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# Experiences of African American Parents of Special Needs Students and School Decisions

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Abstract

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MA, University of Phoenix, 2009

BS, University of North Florida, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Teaching Psychology

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Abstract

Many individuals prefer the ability to choose options as opposed to being directed toward a certain path. School choice programs in the United States allow parents to exercise their democratic right to choose what is best for their children with respect to choosing a school for them to receive their education. The problem is that many African American parents have lost faith and trust in public education due to low school safety, lack of quality education, and social/emotional issues with public schools. The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of African American parents concerning students' safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors in private and public elementary schools. The theoretical framework in this study was the decision theory. The decision theory examines the phenomenon of making choices. The findings were represented by six themes that emerged from the semistructured interviews. The findings indicated that many African American parents felt that there were too many flaws in the public schools and the public charter schools' systems due to such elements as inadequate curriculum, fairness, bullying, and the lack of academic services for many students with disabilities. A private school can provide a better atmosphere for African American children with disabilities to receive a quality education with more emphasis on their social and emotional development. The implication for positive social change was that it has the potential to equip public school administrators, private school administrators, and African American parents with information on how to make an informed decision regarding enrolling their special needs child into a private elementary school.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this to my children, Michael, and Kristen, who will forever be my greatest accomplishments. To the special women in my life, my mother Jean, who taught me about perseverance; my Go-Go, who always loved me unconditionally; and my Aunt Delphia, who encouraged me constantly with her prayers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

**Introduction**

The United States is a place where individuals want opportunities and options for themselves and their children. Many individuals prefer the ability to choose options as opposed to being directed toward a certain path (Holmes, 2017; Powell, 2017). School choice programs in the United States allow parents to exercise their democratic right to choose what is best for their children with respect to choosing a school for them to receive their education (Powell, 2017). These choices come from the experiences and perceptions parents have of the best schools that can accommodate the educational needs of their children. As a result of the choices provided to parents, many feel empowered and confident that they can provide the best school choice for their children (Holmes, 2017; Wang et al., 2019).

However, many African American parents of students with special needs have voiced concerns about school choice options (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Holmes, 2017; Powell, 2017; Wang et al., 2019). Furthermore, despite access to increased funding for private schools and the replacement of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2002) by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; 2015), the problem is that some African American parents of children special needs are making uninformed private school decisions, which might have the potential for special needs children enrolled in private school to achieve lower academic success than their public-school peers (Powell, 2017). Powell (2017) discussed how one African American parent of a special needs student was informed by school administration that they do not follow individual education plan (IEP) protocol.

Administrators also informed the parent that teachers were not trained to teach students with special needs. The parent felt very misled by the school's promises of a better education for her child, who was not progressing academically (Powell, 2017).

Within the United States, there are numerous laws regarding education and special needs students that are specific to public schools but not private schools. For example, public schools (but not private schools) that enroll students with special needs are required to adhere to the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004). According to the laws outlined by IDEA, special education students enrolled in public schools are entitled to the accommodation benefits of Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and IEP (Sopka, 2013). Also, Waitoller and Super (2017) noted that many parents of special needs African American children continue to remove their students from the public-school environment in favor of the charter school. Waitoller and Super found that the choices that minority parents made were based on the charter school proximity in their surrounding area. In this chapter, I discuss the background, the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, definition of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study regarding the lived experiences of African American parents concerning their student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools.

### Background

School choice is an important issue and is a widely debated topic in many areas of the United States by education researchers and policymakers (Billingham & Hunt, 2016;

Holmes, 2017; Wang et al., 2019). Many school districts within the United States have implemented school choice options that include private, charter, and home school options for parents. A common feature of these school choice options is that they are intended to increase students' academic achievement and options beyond just attending public schools (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Holmes, 2017). Many advocates of school choice believe that there is a need to empower parents to choose an appropriate school for their children (Holmes, 2017; Wang et al., 2019). The school choice movement in the United States developed from just a theory in some areas to achieve deregulation and competition into public schools, private schools, and charter schools. Researchers had noted that there are many educational options available for parents of students with disabilities in the school choice movement (Leath et al., 2020).

School choice for students with disabilities has many proponents and many detractors (Waitoller, 2020). Both advocates and opponents of school choice have noted the importance of the civil rights of the student with disabilities to receive a FAPE as required by the IDEA as a significant concern in the debate for school choice (McKittrick et al., 2020). Researchers have noted that when parents enroll their child in a public school or a public charter school, they receive the procedural safeguards noted in the IDEA Act (McKittrick et al., 2020; Sopka, 2013; Waitoller, 2020). These safeguards are the civil rights under the IDEA Act on providing certain services for students with disabilities (Waitoller, 2020). Children placed in private schools by parental choice are usually not entitled to this civil right under the IDEA Act. Parents taking their children with disabilities out of public or charter schools where they are guaranteed FAPE and

placing them in a private school is a decision that many parents must carefully consider (McKittrick et al., 2020; Waitoller, 2020).

Although many African American parents of students with disabilities are concerned with their child receiving FAPE that is guaranteed under the IDEA Act, they have noted other concerns such as students' safety, education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. Waasdorp et al. (2018) reported why parents of students with disabilities use the private school option for their children. Many of these parents noted that school climate and classroom management were essential to them for their children. Waasdorp et al. (2018) reported that some 60% of the parents noted better student discipline was essential to them, 51% noted smaller class size, 49% noted school safety, and 39% noted that individual attention was essential for their child with disabilities.

Waitoller and Super (2017) conducted a qualitative study about African American and Latinx parents in Chicago and their selection of charter schools for their special needs' student. They focused on whether the choices were made based off informed decision making or desperation due to location. The study also provided information that available school choices for charter schools might be influenced by race, disability, or neighborhood. Twenty-four parents responded and participated in the study. The results generated several themes from utilizing grounded theory analysis, tools, techniques, and supports. The authors recommended for further research to increase the participant pool to include those who have special needs students, positive charter school experiences and no legal issues against charter schools, and a longitudinal study of parents' experiences.

Furthermore, Brewer and Lubienski (2017) conducted a qualitative study that analyzed 12 charter school models. The study provided information on how general and specialized charter schools are demographically placed in advantaged and disadvantaged areas. The report also discussed how African Americans and average students are enrolled at a higher rate in charter schools. The students with special needs, language barriers, and low income were at a lesser rate of enrollment when compared to nearby public schools. The authors recommended for future research to familiarize themselves with research on parent decision making and the influences that take place.

Mann et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study that focused on how parents in Queensland, Australia, decided to transfer their student from regular school to special schools. An online questionnaire was provided to 80 randomly selected parents. The findings from the phenomenological analysis and its supports revealed two themes: concern for student emotional well-being and access to special needs supports and services. The authors recommended that future research include exploration of the decision-making process of parents who do not remove their special needs students from regular school.

Mawene and Bal (2018) conducted a qualitative literature review that examined research articles about decision making and school choice. The literature demonstrated how parents of special needs children had much more to consider when selecting a school. School location and accessibility to supports and services were of importance to parents. The authors recommended for further research to include decision making for school choice among minority parents of students with disabilities, geographical

locations, and socioeconomic circumstances. McNerney et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study in London, England, which consisted of 21 participants. The study focused on the decision-making process of parents of children with autism transitioning to secondary school. Semistructured interviews were among each participant. The authors recommended for further research to use a longitudinal approach to explore the influences associated with secondary education transitioning and how new educational laws can improve upon the decision-making process of parents of children with autism.

However, there is a lack of research on private school choice as well as how parents compare private and public school for African American parents of children with special needs in terms of their children's educational, safety, and social/emotional needs (Brewer & Lubienski, 2017; Waitoller & Super, 2017). This study was needed to help understand why many African American parents may choose a private elementary school option for their special needs child's education and the factors they consider, safety issues, education, and social/emotional, which includes giving up the rights they are afforded under the IDEA Act. Thus, there is a need to advance the research in this area of school choice for parents of students with disabilities at the elementary school level.

## Problem Statement

Many African American parents have lost faith and trust in public education due the low school safety, lack of quality education, and social/emotional issues with public schools (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; McKittrick et al., 2020; Mann et al., 2018; Waitoller, 2020). Further, there has been an increase in the number of African American parents considering private school as an option in dealing with several problems that public

schools face in the United States (Egalite & Wolf, 2016; Waitoller & Super, 2017). Some African American parents chose the private school option for their child with special needs because of their different beliefs. Some African American parents believed that some public-school systems were not correctly educating their children and providing a safe climate with low amounts of discipline issues and academic problems (Egalite & Wolf, 2016). Also, many African American parents felt that the public-school system did not try to ensure that African American children with disabilities were receiving adequate education (Mawene & Bal, 2018; Smith, 2020). Researchers have noted that many African American parents place a high value on educating their children, and they felt that the public-school system was falling short in providing students with disabilities the necessary services they needed to increase their academic achievement in the least restrictive environment (Egalite & Wolf, 2016; Mawene & Bal, 2018; Smith, 2020).

Public school funding has been an issue for many school districts across the United States, resulting in inadequate education for many students attending public schools (Leachman et al., 2016). Furthermore, many African American students are vulnerable to the consequences of inadequate educational opportunities due to teachers not providing the needed services for students due to discipline issues and inadequate resources for the classroom (Gatlin & Wilson, 2016). Gatlin and Wilson (2016) reported that the United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights revealed that many African American students received inadequate and unequal education in subject areas such as science, language arts, and mathematics in many public schools. The results of this reality have prompted many African American parents to choose private school

options because private schools would allow them to select academic curriculums for their child with disabilities and more involvement in monitoring the learning activities in which the child is participating at the private school. Further, many students with disabilities learn better in an environment where there are less distractions and that can foster their emotional and social development (Mawene & Bal, 2018; Riley, 2016).

Many African American parents feel that there are too many flaws in the public schools and the public charter schools' systems due to such elements as inadequate curriculum, fairness, bullying, and the lack of academic services for many students with disabilities (Billingham & Hunt, 2016). A private school can provide a better atmosphere for African American children with disabilities to receive a quality education with more emphasis on their social and emotional development (Billingham & Hunt, 2016). Moreover, many African American parents believe they can manage their children's education and development early in their school years. The issues and problems they experience in the public and charter school systems can be solved over time (Billingham & Hunt, 2016).

There was a gap in the literature on African American parents' lived experiences concerning their child's education in terms of safety issues, education, and social/emotional with respect to sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. There are also education quality issues of schools and choice of public versus private school. Researchers have not addressed the reasons why many African American parents choose the private school option for their children with disabilities (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Mawene & Bal, 2018). This study filled the

literature gap regarding reasons why many African American parents choose private

school options on sending their children with disabilities to a private elementary school.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African

American parents concerning student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional

factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary

schools. Phenomenology was the research paradigm used to explore the lived experiences

of African American parents of special needs children. I used the descriptive

phenomenological paradigm to describe and explore the phenomena.

I filled the literature gap regarding reasons many African American parents

choose private elementary school options for their children with disabilities. The results

of this study may provide more information and knowledge for private and public schools

leaders with increased understanding on listening to more African American parents'

concerns on providing adequate services for students with disabilities in the elementary

school setting.

## Research Questions

Research Question (RQ)1: What are the lived experiences of African American

parents who choose a private elementary school for their child with special needs?

Research Question (RQ)2: What is the meaning of education in a private versus

public elementary school for African American parents of a child with special needs?

**Theoretical Framework**

Edwards's (1954) decision theory was the theoretical foundation in this study.

Decision theory examines the phenomenon of making choices. Edwards's (1954)

decision theory birthed two concepts: normative theory and descriptive theory. In

normative decision theory, African American parents have exhausted the research

information and have rational decisions. In descriptive decision theory, African American

parents know that exhaustive research is required, but other variables thwart the decision-

making process, thus producing unwanted outcomes (Edwards, 1954).

I chose the decision theory because it was relevant to the choices made by the

parents, which was the main phenomenon of the study. This model provided a framework

to explore African American parents' perceptions concerning students' safety, adequate

education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private

elementary schools. A detailed discussion on the decision theory is provided in Chapter

2.

**Nature of the Study**

I used a descriptive phenomenological research approach for this qualitative

study. A descriptive phenomenological approach allows the researcher to understand the

meanings of the participants' consciousness by describing how individuals' lived

experiences and the characteristics of their perceptions are grounded in their real-world

experiences (Jackson et al., 2018; Giorgi, 2012). A phenomenological researcher explores

a phenomenon and makes sense of each participants' lived experiences (Jackson et al.,

2018; Giorgi, 2012). The phenomenological design was appropriate for this study

because it allowed for the exploration of parents' perception concerning students' safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools.

Through purposeful sampling, 11 participants were selected who met the following criteria: African American parents who had children in a private elementary school in central Florida. The participants took part in a semistructured, virtual interview. The interviews took from 45 to 60 minutes to complete, depending on the flow of the conversation. I explored the African American parents' lived experiences concerning students' safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. The descriptive phenomenological data analysis involved the Giorgi 5-step process for analyzing qualitative data and categorizing the essential meanings of the phenomenon for themes that may emerge (Giorgi, 2009). The following are the 5-step process of Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological data analysis:

1. The first step to assume an attitude of the descriptive phenomenological perspective.

2. The second step is to review and read the complete narrative to obtain the full view of the participants' experiences.

3. The third step in the data analysis process is the demarcation of meaning within the narrative so that the data can be delt with in manageable portions.

4. The fourth step is to transform the meaning units into psychologically sensitive descriptive expressions of the narrative.

5. The fifth step is the synthesis of the general psychological structure from the psychological constituents of the experiences from the participants.

**Definitions of Terms**

*African American:* An African American is an American of Black African descent. Also, African Americans are an ethnic group of Africans with total or partial ancestry from any of the Black racial groups of Africa (Dumas & Ross, 2016).

*Choice:* A choice is an act of considering or deciding to do something when faced with several alternatives. A choice is also a cognitive process of reaching a decision that involves consideration (Shepard & O'Grady, 2017).

*Decision*: A decision is a course of action made after hearing and deliberation with one or more choices to make a confident decision on a matter (Barone Kolenc, 2016).

*Descriptive decision theory:* The descriptive decision theory involves how individuals make decisions with little to no information (Shapira, Bell, Raiffa, & Tversky, 1990).

