the experience of current African American teacher candidates' self-perception of their program and their experience as they matriculated through the program as an African American teacher education candidate at a predominately Caucasian university. For the currently employed certified teachers and Education program non-completers who are not certified, their interviews were conducted to seek an understanding of their self-perceptions of their journey to becoming a certified teacher. The researcher gained an understanding of past and present African American student experiences and utilized that understanding to conduct interviews with faculty/staff to explore their perceptions of the progress that has been made to assist African American teacher candidates on their journey to becoming a certified teacher.

Protecting Data.

The focus group discussion and the individual interviews were recorded by the researcher. Handwritten notes were taken by the researcher in the focus groups and the individual interviews. This was done on the recommendation that if the audio recording device fails, there was a backup data source (Creswell, 2014). Both the focus group discussion and individual interviews were transcribed and a copy given to the participants to verify accuracy. Participants of this study did not have their name attached to any data. The participants of this study were identified by the last four digits of the participant's phone number. This was to protect their identity, so that they felt free to answer the questions of this study.

Data Analysis

In qualitative studies, one of the most important steps of the study is the analysis of data. Unlike quantitative data, where the data is analyzed at the end, qualitative data analysis is ongoing and can occur simultaneously. The researcher analyzed past interviews, while current interviews were being scheduled and developed. In this case study, the researcher used a bottom build method that is recommended by Creswell. With this method, the researcher organized the raw data, read all of the data, and then coded the collected data into common themes identified by the researcher for interpretation (Creswell, 2014). The organization and development of themes was ongoing throughout the interview process.

Coding and Themes.

Breaking the data down into small subgroups and organizing it by themes is defined as coding (Creswell, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the coding of the data was done utilizing the computer program, Dedoose. Creswell discusses the pros and cons of utilizing a computer program for coding, but one of the cons is that the researcher may feel removed from the research if utilizing a computer program (2007). Since interviewing is such a personalized and involved method of collecting data, the researcher felt that it would be ok to not utilize hand coding. The researcher will utilize color-coding and abbreviations on the transcribed interviews to analyze the data that will be collected. The data will be coded using a combination of predetermined codes and emerging codes (Creswell, 2014). The previously stated coding will expose a small number of themes that will be the basis of the researcher's major findings of the study. These themes will be used as the headings in the results sections of the researcher's study (Creswell, 2014).

Reporting the Findings.

The themes exposed were intertwined with the themes that emerged during the literature review on African American teachers and certification. The themes will be discussed in the next chapter in the context of the related literature, the reference theory of Critical Race Theory, and the data collected within the focus group and individual interviews. These themes were used by the researcher to form interpretations of barriers that African American teacher education candidates face while acquiring certification. This interpretation will be used to call for reform and change on the policies that govern teacher certification.

Trustworthiness

In order for the researchers' findings to be seen as valid and reliable, the following measures were put in place to ensure that the findings are perceived as accurate by the researcher, participant, and the reader (Creswell, 2014). The two measures that were put into place by the researcher were triangulation and member checking.

Triangulation.

Stake (2006) states that triangulation allows the researcher to confirm that what you as the researcher has seen and heard is in the right context. For the purpose of this research, the researcher collected data from three different sources to support triangulation. The three different sources were current African American teacher education candidates, past teacher education candidates, and faculty/staff of African American teacher education candidates. This triangulation of the data ensured that multiple viewpoints and experiences were explored in relation to African American students within their journey to become certified teachers. These three sources of data exposed themes used by the researcher to form interpretations to barriers that African American teacher education candidates face while acquiring certification.

Member-checking.

The participants of this study were given the opportunity to review their interview once it was recorded and transcribed. Each participant of the study received an electronic copy of their interview to determine if their responses were properly recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study was designed to shed insight on the possible barriers that African American teacher education candidates face in their quest to become certified teachers and to discuss how these barriers are being addressed by teacher education programs in the state of Mississippi. The participants chosen for this study offered insight into this phenomenon. Controls were established to limit any bias that could possibly infiltrate this study and damage the validity and reliability of the study. It was the intent of this researcher to provide insight and clarity into this unexplored phenomenon.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the collected data and to present the findings of my study. First is a description of the categories of themes from the study. Next, each theme within each category will be defined and aligned with the category and examples of findings will be presented that ground the theme within the data. Finally, I will name each of the research questions that guided the design of the study and briefly describe how the findings previously presented offer insight into each of the research questions.

Categories of Themes

The two broad categories that emerged from the data were: Barriers and Support Systems. Barriers are defined as those obstacles that hindered African American education candidates in the quest to become certified teachers. Support systems are defined as an individual or group that contributed to African American education candidate's growth academically, personally, financially, and/or mentally. Both categories will be discussed in detail by breaking each down into more specific themes and looking at each in reference to the data collected from the study participants.

As indicated in the table below, twelve themes were categorized as barriers and four as supports. Depending on the context in which the participant replied in their interview, two barriers could also be categorized as support systems.

Table 1

Number of Excerpts in each Category Reporting Each Barrier or Support

Barrier		Support Systems	
Theme_____	Number of Excerpts _____	Theme_____	Number of Excerpts _____
Diverse Teachers	11	Personal Connections	24
Certification	12	Mentor	10
Self-Efficacy	9	High Expectations	16
Finances	26	Self-Efficacy	9
High Expectations	16		
Preparation	14		
Public Perception	26		
Testing	68		
Isolation	35		

Barriers

Barriers are defined as those obstacles that hindered African American education candidates in the quest to become certified teachers. These barriers could be referred to as environmental risk factors. Leiding (2006) states that these risk factors in conjunction with social injustices contribute to the educational problems that black students face. Each specific barrier will be presented with supporting quotations from the participants’ semi-structured interview transcripts and existing literature of African American teachers in K-12 education.

Diverse Teachers

Diverse teachers are defined as excerpts that indicated that diversity matters in the classroom and/or more diverse teachers are needed. The theme of diverse teachers is categorized as a barrier because the selected university that is the focal point of this investigation lacked diversity in the student population and the faculty. Participants indicated that the lack of diversity in their own school careers from K-12 to college was one of the reasons they wanted to become a teacher. This lack of diversity within the teacher education program is an equity issue, on a collegiate level. Representation matters in the classroom. The participants could see the benefit of diversifying the teacher pipeline and felt it was important to do so.

Participant 5734 stated that:

Culturally responsiveness is out there and that teaching all teachers to be culturally responsive and equity minded when working with students of color is important. In the meantime, we have to make sure that every teacher that comes out of a teacher preparation program is equity-minded and culturally responsive in their practices.

Participant 1708 stated that:

Like we have to change culture before we can tell African American men to come teach. When students come into class, like English class and they're learning language, if the social and linguistic conventions of their home life don't match the school, then they're going to not do well in school because a lot of schooling is about socializing you. It's not really about teaching you because half the stuff you learn in school, we kind of like, who cares who wrote Romeo and Juliet?

Certification.

Certification is defined as excerpts that alluded to becoming a certified teacher; rather it

be through the traditional route or alternate route. Certification is categorized as a barrier because if teacher education candidates cannot receive their certification, then they are not viewed as a highly qualified teacher and risk not being hired into the teacher workforce, or entering the teacher workforce on emergency certification. This puts them in a position to receive less pay and no job security if a certified teacher is found. Participants that indicated that certification was a barrier to teacher education candidates were those that worked with African American candidates and those that did not receive their certification.

Participant 9159 stated that certification was an issue for African American candidates. Some candidates are going into the profession and do not have a certification license. They're just kind of in a cyber emergency certification because they can't pass the test. And as long as the district can show they don't have other licensed teachers applying for the positions, which is some cases they truly don't, then that person's continued to renew. But they're not getting the same. They're not getting the same pay as a licensed teacher or anything like that or you know, I mean they're at a disadvantage because that license could expire and not get renewed and, and all that.

Participant 9698 drives the conversation onto the path that quality teachers are being lost, just because of certification. This participant is a teacher education academic counselor and deals first hand with the candidates as they progress through their program. The participant states that, "In my opinion, we're not giving someone who has a potential passion for teaching the chance to actually enter into school; learn, succeed, and become a teacher. That makes no sense."

Participant 5734 made a statement about how there should be alternatives to certification like there are in neighboring states. The argument is that, "I just feel like it should be some alternative tracks. But like I said, in Mississippi, you have to start with the state legislature to

even get that done. If you go to Tennessee, Tennessee has like two alternate routes.”

College Acclimation.

College acclimation is defined as excerpts that referenced transition from high school to college. College acclimation is categorized as a barrier because if students cannot successfully make the transition, their grades and performance will suffer. This is especially concerning for teacher education candidates who must have a 2.75 for certification. If African American teacher education candidates cannot acclimate, this leads to a delay in them being able to enter a program, graduate, and then enter into the teacher pipeline. Responses that were coded as college acclimation were given by faculty/staff that worked with African American teacher education candidates and African American early career teachers.

Participant 9159 stated:

There's a higher proportion of African American students in our department in the School of Ed that are first gen. Some of the stuff I see with students that concerns me with losing our African American students, is even early on, whether they be a freshman or a transfer student, I'll see a lot of attendance absences sometimes. I don't know what's driving that. I don't know what the cause of that is.

This participant then elaborated on class absenteeism and other concerns that lead to African American teacher candidates not being able to acclimate.

Participant 9159 stated:

It could be something as simple as they just don't want to go to class. It could be that they're trying to work multiple jobs. It could be, again, that lack of knowing that attending class and doing all these things help lead to your success. And in college, you know, again, it could be a lack of family support that's in their ear saying, Hey, you want

to make it, you want to do well, this is what you have to do, to navigate through college. So, that's something I see a lot of that concerns me, that there's some disconnect. We've got a current student right now that we've been reaching out to, that we've been calling, we've been trying to get that person to come in and talk about advising and all that. But I can see in the system that they have a huge number of absences that midterm, which already indicates they're floundering for whatever reason. And then we are actually reaching out to the student and they're not responding.

