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Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Student Disengagement and its Role in Low Academic Achievement

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Abstract

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Georgia Ross Holmes

MA, University of Phoenix, 2007

BS, University of Phoenix, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

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Abstract

Disengaged students display boredom, low achievement, and high dropout rates. The problem addressed in this study was the need for a better understanding of teachers' perceptions about disengaged students, which is essential in developing interventions to support students' school completion. This basic qualitative study explored teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for student disengagement and explored how teachers perceived the role of disengagement in student academic achievement. The self-system motivational theory lens was the framework used to guide the research and address the research questions, which asked about middle school teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for student disengagement and how teachers perceived the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement. Data were collected through individual semistructured interviews with 10 middle school teachers and analyzed using a thematic coding process. Lack of knowledge and skills, family-related issues, peer relationships in adolescence, lack of parental involvement, social media effects on student academic performance, poverty and lack of resources, and different levels and styles of learning were the seven major themes that emerged from the data analysis and answered the two research questions. This study's results confirmed the importance of a meaningful, equitable curriculum to meet student needs for relatedness and address disengagement. In addition, teachers and parents can work together as partners in developing students' social-emotional skills and academic competencies in order to provide a curriculum that creates a climate for learning that promotes positive social change through minimizing disengagement and supporting achievement

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Dedication

I dedicate the completion of this dissertation journey to my daughters, grandchildren, friends, and those who God placed in my life that supported me and encouraged me to never give up. A special recognition to my late parents John and Mary, who showed me love and believed in education, empathy, and self-esteem that helped shape my social environment. Always in my thoughts are my late husband, Chief Master Sergeant Cornell P. Holmes, and my daughters Sabrina and Ebony for providing my life an essential ingredient-- “inspiration” to get through life’s ups and downs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Adolescents attending urban middle schools experience significant adversities in their schools and communities because of limited resources, low income, and motivational challenges that may lead to a higher disengagement rate (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016; Frederick et al., 2019). This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of student disengagement and describe what happened during disengagement in their classrooms. A decline in achievement and academic goals among adolescents attending urban schools has received increasing attention from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016; Fredrick et al., 2019; Ladd et al., 2017). Furthering this work, Fredricks et al. (2019) pointed out that students became disengaged when the curriculum was irrelevant (e.g., it did not meet the student needs and subject matter or classroom instruction, and teacher-student relationships became depersonalized).

Student disengagement is a process seen as a withdrawal from being involved, such as lack of motivation, and at-risk school failure, thereby; becoming disengaged as they process through school (Fredricks et al., 2019; Ladd et al., 2017; Tadesse et al., 2018; Zepke, 2018). Frederick et al. (2019) used a mixed-methods sequential exploratory design to examine influences on urban adolescents' disengagement in the classroom. They found that students become increasingly disengaged as they progress through school, resulting in low student achievement. Addressing these research gaps is vital because adolescents are when youth become increasingly at-risk of dropping out of school (Ladd et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019).

Background

Disengagement is associated with different learning outcomes and can affect achievement gaps significantly among adolescents attending urban schools that enroll disproportionately in high low-income students of color (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016; Fredricks et al., 2019). Fredrick et al. (2019) conducted a mixed-methods study to understand urban adolescents who identified as disengaged from their educational experiences; still, it is unclear how they vary in disengagement levels. Various researchers have written about factors that influence student engagement, with less attention to understanding disengagement predictors (Krause & Armitage, 2016; Ladd et al., 2017; Trowler, 2017; Wang & Hofkens, 2019). There remain variations in how student disengagement occurs and reoccurs in the classroom and a perceived lack of an understanding of appropriate class activities to reengage all students (Wang & Hofkens, 2019). Few researchers have examined how teachers and educators navigate challenges and other distracting factors influencing their reengaging approach. Disengagement remains unexplored and not well understood (Bergdahl et al., 2020).

Many students face challenges in the learning process, specifically in the learning activities, maintaining interest in the coursework, and the difficulty of giving individual feedback (Arguel et al., 2019). The increased responses to student disengagement were one key reason why a deeper understanding of factors associated with student disengagement needed further research. Arguel et al. (2019) found that difficulties encountered during the disengaging process could be clues for students to rethink their

learning approaches. The study's findings showed that students need to be able to identify the trigger as a sign to change their learning strategy.

Krause and Armitage (2016) conducted a study and explored the concept of classroom participation; the sample contained 1,900 adolescents (Grades 8 through 10, Ages 14 to 16) and negatively predicted school non-attendance and disobedience. Implications of studies could help educators gain rich information about instructional decisions influencing classroom climate and desire to learn outcomes from these articles (e.g., classmates' cohesiveness, instructional practices, and curriculum alignment) in adjusting student learning behaviors. Most of these studies collected data as tools for student surveys, interviews, and exploratory qualitative methods to uncover in-depth motivation factors related to student engagement and disengagement (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fredricks et al., 2019; McDaniel et al., 2017).

Other researchers considered students' disconnection in middle schools due to economic disadvantage and low funding and suggested addressing limitations and recommendations for future research (Cooper, 2016; Heller et al., 2017). Teachers play a significant role in academic motivation that influences student involvement, including levels of attention, participation, and reengaging their students back on task (Jang et al., 2016a). By providing evidence-based interventions for middle school teachers that support students' social development to energize their interest in their coursework, the student would most likely reengage with the material (Renninger & Hidi, 2017). Careful planning and appropriate implementation would likely strengthen student motivation and academic outcomes. In this regard, exploring how, why, and to what extent certain

factors influence student disengagement was critical to student success and educational outcomes (Quin, 2017; Renninger & Hidi, 2017; Ruzek et al., 2016). From this study, the researchers recommend using the data for teachers and classroom activities to increase student participation in coursework. It may also be used by teachers to develop strategies to motivate and sustain their students' interest in education.

Problem Statement

The problem that I addressed in this study was the lack of understanding of teachers' perceptions regarding the underlying reasons for disengagement. In addition, I investigated how teachers perceived disengagement as a critical role in student academic achievement. The low level of academic achievement in the middle school English language arts (ELA) classes was critical because of its association with at-risk grade retention and prevention of dropping out of school (Ladd et al., 2017). The National Center for Education Statistics Annual Report [NCES], (2016-2017) identified low educational attainment as a significant national challenge. Students who had low motivation to learn showed several measurable disengagement indicators associated with an increased risk of dropping out.

NCES also completed and collected data from middle school teachers on student achievement among sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students. In the survey data, 38% of the middle school teachers reported that they experienced challenges in their subject areas associated with disengaged students (e.g., not participating in coursework, low attendance, and class preparation) were viewed as rising risks. Disengagement can result from many factors, such as students showing little interest in their coursework (e.g.,

distracted, short-term focus, peer behaviors, and emotionally disengaged) that profoundly affect change in student academic outcomes (Reichenberg, 2018). Although a modest body of studies existed on the lack of student engagement, there was still a lack of an understanding of the underlying factors associated with student disengagement and how teachers perceive and react to it (Reichenberg, 2018; Rumberger et al., 2017; Van den Berghe et al., 2016).

The NCES (2018) found that disengaged students tend to drop out of school early and are more likely to be in future need of public assistance. Limited studies of teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for disengagement in coursework that might lead to academic failure prompted a recent literature review to find more information regarding teachers' perceptions of achievement decline (Burden, 2016; Quin, 2017). Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) found that urban schools have lower academic achievement levels and are more focused on educational reform initiatives in rethinking instructional strategies and relationships. Because previous researchers showed teacher factors that might enable student achievement, Hammond et al. suggested a need to investigate what factors influence student disengagement and its role in low student achievement.

As Frederick et al. (2019) reflected on the motivational factors, they considered the range of ways students can express disengagement, such as direct action toward learning and withdrawal from the involvement process. The self-system model was a relevant theoretical framework to examine factors influencing student disengagement and academic achievement variation among Grades 7 and 8 of urban middle students (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Various researchers (Ladd et al., 2017) focused on target factors that

put students at risk of disengaging and emphasized the importance of a more comprehensive understanding for students, such as linking in-class activities to real-life situations.

Understanding the critical role of disengagement in the urban middle school is essential to academic success because adolescence is when youth are at greater risk of dropping out of school (Ladd et al., 2017). Researchers who addressed student disengagement related to low achievement outcomes found that teachers and administrators needed to understand what school indicators support student learning and academic progress (Sebastian et al., 2017). The teachers' perceptions of the learning environment play a substantial role in how students learn, retain, and apply the knowledge. A basic qualitative descriptive study was the most appropriate method for exploring teachers' perceptions of how and why English Language Arts [ELA] students experience academic achievement challenges.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, I listened to middle school teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for disengagement. One of my goals was to determine how middle school teachers perceived the critical role of disengagement in low student academic achievement. I addressed the purpose of this study through semistructured interviews with 12 middle school teachers (Grades 7 and 8, students Ages 12 to14). The findings of the study could increase understanding of teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for low academic achievement and provide insight into the skills necessary to sustain the challenges.

Research Questions

The following research question guided this study:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are middle school teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for students' disengagement?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do middle school teachers perceive the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement?

Theoretical Framework

I used Skinner and Belmont's (1993) self-system model of motivational development (SSMMD) as the guiding framework in investigating the factors that undermined motivation for children to learn. I used self-system process theory to frame my exploration of the learning environment factors. I also used the impact of the dynamic classroom on motivational development as a foundation of thoughts and actions as contributing factors (e.g., self-perception and components of student interactions with teachers) to identify the forces that helped shape student motivation. Disengagement related to various modifiers, such as school, students, classrooms, or low academic achievement, is an important topic and has received much attention (Dincer et al., 2019; Montenegro, 2017). In this study, I developed details on the cognitive-structural and theoretical basis of student re-engagement for self-development in learning.

It was critical to investigate teachers' perceptions of student disengagement and identify strategies relevant to motivating students in their learning. To understand the motivational approach of disengaged students, Skinner and Belmont's SSMMD was the most appropriate lens to use to explain why some students became disengaged. My goal

was to learn about teachers' perceptions of students who became disengaged during their learning activities. The model has posited a reciprocal effect between teacher-student interactions and academic achievement and was used to organize responses into categories in order to understand and explain student disengagement.

There are four reasons why Skinner and Belmont's self-system theory was useful for framing exploration of the environmental learning factors that promote student success as their basic strategies: (a) attention focusing, (b) relevance, (c) confidence building, and (d) satisfaction. In this approach, the self-system model specifies that children's need for competence is fostered when they experience autonomy support in the classroom activities (e.g., develop self-thinkers and encourage adolescents to solve problems actively that are beneficial to their learning). By listening to teachers individually, I gained an understanding of their perspectives and the meaning that they took away from the lived experiences in the classroom regarding disengagement.

Nature of Study

I used a basic qualitative design and semistructured individual interviews of 12 middle school, ELA teachers in the Southwestern United States. I collected data face-to-face, via Zoom, Google DUO, and one conference call from the selected teachers. I used the descriptive design to explore teachers' perspectives of the complex process (e.g., disengagement) that have impacts on low-achieving students in the ELA classes. A qualitative approach can be used to uncover factors that were not previously produced and are appropriate for exploring the participants' perspectives selected for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Waters, 2017). I explored the perceptions of ELA and science

middle school teachers about their perceptions of the underlying causes of student disengagement to support their achievement in one Southwestern urban middle school (Grades 7 and 8, students Ages 12 to 14).

I collected demographic information (e.g., gender, age, years of teaching experiences, and beliefs) each teacher. To address the factors associated with student disengagement, I included multiple data collection methods (i.e., interviews and demographic information) to support the triangulation of study findings (see Wang et al., 2019).

Definitions

Academic Achievement: Academic achievement pertains to motivation and energizes direct behavior toward achievement and therefore is known to be knowledge learned through scores on testing and assessed measures (Wigfield et al., 2019).

Autonomy Support: Autonomy support refers to the perception of choice in learning (e.g., self-thinkers that encourage adolescents to solve problems actively that is beneficial to students' learning) thus improving their academic ability and achievement (Vasquez et al., 2016).

Disengagement: Defined by Trowler (2017), disengagement is the action or process of withdrawing from involvement in a particular activity, situation, or group. It is described as a lack of interactions with educators, such as low participation, and assignments that were late, rushed or missed coursework, and disruption of learning activities and emotionally by the rejection of learning.

Instructional Activities: Instructional activities are the method of small routine

segments of instructions which includes how teacher and students will interact with the material and content.

Self-system Motivational Model Development (SSMMD): Defined by Skinner and Belmont (1993), as the self-system motivational model development that posit the reciprocal relationship between students and teachers (e.g., would be mediated by teachers' perceptions of student motivation). The model also includes self-perception (e.g., how the student's perceived competence, autonomy, and relatedness) are critical components for the optimal structure to predict children's motivation, behaviors, and social interactions.

Teachers' Perceptions: Defined by Whittle et al. (2018), teachers' perceptions are the thoughts and mental images that they have about their students, which are shaped by their background knowledge and life experiences.

Urban schools: Defined by Gadsden and Dixon-Roman (2017), urban schools reference schools, once called *inner city* and describe large districts located in metropolitan areas. These schools typically serve low-income students with the most significant challenges and images that disproportionately point to their culture.

Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas accepted or presumed to be valid for a specific purpose by researchers or peers who read the study. I assumed that all teachers would answer the interview questions honestly and sincere interest in sharing their experiences. I believed that this study accurately represents the current situation in the Southwestern United States. I also assumed that I could use my selected research design to preserve

meaningful features of natural occurrences, including clarifying the issues under investigation to fill the knowledge gap.

Scope and Delimitations

The problem that I addressed in this study was the lack of an understanding of teachers' perspectives about the underlying reasons why classroom processes affect student disengagement because that understanding is critical to academic achievement.

Through theoretical sampling (e.g., interviewing teachers and demographically districts), 10 middle school ELA teachers participated in this qualitative research study. The participants' selection criteria include teaching middle school ELA, Grades 7 and 8, and reporting curriculum assignments and relevant coursework with academic achievement goals. I was interested in how ELA teachers use the text in content area instruction and how they provide instructional strategies for student understanding of the text. Because of COVID-19, schools have moved from in-person to hybrid learning. To achieve data saturation, I considered alternative participants in the same school. To address the quality of the research and present a more thorough investigation (e.g., time restriction, fewer participants, and exposure to face-to-face interviews), I used other research tools (e.g., documents and records) to achieve data saturation.

Limitations

I was unable to conduct classroom on-site observations due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in-person communications were re-routed via Zoom or through other online sources by the school superintendent. Face-to-face interviews were limited because COVID-19 transformed the educational landscape into online

teaching and learning. To address this obstacle, I reached out to multiple teachers online. Additional potential challenges were participation recruitment. However, I conducted the research from teachers' perceptions via Zoom meetings and a conference call, which was sufficient to answer two research questions. Despite this methodological limitation, I expected the results to be more in-depth than in previous quantitative studies. In qualitative research, the sample size of interviews may not be statistically significant to justify findings applicable to the entire subject matter and grade levels under investigation (Nelson, 2017; Saunders et al., 2017). One of the challenges to consider when collecting data to avoid bias is to undertake all possible actions to reduce and minimize the deviation from the truth. When interviewing, I relied on individuals' everyday lived experiences without verification (Kahu & Nelson, 2017; Saunders et al., 2017). I did not collect observation data to establish the findings' consistency. Another possible challenge was that the data and results were purely from teachers' perceptions and experiences that taught Grade 7 and 8 students with a small sample size. However, all 10 participants responded, and the sample size was adequate for the study because of the assumption made about the data saturation (see Creswell & Poth 2018).

Significance

Identifying themes for early interventions and classroom practices of teachers working with disengagement risk factors was a significant part of this study (see Wang et al., 2019; Yeager, 2019). Researchers have investigated effective teaching but have not examined teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons why classroom processes affect student disengagement. This study's findings may expand knowledge in the research

literature by increasing understanding of the concept of disengagement in adolescents who experience academic achievement challenges in school.

Although researchers have identified at-risk factors of middle school grade retention and high school dropouts, it was still unclear how disengagement plays a role in academic achievement. Urban middle school disengagement research is critical to academic success, which is significant to schools in exploring various factors influencing those disengaged to make the necessary adjustments for best practices (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Matos et al.; 2018; Taylor et al., 2018; Wang & Hofkens, 2019). The findings of this study may be used to understand how classroom processes and teachers-related factors such as instructional practices make them more disengaged.

This research is relevant because exploring urban middle school teachers' perspectives to understand the specific factors that support students' needs could result in an understanding of disengagement. Whether these factors can be used to explain why students become disengaged during instruction and identify potential risk factors that can influence students' disengagement (see Heller et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2016; Yeh, 2016). In this study, I developed research-based, classroom-proven best practice teaching strategies that teachers can use to address students' changing needs. I addressed teachers' perceptions of the reasons for low academic achievement with their disengaged students.