*IEP*: A written legal document that describes educational services and accommodations for a student, used by teaching staff and support facilitators (Kurth et al., 2019).

*Parent:* A parent is a mother or father who supports a child (Neuman & Guterman, 2016).

*Private school:* A private school is an educational venue that parents must pay tuition to for their children to attend (Neuman & Guterman, 2016).

**Assumptions**

Assumptions are important in a study because they guide and frame the study process to generate evidence and conclusion from the study (Nkwake, 2012). In this study, I assumed that African American parents would provide in depth answers to the interview questions. I assumed that the participants would have a genuine interest in the study. I also assumed that I could gain the participants' trust to be truthful and accurate in describing their lived experiences concerning students' safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. A final assumption was that each African American parent would have the necessary information and experience to provide information about their decisions on sending their children with disabilities to a private elementary school.

**Scope and Delimitations**

The 11 participants for this study were delimited to African American parents of students with disabilities at the private elementary school level. This study was delimited to African American parents who resided in Central Florida. This study consisted of males and females over the age of 18. This study did not include males and females who were not African American. In this study, I explored these populations to explore African American parents' lived experiences concerning students' safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools.

I chose the decision theory to explain the decisions made by the parents about the choice of school for their special needs child. Edwards's (1954) decision theory birthed

two concepts: normative theory and descriptive theory. In normative decision theory, African American parents have exhausted the research information and have rational decisions whereas in descriptive decision theory, African American parents know that exhaustive research must be done, but other variables thwart the decision-making process, thus producing unwanted outcomes (Edwards, 1954). This model provided a framework to explore African American parents' lived experiences concerning students' safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools.

I achieved transferability by being transparent with providing the reader an in-depth description of the location of the study, the context, and a detailed description of the participants in the study (Connelly, 2016). The researcher should provide clear and concise details of the steps in the research process so that other researchers can conduct the study in a similar manner (Herzog et al., 2019). I provided clear and concise detailed descriptions of the procedures and findings from the study so that the study could be generalized to other settings. I also conducted individual interviews with each participant, created detailed notes, and recorded the interviews to be transcribed for data analysis with the participants.

## Limitations

This study included some limitations related to method, design, and data collection (see Creswell, 2017). This was a descriptive phenomenological study with a small sample size. A limitation of this study includes generalizability to other settings and populations. I gathered experiences from a limited number of people within this study, so

the outcomes may not be considered a typical experience of all African American

parents. However, the results of this study represent the experiences of the participants in

the study. The participants may also have had unknown biases before providing a

response that may have influenced their understanding of the questions during the

interview process.

Another limitation of this study is researcher bias toward the participants. I am an

African American female who is a special education teacher in Florida. Therefore, some

bias may have affected how the interviews were conducted and perceived and how the

transcripts were analyzed. Due to my shared relatedness, I may have had personal

experiences that did not align with the participants' experiences, which may not have

allowed a greater level of empathy for the research participants. It is important to

recognize a researcher's personal views of the world and discern the presence of a

personal lens to accurately listen and analyze the participants' reflections within the data

collected during the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). As the researcher, I maintained a

journal to bracket my preconceived ideas about the topic before conducting the

interviews. To avoid personal bias, the interview questions were created before the

interview process and were delivered within the interview to all participants verbatim

(see Creswell, 2017; Fusch & Ness, 2015). The interviews took place using a virtual

online platform with each of the participants.

## Significance of the Study

In this qualitative study, I attempted to fill the gap in research that focused on

comprehending the decisions of African American parents of special needs children to

private elementary schools due to safety issues, education, and social/emotional issues through their lived experiences. The experiences learned from this study might provide African American parents with information that should aid in making an informed decisions regarding private school education and ensuring the fate of their special needs student's education. This study can influence nonpublic school administrators to enhance the skills of their teaching staff through professional development and training to address curriculums for special education students. The significance of this study is that it has the potential to equip public school administrators, private school administrators, and African American parents with information on how to make an informed decision regarding enrolling their special needs child into a private elementary school. African American parents should utilize resources, peer influence, and personal experience when deciding on a private school for their child with disabilities.

### Summary

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of African American parents concerning their student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. I filled the literature gap about why African American parents choose private school options to send their children with disabilities to a private elementary school due to safety issues, education, and social/emotional issues. This study's findings may provide knowledge of public and private educational leaders' understanding of the importance of evaluating African American parents' views on the

educational system for providing adequate services for students with disabilities in the elementary school setting.

A descriptive phenomenological design allows the researcher to explore the lived experiences of its participants (Giorgo, 2012; Husserl, 1970). A phenomenological researcher explores a phenomenon and makes sense of each participant's lived experiences (Jackson et al., 2018). The descriptive phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because it allowed an exploration of African American parents' lived experiences of their children's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. I used decision theory as the theoretical framework for this research study.

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I will present the relevant parents' choice of sending their children with disabilities in public school to a private school. The literature review includes information on young children's education in private schools, and the parent's lived experiences of using the private school options for their children with special needs. I provide research information on students' safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. A literature review on the decision theory theoretical framework related to this research study is provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

**Introduction**

School choice is an important issue and is widely debated by education researchers and policy makers throughout the United States (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Holmes, 2017; Wang et al., 2019). Many school districts within the United States have implemented school choice options that include private, charter schools, and home school options for parents. A common feature of these school choice options is that they are intended to increase the academic achievement and options for students beyond just attending public schools (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Holmes, 2017). Many advocates of school choice believe that there is a need to empower parents to choose the appropriate schools in which to send their children to foster competition for them (Holmes, 2017; Wang et al., 2019).

The option of school choice has been a relevant issue within the educational arena. School choice has been implemented to offer parents better educational opportunities for their child. O'Day & Smith (2016) discussed how school choice is way of minimalizing the public-school arena that serves mostly children of color and the impoverished. They also found that the school choices had one thing in common with the public schools: poor quality education for children of color and the poor.

Though quality school choice may be available to everyone in the United States, it may not hold true for some parents of students with disabilities (Waitoller & Lubienski, 2019). Some African American parents of special needs students may face another dilemma when it comes to school choice. African American parents are faced with

making the decision that can accommodate the needs of their child. African American

parents are given the opportunity to research and find the best outcome (Waitoller &

Lubienski, 2019). However, certain situations can thwart the decision-making processes,

which may contribute to the academic success of special needs students not being met

(Wang et al., 2019).

In this literature review, I discuss information on reasons why parents of students

with disabilities send their children to private schools. This chapter is organized to

present the literature review strategies, the theoretical foundation, and a background on

parents' school choices throughout the United States with research on private schools,

public schools, charter schools, and homeschooling. The literature review also highlights

African American parents' view of the private school option for their children with

disabilities. In addition, I address African American parents' concerns of the private

school option for their children with disabilities at the elementary school level. Lastly,

there is a summary of Chapter 2 and the transition to Chapter 3.

## Literature Search Strategy

Walden University and the University of North Florida's online library: JSTOR,

Sage, EBSCOhost, Online Journals, ProQuest, and Psych INFO were used extensively

and methodically to obtain articles that were relevant to the research. To gain additional

resources, I accessed the Google scholar search engine, which provided substantive

information pertaining to relevant articles. The initial keyword and phrase searched was

*decision making of African American parents.* To further expand the research for more

relevant articles, I included the phrases *special needs children African American parents,*

*African American parents school choice, phenomenology, decision making theory,*
*descriptive, normative rational choice, minority parents, Black parents, Black special*
*needs students*, *parent-school choice, African American parent school choice, parent*
*decision making, parent perception of school choice for special needs students and*
*school choice for special needs, minority private school choice, race and school choice,*
*minority and school choice decisions, charter school safety, school cultural, home*
*schooling, public schools,* and *urban settings and school choice.*

 Peer-reviewed scholarly articles published within a span of 5 years were used. I also accessed books and literature from prominent agencies and government sites that were affiliated with and were well versed in the subject matter. Older literature such as those that provided original writings were accessed and contributed to the research as well.

## Theoretical Foundation

 The concept of decision making has evolved over the years and has been applied to many sciences by different philosophers, with each bringing forth their own interpretation of the concept. Amadio and Kenny (2019) discussed how the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, theorized that decision making is comprised of two components for the decision process to occur. Aristotle posited that intelligence and wisdom must be present for virtuous reasoning or practical reasoning as a prequel to decision making (as cited in Amadio & Kenny, 2019). Aristotle also believed that the decision-making efforts can be ineffective if the decision maker has selfish desires. The selfish desires complicate the rational decision process (Amadio & Kenny, 2019).

Another theory on decision making was made by 17<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher Pascal. Pascal was a scientist, mathematician, and statistician who focused on the theory of decision making and its process. Pascal focused on the decision-making process of religion such as in accepting or rejecting the concept of God (as cited in Sansom, 2017). Over the years, theorists have applied decision theory to many sciences with the idea that humans are and should be unswerving and rational in their thinking (Amadio & Kenny, 2019).

Through the efforts of modern-day theorists, decision making theory has evolved into an important component in the psychology of human behavior. Modern day theorists such as Edwards (1954) discussed the human phenomenon of decision making. Edwards found that while researching the dynamics of making decisions, two distinct components were discovered about the nature of decision making. The components are descriptive and normative.

According to Edwards (1954), the descriptive concept describes the process of how individuals will make decisions. Bell et al. (1988) posited those individuals take on a decision-making role realistically in the descriptive component of decision-making. Individuals can be illogical in the processing of information regarding the possibilities of a situation. One axiom that holds true is that individuals know that thorough research should take place in to receive the best outcome (Bell et al., 1988). However, the individual uses little or no information in their decision making, thus possibly producing an undesirable outcome (Edwards, 1954). Simon (1957) proposed the descriptive component of decision making as "bounded rationality," which defines how

individuals in the decision-making process have limited information regarding available choices and outcomes that would make decision making easy. Some individuals may be content with their decision based on the premise that the individual did not want to spend the time or effort researching other plausible choices. The normative component of decision making is concerned with how individuals should make decisions on matters of significance. Individuals are thinking and processing information rationally.

Tah (2019) examined the perceptions of parents of students with disabilities in the education marketplace as they searched for schools for their children. The purpose of Tah's (2019) study was to examine the motivations behind parents' school choice, the children, and the sources of information used by the parent in selecting the appropriate school for their child with disabilities. The results of this study revealed that many of the parents were not motivated by choice of the best academic possibilities or the school with the best credentials and the most effective school for their children with disabilities. Tah's (2019) research findings contradicted Gatlin and Wilson's (2016) study. Gatlin and Wilson discussed that when school choice offerings are plentiful and provide numerous options to parents, the rational processing of information takes place. For example, school choice fairs are open to parents. Parents attend school choice fairs to see what is available, and they give parents an idea of what they want. After seeing all the school choice options available, their knowledge base broadens. Parents can then weigh their options and make a rational choice based upon their preferences. Tah's (2019) research found that the rational processing of information took place during the school choice

selection when parents had an array of school choice options available to them and the
advantage of selecting what they considered as a good fit for their child. Tah (2019)
posited that when rational thinking is applied to parental decisions regarding school
choice, parents have the opportunity of getting what they wanted for their child based on
their own personal preferences and expectations.

Normative decision theory found that individuals during the decision-making
process are conscious of the many potential outcomes. Moreover, normative theory
focuses on how individuals decide what is rational (Peterson, 2017). Many people expect
to get the most from their decision because of the effort put into the research that helped
to make the decision (Bernoulli, 1954). In normative decision theory, parents will weigh
their options and do the necessary research that will yield the best outcomes (Peterson,
2017).

Current literature has demonstrated that the application of descriptive decision
theory is relevant to the decision-making process of parents regarding education.
Edwards et al. (2018) used a theoretical foundation to discuss the decision-making efforts
of parents regarding the interventions used for their autistic student. Nolte and Wren
(2016) discussed how parents with mental health issues made decisions regarding
education based upon the relationships they had with their child. Further, Alsauidi (2016)
reported that the perceptions that parents had about area schools influenced their school
choice selection. The decision theory's descriptive component was applied in this study
to the phenomenon of how African American parents of special needs children, Grades
K-3, are making uninformed private school decisions, which might have the potential for

special needs children enrolled in private school to achieve lower academic success than their public-school peers.

The decision theory provides a context on the perspectives of African American parents choosing a private elementary school option for their child with disabilities. Edwards's (1954) decision theory uses two concepts: normative theory and descriptive theory. In normative decision theory, African American parents have exhausted the research information and have rational decisions whereas in descriptive decision theory, African American parents know that exhaustive research must be done, but other variables thwart the decision-making process, thus producing unwanted outcomes (Edwards, 1954).

This model provided a framework to explore African American parents' lived experiences concerning students' safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. The research questions addressed the lived experiences of African American parents who choose a private elementary school for their special needs child. Moreover, the research questions focused on the meaning of education in a private versus public elementary school for African American parents of a special needs child. These questions added to the existing theories on African American parents' private school choice for their children with special needs.

## Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

**History of School Choice**

The history of school choice began with early communities in the United States that had a common goal of quality educational opportunities for their children (Friedman, 1955; Logan, 2018). During this era, Economist Milton Friedman, an advocate for education, believed that government entities should not be directly involved in education. Instead, Friedman promoted the concept of pedagogical offerings from select government approved schools known as school choice (Friedman, 1955; Logan, 2018). To make these schools affordable to families, Friedman pushed for monetary support to families through vouchers. These vouchers would assist with school expenses (Friedman, 1955; Logan, 2018).

The state-approved schools follow specific core curriculum guidelines, as in language arts, science, reading, and math, not equal to those of public school (Friedman, 1955; Logan, 2018). These schools were overseen by government entities, private nonprofit or for-profit agencies, religious, or subsidiaries of government.  Friedman (1955) supported competition among school choice participants. He viewed market trends among the participating schools. If a school was deemed as an academically weaker school, after review of the market trends, the school would be dropped from the school choice pool and closed (Friedman, 1955; Logan, 2018).