Participant 9698 notes that college acclimation is an issue, but felt that it was less of a concern for African American students that were transferring from community colleges and that more due diligence needs to be placed on helping these students to combat college acclimation if we are to diversify the teacher pipeline. Participant 9698 stated:

The issue for us, in fact, for most state institutions, the state of Mississippi, more than 50% of our students come from community college. That in my opinion, that is a focus. We have to continue to recruit from our community colleges. If we're going to make an impact today, we should focus on community colleges because we do have students of color in community college.

Participant 9698 felt that transfer students are more focused once they are in the teacher education program and that a path should be established to acclimate them quickly, so that they are able to fulfill their goals and graduate in a total of four years of college. The participant stated:

They're going to have a plan. They're home-based. They're not coming here for the on-campus experience, they are very driven in a direction and we need to do a better job in that next 30 credits. They are saying, let's take this class, this class, this path, and give

them a path so they can get out in four years. I don't think that's very easy for some community college students. And we have to unlock, I mean we, we have not unlocked those classes. We are honestly working on that right now.

Participant 9698 then explained their rationale around focusing on African American students in community colleges.

I'm very concerned about the current state in Mississippi for teachers. The fastest way to do that is community college right now. The fastest way to increase the number of minority teachers is community college. It's the fastest way to increase the end.

Community colleges, because right now that's a one and a half to two-year path and bang, they're teaching.

The following excerpt is an explanation by Participant 9698 as to how we should help African American students to overcome barriers they may face upon transferring. Participant 9698 stated:

We do have an opportunity to have a better chance to recruit and increase in the end, not only for the teacher pipeline, but also for teachers of color and we need to make that more accessible to us. But again, we have these, you know, barriers coming in and they have 60 credits. To me, if you have 60 credits at a community college and you have a 3.0 GPA, we definitely should be allowing you to enter a teacher education program. Not only that we should be providing you some kind of financial assistance to become a teacher.

Finances.

Finances is defined as excerpts that made indirect mention of teacher and financial funding, rather it be from the selected school for the acquisition of an education or in relation to

teacher salary. Certification is a barrier because upon graduating candidates want to be able to provide for themselves and their families. The average first-year teacher pay is not adequate, especially if you take into account student loan payments and the cost of living in the state of Mississippi. All participants in the focus group spoke about how important finances were and how that could be a barrier for African American teacher education candidates.

Participant 5734 states:

Students want to be teachers and they would, if the field paid more money. When you're trying to recruit, those are things that are stacked against you that you can't combat just by saying, Oh, we have a wonderful program and we have wonderful instructors. You'll be so fulfilled. These kids now they look at you like, that's not enough to be fulfilled. I need to be fulfilled and get paid, I need my coins. I need my bags. That's real.

Being able to take financial care of oneself is a concern shared by participants.

Participant 9159 stated that this concern is very much a barrier for African American teacher education candidates. Participant 9159 stated, "I think we lose a lot of males in the profession because of that exact thing of feeling like they need to be the breadwinner of their family. They need to be able to provide for a family. They're not going to be able to do it financially as a teacher."

Participant 1197 echoed the above sentiment about low pay, but referenced it in relation to African American women. Participant 1197 stated:

For most girls or women of color it's an issue because of the money thing, it could be the low pay. People don't want to do it because of it. But, it's like their last resort, when they can't find a career. Let me take the Praxis test. I'm like, look, if you're not in it for, you know, cause it's your passion, don't do it cause it's not a whole lot of money. And then

they turn away from wanting to do it.

Participant 9698 discussed the fact that the teacher salary does deter African American students from even entering the course of study. The participant states, “I start talking about the salary because they think it's bad. It's not a bad starting salary. It's just the fact that we don't get raises.” For some, the impact of finances is an issue prior to becoming a certified teacher. Participant 1238 stated:

I wasn't able to just stop working, do a whole semester of student teaching all day long. I could have if I didn't want to have any income or work after hours, or something like that. as a nontraditional student coming in and having to work and having a family and then you want me to complete this whole semester of student teaching in a classroom all day and then have a life and work a 40-hour job that wasn't, I couldn't do that. So, I had to make a decision, did I want to quit my job and do my student teaching or do I want to find a job or continue working where I am at the university. I was there at the university, so they were paying for my classes, which I'm thankful for. But it's just so many limitations there for the non-traditional students

High Expectations.

High expectations are defined as excerpts that referenced how a teacher or the participants themselves can have high expectations for student learning, in reference to the teacher education candidate or the future students that they will teach. High expectations can be a positive and /or a negative expectation. Participants provided examples of both. For this reason, high expectations are classified as a barrier and a support system (to be discussed below).

High Expectations is categorized as a barrier because it can be used to set unrealistic expectations upon African American teacher education candidates. These expectations lead the

candidate to feeling defeated and powerless. As a barrier, Participant 1157 stated, “Back then it was just like I wanted to say don't push too hard. That'll push me out the door, you know, kind of thing.” This pushing was coming from an instructor and the participant stated that, “I felt like she was hard on me a lot of times, which she gave me some good constructive criticism, but I feel like sometimes she was a little bit too hard on me.”

The pressure of high expectations is not always directed from teacher to student; sometimes the pressure comes from within the student. For example, Participant 8686 states that, “I think we put that on ourselves. Because we know that other races look at us as people, as like not going to succeed or not do what they can do. So, I think we have to prove ourselves, so I think there's more put on us than anybody else putting it on us, we put it on ourselves.”

Participant 0198 discussed the fact that negative high expectations are not always just from teachers of other races, but can also be exhibited from African American teachers in regards to their experiences. Participant 0198 stated:

I feel like when you have African American teachers, they try to force their experiences on you and I'm like, this is what you went through. I didn't go through this. That's like the only dislike. That would be the only disadvantage I would say because just because I'm black and you're black, we did not have the same experiences and I don't appreciate you pushing that on me.

Participant 1187 echoed that sentiment. The participant stated, “I feel like it was from my black teachers, honestly. I feel like they expected more of me and pushed me and I know that might have, you know, been out of good, you know, wanted me to be great, but at times, it was a lot.” The expectations of the African American professors could be daunting at times. Not only is there pressure to not let your family and friends down, but there was pressure to also meet a

standard in the eyes of your teachers. This added another layer of pressure upon teacher education candidates.

Preparation.

Preparation is defined as excerpts that referenced statements from participants that alluded to any indirect statements to preparation for entering the teacher education program. Preparation is categorized as a barrier because if students try to enter into the teacher education program lacking the prerequisites for the program, they are deferred until they can fulfill those requirements. Teacher education classes are offered on a schedule that makes it hard to take a class out of rotation. This means that candidates have to wait a year until the class is offered again. This delays the entrance of African American candidates into the teacher preparation program. Participant 9698 stated:

We have put barriers and blocks on criteria for getting into a teacher education program. We have very little output for qualities for actually becoming a teacher. What's interesting about that is that we have not found anything that shows that ACT or Praxis core, leads to the outcomes of teachers for student success and makes them a better teacher.

In order for the teacher pipeline to be diversified by African American teachers, we first must have African American teacher candidates within the teacher preparation programs.

Participant 5154 stated that:

I think because our local community college here knows our programs, they prepare our students to finish the core, the things that they need to take, you know, in order to start the program. Because they know there's not a big turnaround. They only have that fall semester to get the core complete. They must have a 275 on the core and then they're

ready to move into phase two in the spring.

Students that are transferring from a community college to a university are continuing their college education and it may be assumed that they should have no issues with acclimating to a four-year college following that transfer.

Participant 9698 stated:

The university system, IHL and the community college board is supposedly working to make sure it's a seamless process. It should be a seamless process for all classes. So, I, to be honest, I hope the elementary ed programs aren't having as much of that hiccup because it's the same for Gulf Coast Community College, as it is for Northwest, Northeast and our programs transfer among IHL institutions and among community colleges.

But for many students that enter into the teacher preparation programs, the barrier lies in the hours needed to obtain their degree. Participant 9698 explained that it has to do with the hours that are being offered. "Most Education majors can't graduate with 120 credits, because there are other requirements we have. We are very focused on the first 60 credits; they are usually not education based, usually more about the core curriculum for your English, your math, your sciences and so forth."

But for the students, the focus wasn't on the hours, it was more so on being prepared for the certification test and feeling that the university did not focus on that aspect. All of the focus group participants commented on this. Participant 6554 stated:

We are not prepared enough to get what we need to be in the teacher ed program. And you can see that the university doesn't give any type of preparation to try to help those who are struggling when they get to the second semester of their junior year. You don't

see anything trying to help people who have just fallen off the edge because they can't get into the program. And I think a lot of African Americans are at that stage.

Participant 8686 stated, "You lack that stuff just like you missed it or that you don't know." Participant 6554 elaborates that it is the lack of preparation that causes the test to be a barrier. "We're losing African-American, pre-service teachers. I just think that some of it, I really think that's preparation because we're behind and everything and I feel like preparation for that test is some of why we're losing who we have."

Participant 9159 sums up that the lack of preparation for African American teacher candidates is concerning because it seems like the lack begins in their K12 preparation.

A greater percentage of our black students are dealing with the struggles in comparison. It's a numbers thing, but, okay. I think a lot of our students that are African American coming here are Mississippians. A lot of them are a product from their K-12 experience and education and preparation and that shows. I feel like we've got a good number of students that are coming in having to take a DS class, the developmental studies class, or having to take multiple ones. And there are a lot of students that do that, that end up being very successful here. They're starting in a hole when they get here. It's an ongoing thing that worries me and it bothers me. I appreciate that they have access to the university coming in. But sometimes it worries me that very first meeting I'll be like, Oh my gosh, this person's already nine credits of DS classes. And it is concerning. It's just concerning them that they are going to be able to muster through that and be okay. And the numbers, I feel like, for our retention for our African American students is lower. Like we look at our freshman retention and return rates and again, we've got more people that aren't coming, same issues otherwise do this. But proportionately it's different, you

know?