Summary

The problem that I addressed in this study was the lack of an understanding of teachers' perspectives about the underlying reasons why classroom processes affect student disengagement because it is critical to academic achievement. To address that

problem, I presented a brief overview of the subject and content of the dissertation. The topic is significant because there is a lack of an understanding of middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of why there is a consistently low academic achievement in a local middle school ELA class. However, little is known about the perceptions and experiences of middle school ELA teachers' regarding how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Matos et al., 2018; Ruglis & Vallée, 2016). By understanding teachers' perspectives, I clarified any misconceptions in the ELA coursework activities, which is essential to support all students' growth. Students who become disengaged in school are at a higher risk of dropping out of school and are most likely to be in future need of public assistance (Ladd et al., 2017).

In Chapter 2, I summarize the literature relevant to the research topic under investigation and discuss the gaps in the literature and how I filled these gaps. In the literature review, I address the current knowledge gap associated with the lack of understanding and provide evidence that the I was familiar with what is known and unknown.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Students become disengaged when they experience a lack of interest in the subject, dislike their schools, or their voices are not heard (Osterholt & Barratt 2017). However, researchers have written about student engagement in academics, with less attention regarding student disengagement. For example, Osterholt and Barratt (2017) proposed that it is important to understand students' perspectives of their learning rather than using the usual one-size-fits-all approach of many current disengagement prevention programs. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore middle school ELA teachers' perspectives on the underly reasons for student disengagement and how being disengaged leads to low academic achievement (see Earl et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019; Watt et al., 2017).

Educators could use the results of this study to examine and change ineffective coursework activities to improve learning and understanding in the classroom. Researchers indicated student disengagement from knowledge, noticeable as disconnected between subject areas and real-life situations (Krause & Armitage, 2016; Trowler, 2017). Krause and Armitage (2016) illustrated when more interactions occurred with teachers, students were motivated to achieve educational goals. Chi et al. (2020) and Seidel et al. (2020) concluded that teachers relied on interpreting visual information from their students, such as a willingness to share their ideas and knowledge to identify what students understand.

The gap in the literature was a lack of understanding of how middle school ELA teachers perceived the influence of student disengagement on the academic achievement

of seventh and eighth-grade students. Previous studies by Wang et al. (2019) argued that differentiation instruction should provide disengaged students the knowledge to think about the subject matter to link new information to their prior knowledge to maintain interest and enjoyment. Effective learning is critical for academic success, and how teachers adapt instructional practices could better meet their students' educational achievement goals (Wang & Amemiya, 2019). Ladd and Sorenson (2017) agreed that teachers are the most significant school-based resources in determining students' future academic success and lifelong learning. The authors stated that teachers find it challenging to develop teaching practices that met all their students' needs in the classrooms (Ladd & Sorenson, 2017). In addition, the lack of involving teachers' voices inhibits opportunities to employ classroom practices to address their perspectives and experiences.

For example, researchers have identified that student disengagement affects their educational experiences throughout their four years of high school; listening to how teachers perceive the reasons behind their disengaged students may indirectly affect student learning (Schmidt et al., 2018).

I reviewed the relevant literature to justify the problem in the study's introduction. While the review focused on limited literature that explicitly discussed teachers' perceptions of student disengagement, I was able to identify other possible theoretical frameworks. The main topics in the literature review included (a)literature search strategy, (b) theoretical framework, and (c) topics related to student disengagement. Finally, I concluded the chapter with a summary based on a review of the literature.

The Literature Search Strategy

This literature was a thorough review of current information located and retrieved from multiple databases, including peer-reviewed journal articles related to the topic. I conducted searches in Walden University's Library Catalogs, Educational Resource Information Center, ProQuest Educational Journals, Educational Research Complete, SAGE, and ERIC. The areas of concern for educators were adolescent disengagement, successful transition to high school, and not dropping out of school. The references selected for the literature review came from peer-reviewed journals published between 2016 and 2021. *In the search, these key words represented the main concept of the research topics included academic achievement, academic success, teachers' perceptions, student disengagement, urban middle schools, Grade levels 7 and 8 students, classroom practices, learning environment, self-motivation theory, and adolescent.*

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study was based on Skinner and Belmont's (1993) self-system model of motivation development [SSMMD], and Ryan and Deci's (2000). I combined both inter- and intraindividual approaches to explore teachers' perspectives of their disengaged students and how teachers perceived it prevented them from effectively supporting their academics. The critical proposition of self-determination theory is that individuals hold different beliefs. SSMMD identified relatedness as an influence on motivation and individual interactions. Relatedness was

consistent with self-determination theory, interpreted as a lack of internal motivation in the learning process.

Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory emphasizes the importance of natural preferences for the development and fulfillment of three vital psychological needs of individuals: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The natural tendencies of individuals for growth do not develop automatically because ongoing social support is essential (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory also identified how teachers perceived their disengaged students as an educational risk (see Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory was a relevant framework to understand student disengagement and academic achievement among seventh and eighth-grade students (see Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The study applied Skinner and Belmont's (1993) self-system model of motivational development [SSMMD] to test a theoretically based model for this study. The SSMMD has proposed a framework for connecting student motivation and instructional activities as an influence on student disengagement. The SSMMD consists of three dimensions of a teacher (involvement, structure, and autonomy support) to identify student disengagement components in the classroom. I determined three measurements obtained from the model as a foundation for exploring how middle school ELA teachers perceive classroom processes in their role in student disengagement. The self-system process theory was a relevant framework for understanding student disengagement in the learning environment.

This study aimed to expand understanding of the teacher views that are part of the

inter-psychological process of the SSMMD. By applying Skinner and Belmont's (1993) self-system theory and self-determination theory, these models help me explain interpersonal relationships between teacher roles in predicting changing the emotional (e.g., interactions and patterns) in the classrooms. The dynamics of motivational development also serve as a foundation for several contributing factors (e.g., self-perception and elements of student interactions with teachers) involved identifying student motivation.

The self-system theory focuses on factors and cognitive components for understanding intervention strategies in preventing the downward trend in academic achievement. The self-system theory explored teachers and adolescents as motivators in an active learning environment and obtained data on the motivational level during class settings. Knowledge of this information regarding the SSMMD theory was relevant for understanding how adolescents experience interactions and activities with others. Also, teachers must help students fulfill personal goals and relatedness to others in activity settings. This theoretical framework for this study identified the specific pathways contributing to student disengagement dimensions (see Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

In this section, I discuss several vital topics regarding student disengagement and its role in low academic achievement. These topics include evidence-based approaches from educational resources that focus on reviewed actionable strategies for disengaged student academic outcomes.

Factors Associated with Student Disengagement

Researchers associated disengagement with students who have poor relationships with their peers and teachers, which puts them at greater risk of dropping out of school (Ladd et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018). Researchers have shown as middle students transition to high school during adolescence between ages 13 and 15 become disengaged. Still, few studies focused on student disengagement, specifically on the study's demographic and characteristics. There were various approaches to data collection on student disengagement, low academic achievement, teachers' perceptions, self-determination, adolescents, classroom activities, motivation, and articulation of learning (Fredrick et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

There was a gap in several studies on the behaviors and understanding of student disengagement and low academic achievement success. Another gap in the literature was a lack of understanding of teachers' lived experiences of student disengagement and the underlying aspects of influences on a higher risk of dropping out of school. Tadesse et al. (2018) concluded that students with high digital skills would most likely show more interest in school than students with low levels of digital skills or students with a low level of disengagement. Tadesse et al. (2018) also suggested that disengaged students fall behind, and there is a need to identify early signs of disengagement in order to prevent downfalls.

Five Dimensions of Disengaged Students

The study was significant because understanding what students do not do, risks and factors associated with student disengagement from learning could inform

intervention programs. The study provides opportunities to explore measurable disengagement indicators to improve academic performance outcomes. Trowler (2017) proposed and highlighted five dimensions of disengagement as follows: motivation, student value, student behavior, education interaction, and noncompletion of assignments. Trowler asserted that "Disengaged students have been described by what they do not do," such as not preparing for class (p. 34). Trowler (2017) suggested that educators could facilitate target interventions to improve student outcomes by disengaging or at-risk disengagement. At the same time, Reichenberg (2018) explained that academic results and disengaged students that transitioned from middle school to high school found it challenging to shift to subject-level learning.

Why Disengagement Matters

Concerns about the causes of student disengagement have drawn the attention of administrators, decision-makers, and many communities because it affects essential goals of schooling (Balwant, 2017; Barksdale et al., 2019). There was a specific need to explore teachers' perspectives on how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement to uncover insight into practical recommendations to meet all low-achieving student needs (Balwant, 2017; Trowler, 2016; Wang et al., 2018). According to Martin and Bolfliger (2018), the multidimensionality of the term disengagement has caused mixed definitions among scholars. The term disengagement has no universally accepted description, meaning based on the perceptions of students becoming disengaged (Bolliger, 2018).

In the current literature, different aspects of student disengagement were results of

low motivation, low academic achievement, and several measurable indicators that educators would benefit from the findings (Balwant, 2017; Barksdale et al., 2019; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Krause & Armitage, 2016; Trowler, 2016; Wang et al., 2017). The reports showed disengaged students were at a higher risk of failing and required purposeful activities to foster learning. There was a lack of data related to middle school English Language Arts [ELA] teachers' perceptions of how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement (Balwant, 2017; Barksdale et al., 2019; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Krause & Armitage, 2016; Trowler, 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

Teachers have a significant influence on student's attitudes to learning, yet there was a lack of an understanding of middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement (Balwant, 2017; Barksdale et al., 2019; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Krause & Armitage, 2016; Trowler, 2016; Wang et al., 2017). Wang et al. (2017) examined inventions supported by evidence from two studies designed to meet at-risk students' academic motivations and provided two components:

- Satisfied their motivations by increasing their confidence and autonomous pursuit of their studies.
- Create motivationally supportive learning environments for themselves and established academic expectations that increase students' participation through direct-thinking activities.

Other researchers highlighted interventions to improve academic achievement by teachers working to make connections with students and create structural support for students who become disengaged (Jang et al., 2016a; Matos et al., 2018). I reviewed

reports regarding student disengagement from various perspectives about the school system's influences. Still, it was unclear how and why middle school ELA teachers' classrooms perceive processes affect student disengagement for achieving academic outcomes.

Ruglis and Vallée (2016) conducted a case study to understand four English-speaking public-school students in Montreal, Canada, who self-identified as disengaged from their educational experience. The study collected data used students ages14 and 16, where the students created photo essays related to their disengagement stories through qualitative analysis for five months. Images evoked deeper elements through the research and triangulated with photo-elicitation field notes and interviews (Ruglis & Vallée, 2016). The results revealed that the youth struggled against systemic unfairness while embodying and enacting their identities and life goals.

Teachers-Student Relationships

Teacher-student relationships are critical to fostering a positive classroom environment that provides positive feedback, acceptance, and a connection to the school, building a foundation for success (see National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2016; Okonofua et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2018). In this article, researchers revealed that disengagement is less about the individual and more about the influence of a school system shaped by social unfairness, explicitly, income inequality. It was unclear how the structure and content of classroom level-learning activities led to disengagement and how teachers addressed contextual factors to support student needs for relatedness using data from the NCES (2016). However, data from the reports were unclear and lacked

information about middle school English Language Arts [ARTS] teachers' perspectives on how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement (Matos et al., 2018; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016; Ruglis & Vallée, 2016).

Archambault et al. (2017) discussed oppositional behavior and engagement in school. Teachers strive for excellence and are in the endless search for 100% student proficiency; even highly qualified teachers find it challenging to build strong relationships with students. Effective teachers understand the differential behavior of the student-teacher relationship in fostering all student engagement in school (Archambault et al., 2017). Archambault et al. (2017) presented a study that used two components of student-teacher relationships: closeness and conflict. Findings indicated that students who demonstrated a higher level of oppositional behavior showed low achievement, whereas students who had a close relationship with their teachers were more motivated to learn. Overall, the research showed that many academic interests decreased with age, especially among youths that displaced oppositional behavior. Yet, the study did not include how teachers perceive the underly reasons for student disengagement.

There are limited examples of these approaches in the literature, and they have questionable validity. One student only met once with researchers to hand in her photos and participated in only one interview. Several other meetings took place with focus groups and interviews. The final analysis included one student in the final analysis, and the photos contained detailed descriptions of her disengagement from school (Ruglis & Vallée, 2016). A larger sample more ethnically diverse and attended different schools would have generated more valid results. Typically, struggling learners in low

achievement environments with high expectations unclear by the teachers' research have found that interest and motivation decrease as students move through the education system (Havik & Westergard, 2020; Qinn, 2017).

The MindUP curriculum is a secular program that employs practices and adopts a systematic curriculum that is evidence-based and classroom-tested (Maloney et al., 2016). It also offers in-service teacher training and explains how to extend the skills and concepts learned to other classes and everyday life outside the classroom. Maloney et al. (2016) reviewed the literature about mindfulness practices, and the MindUP curriculum offers various skills for all students in schools and scholarly studies. Based on this review, the researchers suggested that educators might best introduce mindfulness practices during transitional periods in development, even though the research is in infancy, such as adolescent teen years (Maloney et al., 2016).

MindUp is based on neuroscience to introduce students to how the nervous system operates; and the brain's role in decision making. Several schools have incorporated the MindUp curriculum within a social-emotional learning framework (SEL). Several factors make up the implementation (e.g., low academic achievement, test scores, classroom activities, and Social Risk Index, SRI) performance. The school officials identified interventions and adjusted them when needed to align grade levels, ages, and class sizes. Maloney et al. (2016) suggested that participating in the MindUP curriculum may offer several benefits to students in grades 4-7, including (a) increased mindful awareness, (b) improved social and emotional competencies, (c) increased proficiency in executive functioning, (d) better relationships with teachers and peers, (e)

improved academic achievement and (f) improved psychological and physiological well-being (Maloney al., 2016).

This investigation of the MindUP curriculum used self-reported perceptions gauged using a student satisfaction survey, which limited the study's generalizability. Previous literature (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Havik & Westergard, 2020; Qinn, 2017) provided information about programs and strategies to improve academic achievement and decrease student disengagement. In the studies reviewed, scholarly work associated the effects of educational disengagement. However, there is a lack of knowledge in the previous literature regarding middle school ELA teachers' perspectives on how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement; rooted in the understanding of long-term effects on student educational path (Curran, 2017; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wang et al., 2018).

School Climate and Behavioral Disengagement

A positive school climate contributes to higher student academic achievement (e.g., improving student behavior and strengthening student-teacher relationships), including academic success (National School Climate Center, 2017; Reaves et al., 2018). Other related dimensions of school climate include equity, school connectedness, leadership, and shared beliefs of perceiving oneself about learning (Reaves et al., 2018; Yeager, 2019). Still, there was a lack of an understanding of middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement.

This mixed-method study focused on students' behavioral disengagement, a problem in many schools (Reichenberg, 2018). Why students' behavioral disengagement

repeatedly happens in Swedish classrooms was the purpose of this study. Each lesson offered practical strategies to help students focus and help develop a positive mindset in school and lifelong. The research-based curriculum used two mechanisms to explain student disengagement; researchers tested with primary data that consisted of 74 video-recorded classroom lessons from three Swedish schools. Then analyzed, the data with regressions suggested that students' peer encouragement and the school subject curriculum were fundamental for explaining students' behavioral disengagement by students (Reichenberg, 2018). The current studies regarding educational disengagement analyzed the data to offer practical strategies and provided knowledge about critical variables in the curriculum design for at-risk learners.

Reichenberg (2018) examined student learning focused on the choice of text with decorative illustrations and determined that students with lower prior knowledge became detracted. However, students with higher prior knowledge benefited (p. 388)" Qualitative analysis showed how the mechanisms of school-subject curriculum and peer encouragement increased the risk of behavioral disengagement in real-time. The study concluded both tools provided complementary explanations for students' behavioral disengagement (Reichenberg, 2018).

More broadly, a positive school climate relates to teacher satisfaction, productivity, and positive teacher-student interactions, including teacher perceptions of social interaction and their students' learning (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Because the learning environment is critical to student success, there was a lack of work focusing on middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of student disengagement and its role in low

academic achievement. Curran (2017) examined relations between engagement and disengagement to determine why students become disengaged. Findings showed students were more disengaged when their peers were off task and the teacher did not respect them.