The original purpose of school choice was to promote the ideology of better educational opportunities for children based upon school quality and affordability (Logan, 2018). School choice was an opportunity that was available to White children

(Logan, 2018). During this time, parents could select schools based on educational importance, location, and affordability. Private schools soon entered the school choice arena by offering opportunities based upon religious preferences, location, or educational services. Most notably, Catholic schools entered the school choice arena by offering an alternative to public schools. The offer of a Catholic school education and services was made available to children, and funding was provided by Catholic charities (Logan, 2018).

In an effort towards the modernization of school choice, the 1954 case of Brown vs the Board of Education in Topeka commenced. This case historically and profoundly changed educational rights for African American children. The court case ruled in favor of the desegregating schools to offer African American children the same educational opportunities as their White peers (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). Despite laws that were passed, some cities still refused to desegregate schools. However, between 1957 and 1958 in Mississippi, the Catholic churches were at the forefront of desegregation. Catholic church schools offered two choices to parishioners. That choice was to decide by the end of the week to either integrate or excommunicate (Logan, 2018; School segregation and integration | Articles and essays | Civil rights history project | Digital collections | Library of Congress, n.d.).

In the 1960s, education of minority children took place in several areas in the community. Logan (2018) reported that education had taken a historical turn towards the segregation of children, due to their economic status, cultural/racial differences, and disabilities. Logan found that children of color, such as Hispanic, African American, or

Asian Pacific Islanders, were segregated from public school. However, their White and Native American counterparts with disabilities were not. In addition, during the 1960s, the first magnet school program in the United States was created: Tacoma Washington's McCarver Elementary school, which began in 1968 (Mendez et al., 2017). Lyndon B. Johnson campaigned for a "War on Poverty" for low-income families. His campaign initiates federally funded Title IV and bilingual educational programs to assist low-income students. The Bilingual ACT of 1965, also known as Title IV and bilingual education, was replaced by the NCLB in 2002, and the ESSA Law (2015) replaced the NCLB Act on increasing services for students with disabilities. Further, in the year 1965, Johnson signed The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which focused on educational opportunities for all children, specifically low income (Logan, 2018). All these laws aided in students with disabilities receiving increased educational services in the United States.

Magnet programs were created in the 1970s to diversify schools and allow for a more significant expansion of school choice. Magnet programs turned schools that were in urban areas into schools that provided a curriculum specific to desirable occupations. The magnet program was implemented to diversify school populations in undiversified areas (Logan, 2018). If a student lived in an upper middle-class neighborhood and was interested in medicine or performing arts, they would be transported to that magnet school. The opposite was the same for magnet schools opening in predominantly White neighborhoods in which the magnet school would receive inner city or minority students to the area (Logan, 2018).

**Decision Making for Parents**

Researchers noted that there are two types of decision-making theories (McFall, 2015). These include philosophical normative theories, which is how individuals make decision. The second descriptive decision theory is how individuals make decisions (McFall, 2015). The purpose of the decision theory is that many people apply rules of thinking that guide behavior without the need for deep thinking processing to make decisions under uncertainty (McFall, 2015). In terms of parents, their descriptive decision and choice usually come from their family, educational level, social group, and their culture. Parents tend to rely on their own experiences to guide their decision-making process. The decision-making processes is usually based on convenience, which sometimes leads to making poor choices for their children (McFall, 2015).

**School Choice Options**

There are several school choices options available to African American parents. The school choice options are private, public, home school, and charter schools. According to Baker et al. (2020), public school is defined as "a free tax-supported school controlled by a local governmental authority" (p. 1). Charter and private school are defined as schools that are established, conducted, and primarily supported by a nongovernmental agency. In addition, home school is defined as educating children at home or in other places than at a tradition school. Researchers noted that parents have the right to educate their children using any of these settings in the United States (Baker et al., 2020; Tah, 2019). Tah (2019) found that when parents considered school choice options for their special needs' student, they had a choice of public, private, and

alternative education within the special education arena. However, the author noted that

is limited information regarding to how parents of special needs students make school

choice decisions and the factors that play into the decision-making process (Tah, 2019).

In the United States African American parents have the school choice options available to

them in their neighborhood. Logan (2017) discussed that the options may or may not be

the same quality as the schools outside of their area, because of living situations,

proximity, transportation, socioeconomic status, cultural or racial differences. Mawene et

al., 2018; Waitoller and Super (2017) found similarities as well among minorities living

in urban areas were proximity and transportation. If schools are not in walking distance

or close in proximity transportation would be an issue. The other issue discussed was the

idea of attending a school that did not represent the families' socioeconomic status, race,

or cultural differences (Mawene et al., 2018; Waitoller & Super, 2017).

Some researchers noted that school choice is driven by the market theory (Rowe &

Lubienski, 2017; Tah, 2019). The assumption of the marketing theory that a free school

choice system would work well for them. Also, the market theory emphasizes demand

driven school choice, and individual choice drives the market for school choice for many

parents. In addition, the theory noted that parents will shop for the best schools on the

bases of cost to benefits and they need to find accurate resources and information to make

the correct choice for their children (Rowe & Lubienski, 2017; Tah, 2019). In the market

driven system, many parents will seek to send their children to the best schools with high

academic qualities. Parents are viewed as rational actors in the school choice and

marketplace where their motivation will rest on evidence of whether the school choice is

effective. Furthermore, many parents look at suitability for the academic needs of their children (Prieto et al., 2019). Waitoller and Lubeinski (2019) study further identified that children of color had little educational avenues due to the early use of market models for education. Marketing models were not constructed to assist in opening educational choice arenas for children of color. Instead, it was implemented for schools to gain incentives by not enrolling children of color. This incentive made it more so difficult for children of color with special needs (Waitoller & Lubeinski, 2019).

**Public Schools in the United States**

Public schools in the United States are governed by state and local government. The Federal Department of Education plays a role in getting certain standards, the setting and education finance of schools (Glavin, 2014*).* The federal government also manage some elementary and secondary schools for children whose parents are in the military and these school are run by the Department of Defense *(*Hornbeck, 2017). All public schools in many areas of the United States have a choice between free tax schools or privately funded private schools (Glavin, 2014*;* Hornbeck, 2017).

The public-school system is supported by local, state, and federal government funding resources through certain taxes from these resources (Washington et al., 2020). Researchers noted that a larger part of the funding form public school comes from local property taxes, and this widely vary from local area to another area within the same state or community *(*Glavin, 2014*;* Washington et al., 2020). Also, there are a variety of resources available for teachers and students in some school districts across the United States spent on students. Class size can also vary from school district to school district.

The curriculum that is used in a school district is largely made at the local and state level, however, the federal government has limited influence on certain aspects of the school district curriculum (Hornbeck, 2017).

Researchers noted that admission to public school districts are usually based on your residency (Hornbeck, 2017*;* Welsh, 2017*)*. To bridge the gap between differences in the quality of education students receive in some school districts, school districts serving large areas such as in cities that offer magnet schools that provide enrollment to specific number of non-resident students in addition to serving all students in certain areas of the school district (Allen & Gawlik, 2021). This special enrollment is usually based on the lottery system order which tries to make it fair for students to attend the magnet school program. Some magnet schools offer programs for gifted students or to student with special interests and needs such as the sciences or the performing arts (Allen & Gawlik, 2021)

Some major issues facing public school today include assessment of proficiency versus student growth, funding for resources, and legal protection of special education students (Welsh, 2017). Researchers noted that since the 1950s, the United States school system has gone through a crisis with academic performance. The lack of academic performance shows that school children in the United States are behind such countries as Russia, Japan, and China in many core subjects (Allen & Gawlik, 2021; Welsh, 2017). The federal government has tried to rectify these problems through several legislative acts in recent decades such as the ESSA Act. This act places emphasis on all school districts to raise the academic performance of all students including students with

disabilities in school systems (Hodges, 2018). Researchers also, reported that in many school districts in the United States, teachers generally fail to receive extra training to equip them to be able to improve their teaching of the diverse population of students in several school districts (Allen & Gawlik, 2021; Hodges, 2018).

**Private Schools**

Researchers noted that private schools in the United States include parochial schools such as religious affiliate schools, for-profits schools, and nonprofit schools (Allen & Gawlik, 2021; Hodges, 2018). Many private schools charge parents' various rates for these children to attend the schools. The cost for attending a private school depends on the state and location. Also, many private schools charge parents according to the expense of running the schools, and their ability to obtain funding resources other than tuition (Allen & Gawlik, 2021). For example, some churches will subsidize the tuition rate for some of their members to attend private schools that is church related. Some parents noted that if their child attends a private school, they should be able to take the funding they receive at the public school to pay the private school tuition through a voucher program. The voucher programs are used by some states to pay tuition for students attending private school (Warner-Griffin, 2016).

The mission of private schools varies such as some cater to students seeking college needing a competitive edge with the college admission process. Other private schools cater to gifted students, students with physical disabilities, students with learning disabilities, students with other needs, and students with specific religious affiliations (Warner-Griffin, 2016). In addition, some private schools cater to certain families who

want their children to attend school with a small class size, with certain nurturing needs, school safety issues, and a supportive and nurturing environment for their children (Allen et al., 2018). Private school unlike public school systems do not have a legal obligation to accept a student who may want to attend the private school. The admission process for some elite private schools in the United States is very competitive (Allen & Gawlik, 2021).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2020), 50.8 million students attended private schools in 2019. This was an increase of 15% over the past two years. The NCES (2020) also noted that there were 35 million students in Pre-K to 8th grade who attended a private school in the United States during the 2019 school year. In addition, the NCES data also noted that racial makeup of private schools in the United States during the 2018 to 2019 school year was 75% White student, non-Hispanic 10%, African Americans 10%, Hispanic 5%, and Asian were 6%. (NCES, 2019).

**Charter Schools**

Charter schools in the United States both elementary and secondary schools usually do not charge students fees to take the state mandated assessment exam. Charter schools do not have to follow rules, regulations, and traditional statutes as required public school across the United States (De Luca & Wood, 2016; Hassel, 2017; Saultz, 2017). In addition, charter school receive less funding to operate their schools than funding for public schools which receive a set amount for each student in the school system. There are both for-profit and non-profit charter schools. Charter school that are non-profit can

also receive donations from private sources to operate their schools (De Luca & Wood, 2016; Saultz, 2017).

Researchers noted that during the 2016-2017 school year, there was some 6,900 public charter schools operating in some 42 states in the United States (Hassel, 2017). Also, there was approximately three million students attended public charter school during the 2016-2017. This was a six-fold increase in enrollment for public charter school in the past 15 years (Hassel, 2017). During the 2015 school year, there were about 400 new charter schools that opened while approximately 270 charter school closed due to low enrollment, lack of operating finance, and poor academic performance (De Luca & Wood, 2016; Hassel, 2017). However, in many areas of the United States several charter schools have a waiting list, and many charter schools allocate students by a lottery system. The lottery system means that some school districts put numbers in a hat and pull numbers to determine which child can attend individual schools. Also, many charter schools provide a specialized curriculum such as mathematics, arts, and vocational training. Many parents send their children to public charter through the school option system. the school option system can be used when certain schools in a school district are considered failing as measured by state criteria. The school choice option is a system where public schools that are considered failing due to low scores, parents have the option to send their children to another school (De Luca & Wood, 2016; Hassel, 2017).

Many charter schools operate as public schools through a waiver from the requirements that states require public school districts (Dunn, 2018).  These waivers do not exempt charter schools form the same education requirements and standards as

mandated by the local school district or the state. Many charter schools' advocates

believe that this waiver is critical for creating a nurturing environment where the charter

school leadership can focus on a strong academic program without many of the state and

local mandates (De Luca & Wood, 2016). Many charter schools develop a school culture

that maximizes their student's social/culture elements and motivate the students with high

expectations, academic rigor, strong discipline, and relationships with students from

caring adults who want to increase students' academic achievement (De Luca & Wood,

2016; Dunn, 2018).

**Homeschooling**

Homeschooling means educating children at home or at a variety of places other

than school. Home schooling is usually conducted by the parent, online teacher, or tutor

(Hirsh, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2019). Homeschooling is a term used to use in the

United States by parents who teach their children in a less formal setting than public or

private schools. Researchers noted that in many developing countries, homeschooling is a

legal alternative to parents sending their children to public, charter, or private schools

(Hirsh, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2019).

Researchers reported that in different cultures in past years, educating children at

home by family members was a common practice. They use professionals such as tutors

to educate their children at home. This service was used by only wealthy people in the

United States (Hirsh, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2019). Homeschooling declined

during the 19th and 20th centuries due to the push for compulsory attendance laws brought

by states and the federal government which mandated children's requirements to attend

school (Hirsh, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2019). However, homeschooling became very popular during the 1960s and 1970s with the education reform efforts by school districts, and many parents dissatisfied with the education system across the United States (Hirsh, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2019).

**African American Parents' School Choice Concerns**

African American parents are concerned with having quality education for their child and they seek these options within the neighborhood schools. Caruthers (2020) study discussed African American parents of students with autism had voiced their concerns about their child's academics, and whether the schools of choice were able to accommodate their child's special needs. Research has found that the quality of the schools in proximity may or may not be the same quality as their White counterparts (Logan et al., 2017). Yoon and Lubienski (2017) discussed how minorities in low-income areas seek schools that are representative of their own culture or race. Parents were concerned with their child being able to associate with their friends, which gave them a sense of security and familiarity. The study also found that because some African American parents want to expose their children to a better life, they may select schools outside of their surrounding areas to schools that have a higher population of White students. Some African American parents regarded predominately White schools as offering higher quality education than their neighborhood school. The study also found that low income African American parents who choose to go outside of their area had some education and had higher incomes than that of non-working lower income African American parents. In addition, some African American mothers believed that the local

public schools did not have their child's best interest regarding educational expectations (Yoon and Lubienski, 2017). Waitoller and Lubienski (2017) concurred with Yoon and Lubienski (2017) study, that proximity as well as race played a major role in the school choices available to low-income minority parents. Proximity and race were of importance in school choice for low-income parents because of the familiarity it brings such as that within their own community (Yoon & Lubienski, 2017). Some African American parents feel that schools that are predominately White, can give their child a better education. Especially, if the child attends the school during the early grades (Yoon & Lubienski, 2017).

However, Waitoller and Super (2017) discussed that the role of race, disability, neighborhood school services, and proximity were important in parental choices of a charter school options. Issues such as race, staying within and learning about the African American culture were considered during the decision-making process. Waitoller and Super (2017) also found that African American parents were concerned about how the school of choice would affect their student's wellbeing and academic growth (Waitoller & Super 2017).