Public Perception.

Public perception is defined as excerpts that alluded to the perception held by the public about education. Teachers are public servants. Unfortunately, as revealed in the data, the dynamics of educator interaction with others is based upon the perception that the public has about teachers and public education, which can manifest itself as a barrier. Public perception is categorized as a barrier because funding and teacher salary increases are all determined by public input. If the public doesn't have positive views of education, then states have a situation such as Mississippi is facing now, where teachers are having to fight for salary increases just to have an equitable living in comparison to other states.

Participant 9698 points out that teaching is not valued. The participant stated:

The revolution needs to be that we value teachers and value what you're doing. Because in other countries they are valued. People are lined up to be teachers. Here, you know when your governor, when the governor says they're not doing a good job, we're going to raise the standards and a 21 ACT is the answer.

The participant then elaborates on how this has affected how even African American males view teaching.

I can't tell how many African American males I've talked to at community college. They laugh, they actually laugh at me. It's the perception of teaching. Both my parents talked me out of becoming a teacher. I wanted to teacher, when I left college. They said, "No, you're not going to become a teacher". I was the first one in my family to go to college and they said, "No way". And I didn't. I didn't become a teacher until six years after college. I mean that perception now is huge. Do not become a teacher. You shouldn't be a

teacher. I've heard no, emphatically no, more than ever.

Participant 5734 reinforced this negative perception when they stated. "I can tell you from going out on visits, they're not interested. Not interested in education, period. I don't think it matters when I go out on those visits. It's other schools there and if you have a table there stating that you are the School of Education, they are not even stopping at your table."

As seen in the above excerpts, the lack of value the public places in education is constructing a barrier that is making it hard to recruit teachers who are looking to diversify the teacher pipeline.

Self-Efficacy.

Self-efficacy is defined as excerpts from participants about their own abilities. Self-efficacy is also a theme that can be viewed as a barrier and support system. Self-efficacy is categorized as a barrier because it deals with teacher education candidates doubting their ability to be successful. This self-doubt leads to African American teacher candidates leaving the program and/or profession because of the inadequacies they feel. Participant 0198 doubted how she could communicate with students due to the volume of her voice. The participant stated, "I don't really talk really loud. So, when we have to teach, I have to be loud and I struggle with that, so I don't know how to fix it.". Participant 6144 self-efficacy issues were centered around being able to be an effective teacher. The participant stated, "I'm trying to find my own way of teaching, because everybody has their own way of learning, but if I can't teach it, the way that they need me to, we're not going to get anywhere.". For Participant 1238, who left the program, self-efficacy led to them questioning their worth. Participant 1238 stated, "Am I qualified to be here?"

Testing.

Testing is defined as excerpts that referenced statements from participants about the Praxis Core, Praxis II, or ACT Testing. Testing is categorized as a barrier because these high stakes tests are used to determine if teacher education candidates should progress through their teacher preparation programs and receive certification. This becomes a barrier to African American teacher candidates because if a candidate cannot progress past these tests, it can stall their teaching career in its tracks. Participant 9698 stated, “The law states that you must have a 21 ACT or pass the Praxis core, at the national recommended score number one. Also, you must have at 2.75 GPA.”

Participant 5154 stated:

We do have some trouble with the Praxis core tests that students have to take to be admitted into what we call the phase two of the teacher ed program. We do see that happening to some of our students also, which is another factor of why, you know, some of them just drop out or they just decide not to come back or either they change their major.

Participant 5734 stated:

Testing has been the biggest thing that has caused our decline, and we lose those students. I was talking with our social worker instructor on Wednesday and the students leave when they realize that they can't get the 21 on the ACT or they can't get the cutoff score for Praxis, they go to social work.

Participant 1157 stated, “I haven't really met people who didn't finish the teacher ed program. I've only ever met people who can't pass the test.” Participant 8686 stated, “Praxis is the key barrier that's keeping most African Americans out.” Participant 9159 stated, “I do feel

like we lose some students from the pipeline because of that standardized test.”

Participant 6554 indicates that for African American students specifically, the Praxis I is an issue. The participant stated, “I’m talking specifically towards Praxis. I’m saying we as African Americans, I feel, are falling off because we make it to that point and can’t pass.”

Participant 8686 reinforces that the Praxis stops African American teacher candidates, but that students are not offered help from the selected university when that happens.

Participant 8686 stated:

And so, the School of Ed does not offer to my knowledge anything to help people who are at that level just because let's face it, if an African American student gets to that point, they don't have the Praxis scores, they don't have the 21 ACT either. What did they do?

Participant 1708 stated:

A lot of people, a lot of men of color and people of color are having issues passing the Praxis I, and the Praxis core. So, I think that's a barrier for a lot of people, who are already in teacher ed programs. However, that also translates to ACT as a barrier because if they can't get the ACT score, then they have to take Praxis I. Whereas if they have the ACT score, they don't have to take it. Right. So, it's like the ACT/Praxis barrier.

Isolation.

Isolation is defined as excerpts that referenced statements from participants that alluded to feelings of being alone within the classroom and/or the teacher education preparation program. Isolation is categorized as a barrier because teaching is a collaborative effort. Whether it be in a team, PLC, or presentation group, candidates will have to work with others. That is hard to do if candidates feel like they do not belong. This hinders the collaborative work that is needed to be successful. Being that this study was conducted at an university that lacked diversity in students

and faculty, responses were given from the participants that indicated that being isolated gave them a feeling of having no community or feeling of belonging. Responses that indicated that the participants of this study did feel isolated in their teacher education program were all from early career educators, teacher education candidates, and the degree non-finishers.

Participant 1157, who was an early career educator stated that:

I feel like the teachers, both white and black were very, open and they were there for me.

I didn't have a negative experience at all, but I did feel like I was the African American poster child.

The feeling of being alone made one participant feel pressure to be exceptional.

Participant 1238 stated, "I felt like an oddball and it puts a lot of pressure on you that you have to perform, because you don't want nobody to think that we're less than, or anything." One participant felt that this isolation was very evident when they took into account that there was a lack of diversity in the teacher force and within the teacher education program.

Participant 1157 stated:

I feel like obviously I didn't have enough people who looked like me. I had teachers who were African American, like two teachers out of maybe 10 when I got into the actual teacher ed program. But there was only one other person in my cohort who was, you know, like African American girl. I feel like it wasn't enough people wanting to do this and they look like us in the classroom. Because we stuck out like a sore thumb. And, I mean, we did what we had to do, but we knew that, you know, it was just us.

Support Systems

Support Systems are defined as an individual or group that contributed to an African American education candidate's growth academically, personally, financially, and/or mentally.

Each specific support system will be presented with supporting quotations from the participants' semi-structured interview transcripts and existing literature of African American teachers in K-12 education.

Personal Connections.

Personal connections are defined as excerpts that referenced that connections were important in relation to becoming a teacher. Personal connections are categorized as a support system because candidates felt that they had an avenue to utilize when they are struggling. Responses given are in two groups. The responses indicated that they wanted to become teachers either because of a personal connection they had with a prior teacher or that they wanted to formulate personal connections with their future students.

Participant 1157 stated, "She's always been in my corner and like she's been my favorite teacher since sixth grade". Previous teachers were very instrumental in their success and were influential in them becoming a teacher.

The focus group participants' responses tended to be targeted towards their future students. Focus group participant 8686 stated:

I just wanted to be that person for a kid. Who's struggling and feels like nobody's really trying to help them. So, I just want to help those students that are struggling and that just need extra help. Like I even thought about changing my major and just doing special education because of what I went through. Like it's hard. So yeah, that's the reason I want to be a teacher.

Focus group participant 0198 stated that, "I really like kids a lot and I just want to do it for the kids. I really like children a lot. So, I just want to teach because of that."

Focus group participant 6244 states that:

At first, I just wanted to be like a basketball coach, and you have to teach, to coach. But now, I've heard that I'm good with kids and stuff. The more I think about it, I kind of am good with kids. I feel like I'm a good people person too and you have to be able to relate to kids and I feel like I relate easily with everybody

Mentor.

Mentors are defined as excerpts that referenced a mentor or a mentoring program at the selected school. Mentors are categorized as a support system because they provide guidance, motivation, and emotional support. Having someone that candidates can talk to and connect with is part of a successful support system. Participants that discussed having a mentor were all participants of the student focus group. Of the four participants, they all had found mentors, but stated it was hard to do so. For two of the transfer students, their mentorship came from people outside of the selected university's education department. They all indicated that they felt a mentor within the program would make them even more successful. Participant 6244 stated:

Do you know who Coach A is? I talk to him as much as I can because I mean he of course is going to focus on the players because that's what he is here for, but I mean I feel like, whenever I talk to him, it's kind of like he knows where I'm coming from. So, I think he's a mentor.

Participant 8686 stated:

I don't really have somebody like a mentor that I have latched onto in the school education, but my mom works off campus. So, there's a lady in her office that I can go to and like to talk to about stuff. She's an African American, like me, so not necessarily in the School of Education, but I do have a mentor I can go to.

One of the participants was actively looking for a mentor in the program that they could

relate to, but due to the lack of diversity, they had just found a mentor that was of their ethnicity. Participant 8686 stated:

I kind of gravitate to one of my teachers in particular. I could relate more to her than I can to any of my other teachers. So, I feel like it's really hard to relate to the teacher when, when there is a lack of African American teachers that I have had. So, in my other classes, I just go to class and just do what I have to do. But in her class, I feel like I can actually speak up and say what I have to say about what this is. But like in my other classes, I'm just listening and I can be confused. I'm like, I'm not even going to say nothing because I don't want them thinking I'm slow or something.