In the study, students also reported that they sometimes lacked the confidence to know when to speak up and said it could be difficult to judge whether an idea was worthy of consideration. Some students also described it as pressured to do well academically simply because they were partners with their peers (Curran, 2017). In addition, staff described struggling with letting go meaning unsure when they should give some control to the students. There was a high level of parallels in the lived experiences of staff and students. Theme 1 was identified as personal development and consisted of new ways of thinking and new skills learned. There was a lack of data on teachers' perspectives of how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement (Balwant, 2017; Earl et al., 2017; Curran, 2017)

Cornell and Huang (2018) and Curran (2017) addressed the learning climate through relationship-building and active learning, ripple effect (e.g., students influenced other students with their related views) in class, attendance, and participation. The third theme was challenging, including resistance, time, and capacity for both staff and students; they addressed challenges based on which discipline was involved (Cornell & Huang, 2018; Curran, 2017). Finally, there was proof that all participants' personal development was a welcome outcome, enhancing self-efficacy, motivation, and skills. Personal development also had the most substantial evidence compared with the other

two themes.

Research has shown that teacher and student perceptions are essential indicators of school climate traits; however, investigators have been slow to incorporate both perspectives (Cornell & Huang, 2018; Curran, 2017. Yet, it is unclear about middle school teachers' perceptions of how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement. A related study by Kahu and Nelson (2018) identified three dimensions of student retention: behavioral, cognitive, and affective reaction. Students would most likely comply with behavioral norms for students to be behaviorally disengaged, such as involvement and attendance.

Curran (2017) proposed that students emotionally involved experience affective reactions such as enjoyment, interest, or a sense of belonging. Cognitively connected to student learning went beyond the requirements and education challenges. The proof gathered was limited because of the small sample size and that all participants were from one institution. However, the results gave insight into participants' lived experiences useful for policy developers, staff, and students. It was unclear about teachers' perspectives on how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement.

Wang and Hofkens (2019) discussed the significance of classroom climate both inside and outside; adolescents strive for their identity and form relationships to obtain social networking, explained that within classrooms. School is a multifaceted developmental context where adolescents' social skills are necessary for interactions while developing competencies and exploring their interests. Additionally, Wang and Hofkens (2019) showed that school climate should be re-conceptualized as a multi-

contextual construct involving social and academic contexts. Wang and Hofkens (2019) described these contexts' characteristics present the resources and opportunities for adolescents to participate in social interactions and academic learning. Still, studies were needed to explore middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of academic disengagement to increase learners' academic success (Wang & Hofkens, 2019).

Disengagement in Real-Time

Leite et al. (2016) from Yale University developed a real-time system that created personalized interactions with robots:

> (1) Monitor the disengagement level of each child within a small group, and (2) decide when to employ repair strategies to increase the self-motivation of that particular child and, consequently, the other children in the group (para. 10).

Leite et al. (2016) proposed their algorithm to monitor disengagement in small groups (e.g., a step-by-step solution) so that two robot actors played out interactive narratives containing inspirational words. The field study sample was 72 children. They interacted with the robots three times: (a) control where there was no disengagement repair, (b) the human-robot demonstrated results, where the highest scored pupil disengagement and were adjusted appropriately, and (c) the experiment established long-term interventions to meet the whole group of children needs (Leite et al., 2016). Still, it was unclear how middle school ELA teachers perceived the reasons behind classroom processes affecting student disengagement of the assumed gap (Leite et al., 2016).

Leite et al. (2016) considered the long-term adaption when collaboration required competitive task activities that appealed to different people. Their interpretation meant

that the robot needed to distinguish and adapt to the collaborated humans' characteristics (Leite et al., 2016). Overall, the results showed interrupting the natural course of interaction can be extremely costly, especially in group child-robot interaction. Further research should focus on strategies with perceptive educational robots implementing this kind of disengagement repair intervention (Leite et al., 2016). It was unclear how middle school ELA teachers perceive how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement (Kahu &Nelson, 2018; Leite et al., 2016).

Academic Achievement Gaps

Some studies have shown approximately 25% to 60% of United States students experience various forms of disengagement from their schoolwork. These studies illustrated some indicators to identify early signs of disengagement to prevent school dropouts (Cooper et al., 2016; Lei et al., 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2017; Wang et al., 2017). The study collected information from different school levels, elementary through middle and early high school. The study used exploratory factors analysis approach placed into three dimensions: teacher support, positive classroom climate, and instructional activities to examine the problem of student disengagement. The study results indicated that high school students favored working on their own. At the same time, the lower school levels struggled to stay engaged (e.g., lack of effort and lack of attention). The emotional aspects exhibited several at-behaviors (Cooper et al., 2016; Lei et al., 2018; NCES, 2017; Wang et al.,2017). The behavioral dimension of student disengagement was related to their involvement in and enthusiasm for academic and social activities.

These study results established three main categories under these dimensions: participation in school activities, positive conduct, and learning involvement. Other factors analysis contained demographics, teacher-student relationships, and in-class participation. The same study conducted a quantitative survey of two hundred high school students (Grades10-12, gender, race/ethnicity, and region) through online questionnaires (Cooper et al., 2016; Lei et al., 2018; NCES, 2017; Wang et al., 2017). Still, disengaged students are challenging for educators at all levels and often lead to struggling academically, and it was unclear about middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement (Cooper et al., 2016; Lei et al., 2018; NCES, 2017; Wang et al., 2017). In this reviewed literature, various studies discussed student and school disengagement associated with problematic outcomes and substance use problems.

For example, in a quantitative study, Wang and Hofkens (2019) investigated how implementations for multi-contextual perspectives integrate; each context was crucial to academic achievement (e.g., the process of scaffold learning). The authors explained ways to change school disengagement, more involvement, and targeting at-risk students (e.g., poor academic performance) and added that it is necessary to monitor activities that drive students to succeed (Binning et al., 2018; Wang & Amemiya, 2019). However, the study did not consider extending the research to include social and academic contexts that highlighted how teachers and parents influence disengagement (Wang & Hofkens, 2019), which is the gap that the proposed study may begin to fill.

Schwartz et al. (2016) tested a hypothesis and presumed that the relation between

deficient achievement and violence exposure supported friendships with academically disengaged colleagues. In data collection for this quantitative study, 28 students were absent, resulting in 415 samples of urban adolescents (193 boys; 222 girls with the average ages of the participants 14-16 years; Grades 9-11) for the first year. There were two annual evaluations of psychosocial functioning. A series of outcome variables measured in middle adolescence (ages 15–16) was a 6-month interval. At each interview, we asked respondents to self-report the frequency of criminal offending during the gap between the previous discussion and the current one (Schwartz et al., 2016). The study results viewed as patterns were likely measurements rather than a meaningful indicator of the attributes of their sample. At the same time academically, disengaged peers were also likely to be characterized by other maladaptive characteristics and serve as negative role models in a broader sense (Schwartz et al., 2016).

In addition, the model mirrored the setting with 70% Hispanic American, 6% European American, 4% African American, and 13% of other descent, along with 4% not having a classified background. Examiners analyzed data with Structural Equation Modeling and multiple regressions to capitalize on both analyses' approaches' strengths. The results confirmed the hypothesis; that there is a link between community violence exposure and academic achievement; also, their research failed to find any differences between boys and girls (Schwartz et al., 2016). However, the article did not include information about how and why middle school ELA teachers' perspectives of classroom processes affect student disengagement (Binning et al., 2018; Schwartz et al., 2016; Wang & Amemiya, 2019; Wang & Hofkens, 2019).

Relationships Between Student Engagement and Disengagement

From the self-determination perspective theory, this observational study aimed to investigate relationships between student engagement and disengagement and between teacher's behavior and student (dis) engagement. Student engagement correlated negatively, and (dis) engagement related positively with need-supportive and need-thwarting during the first fifteen minutes of a class (Van den Berghe et al., 2016). The sample consisted of the first 5-minute intervals of 100 videotaped PE classes taught by 100 different teachers, with 51.9% males between 21 and 61. The results showed that student disengagement correlated positively with need-thwarting over the lesson's first 15 minutes. While concentration correlated positively, disengagement correlated negatively with the need for support. Van den Berghe et al. (2016) noted a few significant relationships. When teachers provided more needed help within the first 5 minutes of the course, students were more eager to learn in the third 5 minutes of class. When students became disengaged in the first 5 minutes of the study, teachers exhibited less need for support in the class's next 10 minutes.

Conversely, student disengagement in the second 5 minutes of the study connected to more need support in the next 5 minutes. Although overall relationships between teachers' behavior and student disengagement were in the anticipated directions, the picture may become more complicated should researchers examine relationships according to the lessons' timing (Van den Berghe et al., 2016). Van den Berghe et al. (2016) took a different approach to the study and analyzed 5-to-5 minutes interactions between teaching behaviors and student disengagement. Correlations that the examiner

measured two variables to explore the relationships over the first 15 minutes of the lesson. The study findings suggested that student disengagement was related to less needed support and more need-thwarting teaching behaviors. These results were highly informative insights to build teachers' interventions during critical moments during the coursework (e.g., when dealing with disengaged students at a specific moment in the lesson). A more detailed analysis showed that student disengagement at the beginning of a class provoked less positive teaching behaviors.

The examiner pointed out that students displayed nonparticipation for 15 minutes during the study. Teachers seemed to respond more need-supportive manner to students who appeared to be disengaged (Van den Berghe et al., 2016). These results provided meaningful insights to build interventions for teachers around certain crucial moments during the class. Further research should specifically focus on supplementing the self-report data by teacher rating or observational measures of academic adjustment to assess student academic achievement levels. Still, there was a lack of an understanding of middle school ELA teachers' perspectives on how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement (Van den Berghe et al., 2016).

Impact of Motivation

Jang et al. (2016) and Matos et al. (2018) investigated the school policies and practices of teachers' proactive and transformative contribution to classrooms to fill a gap in whether teachers limit disengaged student autonomy. They adopted two methodological approaches to inform research in different ways. For instance, identifying whether disengaged students' attention would mean a change in teachers' motivating

classes demonstrated that relations between student disengagement and teachers' practices have substantially different results, such as students' affect teachers' behaviors.

Matos (2018) tested students' perceptions of teachers' power as part of a longitudinal project. The researchers used the self-determination theory framework in addition to a classroom-based longitudinal research design, conducted by self-reported their teachers' perceived autonomy-supportive teaching. The same study involved adolescent students; their participation involved submitting self-reports on four facets during academic and achievement in terms of their interest and success in learning: performance, behavior, support, and expectations at the beginning and end of a semester (Matos et al., 2018). The first semester perceived autonomy-supportive teaching indicated longitudinal increases in all four facets of students' late-semester grades that signified students' classroom participation might recruit more perceived autonomy support (Matos et al., 2018). The same study explored teachers' social and emotional competence with student and classroom outcomes. There was a lack of an understanding of teachers' perceptions of student disengagement and its role in low academic achievement (Matos et al., 2018). Still, it was unclear how middle school ELA teachers perceive how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement (Matos et al., 2018).

Fredricks et al. (2019) discussed and described distinctive profiles of disengaged students when they illustrated their ideas and outlined school disengagement as a part of a more extensive motivational process. The study highlighted results from qualitative interviews conceptualization focused on school disengagement. Next, they reviewed

studies and used person-centered practices to identify disengaged students' different profiles (Fredricks et al., 2019). Lastly, they gave an example of the research to determine the subgroups of distinguished students who were notable by unique cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social disengagement patterns. Four profiles included the following identities: (a) emotionally and socially disengaged, (b) cognitively disengaged, (c) emotionally disengaged, and (d) behaviorally disengaged. The results indicated three typical profiles of disengaged students (a) behaviorally disengaged, (b) emotionally disengaged, and (c) students who are cognitively and emotionally disengaged (Fredricks et al., 2019).

Burns et al. (2019) focused on girls' learning behavioral patterns because the boys' learning behavioral patterns rated higher in retaining interest. Also, the girls displayed signs of failure accepting lack of disinterest and withdrawal rather than school refusal, anti-social behavior, and disruptive behavior. These results were well-validated and consistent with related adverse academic and personal outcomes and suggested it was critical to closely assess the girls' disengagement trajectories (Burns et al., 2019). Besides, it is crucial to identify aspects that influence disengagement that is effective for girls. Classroom interpersonal support from peers and teachers is likely to moderate disengagement amongst girls.

The results showed an increase in disengagement as girls progressed through the early grades (in this study, Grades 7, 8, and 9). According to Burn et al. (2019), this experiment found that teachers supported and defended disengagement as a protective factor in learning interactions. The study results indicated that perhaps more teacher

support during the early grades might help decrease disengagement.

According to Qu et al. (2016), youth are more prone to social pressure and stress during adolescence in the United States than in China. Meaning school interest declines more for teens in the United States than teens in China, yet why is unclear. The study examined adolescents' views between (Grades 7-8) to determine whether notable as differences in their self-regulated learning strategies contributed to (Americans vs. Chinese). Qu et al. (2016) discussed four key attributes that prior studies suggested differences between the two countries: (a) Individuation from parents, (b) family responsibility, (c) school disengagement, and (d) peer orientation (Qu et al., 2016). Qu et al. (2016) conducted a two-wave longitudinal study that spanned over six months and took place during the seventh and eighth grades in China and the United States. The sample included the United States, composed of 203 youth, with 110 boys with an average age of 13.26 from five schools in the Midwest.

Qu et al. (2016) conducted a study at the University of Illinois on the American Chinese Middle School Motivation Project. There were 73% European American, 16% African American, 5 % more than one race, 3% Asian American, and less than 2% Hispanic. The Chinese sample consisted of 194 youths, with 89 being boys with an average age of 13.13 (Qu et al., 2016). They were from two junior high schools in the northeast of China, one high-achieving school and the other average-achieving. As is the population, participants were predominantly (99%) of Han descent. Qu et al. (2016) designed both open- and closed-ended spontaneous ideas about teens and closed-ended measures to allow more fine-tuned assessment. Prior research indicated differences in

school disengagement and learning outcomes (Qu et al., 2016).

This study investigated the impact of flow (operationalized as heightened skill and challenge) and immersion on learning within game-based learning environments (Hamari et al., 2016). The collected data included surveys from players in two different settings. There were 134 high school students in 11 classes across the United States who played *Quantum Spectre* as part of their physics class. Other participants consisted of undergraduate mechanical engineering students that played *Spumoni* as part of their engineering class. Both played for 15 weeks and then took a survey. The survey measured skills, actions, behavior disengagement, challenges, immersion, and perceived teaching (Hamari et al., 2016). Students learn complex problem-solving in an ideal educational game setting. Typically, the games' problems begin easy and progressively become more arduous as the player's skill develops.

Players are partially motivated to learn because learning occurs and is situated through probing, hypothesizing, and reflecting upon the game's simulated domain. The goals are clear, and information becomes accessible when needed to reach each goal (Hamari et al., 2016). This study suggested that educational video games can largely shape a supportive, motivational climate for students in a learning activity, increasing interest, concentration, and enjoyment participation levels. The experimental also can stimulate students' interactions by heightened skill and challenges while playing the game. The study results showed disengagement minimized when playing the game with enthusiasm positively affected the players' learning experience (Hamari et al., 2016).

Lei et al. (2018) observed that most scholars argue that student engagement

predicts academic achievement; however, this view were challenged. To resolve this debate researcher sought conclusive evidence through a meta-analysis of 69 independent studies, including 196,473 participants. In this literature review, the authors examined these studies between 2003 and 2015 and transcribed results both in English and Chinese languages (Lei et al., 2016). The report included 273 articles, then analyzed and filtered by specific criteria. Researchers reviewed criteria from three domains: emotional, behavioral, and social cognitive since that is a direct pathway in understanding student learning. Still, a lack of an understanding of middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of the reasons behind classroom processes affects student disengagement (Lei et al., 2016; Zhou, 2018).

Lei et al. (2016) included approximately 69 outlined articles for the study (Lei et al., 2016). Lei et al. (2016) collected data through the Comprehensive Meta-Analysis software version; they employed 2.0 and Pearson's correlation coefficient as the effect size. The results showed:

> a strong and positive correlation between student disengagement and academic levels and an analysis of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement also revealed a relationship between subject matter and academic levels divided into categories by cultural and economic backgrounds (Lei et al., 2016, p. 517).

Because the number of articles from recent publications, the strict criteria adhered to, the method of analysis employed, and student engagement has been a priority for over 20 years, these results appeared valid. However, this study provided limited data for direct effects. It did not include indirect effects of students' achievement across other

variables, and they found no causal relationships because this study used cross-sectional studies.