Similarly, Allers's (2019) article discussed how African American parents school choice decision placed their student in a situation that was blatant racism. An African American mother made the decision to send her son to a predominantly White elite public school hoping for better academic services. Instead, her son encountered a racist Black face video with animal sound effects created by two White female classmates. Allers's (2019) article also found that African American parent often grappled with the prospect

of sending their student to an elite public or private school or staying with what they are familiar with. The article found that African American parent often experience what is referred to "head vs heart" (Allers, 2019). This is a phenomenon in which African American parents struggle with sending their student to an out-area school that will provide the services they seek for their student but, lack cultural diversity. The lack of cultural diversity and sensitivity can do more harm to the student's self-esteem (Allers, 2019).

**School Choices Based on Physical Challenges**

Researchers noted that there are several elements that parents use in deciding school choice for their special needs' child. Some of these include class size, qualitive of instruction, academic quality, safety and discipline, and distance between home and school (Alsauidi, 2016; Altenhofen, 2016). Alternately, some research reported that the appearance of the school and the learning environment are two elements that some parents use to measure whether to send their child to a private school (Alsauidi, 2016; Saia, 2017). These are essential factors that some parents see as a challenge for them in making the correct decision of what is best for their child (Alsauidi, 2016).

*Class Size*

Some researchers noted that class size is a very important element in parental considerations when deciding on whether private or public school choice. Also, some parents' decision on smaller class size assumed that smaller class size can result in better quality learning environment which can lead to higher students' achievement (Alsauidi, 2016; Saia, 2017). In addition, some parents feel that with smaller class size there will be

more positive interaction between their child and the classroom teacher. Many private

schools in the United States limit the number of students in core academic for many

classrooms to a maximum of 25 students (Alsauidi 2016; Saia, 2017).

*Quality of Instruction*

Researchers such as Alsauidi (2016) reported that some parents rank the quality of

instruction such as academic and innovation teaching in their choice for the type of

school especially for their child with disabilities. Also, some parents especially more

influent parents based their school choice on the private school examination scores and

high score on high stakes tests (Saia, 2017). Saia (2017) also found that some parents

equate the quality of education and the school's geographical location as important

reasons for sending their child to a particular school. Although many low-income parents

find it hard to send their children to certain private schools due to living outside the area.

*Distance Between Home and School*

Many private schools do not provide transportation to parents with sending their

children to their school. The lack of transportation leaves parents with designing and

coordinating carpooling with other parents in the area to help provide transportation to

the private schools (Altenhofen et al., 2016). Researchers noted that the distance from

home to school influence many parents' choice on sending their child to a particular

school (Altenhofen et al., 2016). Also, the age of the child and other siblings in the family

increases the complexity for many families of their transportation related decisions (Saia,

2017). Many parents try to place all their children at one school if space is available. But

for some parent, space is not always available for the older sibling. When this happens,

many families report that transportation complexity as a tipping point on their decision-making process in choosing the appropriate school for their children (Altenhofen et al., 2016).

For many low-income and higher-income parents, the distance between home and school is essential for sending the child to a private school. Many low-income parents either do not have the transportation to send their child to a certain private school or do not have the income or the resources to move closer to the private school as with most higher income parents (Altenhofen et al., 2016). For example, Alsauidi (2016) conducted a study on reasons that influencing parent decision making process for school choice. The purpose of the study was examined factors that influence that influence parent on sending their children to private school such as class size, quality of instruction, and teacher student relationship. The population for this study consisted of participants from eight private schools and several public schools with a total population of 6,554. The results of the study indicated that most of the parents prefer private schools due to academic factors which means they had extensive experience of a variety of education systems. Also, many of these parents had personal experiences to draw upon from their own education and through learning the importance of effective education through teaching and learning for their children. Seghers et al., (2020) study of parents in Belgium found that school choice decision making was based on the parents educational and immigration background.

**School Choices Based on Cognitive, Behavioral, and Emotional Challenges**

Many researchers noted that it is theorized that private schools can cultivate a stronger sense of community, student's connectedness, and collective identity among students then in public schools (Cai & Gu, 2019; Glazerman et al., 2018; Waasdrop et al., 2018). Parents reported that at the private school level, many of the administration can make certain decisions about the school such as the child's educational level, discipline issues, the subjects offered and other academics without having to go to stakeholders at the school board or government levels (Cai & Gu, 2019; Glazerman et al., 2018). However, there has been less exploration of the differences regarding students behavioral and social emotional development at some private schools. These are some issues that parents of special needs children find very challenging in their quest to educate their children in a private school setting (Cai & Gu, 2019; Glazerman et al., 2018).

Glazerman et al. (2018) reported that it is difficult to find a contrast between public versus private school experiences on student behavioral and social-emotional adjustment given that selection into school type may reflect differences in observed and unobserved students' characteristics and sometimes this could be bias to many students (Glazerman et al., 2018; Waasdrop et al., 2018). For example, some parent may send their child to a private school because they determined that it is safer, has a better physical environment, and has fewer behavioral issues then at public schools (Glazerman et al., 2018; Waasdrop et al., 2018). Also, some parents may feel the need to send their child to private school due to cultural issues than sending their child to a community public school (Waasdrop et al., 2018). These are issues that many parents find to be very

challenging for them and for their child because there is no easy answer to these problems and issues on school choice (Waasdrop et al., 2018).

Waasdorp et al., (2018) conducted a quantitative study that compared the social, emotional, and behavioral health risk among young students attending public versus parochial schools. The purpose of the study was to contrast public versus parochial schools using propensity scores matching across a range of outcomes such as emotional systems, bullying, and substance use. The sample population for this study consisted of 58 public and five parochial schools. The results of the study indicated that the nonmatched analyses suggested that there was a significant advantage for parochial schools due to these students performed better than students in public schools. The authors noted that without schools using propensity scores to match individuals' students, there are marked differences between public and parochial school students in terms of social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. While both public and private schools would benefit students aimed are promoting positive mental and behavioral health, it could be that programs for improving school climate are more necessary in public schools, specifically programs whose aim is to change the perceptions of safety, while reducing behavior problems.

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## Summary

The literature reviewed demonstrated how school choice is an important issue and is a widely debated topic in many areas of the United States by education researchers and policy makers. Many states in the United States have implemented school choice options that include private, charter schools, and home school options for parents (Holmes, 2017; Powell, 2017). A common feature of these school choice options is that they ae intended to increase the academic achievement and options for students beyond just attending public schools. Many advocates of school choice believe that there is a need to empower parents to choose the appropriate schools in which to send their children to foster competition and improvement for all schools (Holmes, 2017; Wang et al., 2019).

The option of school choice has been a relevant issue within the educational arena.  School choice was implemented to offer parents better educational opportunities for their child (Logan, 2019; Friedman, 1955).  Though quality school choice may be available to everyone, it may not hold true for some parents. Minorities, specifically African American parents of special needs students may face another dilemma when it comes to school choice. African American parents are faced with making the decision that can accommodate the needs of their student. African American parents are given the opportunity to research and find the best outcome.

The increase in the number of African American parents considering private school was noted as a strategy to deal with many of the problems that public-school faces in the United States. Although general findings suggest thus, there is a need to explore the lived experiences of African American parents who choose a private elementary school for their special needs child and describe the meaning of education in a private versus public elementary school for African American parents of a special needs child. This information can be effectively used for school leaders and stakeholders to design strategies and policies to improve the education of students with special needs. The research questions along with description of the research design will be detailed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

## Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American parents concerning student safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. This study included 11 participants who were interviewed to share their lived experiences of student safety, adequate education, and social/emotional reasons for sending their children with disabilities to private schools. I filled the literature gap on why many African American parents choose private school options on sending their children with disabilities to a private elementary school. This study's findings provide knowledge to public and private educational leaders to understand the importance of considering the concerns of African American parents regarding the educational system's capability to provide adequate services for students with disabilities in the elementary school setting. This chapter consists of the purpose of the study, the location of the analysis, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, qualitative methodology, population and sample, inclusion and exclusion criteria, instrumentation, procedures of instrument pretest, strategies for recruitment, participation, and data collection, qualitative data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, ethical practices, threats to validity, and summary.

## Research Design and Rationale

The research method used in this study was qualitative. Qualitative methods are the process of studying participants in a way to obtain an in-depth understanding of

phenomena in their natural setting (Creswell, 2017; Kawamura, 2020) Also, a qualitative

research design usually focuses on the "what" and the "how" in seeking participants'

experiences in their everyday lives (Kawamura, 2020; Kostere et al., 2015). In addition,

qualitative research is used to understand the feelings, perceptions, and values in human

behavior in their natural settings (Tenny et al., 2020). I used a qualitative method for this

study because it also allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena from

the lived experiences of the participants in their natural setting.

A quantitative research method was not well suited for this study because

quantitative studies use numerical data. Also, quantitative researchers provide a

framework to test hypotheses, mathematical models, and theories. This type of research

method involves the use of measurements to establish a connection between observing

behaviors, with the intent to generalizing it to a larger general population (Bernard,

2017). Although the results of quantitative studies can be generalized to the entire

population, a weakness in this type of method includes the inability for it to determine the

rationale associated with the results of the study (Queirós et al., 2017). Many researchers

conducting quantitative studies focus on systematic and objective data collection as well

as examining the relationships between variables and inferences (Queirós et al., 2017).

Therefore, a quantitative research method was not suited for this research study. I

did not intend to examine the relationships between variables or the causality of

variables. I collected data from interviews and journaling and conducted member

checking instead of using empirical data. Due to the types of data collected, I did not

analyze the data using factorial analysis or regression analysis. Instead, I coded the data

to identify themes that emerged. I did not choose a quantitative method for this study because I used nonnumerical data such as interviews and journaling.

Other qualitative research designs were considered for this study, such as case study, grounded theory, and ethnography. A case study research design consists of several types, such as description, explanation, intrinsic, and multiple cases participants within a study (Woodside, 2010). A case study is designed to answer who, what, where, when, why, and how questions in a research study (Woodside, 2010; Yin, 2014). Researchers usually choose case study research when they have little or no control of the behavioral events and when they are exploring a certain phenomenon in a study (Yin, 2014). A case study was not needed to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants within this study because their experiences already occurred before the study took place. Grounded theory is used to test a theory and determine how the theory relates to the phenomenon being considered in a research study (Percy et al., 2015). I did not test a theory or determine how it relates to this study; instead, I obtained the lived experiences of African American parents on sending their children with disabilities to a private school. Ethnography focuses on power, empowerment, and inequality with respect to learning about ethnic groups and their culture around them (Percy et al., 2015). I was not interested in ethnography because I did not want to limit my study to understanding only the cultural aspects of why African American parents send their children with disabilities to a private school. Although other designs were considered, a qualitative phenomenological descriptive design was the most appropriate for this study.

A descriptive phenomenological method was used for this research study. The first-person view of their experiences are the views of researchers using phenomenology (Giorgi, 2012; Husserl, 1970). Husserl (1970) is considered the father of phenomenology, and this researcher established the science for the study of lived experiences of individuals and how these experiences have an affiliation with the real world around them. Giorgi (2012) reported that a qualitative phenomenological descriptive design describes how individuals' lived experiences and the characteristics of their lived experiences are grounded in their real-world experiences. A descriptive phenomenological study's purpose is to find more than just facts and causes from human experiences; it aims to reconstruct the inner world experiences of the subject (Giorgi, 2012; Husserl, 1970).

Giorgi (2012) reported that a descriptive phenomenology design is appropriate to enable clarity in understanding the lived experiences of the research participants with respect to their relationship to the phenomenon being studied. Husserl (1970) reported phenomenology is the preferred method for human science and is critical in the analysis of qualitative research. In this study, the phenomenon focus was on the lived experiences of African American parents who have sent their children with disabilities to a private elementary school. My intent as the researcher was to describe as truthfully as possible the phenomenon and remain true to the facts of the lived experiences of African American parents' decisions of school choice.

This qualitative phenomenological descriptive study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1*:* What are the lived experiences of African American parents who choose a private elementary school for their child with special needs?

RQ2*:* What is the meaning of education in a private versus public elementary school for African American parents of a child with special needs?

## Role of the Researcher

I was the main instrument for data collection in this qualitative research study (see Clark & Vealé, 2018). A qualitative researcher's role is to create an opportunity to interview the participants in their natural setting (Clark & Vealé, 2018). In addition, the researcher in qualitative research observes and interacts in various ways in the interview and data collection process (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Creswell, 2017). My role as the qualitative researcher for this study involved reviewing current literature pertaining to views of parents and their views of taking the school choice option for their children with disabilities and sending them to private school.

Another role of the researcher is to recruit research participants who fit the inclusion criteria for the study (Creswell, 2017). I did not recruit any participants who I knew or who had a prior relationship with me in the past. The participants recruited met the study participation criteria as outlined for this research study. The inclusion criteria were African American parents who had a child with special needs attending a private elementary school for the 2020-2021 school year and were willing to participate in an interview. Another role for the researcher was to conduct the interviews with the participants. To ensure integrity in the data collection process, a qualitative researcher should address this while collecting and analyzing the data. Researchers noted that a way

to minimize biases is to use the technique bracketing (Åstedt-Kurki et al., 2015).

Bracketing in qualitative research is a process where the researcher suspends their

presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and

describe the phenomenon being considered (Åstedt-Kurki et al., 2015; Newman &

Tufford, 2012). In addition, bracketing allows researchers to become aware of their own

feelings and set aside their own presuppositions to capture the authentic lived experiences

of the participants participating the research study (Åstedt-Kurki et al., 2015; Newman &

Tufford, 2012).

A validation strategy member checking was used to add to the credibility of the

research study (see Creswell, 2017). Member checking is to show the researchers'

findings are accurate and honest. Member checking was conducted by repeating back to

the participants their responses to the interview questions to check for accuracy. If

changes were necessary to the interviews, they were completed before the final report

was written.

A debriefing session was conducted with each of the participants after conducting

the interviews. Creswell (2017) reported that debriefing is a procedure when the

researcher provides the participants a complete explanation of the study procedures and

answers important questions concerning the study. After the study took place, I thanked

the participants for taking the time to participate in the interviews for this research study.