Even though these students feel alone, they have found mentors or mentor relationships that give them a feeling of support.

The next two themes, high expatiations and self-efficacy, were covered as barriers prior, but the responses that were given by the participants also warranted them being classified under support systems. High expectations can also be used as a motivator, and not just a barrier. It motivates one to want to excel regardless of the hurdles one may be facing. The concept of meeting expectations can drive you to overcome barriers. Self-efficacy can be a support system because the belief that one has in their ability can overcome any doubt that someone may have about their abilities. It becomes a motivator to “show” the doubter that they can overcome.

High Expectations.

High expectations are defined as excerpts that alluded to how a teacher has high expectations. High expectations can be categorized as a support system because they helped to propel African American teacher candidates to success and that these expectations are needed in K12 education for all students of color.

Participant 8686 had an African American teacher in middle school who greatly influenced their decision to enter into education. Participant 8686 stated:

My middle school teacher really opened my eyes up to like, if he's doing it, then why, couldn't I have more African American teachers when I was younger. Why didn't I see stuff like this when I was younger? So, it's like I didn't think about it when I was younger, but when I got older, it was like, I could have had that. I feel like it would have been different. And then again, with me being dyslexic, I felt like they would've picked up on some stuff that other teachers probably just looked over because they realized that this African American child is struggling. And I know that the white teachers here, they probably just go in day by day looking over it. So, that's how I feel about it.

Participant 5734 discussed how important it was for African American students to be exposed to African American teachers. This participant was an African American university instructor and spoke to the impact not only on K12 students, but also collegiate. Participant 5734 stated:

We have an expectation you are going to perform and we're not going to let them not perform. Whereas a teacher that is not a color, they come with a mindset Oh they're poor and they come from this background and they can't do that and some of it is well on meaning. But then you had those others who are just prejudiced. I mean we just have to be real and that impacts how well their child is going to perform in their classroom, well. If students get that one teacher, of color in their school career, that impacts them positively and impacts them and sets the expectation and tells them you can go to college and you can do this. And I came from this neighborhood and I went to college. All of that impacts. It doesn't take but one to change that child's mindset. in view of what they can

do. And that's like the power of having that teacher of code and is now was, was, was so wonderful now is that the research is out there too back it up.

Participant 1238 who did not become a certified teacher still values education and wants to return to it so that they can impact a child. Participant 1238 stated:

I love children and even now that I'm out of the program, I'm still trying to think about a way to get back to impact children because I think it's important. Education is key. You know, you can take anything else away from us, but if we get that education, we can go and do anything we want. And I feel like that's just our key to success. And so, I feel like if we get that education, there's no limits to us. You know, that glass ceiling, if you get that education you can remove that. That's just what I think.

Participant 6554 felt that having African American teachers provides a level of support that is important, no matter what level of schooling someone is in. Participant 6554 stated:

I feel like as children progress throughout their grades, the impact that African American teachers have on them is greater when they get older. If that makes sense. When you talk about elementary, we're talking about the foundation of education. So, we're talking about the beginning stages of education and whenever you put an African American face with the student at that level of, of schooling, um, I think it kind of opens their eyes to, you know, what people can do. They might not think that, but I feel like it opens their eyes.

The opportunity for African American students to have African American teachers that have high expectations of them is one reason why the teacher pipeline must be diversified.

Self-Efficacy.

Self-efficacy is defined as excerpts that referenced statements from participants about their own ability. Self-efficacy is also a theme that can be viewed as a barrier and support

system. As a support system, self-efficacy is defined as excerpts that referenced statements from participants about their own ability. Self-efficacy is categorized as a support system because the teacher education candidates use their belief in their potential to encourage success as a teacher.

Participant 1157 stated:

Being a new teacher and being that this is my third year, I know that my colleagues don't mean any harm when they, you know, want to make all the calls. But sometimes look, let me give you some ideas. Let me speak too, and I think now at my current school, they're starting to realize like I am pretty good.

Participant 1157 utilized their positive self-efficacy to speak up within their teaching career. Their positive self-efficacy increased their self-confidence with their teaching practices. For Participant 1238, their self-efficacy prompted them to excel within their teacher preparation classes. Participant 1238 stated, "I didn't want others outside of my ethnicity to look down upon me being like, she can't understand this or she is less educated or does she need to be here or she's qualified to be here. You know? So, I made it an effort to stay on top of the game."

A positive self-efficacy provided a support system that was needed in order for African American teacher candidates to be successful at the selected university and in their teaching careers. It was the needed boost to help these African American students to overcome.

Interpretation of Findings by Research Questions

Following the previous section of defining themes, aligning themes with previously stated categories, and illustrating themes with data, the researcher will use the above findings to provide responses to each of the research questions that were used to define the study.

Research Question 1-What kinds of processes are involved in becoming a teacher from the perspective of a group of African American teacher candidates and practicing

teachers enrolled at or recently graduated from the selected large public Southern university's School of Education? The top three themes that were revealed in relation to the questions were: personal connections, isolation, and mentors, where isolation was defined as a barrier, and personal connections and mentors were defined as support systems. The barrier that participants named in response to this question was the feeling of isolation when navigating the process involved in becoming a teacher. Support systems of mentorship and personal connections were pointed to as a means for successfully navigating such a process.

Based upon the findings, it can be interpreted that barriers that African American teacher candidates face during the process of becoming a certified teacher can be overcome if some sort of support system, like mentorship or fostering personal connections, is provided during this time. For example, Participant 8686 stated:

It's good to be able to relate to somebody who's been in the profession and still is in the profession. I feel like as African Americans, we're like all in this together, you know, and it's good to see somebody who knows what they're doing and can give you advice and be there for me.

Research Question 2-What are the perceived key barriers to becoming a certified teacher from the perspective of a group of African American teacher candidates and practicing teachers enrolled at or recently graduated from the selected large public Southern university's School of Education? The top four themes for this research question were testing, self-efficacy, high expectations, and public perceptions. The top four themes were reported instead of the top three because of the same number of responses reported for high expectations and public perception. All responses given by participants in response to this question were barriers.

Based upon the findings, it can be interpreted that the lack of high expectations becomes a barrier to teacher candidates when they are faced with certification testing, and it exhibits itself in low test scores that hinder certification. This leads to a low self-efficacy that undermines their ability. For example, Participant 1238 stated, “I didn't want others outside of my ethnicity to look down upon me being like, she can't understand this or she is less educated or does she need to be here or she's qualified to be here. You know? So, I made it an effort to stay on top of the game.”. If the expectation had been established beforehand that candidates are valued and educated, these feelings of inadequacy could have been minimized and less effort would have been wasted feeling as though they have to “stay on top”.

Research Question 3-What are the perceived key barriers that African American teacher candidates face from the faculty and staff at the selected large public Southern university’s School of Education?

The top three themes for this research question were testing, self-efficacy, and high expectations. All responses given by participants in response to this question were barriers. The inferences that could be drawn are that African American teacher education candidates must be provided with assistance by faculty and staff in overcoming barriers that surround the passage of certification testing. As stated above in the previous question, the responses support the inference that faculty and staff who have high expectations for these candidates help to empower their self-efficacy surrounding their ability to be effective teachers. Participant 5734, who supports African American teacher candidates as faculty stated:

I would just hope that Mississippi will look at what other States and colleges are doing and eliminate the ACT all together, even as an admission requirement, you know, universities who are much more prestigious than we are. I would hope we just would kind

of look at what those places are doing and maybe start following their lead. I think an interview would be a great addition to admitting a student to Teacher Ed. Because you can kind of get a feel for do they really care about the profession and being a teacher or are they just doing this because they tried everything else, and they figure I'll try education. I can be a teacher. I think it's just a balance of things we should be looking at outside of just passing this test, and a GPA. Do they believe in this profession?

Research Question 4-What kinds of recruitment and retention measures are being used to increase the number of African American students that are entering the teacher preparation program at the selected large public Southern university's School of Education? The final research question addressed in my study was, "What kinds of recruitment and retention measures are being used to increase the number of African American students that are entering the teacher preparation program at the selected large public Southern university's School of Education?". Testing, public perception, and finances were the top three themes that hinder the recruitment and retention of African American candidates. The themes that aligned with this question were categorized as barriers.

All three of these themes can be used to infer that in order to overcome these barriers to increase the number of African American teacher education candidates in the state of Mississippi, teacher preparation programs have to be able to bring a more positive light to the public perception surrounding the teaching profession. For example, Participant 9698 made a valid point when they stated, "The revolution needs to be that we value teachers and value what you're doing. Because in other countries they are valued. People are lined up to be teachers." This allows there to be more money allocated to districts to recruit and retain African American teacher candidates and less focus on the archaic testing results that are used for certification. For

example, Participant 1708 stated:

When I think about people who don't want to be teachers, a barrier that keeps them from even looking into education is going to be the pay, and then the social stigma. We're talking about people who want to be hot girls, and go to Miami. We look at men who want to be Rico Suave exactly right. You can't, really do that on a teacher salary. And so, like that perception of what it means to be a young adult. It's like accelerating and outpacing teacher pay, so to speak.

Participant 9698 made a valid point when they stated, “most people show you that it's the dispositions and their passions and their dedication while they're in the teacher education program, not testing. If that was the case, then basically high achieving ACT students would always make better teachers. We don't have any data that shows that.”