Influences on Urban Adolescents' Disengagement

Fredrick et al. (2019) used a mixed-method sequential exploratory design to examine influences on urban adolescents' disengagement in school. The data included 22 interviews with middle school students who were diverse in race, and gender and varied in their disengagement levels. In addition, the participants were in Grades 6th, 8th, and 10th grades (small numbers of Grade 7) who were taking 6th and10th grade coursework. In order to examine factors associated with disengagement, the study included additional participants; it expanded the number of recruitments by identifying highly engaged students in the 6th, 8th, and 10th grades who were diverse in race and gender. In addition, many of the adolescents and staff included administrators, school counselors, and school personnel in various capacities.

The qualitative survey portion of this study showed students' responses to questions, such as who liked their teachers and the topic they were learning; Students felt that they were having a good day and were on top of their work, and they felt highly engaged. However, these students described disengaging in class because they were bored, tired, and not interested in the course. For example, some students did not understand the content, lacked teacher-student relationships, or were distracted by something else in their lives. Nearly all the students in the qualitative interviews discussed that their teachers would have similar perceptions regarding their participation in coursework (Fredrick et al., 2019).

Many adolescents and staff, including administrators, school counselors, and school personnel. The importance of staff supports provided two quotes:

> Like some counselors, they can adapt to you; they like joking around with you, knowing about you, and treating you like friends. It is just like knowing that there is someone you can trust at the school. It is surprisingly good. (7 grades African American males in 10th coursework, unevenly engaged group).
>
> The staff is so comforting; they listen to everything; they welcome you in; they respect everything you say. I like counselors more than elementary staff because they are a lot more welcoming and sociable (White sixth-grade male, highly engaged group (Fredrick et al., 2019, p. 13).

Adolescent Values and Interest

Hansen (2021) took a different student disengagement and explored the relations between adolescent values and interest in activities to understand how well at-risk students connect with their schools. The study consisted of 1,953 participants; the examiner collected data through an online survey. The participants were (Grades 7 & 8 students) overall, six middle schools in Colorado participated in the study. Of those students who provided data, 903 were in Grades 6, and 1,025 were in Grade 7. The examiner transmitted data from the school to a research department at Colorado State University.

The analyzed data were calculated and disaggregated by grade and gender. The overall most significant values included: Acceptance (*having friends and being cared about),* Independence (*having the freedom to do what you want),* and Achievement

(*accomplishing difficult and important things).* Overall, there are significant differences based on race (Hansen, 2021). These outcomes included: Various interventions and components to facilitate programs linked to student-teacher relationship with improvement implementation such as social networking and measurable strategies to decrease school disengagement. In addition, to the study's strength and limitation, researchers added supplementation of quantitative data with more qualitative specifications of why the participants endorsed a specific barrier as a strength. The study mentioned several limitations, such as the cross-sectional design did not allow for concluding the perceived barriers. Researchers collected data from telephone interviews that were not recorded verbatim, weakening the qualitative data.

Summary and Conclusion

A qualitative descriptive research design provides researchers with a more profound understanding of complex situations. It offers rich data on teachers' everyday lived experiences in challenging tasks that contribute to the achievement gap between disengaged and engaged students. In addition, the study explored and described beliefs and best practices and uncovered a more in-depth understanding of why and how classroom processes affect students who become disengaged; exploring these experiences and perspectives could inform educators on how to tailor meaningful activities to enhance academic achievement success. Based on the literature review conducted, it was evident that student disengagement remains a critical issue that stakeholders in the education sector are grappling with to address high performance.

While research on teachers' role in student disengagement is currently plentiful

and highly informative, the analysis underscored a particular research-based area of interest to the current topic. In particular, the research undertaken into teachers' perceptions of student disengagement provided evidence of a direct relationship between academic performance and how it related to school outcomes (Earl et al., 2017; Fredricks et al., 2019; Ladd et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Wang & Hofkens, 2019).

After describing the background and related research on student disengagement, I explained this study's purpose and the research questions. Some studies agreed that student disengagement is essential to academic achievement success. Especially during middle years, but unclear how teachers' perceptions of how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement (Earl et al., 2017; Fredricks et al., 2019; Ladd et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Wang & Hofkens, 2019).

Another gap in the literature identified by Wang et al. (2017) recommended additional research on student disengagement to explore its influence on academic performance using a qualitative research methodology. Many previous researchers significantly over-relied on quantitative data analysis that does not fit the problem (Wang et al., 2019; Wang & Hofkens, 2019). Various studies described the key features of student disengagement related to motivational and background challenges focused primarily on high schools or higher educational contexts (Dooley et al., 2017; Holmes et al., 2018; O'Connell et al., 2017).

Some studies limited the scope of data on early signs of student disengagement and a lack of an understanding of the specific aspects of the educational process, such as the level of students' attitudes and interest (Ladd et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Wang &

Hofkens, 2019). Notably, in adolescent disengagement between actual and perceived competence, few studies addressed whether the learning development affects their active participation and interaction with instructors and other students' level of performance (Kim et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017; Wang & Hofkens, 2019). Specifically, there is little work exploring student disengagement from middle school English Language Arts (ELA) teachers' perspectives in an in-depth, extensive understanding of the issues (Kim et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017; Wang & Hofkens, 2019).

The study investigation contributes to a body of knowledge and theorizes noticeable issues relevant to school educators and curriculum developers. Analyzing teachers' experiences and perspectives could benefit school leaders in focusing on practical strategies in adjusting their education practices for desired outcomes for a positive social change. The lack of qualitative research on middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of student disengagement factors might imply a minimal understanding across the learning environment. The next chapter focuses on the research method. It situates the study on a detailed description of all aspects of the research topic to provide clear continuity for the reader and help frame the data analysis in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This basic qualitative study was to explore how middle school teachers described their students' disengagement in coursework and prevented teachers from attaining educational goals. Through semistructured interviews, I collected data from participants' regarding relevant issues. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of middle school ELA teachers' experiences working within the classrooms.

The study focuses on the perspectives of English Language Arts [ELA] teachers regarding the causes of classroom processes that affect student disengagement. Exploring teachers' perspectives for an in-depth understanding could improve student outcomes (see Balwant, 2017; Barksdale et al., 2019; Frederick et al., 2019; Ladd et al., 2017). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that the qualitative approach is appropriate when the researcher wishes to broaden their understanding of the research under investigation.

In Chapter 3, I discussed crucial components of this research study, which involved a detailed discussion of the investigation method. First, I developed two research questions, then described the research design and rationale. Next, I discussed my role as the researcher for this study. I reviewed and selected a methodology, including participant procedures, instrumentation, and recruitment participation. My rationale for choosing a basic qualitative method; is that it allows me to use a broader range of techniques and sources of evidence to develop various criteria (e.g., sampling strategies, co-coding, etc.). This study included the role of teacher demographics (e.g., gender, grade level, and years of experience) and shared perceptions, specifically of students who

become disengaged. Finally, the chapter includes the chosen analysis method and components of ethical concerns and concludes with a research method summary.

Qualitative research analyzes things in their natural settings. The data from this qualitative study aims to explore new knowledge based on individual points of view to enable the researcher to understand better the participants' actions (seeYin, 2017). I sought to make sense of the meaning of the teachers' perspectives on their disengaged students' nature and role. In this qualitative descriptive study, I explored middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of how and why classroom processes affect student disengagement in learning. I followed a basic qualitative design and collected data from semistructured individual interviews with English Language Arts [ELA] and science teachers (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eriksson et al., 2018). I used a descriptive approach and open-ended questions, which allowed me to explore individuals' perspectives and experiences frequently used in techniques for collecting qualitative data (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eriksson et al., 2018).

I used semistructured individual interviews and collected data from the participants. Qualitative researchers have found this approach to data helps with inquire and developed an in-depth analysis (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). The basic qualitative design was useful in exploring ELA middle school teachers' perceptions of their students' disengagement in coursework and how the processes affect low student academic achievement.

I followed a qualitative exploratory approach, which appropriate for first-person perspectives of participants (see Creswell & Poth, (2018); Eriksson et al., 2018). This

method allowed me to be the voices for middle school ELA teachers and listen to their perspectives of students who become disengaged (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach was consistent with the purpose of the study (see Osterholt & Barratt, 2017). The current research presented qualitative methods to rich data sources and became more evident in this chapter. I selected this methodology and design because it provides a broader picture of the concept that involved critical and imaginative thinking within a social and active environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Consideration of Other Designs

The intent of this qualitative study to provide a set of interpretive lenses about the topic area of investigations representations (e.g., individual interviews & field notes) to learn about the issue (s) from participants (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017). As a starting point for inquiry, I collected data using these sources (semistructured interviews & field notes) based on open-ended questions and transcribed participants' perspectives via Zoom, Google DUO, and conference calls, and one face-to-face meeting. Using semistructured interviews, I was able establish patterns by talking directing to participants and listen to their stories to understand about the study's problem (see Eriksson et al., 2018). Many authors have sought to define student disengagement in the reviewed literature, such as social development support in learning (see Krause & Armitage, 2016; Osterholt & Barratt, 2017; Quin, 2016).

A descriptive study is an appropriate approach to investigate a lack of an understanding of participants and beliefs (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017). This research study sought to understand middle school English Language Arts [ELA]

teachers' perceptions of the specific underlying reasons in classroom processes leading to disengagement and disinterest (see Krause & Armitage, 2016; Osterholt & Barratt, 2017; Quin, 2016). I collected data from semistructured interviews to help me make sense of teachers' perceptions to make meaning and better understand the full scope of information on the topic (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017). I generated results by developing a narrative to incorporate all themes derived from the data analysis to answer the two research questions (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017).

Other possible methods for the present study included: phenomenological research and grounded theory. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that phenomenological design focuses on an individuals' lived experiences within the world and research questions that explore the meaning of the experience. Phenomenology is a method of inquiry that offer a way of systematically studying and learning about the phenomena to bring readers' understanding of the essential structure of the experiences. According to Hense and McFerran (2016) grounded theory as that in which the researcher attempts to derive a general, abstract idea of a process, action, or interaction grounded in a study's participants' views. I selected basic qualitative research because the methodology is strengthened by conducting semistructured interviews to explore the research questions that have not been clearly defined yet (Yin, 2017).

The researcher's role in qualitative research is to extract meaning and interpret it to enhance the reader understanding of those who lived and experienced the situations (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a researcher, my role in this qualitative research study was to access the participants' thoughts and feelings and protect the participants and their

data. As a qualitative researcher, I sought to make sense of the personal stories that are the rich-thick description of participants, places, and conversations by explaining a theory's elements (Yin, 2017). In understanding the subject matter, I collected the data until it reached saturation in interviews and communicated the findings (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017).

Researchers must be aware of their potential bias impacting the study outcomes, including intentionally translating the participants' linguistic codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kowalczyk, 2016). In qualitative research, credibility is essential to link the study's findings as accurate and true to the participants' perspectives and develop theories that describe these study experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Silverman, 2016; Yin, 2017). I focused on different aspects of the data and provided the framework in which to conduct the analysis. In addition, I collaborated with my dissertation chair and committee members for guidance in avoiding biased research. Qualitative researchers, use subjectivity and exploratory approaches to inquiry to gather in-depth data. For example, I used in-depth individual interviews and field notes to understand the participants' working environment. Given the emphasis on understanding the process of social interactions, I developed from the data collection on how the participants described their live experiences. After data collection, I notated different points of the research process for withdrawal of the data about the significant points that I extracted to support the study's research question and key findings that may go against the reviewed knowledge in previous supportive literature.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, it is critical to define the role of the researcher to ensure the findings can add credibility by demonstrating the truth of the research study's findings (see Yin, 2017). I do not serve in a supervisory capacity over any potential participants. I was the only one responsible for recruiting eligible participants for this study. In my role as a researcher, I was aware of my relationships with the selected participants, including power, which could impact the study outcomes, such as intentionally translating the participants' linguistic codes (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kowalczyk, 2016). It was essential to remain neutral and resist the temptation to share my own experiences as a researcher. In addition, it was critical that I remain subjective by framing questions using certain strategies to minimize the chance of including bias in the study.

In qualitative research, credibility is essential to link the study's findings as accurate and true to the participants' perspectives by member checking. (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Silverman, 2016; Yin, 2017). My role as the researcher encountered some challenges (e.g., minimizing the potential for implicit coercion of the participants), which I alleviated by establishing whether the research findings represented plausible information drawn from the participants. In addition, ensuring tacit patterns and regularities were not taken for granted, including awareness of the potential conflicts as a researcher within the same profession.

I focused on the data quality by evidence (e.g., consent form) such as confirming selected participants understood the nature their participation, privacy, and the process for withdrawal. I collaborated with my dissertation chair and committee members for

guidance in avoiding biased research. For this study, I was responsible recruitment of eligible participants from a middle school who taught Grade 7 and 8 at a Title 1 school in Southwestern United States. I was the only one involved in collecting data. I interviewed 10 English Language Arts [ELA] teachers via Zoom, Google DUO, conference calls, and on face-to face. I took field notes as part of the document of teachers to describe the observations of the teachers in order to analyze and interpreted the meaning found in the data. In addition, to ensure that I provide the reader with an overall framework for where this study fits in the knowledge of reviewed literature.

Methodology

In this section, I discussed the methodology in detail and research techniques. I discussed the procedures for the selection of participants. I used a qualitative approach and applied a theoretical framework to make sense of the underlying reasons involved in research study. In this study, I presented a detailed discussion of the procedures, including in-depth face-to-face semistructured interviews of 10 teachers, data collection, and a description of the context under study. As part of the review, I identified a framework, which was a theory of self-system motivation to connected to disengagement for explaining why the research problem exists.

Participant Selection

The school serving as the site for this study houses middle school Grades 6 through 8 in the Southwestern United States. Approximately 1,950 students are enrolled, and the school is somewhat diverse, with teachers being 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 20% Black, 75% White, and 4% Hispanic. The student/teacher ratio in Grades 7-8 is 36 to 1,

students eligible for free/reduced lunches 73.87%, school rating two stars, and services students in-person classes and virtual learning. Due to COVID-19, 30% of Grade 6 meet in person three days a week, 70% virtual instruction, whereas Grades 7-8 moved to virtual education only. I did not need to contact the district administrative assistance to get permission to conduct a study at the Southwestern public middle school and the charter school coordinator as an alternative study site. I participated in the online career teachers' seminars and webinars for middle school professional training to recruit teachers for the present study. The facilitators discussed all areas of education, such as top-performing middle schools and middle schools struggling with the most low-achieving students using.

I intended to conduct my study at one school site. However, due to COVID-19, middle schools were assigned for virtual learning, which suspended face-to-face instruction. I selected the participants through alternative ways, such as online professional training. I was able to recruit teachers from the target school, as stated previously in the above paragraph. The intended plan was for networking with middle-grade level teachers that best represent the question under investigation. During the training, each department breaks into smaller groups to discuss the state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), instruction, behavioral issues, and grade level of underperforming students. I did not need to use other options for recruitment.

I interviewed 10 teachers who met the inclusion criteria for the study topic under investigation. I emailed 12 English Language Arts [ELA] middle school teachers who taught Grades 7 and 8 students. However, 10 teachers accepted the invitation to

participate in the study. I was not limited in recruiting ELA middle school teachers. I sought to recruit until I reached 12 participants from science middle teachers or alternative participants in core academic subjects with demographic profiles (e.g., full-time staff, responsible for benchmark assignments, & report grades). Creswell and Poth (2018) found that five minimal and 50 maximum participants were sufficient for most qualitative studies to achieve data saturation. For this study, participants met the following criteria: (a) certified/alternative in English Language Arts [ELA] in Grades 7 through 8 for at least 1 year or science Grades 7 through 8, (b) willing to participate in an approximately 45-minute interview, (c) teachers' informed assessment of learning monitored through school-based evaluation of students' participation in class addressing low-achievement measures.

Permission was not required by the district administrative assistance to conduct the study. I contacted the potential teachers by email with attached informed consent forms, purpose of study, and documents approved by the dissertation committee outlined by the Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) for participants to sign. Because of the (COVID-19 pandemic), I also attended the online district preservice training to recruit out-of-state certification teachers who taught middle school English Language Arts and worked Title 1 schools. However, it was not necessary recruit the population. This experience provided greater insight into factors acquired for recruiting teachers for the present study.

Instrumentation

I used open-ended questions (see Appendix B) through semistructured interviews with 10 English Language Arts [ELA] middle school teachers; I made notes during the data collection (e.g., field notes) to establish creditability (see Yin, 2017). The instrument for this study was the interview protocol, a list of self-developed semistructured interview questions with follow-up questions for clarification when necessary (see Appendix B). For qualitative interview studies, the interviews were the primary source of data collection. I used semistructured interviews as objective data with a small sample of the respondents who participated in this study (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell, 2018). A semistructured interview is often used for qualitative research purposes and provides the participants with guidance on what to talk about during the interview without leading them to pre-determined responses (see Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used the interview protocol and assessed content validity to ensure the interview questions explored the teachers' perceptions and maintained alignment with the research questions.