I also provided each of the participants with my name and contact information to ask any

additional questions about the research study. In addition, I provided the participants with

a summary copy of the overall results from this study.

**Qualitative Methodology**

**Participant Selection Logic**

The targeted population for this study was African American parents who used the private school option to send their children with disabilities to an elementary private school. The participants participated in a semistructured interview. In addition, the purposeful sampling method was used for this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study. The purposeful sampling method is the process of sampling participants on the desired characteristics and study (Bernard, 2017). Researchers use purposeful sampling to target certain participants that are best suited for the study without concern for generalization (Bernard, 2017; Creswell, 2017).

I used purposeful sampling methodology with a snowballing strategy to select the participants for this study. The advantages of using the purposeful sampling method are that a small sample size can be used with a target number of participants (Orcher, 2016). The purposeful sampling method was well suited for this research study. The ability of the researcher to use a targeted approach when selecting participants ensures that the selection of participants used have the necessary knowledge and understanding to provide appropriate data to address the topic for this study.

The number of participants used for this study was 11. Creswell (2017) reported that a sample size of five to 20 participants is sufficient for qualitative phenomenological studies. Also, qualitative researchers have noted that the sample size should reflect and represent the homogeneity of the phenomenon that exists among the participants (Creswell, 2017). It is important for participants to have similar lived experiences of the

phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2017). The interviews were conducted with the participants until saturation was reached. Creswell (2017) noted that saturation is reached when the participants provide the researcher with no new knowledge or themes about the topic. In addition, I conducted member checking of the data to make sure the data was accurate. This was done by verifying the participants' responses to the interview questions.

The participants received a $10.00 Walmart gift card for volunteering, participating, and sharing their lived experiences with respect to sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. After conducting participant interviews and the member checking, I sent an email letter to each participant thanking them for participating in the study.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

African American parents who volunteered to participate in the study met the following criteria to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria were African American parents who had a child with special needs attending a private elementary school for the 2020-2021 school year and who were to participate in an interview. The parents were required to show the child's report card as a screening measure. The interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, depending on the flow of the conversation with the participants.

The exclusion criteria were non-African American parents, children without special needs, not enrolled in a private elementary school for the 2020-2021 school year, and not willing to volunteer to participant in an interview.

**Instrumentation**

The researcher is considered the main instrument in qualitative research because they emerge themselves in the data collection process (Patton, 2015). As the researcher, I collected the data through semistructured open-ended interviews. I also took field notes on the participants. Creswell (2017) reported that when conducting face-to-face interviews, researchers insert themselves in the conversation with the participant in their environment. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual interviewing took place instead of face to face. I used semistructured, open-ended questions with the participants to provide each participant the opportunity to share their lived experiences for sending their children with disabilities to a private elementary school. Researchers have reported that open-ended interviews are a way to ask questions without a predetermined answer (Creswell, 2017). I also logged the participants' nonverbal communication and expressions in a researcher's journal to provide in-depth responses.

The interview protocol instrument was created by me to provide a context in asking each participant the same questions. Patton (2015) reported that interviews are frequently used in qualitative studies as a way for collection data. The interview protocol included the script on conducting the interview data (see Appendix A). Researchers have noted that before beginning qualitative interviews, the researcher should create an interview protocol to create a sequence approach that can be easy to follow in the interview process. The interview protocol began with explaining to the participants the interview process, the informed consent, and the participants' rights and responsibilities in the interview process (see Patton, 2015). I asked each participant if they had questions

concerning the process and asked for their permission to record the interview. The interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes in length depending on the conversation with the participants.

## Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the local private school to recruit participants for this study. After potential participants responded to the recruitment flyer, I sent them a letter of invitation explaining the purpose of the study and the requirement for participating in the study. Also, parents who volunteered to participate in the study were sent an informed consent form to review and to return email stating "I Consent." After obtaining the participants' consent to participate in the study, I designated time slots available for the participants to select from. In addition, I advised the participants that they would have the option to withdraw from the study at will at any time.

The semistructured interviews were conducted via virtual online platform. The interview data was collected up to 6 months. The interviews with each of the participants lasted from 45 to 60 minutes in length, depending on the flow of the conversation. Creswell (2017) noted that the use of open-ended is a way that qualitative researchers obtain the perceptions and views of the participants in a research study. I began the interview process by making sure the participants were relaxed in a way that they were able to express themselves freely during the interviewing process. An interview guide was used to conduct the interviews with each of the participants. All participants were asked the same interview questions. I used probes with the participants, so the

participants provided a conversation around each of the interview questions. In addition, I

took notes to record nonverbal communication during each of the interviews with the

participants. All interviews were transcribed for data analysis. I verified the responses to

each interview question with the participants after interviewing each participant for the

purpose of member checking. Member checking was used to check the accuracy of the

data collected from each of the participants. The data from the participants were stored on

a USB drive for data analysis.

A debriefing session was conducted with each of the participants of the study.

Debriefing is a procedure that is conducted after completing a study to address any

concerns and to answer any questions the participants may have pertaining to the study

(Creswell, 2017). I thanked the participants for their time and effort in participating in the

research study, with a $10 gift card. In addition, I provided each participant with my

name and contact information for follow-up questions they may have had concerning, the

study. In addition, I provided each participant with the overall findings from this study

after data analysis and completion of the findings.

**Qualitative Data Analysis Plan**

The data collected from the open-ended interviews, journal notes, and the member

checking of the data was synthesized, and analyzed the lived experiences of the African

American parents of children with disabilities in using the school choice of sending their

children with disabilities to a private elementary school. This was based on the African

American parents of children with disabilities to be able to recount their lived

experiences in the natural setting (Creswell, 2017). Giorgi (2009) noted that analyzing the

data is the first step with being able to share the outcomes of a research study to other audience.

In this descriptive phenomenological study, I used Giorgi's five-steps process. I explained the procedures to support the character and the purpose of the study. The data analysis was completed after the interviews had been transcribed and the text completed to be analyzed (Giorgi, 2003). The first step of the phenomenological method is for the researcher to assume an attitude to the phenomenological perspective. In the phenomenological attitude, I bracketed my everyday knowledge to take a new view of the data. I set aside my cultural, theoretical, and experimental views (Giorgi, 2003; Giorgi, 2009). I saw the data as it appeared without doubt or other beliefs.

The second step is that the data analysis required that I review and read the complete narrative to get the full view of the participants experiences (Giorgi, 2003). The participants narratives were their lived experiences and views as they experienced in their everyday life. I provided a critical reflection about the participants experiences to provide a description of those experiences and how they felt about them.

The third step in the data analysis process is the "demarcation of meaning within the narrative so that the data can be delt with in manageable portion" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 10). I read the narrative with the purpose of determining where there are places of meaning in the text. The reading of the text material will be done with the idea of noting where the meaning shifts or changes in the flow of the text material (Giorgi, 2003).

The fourth step in the data analysis process is to transform the meaning units into psychologically sensitive descriptive expression of the narrative (Giorgi, 2009). I looked

at the phenomenon at the psychological level of practical science rather in the transcendental level of practical science. The meaning units were re-expressed in the third person which were accurate meaning units expressed by the participants.

The fifth step in the data analysis process is the synthesis of the general psychological structure from the psychological constituents of the experiences from the participants (Giorgi, 2009, p. 5). Giorgi (2009) noted that constituents differ from the concepts of elements because they are context dependent. The purpose of this step is grounded in the phenomenological concept of parts and whole (Giorgi, 1985; Giorgi, 2008). The value of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. I applied a descriptive word or phrase to the constituents based on the participants psychological expressions.

After the interviews are conducted with the participants, I conducted member checking of the interview data. I verified each response made by the participants to the interview questions for the purpose of member checking. Bernard (2017) reported that member checking is a useful process in qualitative research because it allows the participants a chance to verify their responses and provide additional data if needed to confirm the accuracy of the data collected. the member checking process will continue until each participant is confident that the interview data accurately reflects their thoughts and perceptions on factors respect to sending their children with disabilities to a private school.

I collected and interpreted the data with the least subjective manner possible to ensure credibility and reliability. Researchers noted that the best way this can be done in qualitative research is to ensure that the data are reliable and credible (Bernard, 2017;

Gall et al., 2003). I followed the interview guide, reviewed the interview transcripts, and

performed member checking. To ensure that all participants are asked the same questions,

I followed the interview guide, Also, by reviewing the interview transcripts, I ensured

that the data was analyzed correctly and reflected the participants responses in

accordance with the interview data collected. All participants had the opportunity to

confirm their responses and make appropriate corrections if needed during the member

checking process (Creswell, 2017).

Creswell (2017) reported that member checking is used to verify and confirm the

data is accurate collected by the researcher. Member checking was conducted by

repeating the responses to the interview questions made by the participants to check the

accuracy of the interview responses. I asked the participants to verify the accuracy of

their responses collected through the interview.

## Issues of Trustworthiness

The issue of trustworthiness of the data in qualitative studies is often questioned

by many quantitative researchers due to the elements of reliability and validity being

addressed in a study (Creswell, 2017). The researcher notes that for trustworthiness of

data in qualitative research to be achieved, the researcher must follow and ensure that

four aspects of qualitative steps must be achieved. The four areas are creditability,

transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Creswell, 2017).

### Credibility

Credibility in qualitative studies assures that the findings are credible and can be

trusted which can reflect a real-world situation in the results of the study. Credibility is

important in qualitative studies because it ensures that the findings can be trusted

(Connelly, 2016). Researchers noted that strategies used to enhance credibility include

peer-debriefing, transparency, engagement with participants in the study, conducting

observation when appropriate in the study, reflective journaling, and member checking

(Connelly, 2016). To enhance credibility for this research study, I used journaling

throughout the study. I conducted member checking by reviewing participant responses

to the interview questions with each participant to check the accuracy of the data

collected.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the researcher' ability to generalize the findings of the

study to other settings (Connelly, 2016). Transferability will be achieved by the

researcher being transparent with providing the reader an in-depth description of the

location of the study the context, and a detail description of the participants in the study

(Connelly, 2016). The researcher should provide clear and concise details of the steps in

the research process so that other researchers can conduct the study in a similar manner

(Herzog et al., 2019). I provided clear and concise detailed description of the procedures

and findings from the study so that the study can be generalized to other settings. I used a

thick description of the individual interviews with each participant, create detailed notes,

and transcribe the recorded interviews of participants for data analysis.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to whether the evaluation of the findings, the interpretation,

and the recommendations of the study are supported by the data collected from the

participants (Abowitz & Toole, 2010, p. 1). Also, I properly coded the data throughout

the analysis phase of this study. To ensure the dependability of this research study, I

documented the research findings that was consistent with the current literature on

African American parents' perceptions of sending their children with disabilities to

private schools. Also, I explained the steps of the data collection process and analysis and

made sure that there was truthfulness in reporting the research findings from this study.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the results of the study can be

collaborated or confirmed by other researchers (Connelly, 2016). Also, confirmability is

the level that the researchers' findings is based on the participants narratives in a study

rather than the researcher's bias. In order increase confirmability to this study, I created

the sample size for this study according to the guidelines of qualitative method that will

support the findings for the study. Moreover, I minimized personal bias in the data

collection process with the participants by setting aside my personal views of each of the

participants (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability is a part of trustworthiness in a study, and

the confidence researchers place on making sure the findings are reported accurately

(Anney, 2014). In addition, I searched for and described negative cases from the

participants responses whose experiences, or viewpoints differed from the overall

interview questions. This was conducted to ensure confirmability in the research study. I

followed the guidelines as set for qualitative researchers and did self-reflection

throughout the study to ensure my personal beliefs and assumptions did not interfere

while conducting the study. This process ensured that the findings were determined by

the actions of the participants and not the biases of the researcher. Also, the reporting of the findings was done in a transparent and accurate manner that did not harm the confidentiality of the participants for the study.

## Ethical Procedures

### Treatment of Human Participants

I followed all ethical procedures as outlined by the Walden University IRB and the appropriate procedures as outlined with the local private school's permission procedures. The participants were informed of the purpose, the requirements for participating in the study, and the time commitment for the study. These procedures were done so that the participants can make an informed decision on whether they would like to participate in the study. While there are no direct benefits with participating in the study, I ensured the participants rights were being protected as outlined in the *Belmont Report* before they commit to the study. In addition, to protect the rights of human subjects, the participants were asked to sign a consent from agreeing to participate in the study and they were informed that there is no penalty if they decided not to participate in the study.

### Treatment of Data

The data was stored in a secure location at my home office to protect and provide confidentiality of the participants identity and information. Creswell (2017) reported that data archiving is the process of securing and storing data for future audits to conduct and verify the research findings. I am the only person who has access to the data. All data collected will be maintained in a safe location for 36 months to protect the rights of the

participants. After the 36 months, I will ensure confidentiality by shredding and destroying all data from the participants.

Participants' confidentiality is necessary for all parts of the data collection process. I will protect each participant identity by providing a letter and a number (e.g., P1. P2, P3) to represent each of the participants. Kawar et al., (2016) noted that researchers should reassure all participants that their participation will remain confidential to promote honest responses to the interview questions. I did not require participants to use their names or the name of the private school during the interview process. In addition, all participants were those who volunteered to participate in this research study.

## Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological descriptive study was to explore the lived experiences of African American parents with respect to student safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. This study included 11 participants who were interviewed to share their experiences of perceptions with respect to student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their children with disabilities to private schools. I filled the gap in the literature about factors and reasons why many African American parents choose the private school options on sending their children with disabilities to a private elementary school.

The data collected from the open-ended interviews and journal notes of the data will be synthesized, analyzed the perceptions and experiences of the African American

parents of children with disabilities in using the school choice of sending their children to a private school. This was based on the parents of children with disabilities to be able to recount their perceptions and experiences in the natural setting. I also used Atlas Ti a qualitative software to aid in organizing the data to determine patterns and themes that may emerge from the transcribed data. The findings of this study will provide knowledge to public and private educational leaders understanding of the importance of evaluating African American parents' lived experiences with the educational system for providing adequate services for students with disabilities in the elementary private school setting.