Conclusion

The data collected from the participants for this study exposed barriers that are hindering the diversification of the teacher pipeline. Participants reinforced that there are barriers that will have to be addressed within teacher preparation programs. The barriers that were revealed in this study were: lack of diverse teachers, achievement/opportunity gaps, dated certification requirements, limited college acclimation, lack of financial support, racially based high expectations, problematic legislature, limited program preparation, negative public perception, negative self-efficacy, impractical testing standards, and student isolation. These barriers have imposed hurdles that have resulted in the decline of African American candidates in the teacher pipeline in the state of Mississippi.

Now that these barriers have been exposed, it is up to teacher preparation programs to address these barriers, so that progress can be made to rectify the decline of African American

teachers in K12 education. This decline ultimately has a negative impact on the students in public education.

Participant data also showcased the support systems that are needed in order to diversify the teacher pipeline. Within teacher preparation programs, these support systems provided African American teacher candidates with safety needs that promote their forward advancement within the program. The support systems that were revealed in this study were: peer and instructional personal connections, establishing mentor relationships, attainable high expectations, and positive self-efficacy. These support systems provide the framework for an environment that African American teacher candidates can thrive in as they enter into the teacher pipeline in the state of Mississippi.

Teacher preparation programs must find ways to strengthen and replicate these support systems so that these candidates have the opportunity to complete their journey to certification. Ultimately, this will result in a more diverse pipeline and positive impacts on K-12 students. The next chapter includes a discussion of the findings in light of current teacher preparation practices. Problem solving strategies will be discussed to help address barriers that were revealed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

When you think of the amount of time that a child spends in a school, it is eye opening. During those school hours, students are creating pictures of the type of people they want to be, while formulating the hopes, dreams, and aspirations that will drive their future essays of “What do you want to be when you grow up?” For many children, they will take their cues from their surroundings. They will find their answers and purpose in life in the faces that mirror their very own. For many students, they will not find answers in their surroundings. Everyday African American students are entering classrooms, schools, and districts around the country and they are unable to see a picture of themselves in any of the adults they encounter.

Studies have determined that there is value in giving African American students access to teachers who look like them. This access allows African American students to feel empowered in their education and has a positive effect on their self-worth and self-esteem (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The research points to the need for more African American teachers in K-12 classrooms. Across the nation, states are scrambling to find more teachers, but especially teachers who look like the students in their schools. In order to find these teachers, we must increase the numbers of African Americans successfully matriculating through teacher preparation programs.

This study has helped shed light on the barriers African American Mississippi teacher education candidates are facing in their quest to attain certification and what measures are being taken by teacher education programs to combat these barriers and diversify the teacher pipeline.

The participants utilized in this study gave personal accountings that provided a window into the barriers that African American teacher education candidates are facing in the state of Mississippi. The patterns that emerged from the data have now exposed areas that must be addressed if we are to begin to diversify Mississippi schools.

Identifying the barriers that African American teacher education candidates are facing in teacher preparation programs is the first step in diversifying the Mississippi teacher pipeline. The next step is to address how teacher preparation programs can eliminate those barriers. The final step is to research and promote better recruitment and retention strategies for African American students into the University's teacher preparation program. This chapter focuses on strategies and solutions that could be used by teacher preparation programs throughout the state.

Solutions to Diversify the Teacher Pipeline

This study revealed barriers African American teacher education candidates are encountering in their quest to become a certified teacher. The barriers that were revealed were the lack of diverse teachers, achievement/opportunity gaps, dated certification requirements, limited college acclimation, lack of financial support, unrealistic high expectations, problematic legislature, limited program preparation, negative public perception, negative self-efficacy, impractical testing standards, and student isolation. These barriers were not only exposed by teacher education candidates, but also University staff who interact with teacher education candidates.

Increase Instructor Diversity.

Out of the 283 excerpts coded for this study, 11 of the responses discussed the lack of diverse teachers within the teacher preparation program. The participants indicated that although the diversification of teachers in public K12 schools was important, it is also important in higher

education. Many will make the argument that these higher education students are adults and should not have to see faces that mimic their own, but that is an unfounded response. Within higher education, it is just as important to see examples of “success “stories for these students as well as K12 students. Faculty of color help students of color to feel better understood and creates an environment of support and mentoring for them (Umbach, 2006). The participants related stories of how the lessons that the teacher education candidates are receiving about culturally responsive teaching are not being modeled in the program.

Although a faculty search cannot be conducted just to increase diversity, the education programs could be proactive and recruit diverse teachers as adjunct instructors. Although they would not be full faculty, these diverse adjuncts would be available as a course option for those African American students who wish to take a class with an African American instructor. Additionally, in an effort to expose these teacher education candidates to practicing K-12 African American teachers, programs could pair African American candidates with same demographic classroom mentor teachers during clinical practice.

Admitting that there is a lack of diversity within the higher education teacher preparation programs is easier than fixing this barrier. The solutions presented do not “fix” this problem, but they do offer students the opportunity to see college and K-12 teachers who look like them. We know this is important and can have a lasting impact on achievement, even for college age students. Recruiting and hiring diverse faculty helps all college students, not just minorities. Student growth in cultural awareness has been attributed to diversity of college faculty (Umbach, 2006).

Change Certification Requirements.

Of the responses by participants in this study, twelve centered on certification, rather it be

through the traditional or alternate route. Following the era of No Child Left Behind, districts are required to have teachers that are highly qualified. This title is given to teachers who are certified to teach the subject they have been assigned within the school. In the state of Mississippi, this means that a teacher education candidate holds a Bachelor's degree with a 2.75 GPA, passed the Praxis Core or had a score of a 21 on the ACT, and passed the Praxis 2 licensure examination. There is no research to show that these additional requirements and tests are predictors of teacher effectiveness. Research indicates that instead of valuing certification in reference to teacher effectiveness, grit and life satisfaction are better indicators of teacher effectiveness (Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009). The value of a student cannot be determined only by how well they perform on high stakes tests and that should be the same measure that teacher candidates are being evaluated by. A passing score on a certification exam cannot be the only means of determining effectiveness.

Most careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics have a testing component, but that component is coupled with intensive hands on application of knowledge. That can be similar to the Mississippi Department of Education's view on certification of teachers. Doctors go through undergraduate instruction, medical school, and then supervised specialization before they practice entirely by themselves. Educators get one year of student teaching and are declared ready to take on the world one child at a time. Instead of focusing on a test that tells the evaluator nothing about how the educator interacts with stakeholders, such as the students, parents, staff, and administration; instead focus on the application and relationships that made teaching what it is. Give these educators supervised hands-on training that spans longer than a semester of student teaching and evaluate them on that.

Educators know that all children learn at different rates and in different ways. The same

can be said of college students. Educators in K-12 classrooms differentiate instruction so that students can be successful. Could the same be said for teacher education candidates when it comes to certification? Different tracks towards certification could be offered to teacher education candidates. Differentiation of certification would give teacher education candidates multiple avenues to be successful, thus providing schools and students with what they need most, teachers. This concept would lead to more African American students entering the teacher pipeline, which would offer diversification. Although there are alternate route programs that provide a means for college graduates to become educators, there are not any alternate tracks that are offered for teacher education candidates to acquire certification.

Acclimate Students to College.

In the previous chapter, there were several statements regarding African American teacher education candidates not being able to maneuver their programs successfully because of concerns with their course load, grade point average, and absenteeism. This was especially concerning for transfer students, who had two years to complete their degree if they wanted to remain on the four-year track with traditional college students. These issues around college acclimation can be addressed with opening the lines of communication with the teacher education program.

In K-12 public school districts across the United States, the school begins with new teacher orientation. These new teacher orientations are usually held for educators that are new to the profession or new to the district. They serve as a welcome to the district, administrators, and central office staff. District and state expectations for teachers are shared and explained by the administrators. Incoming educators are trained on the different platforms that are used for student and parent engagement. Some districts even use these orientations to introduce pacing

guides, standard based teaching guides, and grading measures. These orientations give first year teachers an introduction to the district's expectations and standards expected of teachers.

Teacher education programs can mimic this practice with students in teacher education during their junior year. During this orientation, candidates can be advised of concerns with their course load, grade point average, and absenteeism. They can be paired with senior level candidates that are in their final year as a support measure and have introductions to faculty/staff that they will encounter that year on their journey. These steps will help teacher education candidates become more knowledgeable of the pitfalls that students encounter when they enter University life.

Increase Financial Support.

When evaluating why African American teacher candidates are not entering into the field of public education, many responses centered around finances. The lack of financial support can be explored using the critical race theory that I am using as my theoretical lens for this study. Within the discipline of education, critical race theory explores the racial inequalities that are found in education (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). The fact that most African American college students have to accumulate student loan debt to attend school is an inequity. African American students are at a disadvantage financially while attending college because of their need for financial aid. Disadvantaged African American students are more likely than other demographic groups to depend on financial aid (Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009).

According to Teach.com, the average teacher salary of an elementary teacher is \$44,230 and for a secondary teacher it is \$46,360 (Become, 2020). Student loan payments on top of living expenses do not leave an early career teacher with many options to get ahead financially. Financial aid options like the Mississippi Eminent Scholars Grant, Mississippi HELP

Scholarship, Applegate/Jackson/Parks Future Teacher Scholarship and the TEACH Grant, a grant which gives financial aid to students in return for an agreement to teach in a high-need school, could be used to aid Mississippi students who are seeking to become teachers (Become, 2020).

Balance High Expectations.

Teacher education programs teach educators to have high expectations for the achievements of their students. To believe that their students can accomplish all that they put their mind to because they have a teacher who is going to push them to excel. African American student performance is positively impacted by a caring and interactive faculty (Neville & Parker, 2017). In the previous chapter, there were responses that indicated that high expectations could be a double edge sword for some African American education candidates. On one hand, you have non-diverse instructors, who censor themselves and do not challenge the candidates in comparison to how they challenge other candidates. On the other hand, you have responses that indicated that these diverse instructors demanded too much of African American candidates.