Skinner and Belmont's (1993) Self-System Motivational Model Development [SSMMD] is a theory of motivation that examined teachers' and students' reciprocal actions and confirmatory factors in the study's data. There are structural elements of the theory/model that speaks to disengagement in the classroom. Two underlying assumptions of the SSMMD (e.g., feeling competent, autonomous, and relationships) revealed each dimension of the study results. Specifically, the effects of self-perception variables and these perceptions are mediators between context and student

disengagement. Although the study focus population was middle school ELA teachers, the design was transparent and transferable to various middle school subjects.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, I invited teachers to participate virtually using online video conferencing (e.g., via Zoom, cell phone/face time, or Google classroom) to conduct interviews as a source of data collection. Teachers agreed, so I presented options to teachers to interview via Zoom, Google DUO, and conference calls, and one teacher chose to meet in person. With the participants' consent, I used a digital dictation machine to record the face-to-face interviews to minimize nonresponses and maximize the quality of the data collection (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within each action, I provided consistent discussions across all interviews. Still, I allowed the research participants the flexibility to answer the research questions freely.

This qualitative study aimed to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of the underly reasons for student disengagement. In addition, how teachers perceived the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement (see Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used open-ended questions (see Appendix B) to guide the interviews for participants to respond freely to draw in-depth information. I collected data through interview questions to help me explore the participants' views to obtain information in understanding the participants' lived experiences related to the research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data stored collection included electronic files addressing the following: (a) interview list with file names, (b) dates and times occurred, (c) sessions conducted listed by file names, and (d) information about the status of the research data (e) transcription spreadsheet that includes columns

with recorded dates and sessions, and (f) my notes, and coding identifier (e.g., assign teachers as T1, T2, or TA, TB) to protect teachers' privacy.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I conducted and generated data from 10 middle school English Language Arts [ELA] teachers, and one teacher who taught both ELA and science. The participants worked at a Title 1 middle school in the Southwestern United States. I did not need an advanced approval from school officials to conduct the study. After the approval from Walden University Institution Review Board [IRB]. I started the recruitment process and invited the potential participants through their contact information (e.g., email addresses and cell numbers) to discuss their participation in the study. The IRB's ethics require an approval before recruiting participants, data collection, or dataset access. Walden University does not grant credit for student work conducted without the IRB's ethics approval or otherwise failed to comply with IRB's requirements. I anticipated 12 teachers for the study. However, 10 participants in a qualitative study were adequate based of the concept of the data saturation (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018) in qualitative research, 5 participants are sufficient for a small sampling size. The 10 interviews met data saturation. I analyzed the data after each interview until themes evolved from repeating the data in order to determine too many or too fewer themes (see Braun & Clark, 2006).

As I stated previously, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented on-site contact, all operations transferred to online communications (e.g., via Zoom) visibility for parents and public. It was essential to get an immediate response because many teachers do not

log in to check their messages unless they are aware of the urgency. However, I emailed the potential participants at the target school with formed consent forms. If agreed, I provided teachers with detailed information about the informed consent electronically using the words "I consent" to validate the message (e.g., email) through digital documents. This exchange indicated that they agreed to participate and met the exclusion criteria requirements for the study. Then, I scheduled timeslots according to the teachers' availability, but to avoid overlaps, I offered options to reschedule and indicated the interview time frame as 45 minutes.

In the meantime, I scheduled timeslots according to the teachers' availability, but to avoid overlaps, I offered options for rescheduling by indicating the interview time frame as 45 minutes.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I met teachers that agreed to interview face-to-face at the local library in a private study room, which one teacher elected to meet in person. Others elected Zoom video, Google DUO, and one conference call. To prepare for the interviewing process, I tested all recording devices (e.g., cell phone, dictator, and video recorder) to ensure I captured all data. I explained to the teachers the purpose of the interview and would address any concerns and assured them confidentiality by using coded data (T1, T2, T3 or TA, TB, TC) that only I know. I followed the interview protocol for consistency and used a brief introduction by clarifying the informed consent with the teachers to ensure confidentiality. Each semistructured interview consisted of 10 open-ended questions (to gain a deeper insight) into the teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of the study under investigation. I took field reflective notes as needed to

gather for additional documentation.

During the data collection, I took handwritten notes and used a digital audio recorder to capture teachers' verbatim responses. After each interview, I reviewed the data, including handwritten notes, to see if it was necessary to follow up with the participants to get more information. In addition, as I collected data and analyzed it, I developed a process to follow up with the teachers (e.g., emails, phone calls or texts). This process provided an opportunity to discuss and clarify their interpretation to either contribute new information or reinstate their perspectives on the issue under study. Once I completed the interviews and transcribed, I removed the files from my private server. I uploaded the file to Google Safety Drive's removable hard drive that is password-protected to keep data stored for five years before being securely destroyed. Within a week, I shared the transcript with each participant to review and make any necessary corrections or changes.

Data Analysis Plan

This study used a basic qualitative research sequential approach to explore participants' views. Thematic analysis commonly uses techniques seeking to uncover emerging themes (e.g., patterns, insights, and stories) within qualitative data and generate codes for consistency of data reduction (see Terry et al., 2017). The codes are the building blocks for themes and patterns developed within a theoretically informed and confined framework for the research. Terry et al. (2017) agreed that thematic analysis (TA) is widely used to identify patterns within and across the participants' lived experiences and perspectives, seeking to better understand participants' thoughts and

feelings. This approach to TA aligns with a small sample size (1-2 participants to 60 participants) for virtually any type of data (Terry et al., 2017). TA is a fine-grained coding process that captures diversity and nuance to provide a foundation for conceptualizing possible significant patterns for the research question (s) of shared meaning (see Terry et al., 2017)

After I conducted the semistructured interviews and the participants verified all transcribed information that I prepared to transfer all data analysis in NVivo 12 software, using the six-step protocol for thematic analysis proposed by (Blandford et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). These were six specific phases that guided the data to deliver robust results as follows:

1. The first phase of interview data in the thematic analysis is to transcribe the interview recordings to gain knowledge defined by words and phrases transcribed by the researcher into categories to develop a preliminary coding scheme (e.g., on what questions work for the topic).
2. The second phase of the thematic analysis process examines the codes' similarities; by combining principles that refer to the same ideas or experiences.
3. The third phase of thematic analysis involves making sense by corresponding definitions of each theme (e.g., how their ideas differ and what points are agreed) to get a broad feel for what theme narrows deeper analysis.
4. The fourth phase of the thematic analysis revealed the themes' connections (e.g., generate patterns and move toward analytical insight).

5. The fifth phase of thematic analysis draws on comparisons between the participants (e.g., age, gender, and demographics) for appropriate distinctions.
6. The sixth and last phase generates a thick description. It focuses on the research design (e.g., helps to visualize the conceptual framework) and helps to consolidate the researchers' thinking with particular attention to the teachers' role in student disengagement.

When the themes were presented, I used quotes from the participants' statements to illustrate the study's findings. Eventually, all pieces integrated into a coherent narrative to address the research questions directly. The analysis process provided a broader scope to make what comes of the interview count more effectively (see Blandford et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative content analysis uses credibility, dependability, and transferability. These four strategies should provide a reader with a clear indication of the overall reliability of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017). I enhanced credibility from the interview data by using member checking. In addition, I gathered explicit connections to the cultural and social contexts surrounding the data collection.

Throughout this study, I regularly collaborated to debrief with my committee chair and committee members to review any credibility issues to ensure that the investigation was reliable and trustworthy before I finalized the data collection (Yin, 2017). I also worked with the dissertation committee chair and members to minimize any

bias and ensured the findings reflected the participants' voices and whether the categories were well created. Yin (2017) proposed that qualitative research follows through the structure of the interview guide and identifies criteria for establishing credibility. For transferability, I ensured those participating in the study sources of information would report accurately.

Whereas, dependability, my research design followed the guidelines of qualitative methodology to provide adequate information for readers to understand how the participants addressed the issues (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017). The study included detailed methods for accuracy and validation. A literature review helped to familiarize me with any research concerns. Using triangulation was beneficial in comprehensive data to help me determine accurate information for readers to understand the study's methodology. Also, for reliability, I used multiple data sources, including triangulation and theoretical schemes to obtain and define reliable data to ensure confidence in the truth of the findings (see Wang et al., 2017). To further understand the study's dependability, I described the data collection and included information to help the reader construct the scene that surrounds the research (e.g., the number of participants, demographics, where the interviews occurred). In addition, I used an audit trail that consisted of details about the study, such as recruitment of participants, data collection, organized data, and data analysis to support the naturality of the investigation results.

Ethical Procedures

Walden University's Ethical Procedures reflect the core value and mission of the university and are put in place to protect and respect the rights of the participants. As a

student, I withheld the fundamental elements of honesty and quality research integrity required of stewards of the discipline (Walden University, 2020; Yin, 2017). I complied with all the guidelines (e.g., honesty, trust, respect, practices) and regulations outlined by the IRB. My IRB approval number was 10-01-21-0450552. I worked with my dissertation chair and committee members to ensure I followed the privacy of the prospective participants during data collection. I only made contact after IRB approval was granted and reviewed the informed consent with each prospective participant and explained the criteria to ensure they understood the purpose of the study.

Summary

This qualitative study explored the teachers' perceptions of the underly reasons for their students' disengagement in coursework and how and why they became disengaged. The basic qualitative research method was appropriate to generate an in-depth narrative and description to describe their lived experience and allow the researcher to understand better the participants' actions (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017). In a qualitative researcher's role to ensure the creditability and trustworthiness of the study, it is vital to design and incorporate methodological strategies of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research confirms that the issue under investigation was not explored by one lens but by various lenses allowing multiple facets of the topic to be revealed and understood (see Yin, 2017).

The study sample consisted of 12 middle school teachers. Twelve participants were an adequate sample size for this study because of the assumption of saturation and data saturation in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I collected data and used

multiple methods: (a) semistructured interviews, (b) archival documents, and (c) field notes) to make clarification and scope of the study. The examples of studies that have employed these methods also demonstrated the range of research contexts, such as interviews and field notes, could make a valuable contribution.

I transferred all data from the three sources into NVivo for the coding process. In addition, all documents were transcribed and then imported into a qualitative data analysis package, including thematic analysis to break down qualitative data into smaller units to determine relevant codes and themes (see Terry et al., 2017). In Chapter 3, I presented the methodology and design techniques, and data collection in qualitative research. The next chapter includes the presentation data that emerged from the findings based on the results of the data analysis. I described and listed the themes from each collected data (e.g., interviews and field notes). I took the themes from each data source and generated them into a coherent narrative to provide the richness of the information that allowed the researcher to make sense.

Chapter 4: Results

I reviewed various educational literature and identified an existing gap in teachers' perceptions of why students became disengaged, specifically among seventh and eighth-grade students. It was necessary to understand how English Language Arts [ELA] teachers explained disengagement's critical role in low student academic achievement. To address this gap in research, I conducted a basic qualitative study. I explored the perceptions of ELA teachers regarding the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement. Researchers discussed risk factors in student disengagement. However, it was unclear whether all aspects of student disengagement and its role in low student academic achievement are directly missed opportunities in education (O'Connor et al., 2017).

Wang et al. (2019) called for studies to explore the complexity and heterogeneity of student learning to move beyond simplifying disengaged students and provide environmentally valuable insights into student experiences in everyday classrooms. Wang et al. (2019) asserted that in-depth analyses might help clarify whether students can closely follow ongoing whole-class dialogues in-class participation with high cognitive and emotional engagement. Exploring teachers' perceptions of the causes of classroom processes that affect disengagement among Grades 7 and 8, specifically with low student academic achievement, may provide a deeper insight into disengaged factors (see Frederick et al., 2019). I formulated two research questions to guide this study:

RQ1: What are middle school teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for students' disengagement?

RQ2: How do middle school teachers perceive the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement?

This chapter's results consist of data analysis to answer the two research questions. I analyzed data using the six-phase approach to thematic analysis (see Terry et al., 2017). I wrote a detailed analysis of each theme about the comprehensive data that something interesting about the two research questions. There are seven sections, including the introduction. The second section consists of the study's settings, including the descriptions of the sample size of ten seventh and eighth-grade middle school ELA teachers. The third section provides information in a narrative summary of the participant demographics. It explains the data collection and analysis processes used in this study, following a section on analyzing data and identifying the descriptive thematic analysis (see Terry et al., 2017). In the fifth section, I presented results derived from data analysis by themes and patterns and followed the sixth section on the evidence of trustworthiness. The last section includes a summary and concludes the chapter.

Setting

The target population was a Title 1 middle school in the Southwestern part of the United States. The focus of the study was seventh and eighth-grade teachers who taught English Language Arts [ELA], serving students living in high-poverty households that provided approximately 92% of students free lunches. After obtaining Walden University Institution Review Board [IRB] approval, I invited the potential participants via email. I was responsible for the recruitment, location, and data collection. I invited 12 potential participants by email and attached a description and purpose of the study. One potential

participant felt uncomfortable discussing the research and pulled out at the last minute, which I respected. The 11 other teachers emailed me with interest and understood that the participation was a voluntary study. I emailed each teacher the informed consent to reply within 72 hours, to which they responded by writing, “I consent,” highlighted in a replied email as evidence of consent. However, another teacher opted out for a family matter, which I respected, and left me with little time for a replacement.

Ten teachers accepted the invitation to participate in the study. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I offered options to the teachers to select their preferred settings that provided the best conditions by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) when meeting in the public environments. I interviewed one teacher in person in a study room located at a local library. Other options of communication for teachers included tools via Zoom and Google DUO. Two teachers chose to interview via Zoom online video meetings, six teachers chose to interview via Google DUO video calling, and one teacher decided to interview via video conference call.

Demographics

I selected 10 middle school teachers from three public schools within the same community because of COVID-19, which created teacher shortages. Some teachers transferred to different schools with similar demographics that served approximately 55% student population with free lunches living in high-poverty households (Title 1 schools) but mandated by the same district. The education of the teachers included eighth teachers with master’s degrees and two with bachelor’s degrees. All teachers responded within the 72 hours timeframe, as previously mentioned. I emailed an informed consent to those

teachers who responded within the timeframe, and they emailed me back with the following words “I consent.” Having a small sample size for the research provided the interviewer (me) an opportunity for more in-depth inquiry (Caswell & Poth, 2018). I used pseudonymized codes for teachers’ names to protect teachers’ identities (e.g., T1, T2, T3, etc.). Table 1 includes the demographics of the teachers who participated in the study, including years of experience, grade levels, and gender.

Table 1

Teacher Demographics

Teachers	Years of Experience	Grade Levels	Gender
T1	25	6-7	Female
T2	15	6-8	Female
T3	10	6-7	Male
T4	22	6-7	Female
T5	25	8	Female
T6	26	7-8	Female
T7	29	8	Female
T8	31	8	Male
T9	22	8	Male
T10	32	6-7	Female

I collected data for the basic qualitative study from 10 interviews. I also made reflective memo notes (e.g., body language, eye contact, etc.) and teachers’ perceptions of disengaged students. I took steps to ensure the privacy of teachers’ identities by not disclosing unnecessary demographic data and school locations. No personal or organizational conditions influenced the participant’s willingness to participate in the study. I was responsible for recruiting all participants.

Data Collection

Due to the pandemic, my proposal for in-person interviews was changed because all schools were closed with state-wide restrictions placed by the governor. I modified the plan and offered teachers options to conduct interviews, such as online (Zoom, Google DUO, or video conference calls). While one teacher met in person, others selected online video meetings. This section describes the data collection process. I interviewed nine English Language Arts [ELA] teachers and one teacher who taught science and ELA employed in three Title 1 middle school mandated by the same school district in the Southwestern part of the United States.

I worked with the teachers to schedule interviews based on their availability. I collected informed consent forms from the teachers as evidence that they understood the nature of their voluntary and rational decisions to participate in the study. However, one teacher opted out at the last minute due to a family emergency, which left little time for me to get a replacement. One teacher chose an in-person interview, which included the interviewer (myself) and one interviewee in a private secured study room (local library) that I found easy to conduct a qualitative inquiry. I informed all teachers to discontinue the discussion if they felt any discomfort during the interviews. I collected data in person, Zoom, Google DUO, and one telephone conference call. I complied with the CDC COVID-19 guidelines on safety precautions for (in-person) interviews included in the following:

- A cell phone
- Pre-written questions

- Laptop
- Recorder application
- Digital video recorder
- Data collection log
- Face masks (in-person interview)
- Disinfectant wet wipes (in-person interview)

The teachers seemed eager to answer the questions and shared information willingly. As I listened to each teacher's experiences, it seemed like valuable experiences from the responders that made connections appeared to be at two places at once in dialogic interactions (see Giacomucci & Stone, 2019). After the interviews, I reflected on my understanding through the teachers' voices and teaching lenses to gain insight into using the teachers' words to tell stories (see Barone, 2021; Rosala, 2019).