Chapter 4: Results

**Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American parents concerning student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. Phenomenology was the research paradigm used to explore the lived experiences of African American parents of special needs children. A descriptive phenomenological paradigm was used to describe and explore the phenomena. The intent of this study was to fill the literature gap regarding reasons why many African American parents choose private elementary school options for their children with disabilities. The results of this study may provide more information and knowledge for private and public-school leaders and increase their understanding by listening to the African American parents' concerns about the availability of adequate services for students with disabilities in the elementary school setting.

The data that emerged from the interviews revealed a variety of factors concerning student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. The research questions are noted below.

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of African American parents who choose a private elementary school for their child with special needs?

RQ2: What is the meaning of education in a private versus public elementary school for African American parents of a child with special needs?

In this chapter, I discuss the data collection process, data analysis verification procedures, and a discussion of the findings from this study. In Chapter 4, I also discuss the setting, which took place at the participants' choice, and demographics. Topical headings are setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary. Table 1 shows the demographics of the participants.

**Table 1**

*Demographics of the Participants*

| Gender | Male | Female | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2 | 9 | | |
| Marital status | Married | Single | Widowed | Divorced |
| | 1 | 7 | 1 | 2 |
| Education | High school | College degreed | Trade school | |
| | 7 | 3 | 1 | |
| Employed | Yes | No | | |
| | 10 | 1 | | |
| Government assistance | Yes | No | | |
| | 4 | 7 | | |
| Income range | 25,000-35,000 | 35,000-45,000 | 45,000-55,000 | 55,000 + |
| | 6 | 2 | 2 | 1 |

**Data Collection**

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Walden University IRB (approval number 06-29-21-0234341). With the permission of the private school principal, a recruitment flyer was posted on the Parent Teacher Organization bulletin board seeking parent participants for the study. After potential participants responded to the recruitment flyer, I sent them a letter of invitation explaining the purpose of the study and the requirements for participating in the study. In addition, parents who volunteered to participate in the study were sent an informed consent to review and sign, stating that they were willing to participant in the study. After obtaining the participants' consent to participate in the study, I designated time slots available for the participants to select from to be interviewed. In addition, all the participants were advised that participating in the study was voluntary and that they had the option to withdraw from the study at will at any time.

The semistructured interviews were used during the interview process and conducted via virtual platform. The interview data were collected in a 3- to 4-week time span. The interviews with each of the participants lasted from 45 to 60 minutes in length, depending on the flow of the conversation. Creswell (2017) noted that the use of open-ended is a way that qualitative researchers obtain the perceptions and views of the participants in a research study. I began the interview process by making sure the participants were relaxed in a way that they would be able to express themselves freely during the interviewing process. An interview guide was used to conduct the interviews with each of the participants. All participants were asked the same interview questions. I

used probes with the participants so they could provide a conversation around each of the interview questions. In addition, I took notes to record nonverbal communication during each of the interviews with the participants. All interviews were transcribed for data analysis. After each interview, I asked each participant to verify the responses given to each question for the purpose of member checking. Member checking was used to check the accuracy of the data collected from each of the participants. The data from the participants were stored on a USB drive for data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

In this descriptive phenomenological study, I used Giorgi's 5-step process. This method was used to explain the procedures to support the character and the purpose of the study. The data analysis was completed after the interviews had been transcribed and the text was completed to be analyzed (see Giorgi, 2003). The first step of the phenomenological method was for me to assume an attitude of the phenomenological perspective. In the phenomenological attitude, I bracketed my everyday knowledge to take a new view of the data. I also set aside my cultural, theoretical, and experimental views (see Giorgi, 2003, 2009). Furthermore, I viewed the data as they appeared without doubt or other beliefs.

The second step is that the data analysis required that I review and read the complete narrative to get the full view of the participants' experiences (see Giorgi, 2003). The narratives given by the participants were reflective of the attitudes and views they had experienced in their daily lives. I provided a critical reflection about the participants' experiences to provide a description of those experiences and how they felt about them.

The third step in the data analysis process was the "demarcation of meaning within the narrative so that the data can be delt with in manageable portion" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 10). I read the narrative with the purpose of determining where there were places of meaning in the text. The reading of the text material was done with the idea of noting where the meaning shifted or where there were changes in the flow of the text material (Giorgi, 2003).

The fourth step in the data analysis process was to transform the meaning units into psychologically sensitive descriptive expression of the narrative (see Giorgi, 2009). I analyzed the phenomenon at the psychological level of practical science rather than at the transcendental level. The meaning units were reexpressed in the third person, with accurate meanings units expressed by the participants. The fifth step in the data analysis process was the synthesis of the general psychological structure from the psychological constituents of the experiences from the participants (see Giorgi, 2009, p. 5). Giorgi (2009) noted that constituents differ from the concepts of elements because they are context dependent. The purpose of this step was grounded in the phenomenological concept of parts and whole (Giorgi, 1985, 2008). The value of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. I applied a descriptive word or phrase to the constituents based on the participants psychological expressions.

I compiled a list of categories that emerged from the responses to the interview questions; from this, I found no discrepant cases. Similar meaning units were grouped together in themes that resulted in three categories that was a clear descriptive of the phenomenon. Meaning units and themes were highlighted, sorted, and grouped by

recording the number of times a meaning unit or phrase appeared in each of the participant's interview responses. The themes and patterns were written as textual and structural descriptions. In addition, I combined the descriptions to provide the essence of the phenomenon. After grouping the similar meaning units into categories, six themes emerged, and Theme 1 had one subtheme (see Table 2). These include (a) frustrated with the public schools, (b) lack of adequate services and support from public schools, (c) smaller class sizes, (d) safe environment at the private school, (e) parents have a choice in the child's education, (f) positive teacher/parent relationship, and (g) parents are not involved in the IEP process. Table 2 shows the meaning units, categories, themes, and subtheme.

**Table 2**

*Meaning Units, Categories, Themes, and Subtheme*

| Meaning units | Categories | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Frustration, public school, private school, services, support, lack of communication, lack of services | Public school versus private school | RQ 1-Theme 1. Frustrated with public schools<br>RQ 1 -Subtheme 1. Lack of adequate services and support from public schools |
| Class size parent involvement, IEP process, IEP meetings, academic progress, grades, relationships, teacher/parents' communication | Private school services | RQ 2-Theme 2. Smaller class sizes |
| Safety, private school public schools, education, children, relationships, teacher/parents' relation, parent communication, discipline, school choice | School Choice | RQ 1-Theme 3. Safe environment at the Private School<br>RQ 2-Theme 4. Parents have a Choice in the Child's Education |
| Class size parent involvement, IEP process, IEP meetings, academic progress, grades, relationships, teacher/parents' communication | Private school services | RQ 1-Theme 5. Positive Teach/Parent Relationship<br>RQ 1-Theme 6. Parents are not Involved in the IEP Process |

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The issue of trustworthiness of the data in qualitative studies is often questioned by quantitative researchers due to the elements of reliability and validity being addressed in a study (Creswell, 2017). For trustworthiness of data in qualitative research, I followed and ensured that four aspects of qualitative steps were achieved. The four areas were creditability, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (see Creswell, 2017).

**Credibility**

Credibility in qualitative studies assures that the findings are credible and can be trusted, which can reflect a real-world situation in the results of the study. Credibility is important in qualitative studies because it ensures that the findings can be trusted (Connelly, 2016). Researchers noted that strategies used to enhance credibility include peer-debriefing, transparency, engagement with participants in the study, conducting observation when appropriate in the study, reflective journaling, and member checking (Connelly, 2016). To enhance credibility for this research study, journaling was used throughout the study. Also, member checking was conducted by repeating the responses to the interview questions made by the participants to check the accuracy of the interview responses. I asked the participants to verify the accuracy of their responses collected through the interview. All participants noted that no changes were needed on the transcribed interview data.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the researcher' ability to generalize the findings of the study to other settings (Connelly, 2016). Transferability was achieved by me being

transparent with providing the reader an in-depth description of the location of the study

the context and a detailed description of the participants in the study (see Connelly,

2016). I provided clear and concise details of the steps in the research process so that

other researchers can conduct the study in a similar manner (see Herzog et al., 2019). I

also provided a clear and concise detailed description of the procedures and findings from

the study so that the study can be generalized to other settings. In addition, I used a thick

description of the individual interviews with each participant, created detailed notes, and

transcribed the recorded interviews of participants for data analysis.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to whether the evaluation of the findings, the interpretation,

and the recommendations of the study are supported by the data collected from the

participants (Abowitz & Toole, 2010, p. 1). Meaning units were used throughout the data

the analysis phase of this study. To ensure the dependability of this research study, I

documented the research findings that were consistent with the current literature on

African American parents' perceptions of sending their children with disabilities to

private schools. I also explained the steps of that data collection process and analysis and

made sure that there was truthfulness in reporting the research findings from this study.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the results of the study can be

collaborated or confirmed by other researchers (Connelly, 2016). Also, confirmability is

the level that the researcher's findings is based on the participants' narratives in a study

rather than the researcher's bias. To increase confirmability of this study, I used the

sample size according to the guidelines of the qualitative method that supported the findings for the study. Moreover, I minimized personal bias in the data collection process with the participants by setting aside my personal views of each of the participants (see Connelly, 2016). Confirmability is a part of trustworthiness in a study, and the confidence researchers place on making sure the findings are reported accurately (Anney, 2014). In addition, I conducted a search for negative cases from the participants' responses regarding their experiences, that may have differed from the overall interview questions. This was conducted to ensure confirmability in the research study. I followed the guidelines as set for qualitative researchers and did self-reflection throughout the study to ensure my personal beliefs and assumptions did not affect the study. This process ensured that the findings are determined by the actions of the participants and not the biases of the researcher. Also, the reporting of the findings was done in a transparent and accurate manner that did not harm the confidentiality of the participants for the study. Data saturation was achieved by Participant 8, but I continued to Participant 11 to make sure that no new information emerged from the interviews.

## Themes

There was a total of 6 themes and 1 subtheme that emerged from the data that aligned with the two research questions. Theme 1 had one sub-theme. These include Theme 1 frustrated with the public schools, Sub Theme 1 lack of adequate services and support from public schools, Theme 2 smaller class sizes, Theme 3 safe environment at the private school, Theme 4 parents have a choice in the child's education, Theme 5 positive teach/parent relationship, Theme 6 parents are not involved in the IEP process.

**RQ 1- Theme 1: Frustrated With the Public Schools**

The participants' responses showed that several of the parents expressed that they were frustrated with the public schools as a reason for send their child to private school. eight of the 11 parents responded to this theme.

Participant 1 reported,

At the public school I was frustrated most of the time due to services and too many children with disabilities in one classroom. My child has several issues that need more special attention and I felt that the public school did not provide adequate services which frustrated me at times.

Participant 2 expressed,

I became very frustrated with the public school because my child needed from the public-school occupational therapy, he didn't get, he was being bullied, yelled at. He has special needs so they need to be able to accommodate him I just wish that they would go by …I'm trying to think …go by the skills instead of the grade. I just don't want him to feel like he has low self-esteem, or I want him to be put into a class where everybody else is on the same level as opposed to him being on a kindergarten level and everybody else is on different levels.

Participant 3 expressed,

What happen when I decided to send my son to a private school is because when he was in public school, he got bad grades and he was being picked on, so I decided since he wasn't still getting the help, I wanted him to have I decided to send him to a private school because my friend told me about it. Also, I was

frustrated many times with the administration and the teachers at the public

school.

Participant 4 stated,

The experiences that I had when I decided to send my children to a private school

was that whenever my children got in trouble, and it wasn't their fault I was

constantly getting calls on my job and this was very frustrating for me. They were

being picked on all the time, but the other children weren't getting in trouble just

my two boys.

Participant 5 reported,

I'm a single father since my wife passed and I just wanted the best for my

daughter. My daughters' grades were not good she was overwhelmed with testing

and testing for things she hadn't been taught yet. Teachers at my church talked

about the school.

Participant 7 reported,

When my daughter was in public school, she was coming home complaining that

when she would ask the teacher for help, she would get told to do it herself. Then

the teacher would call me saying that my daughter doesn't want to do her work. I

was just over it, this new math I don't it and why can't they just teach math the

old school way. She would cry not to go to school.

Participant 8 reported,

I was tired of getting phone calls about my son acting out in class, the school

would write him up on a referral and then not get to why he was acting out. They

just think he is bad and that he come from a mother that don't care but I do care, I

just don't know what else to do. So, I told my friends and family what was

happening, and they told me I should put him in private school, so I did.

Participant 10 expressed,

I was sick of the public school system and these damn crackers treating my child

like he doesn't matter like he some criminal. My son was transferred to 6 different

school in school year and the same thing keep happening. I know my son got

problems but don't keep treating him like shit! I'm sorry for cussing, I just get

angry every time I think about it.

**RQ 1- Subtheme 1: Lack of Adequate Services and Support From Public Schools**

The participants reported that there was a lack of adequate services and support

from the public schools for their child with disabilities. Eight of the 11 participants

responded to this theme.

Participant 3 expressed,

I did not receive much support from the teachers and the administration at the public

when there were issues with my child. They seem not to care due to having so many

other students in the school. It seems like students with disabilities get lost in the

process. Also, I did not receive adequate services with accommodation services for

my child at the public school.

Participant 2 noted,

I did not receive much support from the public school especially when my child

was bullied often. I reported it several times, but the public school seem like they

did not care, so I took my child out of that school and enrolled him in a private school.

Participant 1 expressed,

> I would say the additional support that's needed for my student as well as difficulty of my child expressing something is going on that they can't fully verbalize or explain thoroughly. As far as them constantly possibly get into trouble because of them not being able to express the situations of what might be going on in the classroom with other students.

Participant 5 reported, "The support I received while my child was in the public school came from other parents and friends who had children at the school. The administration seemed not to care much about students with disabilities."

Participant 4 expressed,

> I felt that my boys were being picked on one has learning problems so you may have to repeat stuff to him and the other one has an IEP for behavior problems. The teachers, counselors, and the principal, did not talk to me right… they talked to me using big words talking to me like I'm stupid because of where we lived and talking down at me when I had a question about my children.

Participant 9 noted,

> The public school seem like they did not care about the academic needs of students with disabilities. I did not receive much support from them, and the services were not adequate especially the accommodation which the IEP stated that he should receive accommodation in all his classes.