The expectations that are placed upon African American education candidates are influenced by the cultural views that an instructor may have (Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, & Green, 2004). Then you have diverse teachers who hold extreme high expectations for African American candidates that constantly put them in a state of trying to prove themselves. These experiences support the research that states that race plays a part in the academic experiences of African American candidates at predominately-Caucasian institutions (Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, & Green, 2004).

Teacher Education Program Preparation.

The Mississippi Key Findings Report that is published by ACT stated that in 2018,

37,000 students took the ACT in the state of Mississippi, with an average score of 18.6 (American 2019). Of the Mississippi graduates that took the ACT in 2018, only 39% of them were African Americans students. This is a 1% drop from 2017, when the percentages were reported at 40%. Between the years of 2014-2018, only an average of 6% of graduating African American students met three out of four benchmarks of the ACT (American, 2019). It can be concluded that the state required score for entrance into teacher education of a 21 is unreasonable. The state's average ACT score of graduating high school students is 18.6. Only 30% of Mississippi high school students earned a 21 or higher on the ACT. This means that 70% of Mississippi high school graduates are not eligible for admittance into any teacher education program in the state. African American teacher educators are striving for an unattainable goal from the very beginning, when a 21 is being held as the goal score to have. This score has to be changed by the legislature because the average graduating Mississippi student does not come close to meeting this requirement.

Responses from participants indicated that they did not feel adequately prepared to be in a teacher preparation program. Participants indicated that when it came to pre-requisites there was not enough communication about what was needed to enter into the teacher education program. This was especially so in regards to the ACT and Praxis entrance requirements.

Teacher education programs have to make a better effort of communicating with high school and community colleges about the requirements, especially in reference to the 21 ACT. Teacher education candidates who do not have the required 21 on the ACT can take the Praxis I series of tests to show academic achievement. The Praxis I cut scores are set by the state and are not easy to obtain for students who also struggled with the ACT. The ACT is cheaper and is a more affordable option for teacher education candidates. Emphasis needs to be placed on

reaching that score on the front end, so that stress is not on the student on the back end if they do not attain it.

In reference to community colleges, the conversation has to be had with those candidates that are transferring about what courses and requirements are needed prior to transfer, so that years are not tacked onto their education journey because they are not prepared. This then becomes a barrier that leads African American education candidates to acquire more school debt and an increased school timeline. Combatting the lack of preparation means that African American candidates will enter the teacher preparation programs more informed and prepared to continue onto the path of becoming a certified teacher.

Revamp Public Perception.

Public perception was identified as a barrier and a support system by participants in this study. As previously mentioned, family members are discouraging college students from pursuing careers in teaching due to the dismal pay and the perception that teachers do nothing. To decrease the poor public perception that surrounds education, there must be a rebranding of what it means to be an educator. The public has to be able to see that we are more than people who work 8-3 and get summers off. Teaching is not just tests and achievement scores. Teaching has an emotional side that is often overlooked. It requires empathy and courage and can be frustrating on an emotional level. Many outside the profession never see the emotional toll on teachers.

Teacher education programs and school districts can showcase the true plights of educators. With the advancements in technology and the use of social media, this can be done cost efficiently with the use of a cell phone. Let the public get up close and uncomfortable with the award-winning teacher who has to work a second job, or the educator who sacrifices her own

kid's extracurricular activities, so that they can attend the ones of their students. In the rebranding of this profession, the perception of teachers will be replaced with true representations of the many emotional faces of educators.

Some states have been successful in changing the perception of the public towards education. States such as Oklahoma, Kentucky, and West Virginia have been successful in changing how the public views educators and the public's willingness to support educators in their quest for better teaching conditions (Ferguson, 2018). The primary means for achieving this change was striking. Although a strike is not the ideal solution to bargaining appreciation by the public and in Mississippi, it is illegal; it does give a visual of dissatisfaction when schools are lacking teachers because of a walkout. A poll conducted by Phi Delta Kappa indicated that 73% of the participants supported teachers striking for better pay (Ferguson 2018). Apparently, they do have the support of the public, because in 2019 a 5% raise was voted upon and given to teachers in West Virginia (Ferguson, 2018).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the public perception of educators has been challenged and changed. With the closing of schools around the world due to social distancing, the public has a newfound appreciation for the school and educators. Public support has increased since the COVID-19 Pandemic because the public is now seeing the value in school and educators and all that they provide on a daily basis for children (Vargas, 2020). Allowing the public to have a front row seat to what and how teachers enrich the lives of their students via mediums such as Zoom and Google Classroom during the Pandemic could possibly work to the advantage of educators. It may lead to a better appreciation and more positive public perception in the school years to come.

Increase Self-Efficacy.

Participant responses in the previous chapter indicated that African American teacher candidates felt they would not be able to be effective educators. As one participant in the previous chapter stated, “Do I belong here?” These feelings of inadequacy were heightened by other barriers that these students were facing at the time. This can lead a student to exhibit imposter syndrome. This syndrome leads to a person feeling that they are not “good enough”, and that they are a fraud. As an African American who faces societal judgement from all sides, imposter syndrome can attack mental health and self-esteem (Doggett, 2019).

This syndrome has no place in our candidates. These feelings will fester and if these African American candidates become certified, then they will take these feelings with them into their schools and manifest them into their students. Students are already dealing with enough and this would be one more thing to undermine their ability. That is why steps must be taken to eliminate negative self-efficacy in education candidates. Allowing teachers to be able to observe teachers who have been labeled as a successful teacher and the verbal support of stakeholders have been found to increase teacher self-efficacy (Klassen &Chiu, 2010). Providing African American candidates, the option to be assigned to a mentor teacher of their same demographic match is one way to accomplish increased teacher self-efficacy. Creating support groups facilitated by African American teachers, perhaps those in graduate programs, provides a veteran teacher who can provide feedback and encouragement for the candidate. This would provide measures identified as increasing self-efficacy.

Reduce Testing Standards.

The assessment instrument that is used to determine certification for teacher education candidates is the Praxis II series of tests. Different states have different requirements when it

comes to the application of testing scores. Forbes published an article that stated that 54% of students who take the Praxis II the first time, on elementary content, are unable to pass and 24% never pass the test (Wexler, 2019). Areas in which candidates want certification determine which Praxis II they will have to take. The question that states have to ask themselves is does a test adequately measure how proficient a candidate is in English, math, social studies, and science. This is an especially important question when the test has been shown by researchers as being biased to African American teacher education candidates (Bennett, McWhorter, & Kuykendall, 2006).

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the Mississippi Department of Education to make a concession that allowed candidates to acquire a 5-year license without passing the Praxis II. The decision was made due to the circumstances of social distancing where the candidates were not allowed to complete their requirements of student teaching or testing due to closures of schools and testing centers. Due to these limitations, certification standards were waived until 2021, when they would be reenacted.

This leads one to consider if certification tests are needed at all. If they are needed as a means of validating potential teachers, why are they being dismissed in times of crisis. This recent revision of the testing requirements due to the COVID-19 crisis gives candidates who meet all other requirements for certification a full five-year license without passing licensure exams. Even emergency certification in Mississippi is for only 1 year and then only on a case-by-case basis. The declining numbers of certified educators in the state of Mississippi has been a crisis long before now. This pandemic has highlighted the need to ask the question: Are these certification tests needed. The state of Mississippi has an opportunity to look at their testing requirements and determine if permanent changes could be made.

Eliminate Student Isolation.

Deciding to attend a school that lacks diversity is hard for many African American students. It is especially hard if your K12 experience was diverse. The lack of diversity in the selected school affects the faculty and the students in the building. Statements from the previous chapter indicate that African American candidates feel like the token “one” in these schools that lack diversity. They feel like they stick out like a sore thumb and they feel lonely. The teacher education program lasts at least two years and that is a long time to feel isolated. School should be a place of comfort and the isolation felt by these candidates hinders that from taking place.

In order to combat the isolation that occurs when programs lack diversity, efforts need to be made to create a sense of community with the African American teacher education population. This could be accomplished via student groups. Most programs have a student organization within their programs that are dedicated to different diversity groups, such as I.M.A.G.E (Increasing Minority Access to Graduate Education), M.A.M.P (Mississippi Alliance Minority Participation) and McNair Scholars Program. Programs such as these are available, but they do not target education majors. They target students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. A program such as the National Alliance of Black School Educators or Black Educators Rock could be useful in creating a place where diverse students could feel accepted and not isolated. Programs such as these help to foster a sense of community and identity that these students are lacking at their current institution due to the lack of diversity.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study helped shed light on barriers and supports that African American education candidates face while working towards certification. This research focused on one teacher preparation program in the state of Mississippi. With there being more teacher preparation

programs in the state, research is needed to determine the best ways to diversify those programs also to aid the teacher pipeline.

Further research can be conducted to determine barriers that may be evident in all sixteen teacher education programs throughout the state, especially in reference to African American candidates. Further research can be conducted to determine barriers that African American candidates face at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's). Further research can be conducted to compare and contrast barriers faced by African American teacher education candidates at HBCU's and PWI's. A critical eye can be used to determine what support systems are needed throughout the state to help African American teacher candidates become certified.

In reference to African American education candidates, gender research studies could be conducted to shed light on the lack of African American males that are choosing to become teachers. A study into teacher academy programs could yield information as to what steps are being made to grow our own educators in the state of Mississippi.

Conclusion

African American teachers are needed in today's schools. Their impact is not for African American children, but for all the students that they can impact around their culturally relevant teaching methods. The barriers that African American candidates are facing are not new, but it is time for teacher education programs to stop acting as though they do not exist. Teacher education programs have a responsibility to offer the best support systems to assist every candidate that enters their program to overcome barriers that they may face in obtaining certification. Acknowledging these barriers and increasing the access to the support systems that are needed to overcome them are only one step in the right direction. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the ongoing investigations into how to diversify the teacher pipeline in states

across the country, but especially in the state of Mississippi.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

I am Erica Avent and _____ referred me to you.