However, my particular interest made it worth investigating to acquire new insights and ways of thinking about others' experiences, increased empathy, and heightened awareness of the experiences during the research (see Curry et al., 2018). The data collection process occurred between October 16, 2021, and November 12, 2021. During this time, I interviewed 10 teachers for 45 to 55 minutes with an average of 50 minutes. Before the meeting, I ensured that each teacher understood the purpose of the study by explaining the informed consent procedures and confidentiality procedures about sharing information to protect against potential (e.g., loss of employment) harm.

Prior to the interviews, I collected informed consent forms from each teacher as evidence that they understood the nature of their participation. I prepared 10 open-ended

interview questions (see Appendix B). I formulated 10 open-end questions to guide the two research questions and the study's topic. I took steps to minimize the identities and confidentiality of teachers (e.g., records secured by password-protected files and codes only known by me). I collected data through individual interviews with the teachers and used alphanumeric codes in place of their names. I also took analytical notes to identify any potential themes that might emerge. In addition, I used the reflective journal notes to remember and notate the responders' behaviors to produce meaning and understanding of the social situation under investigation.

For example, before I interviewed the teachers, I viewed an online resource regarding the benefit of visual cues to feel more connected to the responder during the interviewing process. The decision to use nonverbal observation was helpful for me as a novice researcher. The nonverbal communication techniques provided insight into collecting quality data established by Mirick and Wladkowski (2019). The information I gained from that source strengthened my ability to focus on three nonverbal communication signals: facial expressions, eye contact, and body language (see Cherry & Gans, 2019). I noticed how teachers looked when they expressed emotions phrases such as "I want my students to take their education seriously (support)" and "I worry (fear) that some students may give up and become part of statistics in society." Although my focus was on qualitative research, the teachers 'nonverbal communication signals provided me observation notes about their perceptions of low student achievement. As noted above, teachers' nonverbal communication showed signs of eagerness, and reflected interest and passion for the success of their student's achievements.

It is vital to remember the analysis is not in the data but waiting to find out the unknown (see Braun et al., 2019). Braun et al. asserted that analysis would produce through the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumption, such as discipline knowledge, and the content analysis of the data themselves. Interview transcripts were a means to maintain the fidelity of the data (see Braun et al., 2019). During the in-person interview, I transcribed the data and allowed the teacher to verify the responses for accuracy. Confirmability of my perceptions was audio transcribed on-screen during the interviewing process, which meant the teachers could see the screenshot (my laptop) on Google DUO video meeting of what I interpreted from their perceptions. After, the interpretations and transcripts were verified by teachers via Google DUO video meeting and sent via emails. Each teacher viewed the interpretive translated into the transcripts via Google DUO Video meetings to confirm what they responded to me, increasing the credibility of the findings.

I conducted interviews via Zoom meetings and Google DUO videos, which allowed me to screenshot the responses to understand their perceptions for transcribing accuracy. I used this method due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which created teachers' shortages that limited their time to reschedule another meeting. However, I followed up with member checking for validation. The online contact helped expedite the member checking to meet the data collection deadline. As a researcher, it is critical to provide honesty and quality research integrity required of stewards of the discipline (see Walden University, 2020; Yin, 2017). I stored the written and recorded data in a locked file cabinet to ensure teachers' confidentiality. I transferred the data in Microsoft Word files

on a password-protected computer. After five years, I am responsible for deposing data, including written notes, interview transcripts, all video recordings, and any documents about the participants and their locations.

Data Analysis

I conducted and transcribed all the interviews. After data collection, I familiarized myself with the data. Then I analyzed the collected data using thematic analysis guided by the six-phase thematic analysis of Terry et al. (2017). The thematic analysis provides a flexible and valuable research tool for analyzing qualitative data. Thematic analysis's six phases include initial code generation, theme identification, themes review, the naming of themes, and production report. The data analysis goal was to provide meaning relevant to best answer the research questions. Themes emerged from the data analysis procedure so that the approach to coding was appropriate to the analytic purpose and research questions (see Terry et al., 2017).

I conducted and completed 10 semistructured interviews over 2 weeks in November 2021 and adhered to the process in the interview guide (see Appendix B). I transcribed the interviews' data into Microsoft Word files immediately from the responses after each interview, including descriptive field notes. After, I compared the audio files to the transcripts and checked for accuracy. I ensured privacy protection and maintained the confidentiality of the participants, and assigned letters and numbers (e.g., T1, T2, etc.) to each data set. I stored the data in a Microsoft Word folder on my OneDrive with a log of collected data into a secure password.

As a first step, I read and re-read all data and noted any concepts that helped address the research questions. I opened the transcripts, read one at a time, line by line, and familiarized myself with the data. After, I uploaded the data sets to the NVivo 12 software and assigned specific nodes. NVivo 12 is a qualitative data analysis application that allowed me to feed the interview data and import data into various file formats.

The second step in thematic analysis allowed me to simplify and focus on specific data characteristics before opening it for coding. I went over each line of the transcripts, identified relevant sections of the text, labeled related themes, and assigned codes to the data. I highlighted and underlined critical phrases in chunks of data pertinent to the research questions for clustering codes for possible patterns (Terry et al., 2017). During the coding process a master list of all codes generated from the qualitative data so I could identify patterns. I reviewed the teachers' highlighted and underlined common phrases, noted reoccurring words, and examined the perspectives' similarities in the data. I identified 68 initial codes deductively based on research questions, prior research, and theoretical framework. After completing the opening stage, I used axial coding to review the initial codes in search of categories. Following the axial phase, I was able to identify seven themes that emerged across the data set (see Appendix D).

In qualitative research, researchers search for merging information among multiple sources to form themes or categories in a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After several reads, I began the coding process by using emergent coding. I checked for accurate data representation by returning to the data set to check whether the themes answered the research questions. In addition, I answered the following questions: Am I

missing anything? What can I change to make my pieces work better? I opened each interview transcript and closely examined the data to identify common themes. During the analysis suggested by Terry et al. (2019), I used the codebook and documented codes and categories (e.g., a spreadsheet with a label identifying participants). I used the patterns from the first and second coding in the third round to identify themes (see Terry et al., 2019). Saturation occurred after I entered the last participant interview responses. At that point, no additional data led to any new emergent themes.

The third step led to a thematic analysis plan, in which I identified patterns and assigned emerging themes in the NVivo 12 software used to assist in the analysis. For example, the statement, "some students lacked basic knowledge to participate in class discussions," would then be assigned a code for common connection. In the same way, I transferred codes to store within the NVivo 12 database as nodes, which I used as sticky notes (highlighted segments of text) to stay close to the teachers' language and read through all the data to identify a specific theme or case. Another example, when I opened the nodes, I could see all the references in one place, which allowed me to reflect on the knowledge of the topic to compare attitudes and discover patterns.

For instance, some responders perceived the low academic performance of students directly related to their active effort to "fit" within certain peer groups, and they began to show disengagement. The respondent added, "you know, after engaging with one of their friends as the downfall." I pulled participants (T3) and (T4) from the transcripts and assigned them under the *node-negative peer influence.* I coded the

statement without any other context apart from being relevant to answer the research questions.

During the fourth step in the thematic data, I continued to refine the themes to identify the connections within the themes related to the research questions and theoretical framework. I create a visual mind map with refined themes. At this stage, I entered all interviews and analytical memos to capture possible connections between the first and second coding rounds. I moved from coding to constructing themes. Then I examined patterns through the lens of the theoretical framework. I maintained reflective journal memos on relevant issues such as potential themes with others. I noted how the same process code (e.g., a word or phrase) identified possible codes from responses to perceptions such as family issues and poverty. This round enabled me to develop a more profound data set to determine what is not a potential cluster of codes (Terry et al., 2017).

In the fifth step in thematic data analysis, I decided to combine, refine, and define the final themes and discard the identified themes by answering the following questions: Do the pieces make sense while being different from the data set? What do the different themes reveal about the topic? I compared two data sources with the interview data on whether pieces illustrated the teachers' perspectives or directly implied them. Based on the similarities, I also checked how each other fit into the overall story about the different themes. I used the literature and theoretical framework to determine if the data set aligned with the research questions (Braun et al., 2019). The axial process helped develop a synthesis of the information in identifying a specific area of interest to the research questions. Following the axial coding phase, I finalized seven themes from the data (see

Appendix D). Four themes answered the first research question, while the remaining three answered the second research question.

The sixth step and final phase involve generating a thick description of the causes of low student academic achievement of seventh and eighth-grade students, with specific attention to the role of disengagement in low-achievers (Braun et al., 2019). After conducting a thorough data analysis, four themes answered the first research question, while the remaining three answered the second research question. Braun et al. (2019) suggested that researchers use direct quotes or specific interpretations from participants to understand the prevalence of the themes. I selected the most relational perceptions and beliefs about the topic regarding disengaged students and which phrases related to the two research questions.

For example, the teachers noted specific interactions and behaviors regarding students' mobile devices in the classroom. Despite the importance of interactions and socialization, they thought that social media has proved to be a significant distractor to students and why most students are disengaged in their learning and end up performing poorly. Other examples from teachers' perceptions regarding family issues and parental involvement and reported as a critical element in the low student academic performance. Many teachers understood the significance of student disengagement and low student academic achievement. They expressed that "Parental involvement" was a vital factor in student learning, and student's family home lives played a critical indicator in low achievement. Table 2 includes collected data analyzed using thematic analysis and

triangulated to generate the following seven themes, which answered the two research questions below.

Table 2

Data Analysis: Included Themes and References

Themes	Number of References
Lack of Knowledge and Skills	18
Family-related issues	30
Peer relationships in adolescence	12
Lack of parental involvement	21
Social media effects on student academic performance	18
Poverty and lack of resources	23
Different levels and styles of learning	14

I established these themes to illustrate the perspectives provided by all my participants. The report included narratives and excerpts from the collected data to support the themes in answering the two research questions. The themes, including supporting evidence of the findings and conclusion, are presented in the next section.

Results

This section contains the description of this study's data analysis and results. The researcher assigned codes to each participant in place of their names (e.g., T1, T2, etc.) to conceal their names and collect anonymous data to prevent answers connected to a specific person. Overall, themes 1: Lack of knowledge and skills, and 2: Family-related issues, provided an answer to Research Question 1, which asked, "What are middle school teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for students' disengagement?" Themes 3: Peer relationships in adolescence, and 4: Lack of parental involvement, answered both Research Questions 1 and 2 which were: "What are middle school

teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for students' disengagement?" and "How do middle school teachers perceive the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement?" Finally, themes 5: Social media effects on student academic performance, 6: Poverty and lack of resources, and 7: Different levels and styles of learning answered Research Question 2: "How do middle school teachers perceive the role in low student academic achievement?"

There were overlapping themes within the research questions emerged during the data analysis stage. I combined the minor themes to create one overarching theme for each question. The overarching themes that emerged: (a) lack of knowledge and skills, (b) family-related issues. (c) peer relationships in adolescence, (d) lack of parental involvement, (e) social media effects on student academic performance, (f) poverty and lack of resources, and (g) different levels and styles of learning. The following section describes the themes that emerged from the data, which answered the research questions.

Theme 1: Lack of Knowledge and Skills

Teachers perceived that many students lacked the knowledge necessary to respond when they did not understand the lesson content. Overall, all teachers connected student disengagement as common problem behaviors among middle schoolers, especially seventh and eighth graders. However, teachers perceived that some students struggled academically due to embarrassment or quickly forgetting what was taught. Nonetheless, the responses were overwhelming and consistent regarding students lacking basic content area knowledge, and many linked to different learning styles. Overall,

teachers agreed that empowering their students is a worthy goal and a win-win outcome. T8 reported the following:

> I believe that some students who lack basic knowledge of daily class discussions performed below grade level and tended to mimic disengaged peers in the classroom, or the relatedness was not being met, which might lead to disruptive behavior. Also, you know…due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed students into virtual learning, where they were accustomed to using their cell phones for online learning. Now that they are back to face-to-face learning, they become less engaged. It is essential to regularly assess students' skills and use ongoing research toward more equitable and relevant learning needs for all students.

T3 reported the following:

> First, I assess the class to see what challenges, such as low achieving or nonproficient students, especially my ELL students. After, I set attainment goals based on the assessment outcomes. To build knowledge, I use visual aids, such as CNN10, where students take notes and provide a detailed summary of what they learned and how it relates to real-life situations. Also, I believe those learning strategies build on new knowledge by connecting learning content and recalling their understanding.

Ultimately, most teachers reported that students who understood content areas

with little support tended to use higher-order thinking skills. In addition, many teachers observed that those students who struggled the most were not exposed to the subject matter. T9 reported the following:

> In my opinion, when students became unmotivated and exhibited inappropriate behavior, they lacked the content area knowledge, relatedness satisfaction, or inadequate support. Also, I perceived that the lowest-achieving students were African Americans and the reasons for it…Proclaimed, I'm not sure if it's the system social problems or the feeling of apathy that the students don't care or do not see the forest from the trees or see the value of an education. Thereby, I encourage students by giving them more voice to participate in higher-order thinking discussions to practice various skills that ask for more opinions.

Overall, most teachers recognized that students lacked the essential academic tools to support content areas necessary for academic achievement adequately. Others perceived that students' lack of social skills affected their ability to acquire crucial educational outcomes. T4 reported the following:

> I believe that some students have trouble grasping new knowledge and become emotionally embarrassed because they lack academic skills, which leads to improper behavior. Despite these behaviors, I use intentional instructional practices to accelerate student learning by using think-pair-share activity, where students partner with another student. The action tends to create less stress for some students and encourage risk-taking.
>
> T4 also uses writing techniques after reading, where students use their critical

thinking skills to broaden their knowledge in different ways by analyzing examples from what they read. T5 reported the following:

> I believe that some students lacked the knowledge to respond in class because of little support and relationships building…It is essential to build a trust-filled environment because when we don't respond calmly and supportively, most students become uncomfortable and would not take a chance in class discussions.

T5 further observed that low participation is not unusual among middle schoolers for many reasons, such as a lack of basic knowledge and transitioning from school to school. In addition, T5 stated, I take a step-by-step approach by showing their feedback on their lack of understanding and possible answers that might provide input to apply with the next assignment.

Most teachers agreed and explained that students who were promoted to eighth grade without basic skills lacked dedication and the subject area knowledge and showed little effort to learn. Also, teachers admitted that students transferred into their classes reading below grade level and did not comprehend what they were reading, which led to high absences; teachers had to re-teach the subjects. Teachers agreed that the curriculum should tailor with strategies and resources for nurturing the grade-level skills to prepare students to move to the next school level successfully. T6 reported the following:

> I would say that students perform low when they don't have the background knowledge and the necessary skills to perform at their standards' current grade level, and they miss critical concepts along the way. However, I try to meet one-

on-one to assess the knowledge level of most of the low achieving students.

Theme 2: Family-Related Issues

This theme speaks to the first research question that guided this qualitative study. According to the middle school teachers, many middle school students tend to become disengaged from the learning environment if they experience or come from homes experiencing family-related issues. Under this theme, the data analysis supported student disengagement due to family issues and personal problems. During the interviewing, I kept reflective journal memo notes and highlighted information from teachers related to family-related issues, such as custody battles, death, and homelessness, to name a few. According to the teachers, many students experience emotional difficulties and behavioral changes due to family problems, which might cause disengagement from learning. For instance, T1 reported the following:

> I would also describe a student that becomes disengaged in their learning as having experienced some trauma, such as a family member's death. I also believe it is crucial to build a relationship with the student and find ways to help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to reengage. For example, I might ask them about a book they enjoy reading. Also, I noticed that many students do not take their education seriously. I believed they could not help their behavior because of those issues they experienced at home. It is also crucial for teachers to seek relevant resources, such as safe school professionals like psychologists to support their social emotional needs and monitor them, not just state and nationally but globally.

Similarly, T5 stated the following:

> I recognize the population we serve brings so many emotional issues to school, so they're acting out and not thinking about what they can experience once they leave school and go home. I also observed that many students come to school…like significant changes in family dynamics and spent much time not thinking about the problem hence the disengagement act.

T5 reported the following:

> I think that when students deal with issues at home, it is still our responsibility to explain the importance of getting work done while remembering that student trust you and is willing to share about their problems.

T1 and T5 observed family-related matters regarding the underlying reasons students become disengaged from learning due to the problems they experience at home. I noted that T1 and T5 experienced the most students dealing with family-related issues and have referred many to the school counselors, social workers, or psychologists.