Participant 10 expressed,

> I did not receive much support from the public on different services at the public
> school. I also fell that they need to do something about the behavior of other
> students and there were too many students in a classroom.

Participant 6 reported,

> I did not like the services and the lack of support on the academic needs for my
> child at the public school. My child seems to like it here at this school and the
> administration is very supportive of the children here.

**RQ 2-Theme 2: Smaller Class Sizes**

The participants responses showed that a reason for sending their child to a
private school was that the private school had smaller class sizes. Eight of the 11
participants responded to this theme.

> Participant 11 stated,
>
> My friends owned the private school, so I felt it would be better for my daughter
> since she had an IEP and it had smaller class sizes to address her needs.
>
> Yeah, the first day of school, I took my daughter to her class and saw how crowded
> it was and wondered with 25 kids in this class with 1 teacher how is the teacher
> going to get to all these kids. It made me worry about my daughter's education she
> already has learning and physical disabilities.

Participant 8 reported, "He is doing good in school his grades done came up and he has a
better attitude. I think this is due to the small class size at the private school." Participant
1 reported, "I chose the private school due to my child receiving their education in a

smaller class setting than at the public school where the average class size is about 25 students." Participant 3 reported,

> The public school use the inclusion model and I do not like my child in a classroom with 20 students and one teacher. I feel that they can learn more things in a smaller setting with a teacher and a teacher assistant.

Participant 4 expressed, "I like the small class size here at the private school. My child seems to do better in smaller setting. Their grades have improved here and they like their teachers." Participant 5 noted,

> The private school has smaller classes when my child can do better with their class assignment. The teachers here take the time with all students in the classroom. Also, my child seems to have less discipline problems in a smaller setting.

Participant 10 reported, "I like the small classes here at the private school. My child has increased their grades since attending this school. Also, I like the teachers here and they seem to care about the children here." Whereas, Participant 8 expressed, "There are smaller classes here at this school and I like the administration because they support the parents and the children. Also, my child grades have improved since attending this private school."

**RQ 1- Theme 3: Safe Environment at the Private School**

The participants noted that the private school offered a safe environment for this child. Seven of the 11 participants responded to this theme. These participants were able

to provide some reason why the private school their child was attending had a safe environment for learning.

Participant 3 stated,

He is safe at this private school, I have no problems with nobody bothering him and he had one incident where a little boy in his class was saying stuff, but the principal nipped that in the bud, when he was in the public school. I used to have to come up there each week and seemed like the principled and Deans they just didn't take me serious as a parent I guess cause I'm a male. A man. I found out that my son was being picked on but when I called the bully line, the district found out the little boy who had been bothering him all school year didn't even have referrals in the system on him. The teachers all said they had put some on the boy so that was my main reason for taking them out of the public school system.

Participant 4 reported, "I feel she is very safe here at this private school. She gets a lot of attention at private school, and I like the attention the teachers are giving her. Her grades have improved since attending this school." Participant 6 expressed, "Yes, he is safe at this school because the principal is very firm about bullying and he commands respect." Whereas, Participant 7 stated, "Yes, I believe she is safe. The class size is small, so she is not overlooked." Participant 8 noted,

I think the private school is very safe over the public school. There are less students in the class and less students in the hallways when classes are not in session. My child seems to feel safe, and I think it is a safe environment here at this school.

Also, Participant 9 noted, "Yes, my wife and I both feel our son is safe, because he is not in a class with 30 other students." I also like the small class sizes which can promote a safe environment for children to learn." Participant 10 expressed, "A safe environment is very important for students to learn, and I feel that this school offer my child a safe way to learning and there is less distraction here at this school." Participant 11 stated, "I feel that the private school is a safe environment over the public school. Since we have been here, I have not seen too many discipline issues that the administration cannot take care of in a timely manner."

**RQ 2- Theme 4: Parents Have a Choice in the Child's Education**

The participants expressed that parent have a choice in the child education by sending their child to a private school over a public school. Eight participants responded to this theme.

Participant 6 stated, "Yeah, I had choices but if my son didn't go to his neighborhood school he would be on special assignment. I feel that parents need to have choices of where their child can attend school." Parent 2 noted, "I like the fact that I have choices in my child education. The private school allows me to have a say in the decisions of my child education. I did not have the choice at the public school." Participant 4 reported, "The private school allows me to make certain decision about the type of education my child is receiving. You do not have this type of service at the public school." Participant 5 expressed,

I feel that school choice is a good thing for parents. I like the idea that I can make certain school discussion for my child with disabilities. The public school do not

ask parents how they feel about the decisions they make on behalf of the children they teach.

Participant 7 reported,

The private school my child attends allow parents to have a voice in what instruction and services their child receive at the school. They send out surveys and questionnaires several time a year to get parent opinions about the changes they want to make in the school.

Participant 9 stated,

The public school do not allow parents to make decisions about their child education. They only provide a one size fits all approach to education for children. I like the private school options because the parents can provide their opinions at any time to the school administration. They seem to listen to parents' concerns.

Participant 10 expressed,

School options is a good thing, and the private school is the option me and my family felt was best for our children and my child with a disability. They need extra help, and the public school did not provide it for her. I did not like the inclusion concept for all children with disabilities. There are too many children in one class at a time and you have one teacher and one assistant.

Participant 11 noted,

I like the idea that with private schools, the parents have the option and decision making on some of the services their child can receive. Also, the private school

allows parents to make certain decision about different types of services offered with children with disabilities. They can do better but it is better than the public school my child attended.

**RQ 1- Theme 5: Positive Teacher/Parent Relationship**

The participants expressed that there is a positive teacher/parent relationship at the private school. Seven of the 11 participants responded to this theme.

Participant 2 expressed, "They seem to be very concerned about my child's education and they ask me questions about how to help him. I call the relationship with his teachers very helpful to accomplish his goals." Participant 3 noted,

I got a good relationship with my sons' teachers at the private school and my son he has real good relationship with his teacher she contacts me, and you know if anything's wrong at school or we need to know about anything that's important.

Participant 11 stated, "There is a positive parent and teacher relationship at the private school. The teachers keep me informed of all that is going on with my child each week at the private school." Participant 6 stated, "I like the administration and the teachers here at this private school. They seem to care a lot about the children and make sure they keep me informed about my child progress." Participant 7 noted,

I like the way the teachers keep me informed about my child's progress in terms of his reading and math assignment. They also informed my about certain things I need to do at home to help my child's progress in his class assignment.

Participant 4 stated,

I have a good working relationship with the teachers and the administration here

at this private school. They seem to be very supportive of the child and provide

needed information through progress reports. I did not receive a lot of information

on my child while they were attending the public school.

Participant 5 reported,

I feel that I have a good working relationship with all the teachers at this school.

They keep me informed about the progress m child is making in their classes. The

administration seems to be on top of everything and there are less discipline

issues at this school. I did not receive these types of services, at the public school.

Participant 7 noted,

I have a good working relation with the teachers at this private school. They keep

in contact with me about the progress my child is making. They also let me know

if there is an issue that needed to be addressed with my child. I did not receive

that service at the public school.

## RQ 1- Theme 6: Parents Are Not Involved in the IEP Process

The participants noted that parents are not involved in the IEP process at the

private school. Nine of the 11 participants responded to this theme.

Participant 1 reported, "I' has never been contacted about an IEP process at this

private school. I did attend several IEP meetings while my child was at the public

school." Participant 2 reported, "I was involved in the IEP program in a public school,

but I haven't yet been to a meeting with the private school yet." Whereas, Participant 3

expressed, "I've been to an IEP meeting for my son when he was in public school, but I

never been in one at this private school." Also, Participant 4 reported, "I have never had an IEP meeting at the private school since my child has been attending the school." Participant 5 expressed, "I did not have one meeting since we left public school." Participant 6 reported, "I haven't had one here, I did at his public school. In addition, Participant 7 reported, "Oh, at this school, I haven't had one.  I did at public school." Participant 9 stated, "We haven't had one, I don't think …. yeah, I'm pretty sure we haven't had one since being at the private school." Finally, Participant 10 reported, "I don't know nothing about that, no nobody told me nothing about one."

## Summary

This study explored the lived experiences of African American parents concerning student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. A phenomenology research paradigm was used to explore the lived experiences of African American parents of special needs children. A descriptive phenomenological paradigm was used to describe and explore the phenomena. The intent of this study was to fill the literature gap regarding reasons many African American parents choose private school options on sending their children with disabilities to a private elementary school. The results of this study may provide more information and knowledge for private and public schools leaders with increased understanding on listening to more African American parents' concerns on providing adequate services for students with disabilities in the elementary school setting. Chapter 4 provided the results of the research study, the setting and demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, credibility,

transferability, dependability, confirmability, and the themes that emerged from the

research study results. In Chapter 5, conclusions were made for this study with

interpretations of the findings, limitations to the study, recommendations for future

research, researchers' reflections, and implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

**Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American parents concerning student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. Phenomenology is the research paradigm that can be used to explore the lived experiences of African American parents of special needs children. A descriptive phenomenological paradigm was used to describe and explore the phenomena. The intent of this study was to fill the literature gap regarding reasons many African American parents choose private elementary school options for their children with disabilities. The semistructured interviews were used in the interview process and were conducted via a virtual platform with 11 participants in this research study. The interview data was collected in a 3-to 4-week time span. The interviews of each participant lasted from 45 to 60 minutes in length, depending on the flow of the conversation. I used probes with the participants so the participants could provide a conversation around each of the interview questions. In addition, I took notes to record nonverbal communication during each of the interviews with the participants. All participants, except for Participant 10, appeared to be happy about the school choice for their child with disabilities; this was evident through the facial gesture of smiling when talking about the private school. However, Participant 10 appeared angry when talking about her experience with White public school staff. This was evident from her body language that exhibited the following: balled fist, pursed lips, voice inflection, and head shaking back and forth. All interviews were transcribed

for data analysis. The results of this study may provide more information and knowledge for private and public school leaders and increase their understanding by listening to the African American parents' concerns about the availability of adequate services for students with disabilities in the elementary school setting.

## Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, each theme is discussed within the broader context of the literature review in Chapter 2 and the theoretical framework of this study. I interpreted the results to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of African American parents concerning student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools as well as how the themes aligned with the theoretical framework and the literature review.

The findings were analyzed and interpreted in the context of the decision-making theoretical framework. The findings are represented by six themes that emerged from the semistructured interviews. These themes included Theme 1: frustrated with the public schools, Subtheme 1: lack of adequate services and support from public schools, Theme 2: smaller class sizes, Theme 3: safe environment at the private school, Theme 4: parents have a choice in the child's education, Theme 5: positive teach/parent relationship, and Theme 6: parents are not involved in the IEP process.

### RQ 1- Theme 1 /Finding 1: Frustrated With the Public Schools

The first finding was that the participants were frustrated with the public schools; this was the reason for sending their child to a private school. Many of the participants were frustrated due to services and too many children with disabilities in one classroom.

Participant 1 reported that their child had several issues that needed more special

attention, and they felt that the public school did not provide adequate services, which

frustrated them at times. Some of the participants noted that that their child came home

complaining that when they would ask the teacher for help, they would get told to do it

themselves. Also, some teachers did not help the parents' child when needed on certain

lessons. Participant 8 reported that they were tired of getting phone calls about their son

acting out in class; the school would write him up on a referral and then not get to why he

was acting out. Participant 8 stated that they just thought he was a bad child and would

not apply himself in the classroom.

**RQ1-Subtheme 1 / Finding 1: Lack of Adequate Services and Support From Public
Schools**

The subtheme lack of adequate services and support from public schools

described how the public schools lacked adequate services and support for their child

with disabilities. Most of the participants explained that they did not receive much

support from the teachers and the administration at the public when there were issues

with their child. The teachers and the administration seemed not to care due to having so

many other students in the school. It seemed like students with disabilities were lost in

the process. Also, most of the participants noted that the public school seemed like they

did not care about the academic needs of students with disabilities. In addition, they

expressed that they did not receive much support from the school, and the services were

not adequate, especially IEPs stating that students should receive accommodations in all

their classes.

The findings of this research study confirmed Billingham and Hunt (2016),

McKittrick et al. (2020), Mann et al. (2018), and Waitoller's (2020) research on parents'

view of public schools and how many African American parents have lost faith and trust

in public education due to the low school safety, lack of quality education, and

social/emotional issues with public schools. Further, there has been an increase in the

number of African American parents considering private schools as an option in dealing

with several problems that public schools face in the United States, such as lack of

support, teacher/parent relationships, emotional well-being, and safety issues of the

student, therefore confirming the research of Egalite and Wolf (2016) and Waitoller and

Super (2017).

**RQ 2- Theme 2 / Finding 2: Smaller Class Sizes**

Findings from the second theme indicated that a reason for sending their child to a

private school was that the private school had smaller class sizes. Several of the parents

expressed that the public school used the inclusion model, and they did not like their

child in a classroom with 20 students and one teacher. The parents also felt that their

child could learn more things in a smaller setting with a teacher and a teacher assistant.

Also, the parents liked the small class size at the private school. The parents also noted

that their child make more academic progress in a smaller setting, their grades improved

at the private school, and they liked the teachers at the private school. Participant 5 noted

this about the private school:

> The private school has smaller classes when my child can do better with their
>
> class assignment. The teachers here take the time with all students in the

classroom. Also, my child seems to have less discipline problems in a smaller

setting.

This research study confirmed the work of Waasdorp et al. (2018), who reported

that some 60% of the parents noted that better student discipline was essential to them.

Fifty percent noted smaller class size, 49% noted school safety, and 39% noted that

individual attention was essential for their child with disabilities. In addition, some

private schools cater to certain families who want their children to attend school with a

small class size, with certain nurturing needs, school safety issues, and a supportive and

nurturing environment for their children (Allen & Gawlik, 2021). Private schools, unlike

public school systems, do not have a legal obligation to accept a student who may want to

attend the private school. The admission process for some elite private schools in the

United States is very competitive (Allen & Gawlik, 2021). Also, the class size for many

private schools is smaller than in many public schools.