Currently I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Mississippi and I am working towards the completion of my dissertation. My study is focusing on determining if and what barriers Mississippi teacher education candidates are facing in their quest to attain certification and what measures are being taken by the teacher education programs to combat barriers to diversifying the teacher pipeline. I believe this research to be imperative because currently educational demographic trends indicate that although public schools collectively are becoming more diverse in student population, the teaching force is not.

Through the findings of my research, I hope to emphasize why diversity (especially in terms of African American teachers) is important for the current and future state of public education. Additionally, there has been little research addressing this issue; therefore, I hope to help fill a research void and perhaps encourage others to also investigate and bring more focus to this problem.

Mostly importantly, I am a Black teacher. (I currently am employed in the Oxford Public School District as an Intervention Coordinator. Thus this is more than research, but it is also an issue that has personal relevance to me.

I am writing to ask for your assistance in my doctoral research. I have chosen to investigate my research question through qualitative means of in depth interviews and a focus group that meets the demographic parameters of my study. Specifically, I hope to conduct a focus group with current students that are enrolled in the Foundations of Education Class, one on one interview with current teachers employed in public education, and one on one interview with current faculty and staff that interact with students in the teacher education program.

At the conclusion of the interviews, I will code the interview transcripts for themes that address various areas of my research, and write about these findings and research implications in the final two chapters of my dissertation.

Participants must meet the following criteria:

Be an African American student who is currently enrolled in the teacher preparation program

or

Be an African American student who graduated from a teacher preparation program in the last 2-3 years and employed as a K12 school as a certified teacher

or

Currently employed within the School of Education and work with African American students seeding certification in the Teachers Preparation Program

Participants in my study will only be referenced by pseudonyms to preserve anonymity. If you would be interested in participating in my research (or would like to inquire more about my study before deciding), please contact me at the following email address, using the subject heading "Doctoral Study": elbrantl@go.olemiss.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I hope to hear from you soon.

APPENDIX B

Study Information Sheet

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Study Title: Diversifying the Teacher Pipeline: Barriers that Prevent Teachers of Color from Entering the Profession

Investigator

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Faculty Sponsor

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Department of Education
206 Peabody Hall
University of Mississippi
University, MS 38677
(662) 915-5250
amonroe@olemiss.edu

checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Description

The purpose of this research is to determine if and what barriers Mississippi teacher education candidates are facing in their quest to attain certification and what measures are being taken by the teacher education programs to combat barriers to diversifying the teacher pipeline. You will not be asked for your name or any other identifying information.

Duration

It will take you 1-2 hours to complete this interview.

Risks and Benefits

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts for your participation. You should not expect benefits from participating in this study. However, you might experience satisfaction from contributing to scientific knowledge.

Confidentiality

No identifiable information will be recorded; therefore we do not think you can be identified from this study.

Right to Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this study and you may stop participation at any time. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, all you have to do is to tell Mrs. Erica Avent or Dr. Ann Monroe in person, by letter, or by telephone (contact information listed above). You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read and understand the above information. By completing the interview, I consent to participate in the study.

Student Participants in Investigators' Classes

Special human research subject protections apply where there is any possibility of undue influence – such as for students in classes of investigators. Investigators can recruit from their classes but only by providing information on availability of studies. They can encourage you to participate, but they cannot exert any pressure for you to do so. Therefore, if you experience any undue influence from your instructor, you should contact the IRB via phone (662-915-7482) or email (irb@olemiss.edu) and report the specific details. You will remain anonymous in an investigation.

Appendix C

Consent Form for Current Teacher Education Candidates Consent Form

MANDATORY CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE
– ADULT –
(Non-Treatment Studies)

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Diversifying the Teacher Pipeline: Barriers that Prevent Teachers of Color from Entering the Profession

Investigator

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Faculty Sponsor

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(662) 915-5250
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Key Information for You to Consider

- **Voluntary Consent.** You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
- **Purpose.** The purpose of this research is to determine if and what barriers Mississippi teacher education candidates are facing in their quest to attain certification and what measures are being taken by the teacher education programs to combat barriers to diversifying the teacher pipeline.
- **Duration.** It is expected that your participation will last 1-2 hours.
- **Procedures and Activities.** You will be asked to answer questions about your experience during the time you were seeking an undergraduate degree in Elementary Education.
- **Risks.** There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts for your participation.
- **Benefits.** You should not expect benefits from participating in this study. However, you might experience satisfaction from contributing to scientific knowledge.
- **Alternatives.** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

What you will do for this study

For the purpose of this study, you are being asked to participate in a focus group discussion that will be conducted to seek an understanding of the teacher candidates' self-perception of their program and their experience as they have matriculated through the program as an African American teacher education candidate at a predominately white university. The focus group will be held on campus at the School of Education.

In a conversation style setting, I will pose questions to the group and you along with other participants will answer the questions. There are no right or wrong answers. I, as the researcher, will take notes while conducting the interview. The handwritten notes will allow me to listen carefully to the responses of the participant and make notations that I need to pay extra attention to.

Videotaping / Audiotaping

You will be audio taped during the interview so that I can quote your interview answers and take better notes – more accurately.

Time required for this study

This study will take about 1-2 hours.

Possible risks from your participation

There are no anticipated risks to you from participating in the study.

Benefits from your participation

You should not expect benefits from participating in this study. However, you might experience satisfaction from contributing to scientific knowledge.

Confidentiality

Research team members will have access to your records. We will protect confidentiality by coding and then physically separating information that identifies you from your responses (which is even safer than how medical records are stored today).

Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) – the committee responsible for reviewing the ethics of, approving, and monitoring all research with humans – have authority to access all records. However, the IRB will request identifiers only when necessary. We will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone else without your written consent unless required by law.

Confidentiality and Use of Video/Audio Tapes

- Audio Recording will allow the experimenters to score your test responses to check reliability. Only experimenters on the research team will have access. The recording will be kept after transcription and will be destroyed after the end of the study – which is expected to be spring semester, 2020. The recording will be stored on a locked iPad will locked in a file cabinet in a locked office.

Right to Withdraw

You do not have to volunteer for this study, and there is no penalty if you refuse. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, just tell the experimenter and you may leave. Whether or not you participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with the Department of Education, or with the University, and it will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

The researchers may stop your participation in the study without your consent and for any reason, such as protecting your safety or protecting the integrity of the research data.

Student Participants in Investigators’ Classes

Special human research subject protections apply where there is any possibility of coercion – such as for students in classes of investigators. Investigators can recruit from their classes but only by providing information on availability of studies. They can encourage you to participate, but they cannot exert any coercive pressure for you to do so. Therefore, if you experience any coercion from your instructor, you should contact the IRB via phone (662-915-7482) or email (irb@olemiss.edu) and report the specific form of coercion. You will remain anonymous in an investigation.

IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, then decide if you want to be in the study or not.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have been given an unsigned copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Furthermore, I also affirm that the experimenter explained the study to me and told me about the study’s risks as well as my right to refuse to participate and to withdraw.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Participant _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Early Career Educators/Past Education Students Consent Form

MANDATORY CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE
– ADULT –
(Non-Treatment Studies)

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Diversifying the Teacher Pipeline: Barriers that Prevent Teachers of Color from Entering the Profession

Investigator

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Faculty Sponsor

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(662) 915-5250
amonroe@olemiss.edu

Key Information for You to Consider

- **Voluntary Consent.** You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
- **Purpose.** The purpose of this research is to determine if and what barriers Mississippi teacher education candidates are facing in their quest to attain certification and what measures are being taken by the teacher education programs to combat barriers to diversifying the teacher pipeline.
- **Duration.** It is expected that your participation will last 1-2 hours.
- **Procedures and Activities.** You will be asked to answer questions about your experience during the time you were seeking an undergraduate degree in Elementary Education.
- **Risks.** There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts for your participation.
- **Benefits.** You should not expect benefits from participating in this study. However, you might experience satisfaction from contributing to scientific knowledge.
- **Alternatives.** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

What you will do for this study

For the purpose of this study, you are being asked to participate in an interview that will be conducted to seek an understanding of their self-perceptions of their journey to becoming a certified teacher as an African American teacher education candidate at a predominately white university.

The current employed certified teachers' interviews will be held in the participants' classroom or at a neutral site in the community which provides a comfortable setting for the conversation. For the current employed certified teachers and Education program non-completers who are not certified, their interviews will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon public setting. I will interview each participant once with a projected time of one to two hours' total.

In a conversation style setting, I will pose questions to each interviewee and you, the participant will answer the questions. There are no right or wrong answers. I, as the researcher, will take notes while conducting the interview. The handwritten notes will allow me to listen carefully to the responses of the participant and make notations that I need to pay extra attention to.

Videotaping / Audiotaping

You will be audio taped during the interview so that I can quote your interview answers and take better notes – more accurately.

Time required for this study

This study will take about 1-2 hours for a semi-structured interview.

Possible risks from your participation

There are no anticipated risks to you from participating in the study.

Benefits from your participation

You should not expect benefits from participating in this study. However, you might experience satisfaction from contributing to scientific knowledge.

Confidentiality

Research team members will have access to your records. We will protect confidentiality by coding and then physically separating information that identifies you from your responses (which is even safer than how medical records are stored today).

Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) – the committee responsible for reviewing the ethics of, approving, and monitoring all research with humans – have authority to access all records. However, the IRB will request identifiers only when necessary. We will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone else without your written consent unless required by law.

Confidentiality and Use of Video/Audio Tapes

- Audio Recording will allow the experimenters to score your test responses to check reliability. Only experimenters on the research team will have access. The recording will

be kept after transcription and will be destroyed after the end of the study – which is expected to be spring semester, 2020. The recording will be stored on a locked iPad will locked in a file cabinet in a locked office.