T3 reported the following:

> I noticed that most students have potential and believe they could achieve academic goals if teachers knew their personal needs. Because teachers don't know about the homes that they are from…we don't know what they go through once they return to those homes, making them more likely to become detached or disengaged from learning.

Continuing many issues at home, some teachers met with school counselors, and

discussed caregivers' goals and scheduled a meeting to address students' family-related issues or connect them with resources. Many teachers expressed a need for training to understand that behavior can signify that a pupil is experiencing stress or personal problems because it is difficult to tell what happened in those homes. They made it clear that teachers need to keep open communication lines when a child misbehaves or fails to meet expectations.

In my reflective journal notes, I noted that T1 and T3 acknowledged that some students experienced domestic issues among parents in their responses to how they became disengaged. The analysis of the analyzed data revealed that disagreements and negative dialogues between parents were associated with students who become disengaged from their learning. T1 stated the following:

> I found that some of our students experienced homelessness or domestic violence in their homes.

T3 stated similar perspectives and reported the following:

> I believe that many students experienced domestic issues and craved attention. Also, I can remember one student who seemed disengaged, and he was all over the place, off task, just sitting at his desk and not doing his coursework. I noticed that he would ask me questions off-task, such as what do you do when you get home? I found out later that several issues were going on in this child's home, and the child was not getting any attention. So, the kid wanted that attention at school, even though my students know not to ask me off-task questions during instructional time.

Other issues related to this theme, T8 and T5, shared similar concerns, where they both remembered how some students became disengaged in the learning environment because of family custody battles. T5 reported the following:

> Sadly, many students began disengagement when they entered the classroom for different reasons. For instance, one student shared a family issue at home regarding the mother losing custody of her, which she would come in and sit down and not do her coursework. Eventually, she was referred to the school counselor for additional assistance and outside resources.

Theme 3: Peer Relationships in Adolescence

This theme responded to both research questions; most teachers perceived those students whose peers easily convinced them tended to show disinterest in learning. They believed interest is powerful, energizing knowledge, guiding academics, and is essential to academic achievement success. T3 stated the following:

> A student showed little interest in education after engaging with a friend with bad intentions, which led to behavior issues. For example, I reach out to students and let them know that I am here to help them in any way to ensure that they succeed.

T2 reported the following:

> Some students become disengaged because of their association with students who do not take learning seriously. I remember one student became disengaged and began turning in incomplete work, and his behavior changed toward his peers and me. The student made nonverbal gestures such as frustration or laughing aloud. I was able to confirm what was suspected. After a parent-teacher conference, the

> parent admitted that the child was hanging around with a troubled kid. However, the parent showed concerns and remained actively involved in the child's academic learning; these changes shifted the accountability to the child, which helped him deal with decision making.

Overall, teachers reported that students who could use problem-solving were highly engaged and performed better academically than students who make pro-social choices based on popularity. T5 reported the following:

> I noticed that some students come to school to hang out with their friends and participate in inappropriate behavior. I perceive teaching this generation that most students put a lot of emphasis on fitting in with their friends and these actions take precedence over learning and decrease academic motivation. However, it is crucial for teachers to offer support to ensure that all learners in the classroom are engaged.

T7 reported the following:

> In my opinion, student lack of motivation pertains to peer pressure, which involved some students' disengagement from their learning due to problematic behaviors engagement. I perceive that sometimes peer pressure causes conflict and plays a significant role in low academic performance.

All teachers expressed their concerns regarding peer influences on student decision-making. They concluded that students make risky choices trying to please or mimic their peer's inappropriate behavior in specific tasks. In addition, they wanted better leadership in tailoring interventions to empower students to become better

competent decision-makers. T4 reported the following:

> I believe that it is critical to know how your students learn and to guide them on how to navigate the often confusing and anxiety they experience in the learning process. I believe that students are mainly focused on appeasing and entertaining their friends that failed to achieve their academic objectives.

T8 stated the following:

> I had a personal encounter with one student who refused to participate in class by getting attention from peers who acted out in class. According T8, through constant encouragement and positive feedback, the young man improved his focus in class activities and subsequently, his grades improved.

Theme 4: Lack of Parental Involvement

This theme speaks to both research questions of this study. Teachers perceived lack of parental involvement is critical for increasing student engagement. Overall, teachers' support involved addressing each student's learning needs. T3 helped to answer the second research question and reported the following:

> I expected parents to be more involved, but they have become less engaged over the years. Therefore, many students need help more at school because they do not get attention at home. Also, the parenting dynamic has changed in homes lacking support, contributing to kids' non-proficient academic.

Overall, teachers believed many families would like to be more involved but may face significant barriers such as work inflexible schedules or English being their second language. Similar sentiments alluded to T6, who reported that many middle school

students failed to improve their academic performance because they lacked parental support. T6 stated the following:

> From my perspective, I think many of the students do not get parental support because the parents are uneducated. I believe that finding ways to help their child would be challenging if they behave aggressively and perform poorly. In most cases, because some students are not familiar with the materials or give the wrong answer, they shut down due to feeling embarrassed or ashamed. I think reaching out to families is critical to show them that you value their time and help engage in their child's learning.

For the first research question, T7 noted students were disengaged from learning because their parents were not involved, and it is a vital role between home and school that leads to academic achievement for their children's success. T7 also reported the following:

> I noticed a lack of parental involvement, which means the parents I need to see and discuss their children's progress with never show up, especially during family nights or back-to-school gatherings.

T8 reported the following:

> Most kids believe that education is not essential, and no one is holding them accountable. I noticed that getting an education is not a high priority for some students, and you see this every day, and the parents have little involvement with their children's education.

T8 further added that student disengagement would only worsen if parental

involvement continued to be scarce. T9 reported the following:

> I believe that student disengagement stems from their home living environment. Also, I believe most low achievers desire to perform better, and we can only do so much in the classroom. Right now, some of my 8th graders use public transportation to get to school because they live with their single moms, and most single moms work two jobs and are unable to be a part of their child's academic life or time to attend parent-teacher conferences.

Many teachers perceived that many students from single-parent households seemed to struggle academically compared to peers from dual families. For instance, the teachers perceived that many students from single homes have the responsibility of caring for their younger siblings. Those students acknowledged that babysitting leaves little time for them to do their homework, which leads to missing assignments; thereby, they seem to develop negative perspectives about the subject.

Theme 5: Social Media Effects on Student Academic Performance

Social media negatively affects student academic performance that faces many challenges such as distractions during instruction time in the learning environment. Teachers perceived that many students spend more class time checking their phones and not a quick glance. Teachers stated that students were texting, playing games, or checking social media during class.

According to most teachers, low-performing students do not see a problem with this behavior. I took reflective field notes regarding T2, which expressed how distractions caused by social media affected student performance and academic achievement.

T2 stated the following:

In my opinion, in today's world, distractions have limited academic achievement. For example, today's students tend to emulate what they see and follow those actions and behaviors, which is a huge distraction. Also, students face unsafe challenges on social media platforms and in viewing those actions reduced the students' academic proficiency and inhibited their concentration on actual learning.

T3 offered similarly perspectives and reported the following:

Mainly, when students follow the actions and behaviors that they watch on social media platforms. These actions and behaviors affect the students' focus on education, thus leading to dismal academic performance. Also, when students do not use their thinking skills, some tend to panic or develop anxiety during testing trying to wrap their minds on figuring out the answers. Noticeably, when we give them homework, they use the internet or phones to help them, so they do not have to figure it out for themselves. So, I understand their dependence on the internet and phones, but I do not condom to them using the devices for recreation during class.

T10 reported similarly:

I believe social media distract students by shifting their focus from learning and they lose interest in school and progress reports. Also, most students have used social media since they were at an earlier age and have become addicted to their devices.

Many teachers addressed issues regarding social media and believed too many students mimicked those behaviors that they viewed, which posed significant challenges every day, especially during class discussions or instructional time. All teachers felt that the school needed better restrictive policies for mobile devices to minimize class interruptions and implement schoolwide policies that support staff recommendations and ramifications on phone time and media use. Most teachers perceived that combining face-to-face interactions with virtual education should be achievable due to COVID-19 pandemic, where students used their phones in virtual learning. Thereby, school districts have computer agreement policies between the parents and students. They recommended similar policy guidelines govern personally owned devices.

Teachers believed that students followed the actions and behaviors they watched on social media platforms, and more likely mimic the actions and behaviors, which affect the students' focus on education, thus leading to dismal academic performance. T8 reported the following:

> In today's world, distractions have limited academic achievement because students tend to emulate what they see and follow those actions and behaviors, which is a huge distraction. They rely on technology to make decisions for them. Also, technology is used a constant interruption during instructional time. I have tried various interventions in collecting cell phones before classes, which we do not use during lessons. I know teachers cannot magically do whatever works in their classrooms, which is very bad as we all know consistency is critical. "I'm not anti-technology," but if I could take one thing away, it would be students' cell

phones.

Theme 6: Poverty and Lack of Resources

The study's second question was: How do middle school teachers perceive the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement? The general observation from the teachers' perspectives was that poverty and lack of resources cause a child's educational attainment and low student academic performances in several ways. For instance, some teachers perceived poverty and lack of resources as the core factors contributing to students' lack of motivation and scoring significantly lower vocabulary and communication skills. Others perceived those students from underserved communities, mostly African Americans and Latinos, to fall short to access equity. Regarding research question 1, how do teachers perceive the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement? According to many teachers' poverty is a crucial factor that places stress on many students, such as non-nutritional diet, homeliness, and lack of basic skills, which can negatively impact student learning ability.

T2 reported the following:

> Teaching students from underserved communities is quite challenging to keep them engaged. Also, I have worked in Title 1 schools where we served primarily minorities and lived in underserved communities and live high poverty households. I have learned throughout my teaching years that it can be challenging teaching African American males and Latino American males. Because they are less successful than other racial/ethnic groups, most lack self-motivation, which is another barrier to academic success.

T1 recalled another factor that was like T2's response student lack of motivation. T1 reported the following:

> I believe that we serve many homeless students who lack motivation (not engaged) in their schoolwork, contributing to low student academic performances. So, I blamed policymakers for degrading Title I schools, which were meant to serve students from underserved populations.

According to T1, policymakers should hire the highly qualified teachers to help Title I students and contribute to schools to ensure underserved students gain access to highly-quality education. T6 reported the following:

> My perception regarding a lack of resources to meet the population attending our school. Also, I believed that English Language learners (ELL) struggle primarily because of inadequate resources, which impact academic performance, and we need more resources to reach out to the student and teacher to agree on ways to help increase student engagement. I noticed that those students who were not familiar with the material and give the wrong answers. Also, to better serve the needs of marginalized students and provide educators with the tools they need to improve teacher retention and offer insight on meaningful student data so you can better respond to your students' needs.

T9 reported similarly concerns, and stated the following:

> The bottom line, socioeconomic status plays a vital part in education and early childhood education and maybe the main contributing factor to poor academic ability. Also, the inequality of education and opportunities offered to kids who

> need the most get the least. I believe policymakers that Title 1 initiatives and funding should translate to improvement and hire the best teachers. I believe it sends the wrong ideas to some teachers because some teachers stay with no expectations to improve student performances.

Overall, the teachers perceived students living in poverty influenced student outcomes, and limited access to educational opportunities. Teachers also believed that school funding was vital to increasing student achievement. T5 stated the following:

> I blame the school district for implementing budget cuts allocated to support children from underserved populations. Also, due to excessive budget cuts, some children from underserved populations are unable to get quality food or sleep hence may lack academic engagement and subsequently exhibit dismal academic performance. I also believe that the district faces significant budget cuts, affecting students living in poverty those, and decisions meant some students would not get enough food or sleep and are more likely to lack academic potential.

T7 reported similar views:

> I read somewhere that research findings indicated that students who reported having food insecurity issues were at a higher risk of underperforming in their academic compared to students who reported no food insecurity issues. In my observations of some students that relate to research that explored basic needs of students struggling academically. Specifically, K-12 education with low-income status found to be valid in higher risk adversely on students who reported food insecurity (Feeding America Report, 2017).

The teachers perceived economically disadvantaged students observed that many qualified for free and reduced lunch. In addition, they were concerned about many of the students' health and nutrition, which impacted their ability to concentrate, mainly during testing. At the same time, a students' lack of nourishment can affect off-task behaviors with others. Although all schools provide free lunches, many students' households still deal with food insecurity, which might prompt specific social skills and learning behaviors. T10 stated the following:

> I proposed schools should provide essentials, such as food for children struggling with such issues as homelessness.

According to T10, such basic needs might make the children feel safe, thus, contribute towards their academic success. Also, the school provides backpacks for some kids to take food home over the weekend sponsored by (Three Square Meals). It is critical that basic needs are met, such as food, psychological needs, and they must feel safe. T8 reported the following:

> I believe most kids in my classes feel it is the safest time because the mom is working two jobs and not at home when they get there. These kids are living in poverty and the school cannot fix it, this is a societal problem. We need to make sure the kids feel safe and know that they are fed regularly and provide them access to necessary materials to fulfill their academic responsibilities. So, I think poverty plays a significant factor toward students developing and achieving a better education.

Theme 7: Different Levels and Styles of Learning

Flexibility was a significant concern accommodating those students who struggled in subject areas with different learning styles. The teachers whose perspectives identified in this theme believed that understanding individual preferred learning styles improved student engagement and played a significant role in academic performance. The teachers believe that learning styles play an integral part in each student's learning process, thus positively influencing academic achievement. All teachers agreed that the current curriculum allows for small group instruction where students can choose learning approaches that work best for them. T2 stated the following:

> I often allow students to listen to music during their coursework to increase their engagement, and I believe that some students concentrate better during their coursework if they are allowed to listen to music. Whereas others have asked me if they could do work differently, such as creating a game for more complex thinking.

T4 stated the following:

> I use intentional instructional practices to accelerate students learning, such as an activity called think-pair-share where students work together to solve problems. Noticeably, the think-pair-share is an effective way to expand students' vocabulary ensure that everyone participates in class discussions. After, we have class discussions on what they learned, the knowledge gained, and how they applied what they learned. Also, I use strategies designed to differentiate instruction by enabling students to formulate individual ideas.

The teachers reported that students do well with collaborative learning styles and achieved higher academic performance. Furthermore, those students were motivated to devote more time to tasks and increased levels of class participation. T10 reported the following:

> I use strategies that worked best for the students to increase participation and more engagement. I began my class with an exciting topic that most students enjoy, and sometimes the lesson may start with a question and end with a question for more participation. T10 further reported that the classes moved quickly from teacher instruction to small group discussions, which help students develop strategies to allow them to discover new ways of critical thinking and solving problems.

All teachers believed that designing strategies to students preferred learning styles allowed them to maximize their learning during a particular lesson. An example of this action would include reading with written responses and working as partners in small cooperative learning groups. Some teachers used interaction materials that allowed students to move around to observe objects, view diagrams, images, and computer slides. They found it vital in developing higher-level thinking skills for many low achievers. T4 stated the following:

> I perceive learning styles practices as helping me pinpoint how the child learns best, and how to support those who have experienced trauma or forms of oppression. For example, understanding the learning behavior maybe related the following factors: backgrounds, strength, weaknesses, and interests.

Also, T4 believed accommodating different learning styles practices in every subject would require much of our staff who have never learned this way.

The teachers found that creating a purposeful learning environment meant more time they did not have to spare. However, they worked as grade level partners to share different learning strategies and adopted those strategies, such as student-centered learning, where they shifted the focus of instruction from the teacher to students. This practical approach provides students opportunities to learn independently and from one another with the end goal of skill-building and self-regulating learners. T6 stated the following:

> I put students into differentiated groups, especially the English language learners, which all students benefit by seeing diversity of cultures and ides reflected in instruction and their classroom…I also schedule time to meet one-on-one with my students where can select hands-on learning activities that are fun and best related to their daily lives, including insight for ongoing learning that connects academic concepts.

Teachers perceived the pandemic consequences for student virtual learning and development was interrupted and disrupted for many students and teachers, which posed barriers to meeting their basic needs. However, the teachers believed that the school's website (Canvas Management System) was valuable and easy to navigate if the wireless network remains online during operation hours. The downfall was that teachers found it hard to reengage students when the network was down most of the day, especially if the teachers were using game-based lesson plans, which boost student learning skills.

Teachers identified that incorporating learning that blends well with contemporary technology is a factor that improves student academic performance.