**RQ 1 - Theme 3 / Finding 3: Safe Environment at the Private School**

Findings from the third theme indicated that the participants noted that the private

school offered a safe environment for this child. These participants were able to provide

some reasons the private school their child was attending had a safe environment for

learning. All the participants felt that the private school was very safe. Also, the

participants noted that they liked the attention given to their child from the teachers at the

private school. The school climate felt very inviting to many of the parents, and they felt

that their child could learn more due to the safe environment at the private school. Also,

P8 noted that the private school was very safe over the public school. There were less

students in the class and less students in the hallways when classes were not in session.

P8 noted that their child felt safe, and they felt good about the safe environment at the

private school.

This research study confirmed the work of Brewer and Lubienski (2017) and

Waitoller and Super (2017) on school safety for students with disabilities in schools.

Also, although many African American parents of students with disabilities are

concerned with their child receiving FAPE, guaranteed under the IDEA Act, they have

noted other concerns, such as students' safety, education, and social/emotional factors, for

sending their special needs children to private elementary schools (Brewer & Lubienski,

2017; Waitoller & Super, 2017). Cai and Gu (2019) and Glazerman et al. (2018) also

confirmed how education, safety, and social/emotional factors are supported at the

private elementary school level through community presence and relatedness among

students. In addition, Waasdorp et al. (2018) reported why parents of students with

disabilities use the private school option for their children. Many of these parents noted

that school climate and classroom management were essential to them for their children,

confirming Alsauidi's (2016) and Saia's (2017) study regarding classroom and

environment leading to better student achievement.

**RQ 2- Theme 4 / Finding 4: Parents Have a Choice in the Child's Education**

Findings from the fourth theme indicated how participants expressed that they

have a choice in their child's education by sending their child to a private school over a

public school. The parents felt that school choice was a good thing for parents. The

parents liked the idea of having certain school discussions for their child with disabilities.

They also felt that the public school did not allow them to make certain decisions about the education for their child with disabilities. Participant 7 stated,

> The private school my child attends allow parents to have a voice in what instruction and services their child receive at the school. They send out surveys and questionnaires several time a year to get parent opinions about the changes they want to make in the school.

Also, the parents felt that the private school allows parents to make certain decision about different types of services offered with children with disabilities.

This research study confirmed the research of Egalite and Wolf (2016), Mawene and Bal (2018), and Smith (2020) on school choice. Some African American parents chose the private school option for their child with special needs because of their different beliefs. African American parents believed that some public-school systems were not correctly educating their children and providing a safe climate with low amounts of discipline issues and academic problems, confirming Egalite and Wolf's research. Also, many African American parents felt that the public-school system did not try to ensure that African American children with disabilities were receiving adequate education, which confirmed Mawene and Bal's and Smith's research. Researchers noted that many African American parents place a high value on educating their children, and they felt that the public-school system was falling short in providing students with disabilities the necessary services they needed to increase their academic achievement in the least restrictive environment (Egalite & Wolf, 2016; Mawene & Bal, 2018; Smith, 2020). Findings from the research study confirmed this as well; I found that African

American parents were frustrated with the public school system and felt it often lacked the support that was necessary to promote academic progress for their child with special needs. Participant 11 reported, "I tried to get her OT services, but the school was giving me the run around saying she didn't need it. My daughter was in 3ʳᵈ grade and still had problems buttoning her shirts." Participant 9 reported,

> I was frustrated, angry and mad because of my child getting all these referrals and nobody helping us…not a whole lot of support when I would ask about how I could get some help they talk to me like they didn't know what I was talking about.

Participant 7 also reported, "I was really frustrated and upset because my baby was still failing. From what I understand sometimes the ESE teacher had so many students that she missed seeing my daughter sometimes."

**RQ1- Theme 5/ Finding 5: Positive Teacher/Parent Relationship**

Findings from the fifth theme indicated that the participants expressed that there is a positive teacher/parent relationship at the private school. The parents noted that had a good relationship with parent/teacher relationship at the private school. The parents also reported that the teachers at the private school contacted them often about the positive and negative things that were going on with their child at the private school. Participant 11 reported, "There is a positive parent and teacher relationship at the private school. The teachers keep me informed of all that is going on with their child each week at the private school." Also, Participant 5 reported,

I have a good working relation with the teachers at this private school. They stay

connected with me about the progress my child is making. They also let me know

if there is an issue that need to be addressed with my child. I did not receive that

service at the public school.

This research study confirmed the work of researchers such as Billingham and

Hunt (2016) on parent and teacher relations at schools. Many African American parents

felt that there are too many flaws in the public schools and the public charter schools'

systems due to such elements as inadequate curriculum, fairness, bullying, and the lack of

academic services for many students with disabilities (Billingham & Hunt, 2016). A

private school can provide a better atmosphere for African American children with

disabilities to receive a quality education with more emphasis on their social and

emotional development (Billingham & Hunt, 2016). Moreover, many African American

parents believed they could manage their children's education and development early in

their school years. The issues and problems they experience in the public and charter

school systems can be solved overtime (Billingham & Hunt, 2016).

**RQ 1- Theme 6 / Finding 6: Parents Are Not Involved in the IEP Process**

Findings from the sixth theme indicated that parents are not involved in the IEP

process at the private school. The parents reported that they have never been contacted

about an IEP process at this private school. The parents noted that they attended several

IEP meetings when their child was at the public school. Participant 2 reported, "I

participated in the IEP program in a public school, but I haven't yet been to a meeting

with the private school yet." Also, Participant 3 expressed, "I've been to an IEP meeting for my son when he was in public school, but I never been in one at this private school."

This research study did not confirm the purpose of the IEP and the importance of parents being involved in the IEP process for students with disabilities (see IDEA, 2004; Sopka, 2013). Within the United States, there are numerous laws regarding education and special needs students that are specific to public schools but not private schools. For example, public schools (but not private schools) that enroll students with special needs are required to adhere to the provisions of the IDEA (2004). According to the laws outlined by IDEA, special education students enrolled in public schools are entitled to the accommodation benefits of FAPE and IEP (Sopka, 2013). Also, private schools do not have to follow the requirements under the IDEA 2004 law unless they receive federal funds.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework in this study was the decision theory by Edwards (1954). This theory served as the theoretical foundation in this study. Decision theory examined the phenomenon of making choices. Edwards (1954) decision theory birthed two concepts, normative theory, and descriptive theory. In normative decision theory, African American parents have exhausted the research information and have rational decisions. Whereas in descriptive decision theory, African American parents know that exhaustive research is required, but other variables thwart the decision-making process, thus producing unwanted outcomes (Edwards, 1954). After analyzing and interpreting the findings from the study it was found that other variables thwarted the decision-making

process for school choice. Exhaustive research was not utilized by the parents thus, concluding that the theoretical framework of decision theory's descriptive concept was more often used.

The decision theory was chosen because it was relevant to the choices made by the parents which was the main phenomenon of the study. African American parents when choosing a private school option for their child with disabilities. Edwards (1954) decision theory birthed two concepts, normative theory, and descriptive theory. In normative decision theory, African American parents have exhausted the research information and have rational decisions. Whereas in descriptive decision theory, African American parents know that exhaustive research must be done, but other variables thwart the decision-making process, thus producing unwanted outcomes (Edwards, 1954). This model provided a framework to explore African American parents' perceptions concerning students' safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools.

## Limitations of the Study

This study included some limitations related to method, design, and data collection (Creswell, 2017). The descriptive phenomenological study used a small sample size. A limitation of this study included generalizability to other settings and populations. The geographical region for this study was in the central part of Florida. The participants for this study were male and female parents who placed their child in a private school. The outcomes of this study may not be considered as a typical experience of all African American parents. However, the results of this study represented the experiences of the

participants in the study. The participants also may have had unknown biases before providing a response that may influence their understanding of the questions during the interview process.

Another limitation of this study was researcher bias toward the participants. I am an African American female who is a special education teacher in Florida. Therefore, some bias may have affected how the interviews were conducted, perceived, and how the transcripts were analyzed. Due to my shared relatedness, I may have had personal experiences that may not align with the participants' experiences, which may not have allowed a greater level of empathy for the research participants. It was important for me as the researcher to recognize personal views of the world and discern the presence of a personal lens to accurately listen and analyze the participants' reflections within the data collected during the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). As the researcher, I maintained a journal to bracket my preconceived ideas about the topic before conducting the interviews. To avoid personal bias, the interview questions were created before the interview process and delivered within the interview to all participants verbatim (Creswell, 2017; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Also, the interview questions were validated for use in this research study by having two parents and an expert in qualitative research who reviewed the interview questions. I made the corrections as suggested by the expert panel. The interviews took place using a virtual online platform with each of the participants.

## Recommendations for Future Research

This study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of African American parents concerning student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. The findings related to this study showed that several of the parents were frustrated with the public schools as a reason for sending their child to private school. There is a need for more research in these areas to determine why parents feel this way. As the researcher, I recommend that a quantitative study be conducted with parents to find out some reasons for this frustration. Also, the participants noted that they are not involved in the IEP process at the private schools from the participants in this study. Therefore, a qualitative study should be conducted with parents and private school to determine why they do not conduct IEP meetings with the parents since students with disabilities are governed under the IDEA regulations for students with disabilities. Also, a research study should be conducted with African American parents from other locations in Florida, other states in the United States and income level to obtain the reasons why they send their child with disabilities to a private school.

## Implications for Social Change

This qualitative study has implications for social change because it attempted to fill the gap in research that focuses on comprehending the decisions of African American parents of special needs children to private elementary schools due to safety issues, education, and social/emotional issues through their lived experiences. The experiences learned from this study might provide African American parents with information that

should aid in making an informed decision regarding private school education and ensuring the fate of their special needs student's education. This study can inform public school administrators on the events that occur in the public school setting that are antecedents for private school choice for African American parents of children with special needs. The implication for social change is that it has the potential to equip public school administrators, private school administrators, and African American parents with information on how to make an informed decision regarding enrolling their special needs child into a private elementary school.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American parents concerning student's safety, adequate education, and social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. Phenomenology is the research paradigm that can be used to explore the lived experiences of African American parents of special needs children. A descriptive phenomenological paradigm was used to describe and explore the phenomena. The intent of this study was to fill the literature gap regarding reasons many African American parents choose private school options on sending their children with disabilities to a private elementary school.

The study was founded and fulfilled by addressing the literature on African American parents' lived experiences concerning their special needs child's education in terms of safety issues, education, and social/emotional with respect to sending their special needs children to private elementary schools. There are also education quality

issues of school choice of public versus private school. Researchers have not addressed the reasons why many African American parents choose the private school option for their children with disabilities (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Mawene & Bal, 2018). This study filled the literature gap regarding reasons why many African American parents choose private school options on sending their children with disabilities to a private elementary school. The findings revealed that parents chose the private school option because they want to have a say in the education of their child's education and the private school provides them that choice in the decision-making process. The study's findings also revealed that the parents like private schools due to the small class size and the relationship they have with the teachers and the school administration.

Many African American parents felt that there are too many flaws in the public schools and the public charter schools' systems due to such elements as inadequate curriculum, fairness, bullying, and the lack of academic services for many students with disabilities (Billingham & Hunt, 2016). A private school can provide a better atmosphere for African American children with disabilities to receive a quality education with more emphasis on their social and emotional development (Billingham & Hunt, 2016). Besides, many African American parents believed they could manage their children's education and development early in their school years. The issues and problems they experience in the public and charter school systems can be solved overtime (Billingham & Hunt, 2016).

As a scholar for positive social change, it is important to highlight lived experiences of African American parents concerning student's safety, adequate education, and

social/emotional factors for sending their special needs children to private elementary

schools. School choice is a critical issue that parents must make for their children with

disabilities. Therefore, African American parents need to weigh their options and make

the best choice for their child with disabilities to receive the proper education.

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Appendix A: Interview Instrument

**INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT**

| RESEARCH QUESTIONS | INTERVIEW QUESTIONS |
|---|---|
| **RQ1:** What are the lived experiences of African American parents who choose a private elementary school for their child with special needs? | **IQ1:** Can you tell me what experiences occurred before deciding to send your child with special needs to a private elementary school? |
| | **IQ2:** Can you describe any resources or support that help you choose a private elementary school for your child with special needs? |
| | **IQ3:** Can you describe any events, for example, tutoring programs you might have encountered since sending your child with special needs to a private elementary school? |
| | **IQ4:** Can you describe any educational programs or services at the private elementary school that your child with special needs has received? |
| | **IQ5:** Can you describe your relationship with the teachers at the private elementary school? Now can you describe your child with special needs relationship with the teachers at the private elementary school? |
| | **IQ6:** Can you describe for me how you are included in the private elementary school individual education program (IEP) meetings for your child with special needs? <br><br> FU1: Tell me your experience with the IEP process? <br><br> FU2: Can you tell me if your child is included in the IEP process? If so, |

| | please describe for me your child with special needs experience with the process. |
|---|---|
| | **IQ 7:** Can you describe your child with special needs academic achievement in a private elementary school? |
| | **IQ8:** Since your child with special needs has been attending a private school, can you tell me if your child is safe at the private elementary school? Please explain. |
| **RQ2:** What is the meaning of education in a private versus public elementary school for African American parents of a child with special needs? | **IQ9:** As an African American parent of a special needs child, can you describe the meaning of education in a private elementary school? As an African American parent of a special needs child, can you describe the meaning of education in a public elementary school? |
| | **IQ10:** FU1: Can you tell me if you had choices in selecting a public elementary school for your child with special needs? Please explain. FU1: Can you tell me how you selected the public elementary school? Please explain. FU2: Can you tell me if the public elementary school was close to where you lived? Please explain. |
| | **IQ11:** Can you describe your experiences with sending your child with special needs to a public elementary school? |
| | **IQ12:** Can you describe the resources or support your child with special |

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| | needs received at a public elementary school?<br><br>FU1: Can you tell me if your child with special needs has received the same resources or support at the private school that you described for the public elementary school? Please explain. |
| | **IQ13:** Can you describe for me your child with special needs academic achievement in the public elementary school?<br><br>FU1: Can you tell me if your child with special needs is experiencing the same academic achievement in the private elementary school as experienced in the public elementary school? |
| | **IQ14:** Can you describe your child with special needs social emotional state in the public elementary school? Can you describe your child with special needs social emotional state in the private elementary school? |