Right to Withdraw

You do not have to volunteer for this study, and there is no penalty if you refuse. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, just tell the experimenter and you may leave. Whether or not you participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with the Department of Education, or with the University, and it will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

The researchers may stop your participation in the study without your consent and for any reason, such as protecting your safety or protecting the integrity of the research data.

Student Participants in Investigators’ Classes

Special human research subject protections apply where there is any possibility of coercion – such as for students in classes of investigators. Investigators can recruit from their classes but only by providing information on availability of studies. They can encourage you to participate, but they cannot exert any coercive pressure for you to do so. Therefore, if you experience any coercion from your instructor, you should contact the IRB via phone (662-915-7482) or email (irb@olemiss.edu) and report the specific form of coercion. You will remain anonymous in an investigation.

IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, then decide if you want to be in the study or not.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have been given an unsigned copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Furthermore, I also affirm that the experimenter explained the study to me and told me about the study’s risks as well as my right to refuse to participate and to withdraw.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Date

Appendix E
Faculty/Staff Consent Form

MANDATORY CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE
– ADULT –
(Non-Treatment Studies)

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Diversifying the Teacher Pipeline: Barriers that Prevent Teachers of Color from Entering the Profession

Investigator

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(662) 915-5250
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Key Information for You to Consider

- **Voluntary Consent.** You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
- **Purpose.** The purpose of this research is to determine if and what barriers Mississippi teacher education candidates are facing in their quest to attain certification and what measures are being taken by the teacher education programs to combat barriers to diversifying the teacher pipeline.
- **Duration.** It is expected that your participation will last 1-2 hours.
- **Procedures and Activities.** You will be asked to answer questions about an understanding of the progress that has been made to assist African American teacher candidates on their journey to becoming a certified teacher
- **Risks.** There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts for your participation.
- **Benefits.** You should not expect benefits from participating in this study. However, you might experience satisfaction from contributing to scientific knowledge.
- **Alternatives.** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

What you will do for this study

For the purpose of this study, you are being asked to participate in an interview to seek an understanding of perceptions of the progress that has been made to assist African American teacher candidates on their journey to becoming a certified teacher. The interviews will be held in the participants' office at the School of Education. I will interview each participant once with a projected time of one to two hours' total.

In a conversation style setting, I will pose questions to each interviewee and you, the participant will answer the questions. There are no right or wrong answers. I, as the researcher, will take notes while conducting the interview. The handwritten notes will allow me to listen carefully to the responses of the participant and make notations that I need to pay extra attention to.

Videotaping / Audiotaping

You will be audio taped during the interview so that I can quote your interview answers and take better notes – more accurately.

Time required for this study

This study will take about 1-2 hours for a semi-structured interview.

Possible risks from your participation

There are no anticipated risks to you from participating in the study.

Benefits from your participation

You should not expect benefits from participating in this study. However, you might experience satisfaction from contributing to scientific knowledge.

Confidentiality

Research team members will have access to your records. We will protect confidentiality by coding and then physically separating information that identifies you from your responses (which is even safer than how medical records are stored today).

Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) – the committee responsible for reviewing the ethics of, approving, and monitoring all research with humans – have authority to access all records. However, the IRB will request identifiers only when necessary. We will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone else without your written consent unless required by law.

Confidentiality and Use of Video/Audio Tapes

- Audio Recording will allow the experimenters to score your test responses to check reliability. Only experimenters on the research team will have access. The recording will be kept after transcription and will be destroyed after the end of the study – which is expected to be spring semester, 2020. The recording will be stored on a locked iPad will be locked in a file cabinet in a locked office.

Right to Withdraw

You do not have to volunteer for this study, and there is no penalty if you refuse. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, just tell the experimenter and you may leave. Whether or not you participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with the Department of Education, or with the University, and it will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

The researchers may stop your participation in the study without your consent and for any reason, such as protecting your safety or protecting the integrity of the research data.

Student Participants in Investigators’ Classes

Special human research subject protections apply where there is any possibility of coercion – such as for students in classes of investigators. Investigators can recruit from their classes but only by providing information on availability of studies. They can encourage you to participate, but they cannot exert any coercive pressure for you to do so. Therefore, if you experience any coercion from your instructor, you should contact the IRB via phone (662-915-7482) or email (irb@olemiss.edu) and report the specific form of coercion. You will remain anonymous in an investigation.

IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, then decide if you want to be in the study or not.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have been given an unsigned copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Furthermore, I also affirm that the experimenter explained the study to me and told me about the study’s risks as well as my right to refuse to participate and to withdraw.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Date

Appendix F

Early Career Educators Interview Questions

Early Career Educators Interview Questions

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. What has been your biggest challenge in your quest to become a teacher?
3. Describe the racial diversity of the college you attended.
4. Describe the educational path that led you to become a teacher.
5. Describe your interactions with administrators and other teachers in your teacher preparation program.
6. Do you feel that there are different expectations or pressures placed upon you because of your race?
7. Who are/were your mentors and from whom do you get your support?
8. What do you perceive to be the key obstacles for African Americans to becoming a teacher from the teacher preparation program that you graduated from?
9. How were you recruited to attend your teacher preparation program?
10. How many years have you been teacher and how long have you been teaching at your current school?
11. . What policy recommendations do you believe would support the recruitment and retention of African American teacher education candidates in this program?
12. How do you feel that African American teachers affect P12 student achievement?

Appendix G
Faculty/Staff Interview Questions

Appendix F- Faculty/Staff Interview Questions

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. In your role in the school of education how would you describe your role with teacher education candidates?
3. How does this school of education preparation program value diversity in the teaching force?
4. What policy recommendations do you believe would support the recruitment and retention of African American teacher education candidates in your program?
5. How important is it for teacher education programs to include a multicultural curriculum?
6. What is your departments recruitment and retention policies? Do you have specific policies for AA candidates?
7. How do you feel that African American teachers affect P12 student achievement? In what ways?
8. What do you perceive to be the key obstacles for African Americans to becoming a teacher from this teacher preparation program?
9. Do you feel that there are state or EPP policies at admissions, program completion, or post-graduation that impact African American candidates disproportionately?

Appendix H
Focus Group Interview Questions

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. What has been your biggest challenge in your quest to become a teacher?
3. Describe the racial diversity of the college you attended.
4. Describe the educational path that led you to become a teacher.
5. Describe your interactions with administrators and other teachers in your teacher preparation program.
6. Do you feel there are different expectations or pressures placed upon you because of your race?
7. Who are/were your mentors and from whom do you get your support?
8. What do you perceive to be the key obstacles for African Americans to becoming a teacher from this teacher preparation program?
9. How were you recruited to attend your teacher preparation program?
10. What policy recommendations do you believe would support the recruitment and retention of African American teacher education candidates in this program?
11. How do you feel that African American teachers affect P12 student achievement?

Appendix I

Education Program Non-Finishers Interview Questions

Education Program Non-Finishers Interview Questions

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. What has been your biggest challenge in your quest to become a teacher?
3. Describe the racial diversity of the college you attended.
4. Describe the educational path that led you to want to become a teacher.
5. Describe your interactions with administrators and other teachers in your teacher preparation program.
6. Do you feel that there are different expectations or pressures placed upon you because of your race?
7. Who are/were your mentors and from whom do you get your support?
8. What do you perceive to be the key obstacles for African Americans to becoming a teacher from the teacher preparation program that you graduated from?
9. How were you recruited to attend your past teacher preparation program?

Appendix J

Code Book

Code		Description
High Expectations		Interviewee alludes to how a teacher has high expectations for the student
Testing		Interviewee alludes to mentions of the Praxis/ACT and how it impacts certification of teacher educators
Isolation		Interviewee alludes to feelings of being alone within the classroom and/or program
Self-Efficacy		Interviewee alludes to their own ability
Public Perception		Interviewee alludes to the perception held by the public in regards of teaching as a profession
Finances		Interviewee states make indirect mention to teaching and financial funding rather it be from the selected school for education or in relation to salary.
Preparation		Interviewee states of makes indirect mention to preparation to enter the teacher education program
Certification		Interviewee alludes to becoming a certified teacher; rather it be through the tradition route or alternate route
Diverse Teachers		Interviewee alludes to diversity matters in the classroom and/or more diverse teachers are needed.
Mentor		Interviewee alludes to a mentor or mentoring program during their tenure at the selected school
Personal Connections		Interviewee alludes to personal connections at the selected university and within the teacher education program
College Acclimation		Interviewee alludes to the transition to the selected university

VITA

Erica LaShay Avent is a native of Forest, Mississippi, and has inspired and motivated the children of Mississippi schools for the past fifteen years. She completed elementary and secondary education in Scott Central School District, where her love for education began. Upon completion of high school, Erica enrolled in The University of Mississippi, located in Oxford, MS. She completed her Bachelor's, Master's, and Specialist degrees all from the University of Mississippi. She is also a National Board Certified Teacher.

Erica started her teaching career as a sixth-grade teacher in Holly Springs, MS in August of 2005. She taught elementary school in other MS school districts prior to becoming an Intervention Coordinator. Erica had a desire to receive a doctoral degree in Elementary Education, and she enrolled in this program at the University of Mississippi.

While enrolled in the Doctor of Education program at the University of Mississippi, Erica has presented at several state, national, and international teacher education conferences. In addition to this, she is working and mentoring teachers as an Adjunct Professor of Teacher Education with the University of Mississippi and mentor teacher with the Mississippi Teacher Fellowship Program. She serves as a board member for the Mississippi Association of Educators and President of the Oxford Association of Educators. In the fall of 2020, Erica will begin an administration position as an Assistant Federal Program Coordinator with the Holly Springs School District in Holly Springs, Mississippi.