For instance, T2 provided a specific example of a website that contains multiple learning resources such as reading, writing, video clips, and simulations. Additionally, the website offers flexibility for students to do assignments from home and school. T2 stated the following:

> I want to discuss how the school participates in online teaching and learning (Virtual learning) approved by the district called Nearpod…it provides students different types of applications. T5 reported similarly:
>
> Nearpod uses dynamic media and applications to keep students engaged and help me with an ongoing assessment of where they are. The program includes multiple learning choices such as reading, writing, video clips, simulations and allows students to log into Canvas (the school website) to do their assignments during school and from home. Lastly, the school provides program to help teachers personalize learning experiences to address students' varied needs and learning styles. The application manage content on students and them stay current with their academic work allowing students some control over learning activities.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative content analysis includes findings, credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Creditability asked the researcher to link the research study's findings to the research findings' truth (see Creswell & Poth 2018). When interpreting the data, it must not distort the participant responses to fit a

specific narrative. I explored the qualitative data through the lens used in the study's literature review and theoretical framework.

Dependability means doing what one says they will do. I took steps (e.g., the accuracy of the interpretations captioned the perceptions) to ensure that a thorough understanding of the research of a basic qualitative research design was selected and adequately implemented. In addition, it involves participants' evaluation of the data interpretation of the study that supports the data received from the participants of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I used a step-by-step approach to gather data, verifying that the findings were consistent with the raw data collected.

Confirmability refers to the confidence that the research study findings are on the participants' narratives and words rather than the researcher's potential biases. I used several approaches to verify this study's confirmability throughout the data collection and analysis process, including interviews and explanatory field notes. Methodological triangulation was used by gathering data from in-depth interviews, descriptive memo field notes, and member checking. Maher et al. (2018) suggested that researchers use explanatory field notes and reflective memo journals as a form of triangulation to validate the data collected.

Transferability provides readers with evidence that the research study's findings might be generalized in other contexts (see Creswell & Poth; Yin, 2017). I demonstrated how the collected data precisely, consistently, and exhaustively established the research study's findings in basic qualitative research. I employed data by using multiple data sources such as interviews and descriptive field notes to enrich the understanding of the

study. I also spent time reading qualitative peer-reviewed literature. In the literature, I uncovered how to interpretative positions, which helped me identify the ways writers addressed the "fit" between respondents' views and the researcher's presentation.

Summary

This chapter contained the presentation of the results needed to answer the two research questions. The basic qualitative research aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for the disengagement of seventh and eighth-grade students. The focus was on how disengagement' critical role played in low student academic achievement. The two research questions that guided this study were the following:

RQ1: What are middle school teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for students' disengagement?

RQ2: How do middle school teachers perceive the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement?

Overall, seventh and eighth teachers reported that students who became disengaged in the classroom tended to have low academic performance. Additionally, the teachers believed that parental involvement would free teachers to focus more on mentoring their children, significantly raising their academic achievement. In addition, students who perform poorly in academics have deficient basic skills, particularly in English, and poor reading skills. Teachers' perceptions of factors relating to low student academic achievement were below grade-level and seemly inadequate assessment. If the evaluation does not include specific skills and abilities, teachers perceive that the outcomes would not aid their learning and comprehension processes. Teachers described

participation in the classroom and revealed that most eighth-grade students volunteered less than lower grades. Several factors could contribute to the behavioral characteristic, such as adolescents' shyness, lack of content knowledge, fear of embarrassment, or language difficulties.

Most teachers believe that students become disengaged because they rarely find relevance or usefulness in whatever they learn, which might cause them to underperform. The teachers encourage differentiated instruction to accommodate the different learning styles to improve academic performance to meet achievement and behavior needs. However, despite the students' learning styles, teachers perceived that socioeconomic status plays a vital part in education and might be the number one factor contributor to poor academic ability. Teachers believe making students feel a sense of belonging and connection in the classroom through encouragement, and positive feedback is critical, especially for students coping with negative peer pressure.

All teachers, no matter their ideologies, agreed that students who live in poverty households or struggle with subject matter knowledge to meet their basic needs influence educational outcomes. Lastly, teachers reported that the school officials or school board must implement better policies to deal with mobile devices. The technology used for noneducational purposes was distracting to almost half of the students, especially on mobile devices during class. The teachers were concerned that many students would not be likely to retain the information received fully. The next chapter includes my interpretations of the findings categorized by the research questions and the theoretical

framework. Chapter 5 also consists of the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, implications for practices and analysis, and finally, the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

I used a basic qualitative study to explore teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for student disengagement. In addition, to understand how teachers perceive disengagement and its role in low student academic achievement. A gap in the literature existed because no research addressed English Language Arts [ELA] middle school teachers' perceptions among Grades 7 and 8 regarding the underlying reasons for student disengagement. In addition, how teachers perceive disengagement's critical role play in low academic achievement.

The study population consisted of 10 middle school ELA teachers who worked at three Title 1 schools in the Southwestern United States. The teachers had various teaching experiences ranging from 7 years to 25 years. I collected data via Zoom, Google DUO, one in-person, and one telephone conference call. I identified seven essential themes aligned with the theoretical framework that explains development and motivation focused on our social influences and observations. Seven overarching themes emerged to answer the following research questions: What are middle school teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for students' disengagement? How do middle school teachers perceive the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement?

I used Skinner and Belmont's (1993) self-system theory of motivation in the classroom to categorize, analyze, and compare teachers' interview responses related to student disengagement in learning. Overall, seventh and eighth teachers reported that students who became disengaged in the classroom tended to have low academic

performance. Additionally, results reinforced the conclusions from other studies, which suggested activities perceived as fun, engaging, and technology-connected most likely developed motivation in learners. This chapter includes the descriptions and results of the data analysis and discusses of these relations to existing literature. The chapter also includes sections on the study's limitations and concludes with recommendations based on the investigation results.

Interpretation of the Findings

Seven overarching themes from the data analysis included: (a) lack of knowledge and skills, (b) family-related issues. (c) peer relationships in adolescence, (d) lack of parental involvement, (e) social media effects on student academic performance, (f) poverty and lack of resources, and (g) different levels and styles of learning. The analysis informed that Themes 1 and 2 answered the first research question, Themes 3 and 4 answered both first and second research questions, while Themes 5, 6, and 7 answered the second research question.

The teachers interviewed did not specifically define student disengagement. Still, they offered insight into a lack of consistency in the information on risk factors disengagement. Some teachers identified factors associated with student disengagement as they viewed the students as the issues. For instance, students who were non-attendees, boredom, or lack of essential skills to understand the subject's content area preferred to work alone. The teachers discussed how emotional health and psychological distress, such as family-related issues and an inequitable curriculum, contributed to students being frequently disengaged and withdrawn from their coursework. The teachers also provided

several examples of the nonparticipation in class discussions as a lack of support from their teachers, parents, peers, and the school. Lastly, the teachers perceived a link between low motivation and disengagement to learn or achieve academic goals was supported by the study's analyzed data set from the teachers' responses to interview question three (see Appendix B).

Research Question 1 Causes of Disengagement

A review of existing literature on the causes of disengagement among students indicated a lack of studies on the specific population for this study. Previous studies were conducted for students at the middle school levels or in cultures outside the United States. They did not specifically address how Grades 7 and 8 middle school English Language Arts teachers perceived the role of disengagement in low student academic achievement. Despite these different contexts and populations, a lack of understanding still existed (Chipchase et al., 2017). This study showed a lack of parental involvement and basic knowledge, and skills was linked to poor academic achievement. These findings were consistent with Wang et al.'s (2019) study of middle schoolers' development by which students become disengaged from academic or social interactions.

Wang et al. (2019) found that middle school students' academic work tends to be more cognitively demanding, and the nature and quality of social interaction change dramatically from elementary. The study also showed a high need for parents, teachers, and schools to provide multiple pathways to support adolescents' psychological needs. The authors found that the self-system motivational theories (see Skinner & Belmont, 1993) worked for understanding how and why adolescents failed to engage in academic

work or social interaction. This current study regarding teachers' responses to students who have not mastered basic cognitive skills by grade level faced challenges when coping academically with the high-level workloads. Although Wang et al. (2019) used data from students and teachers, this study's results were consistent with their work in two regards. First, participants identified a high need for parental involvement, and students who have not mastered their middle school skills have a hard time coping academically.

In addition, lack of parental involvement contributes to adolescents' disengagement, indicating children whose parents have less involvement have a lower academic achievement (see Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Findings from the current study align with Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) conclusion that parental involvement was crucial in supporting learning and academic achievement. One other significant finding from the previous studies indicated that the quality of perceived peer relationships substantially affects student achievement and outcomes of students transitioning from elementary to middle school. The finding was of interest in this study because the focus was on Grades 7 and 8 students, and the responses from teachers were consistent with the results from previous studies. According to the teachers, peer relationships affect students' learning behavior decision-making, which data highlighted in multiple studies showing that relationships significantly predict learning behavior decision-making (Wang et al., 2019; Yeager, 2019).

Research Question 2: How Teachers Perceive the Role of Disengagement in Low Student Academic Achievement

Seven major themes emerged regarding the challenges that teachers faced in high-poverty schools. Challenges situations with unmotivated students were mentioned and relieved 22 times from the 10 interviews. The second research question in the study is how teachers perceive disengagement and its role in low student academic achievement? The responses from the teachers were consistent with the findings from the previous studies where the participants identified the same factors associated with low student academic achievement (see Garbacz et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019; Yeager, 2019). Overall, teachers who identified low achievers in the seventh and eighth grades reported that family-related issues were vital in creating a sound environment for children. The teachers repeatedly underlined that tension and stress were the most significant causes of decreasing academic achievement. Notably, teacher (T1) perceived socioeconomic status, parenting, and student who had poor relationships with peers and teachers tended to exert minimum effort to meet requirements.

This finding aligned with Fredrick et al.'s (2019) definition of cognitively engaged students. Regarding the low student academic achievement. The cognitively engaged student displayed more favorable effort and willingness to learn more complex ideas and skills. Fredrick et al.'s (2019) definition of emotional engagement was consistent with how the study participants described the low achieving students. Fredrick et al. defined emotional student engagement as a welcoming and caring environment and significant relationships between teachers and peers. The study participants also

described low achieving students as disconnected and detached from learning. The teachers stated that their low performers were not always the ones who demonstrated behavioral issues, but the problem may involve embarrassment or frustration with a physical impairment. Further, the teachers explained that school practices and organizational policies obstructed their ability to implement equitable practices for students who required additional resources.

Regarding teachers' perspectives of working with engaged students versus disengaged students, they wished student engagement interactions would provide insight into how a lack of interest led to low performance or achievement. Besides the findings corresponding to the two research questions, the participants highlighted the essential aspects of increasing student engagement. The current study focused on Grades 7 and 8 adolescents with developmental changes that impact learning in numerous areas, such as declines in academic success and nonparticipation in class discussions (see Fredrick et al., 2019). Although various researchers did not explicitly address the underlying reasons for student outcomes, they have not been unnoticed by parents, administrators, and teachers. According to teachers' observations, at Title 1 schools, the percentage of students from low-income families, at least 45% of the population, use Title 1 funding, including other federal, state, and local funds.

Teachers also explained that it is critical that schools acknowledge the positive motivational aspects regarding incentives for at-risk students and failing students to improve achievement for all students. This finding was concurrent with the tenets of self-determination theory, in which rewards are viewed as fostering higher motivation and

engagement (Skinner & Belmont 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). From the interviews, I collected data that provided insight into supportive relationships and the different mechanisms by which teachers can increase engagement. Teachers described positive reinforcement, a welcoming learning environment, and scaffolded learning. Teachers also reported that positive peer relationships and more online learning activities influenced student success, especially for students with academic difficulties or personal struggles.

I followed the qualitative inquiry method, which was beneficial for determining relationships between achievement and disengagement to enrich learning goals and possibly increased engagement, leading to improved school performance (see Lei et al., 2018). Another noteworthy similar finding, Honicke et al. (2020), found that participants who reported self-efficacy mediated relationships between performance-approach goal orientation and academic achievement motivated engagement in learning.

Limitations of the Study

The critical limitation of the current study results could not necessarily be generalized to other seventh and eighth-grade teachers from the Southwestern United States. The recruited teachers who taught grades 7 and 8 students employed at a particular school and population; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable. Although these participants met the study's criteria (e.g., taught Grades 7 and 8 students), comparably sample size few studies assessed only teachers' perspectives who taught middle school English Language Arts.

This limitation primarily focused on teachers' perceptions and field notes and collected data by one researcher, limiting her perceptions and interpretations. However,

in terms of the analyzed data, I described the context explicitly so the transferability of the results could transfer beyond the bounds of the study (see Creswell & Poth 2018). Based on the conclusions of this study and data from a small sample size. However, findings may add to the knowledge of the study's topic, and the research study included data embedded within the analytic narrative to determine whether the transferability can apply in other contexts and studies. Finally, I used the data to support trustworthiness results to enhance through the data triangulation of multiple data sources.

Recommendations

The critical limitation of this study was a small sample size from a specific geographical location, which limited the generalizability of the study's results. In line with this, I recommend that future researchers replicate this study with seventh and eighth-grade teachers in other areas of the United States. In addition, future researchers might address these limitations by interviewing a broader range of participants, including data from classroom observations. Researchers could also conduct a quantitative study to ascertain a significant relationship between variables, such as low academic achievement and parent-teacher support autonomy, to draft specific policies for improvement in student achievement.

The findings suggested that this study can guide policymakers and educators to ensure a quality education for all learners. To make this happen, policymakers and school leaders could implement deep learning models equipped with instruction specifically designed to meet students' preferred learning styles. When teachers vary their teaching

styles, all students likely experience a boost to reach higher learning. The implementation may bridge the gap between high-achievers and low-achievers.

Implications

Researchers have suggested that teachers' insights may contribute to the implications of low student academic achievement for students living in poverty (Riordan et al., 2019). The findings of this current study contribute to positive social change by presenting teachers' perceptions of the critical need to reengage students to reach the requirements of all learners, and the results may support students' and schools' success. It could positively impact the achievement of supporting students in higher-poverty households and schools. Because in higher-poverty schools, generally, academic resources are relatively scarce, and parents in these schools seek teachers skilled at improving achievement. The implication aligned with Jones et al.'s (2018) descriptive study amongst students living in poverty households. The study aimed to clarify the relationships between poverty and student achievement by the gaps observed at the end of elementary. The descriptive statistics indicated that students' socioeconomic status was strongly related to student achievement gains.

The data analysis results indicated the critical need for parental involvement, as asserted by previous studies (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Reinke et al., 2019). Thus, school leaders and curriculum developers should implement programs to strengthen relationships between schools. However, parental involvement can better the schoolwork, and teachers can better understand students' cultural backgrounds, needs, and interests. Researchers have suggested that teachers' insight could contribute to implementing

diverse instructional practices tailored to learning experiences to meet the needs of students living in poverty (Jones et al., 2018). In addition, this research showed that teachers have a significant stake in students who struggle with grade-level skills and what they must learn in the classroom. Interestingly, although researchers have shown that evaluation in education has relied heavily on assessing academic achievement; however, teachers lived experiences can be an effective vehicle for change, according to Berger et al.'s (2018), mirrored the impact of poverty on academic success.

The qualitative analysis demonstrated that parents' and teachers' support was crucial to boosting [children and students] achievement, especially for African Americans and Latinos. Some teachers reported that curriculum developers must move beyond the assumption that teaching is only about content. All teachers suggested teaching pedagogy and practices that support students' need for relatedness. Moreover, teachers believed that there is a need for training teachers on how to support and build relationships, particularly with our most disengaged students. Teachers create long-life learners, and it is crucial when teachers engage with students because researchers suggested that teachers can shape student thinking skills and students rely on their teachers for guidance (Cook et al., 2018).

The teachers reflected on their controlled abilities and provided insight into practices that obstructed their ability to implement equitable instructional practices in high-poverty schools. The findings presented detailed information about teachers' lived experiences working with low achievers and provided insights into school factors and the impact of low student achievement. Future research should look at different dimensions

of autonomy support to understand facet help or whether there are differences in how high and low students' achievement levels effects parental involvement. Modeling teaching strategies that support disengaged and English Language Learners could provide insight into what teaching method best helps engage students in their learning and help set academic expectations among students (Baker et al., 2020). The findings from this present study were vital for educators, curriculum developers (parents and guardians), teachers, and school policymakers. The study also filled a gap, which contributed to new knowledge in the educational literature.

Conclusion

Academic achievements investigated by many researchers agree that the achievement gap between students living in high-poverty and low-poverty households was a significant risk factor for poor outcomes (Riordan et al., 2019). However, it is also crucial for school leaders to work closely with teachers and students to ensure caring and support for clear communications through best practice strategies to close the achievement gap. In addition, providing social support for children raised in poverty prevents dropping out of school (Budge & Parrett, 2018). There was an existing gap in the literature on teachers' perceptions of the underlying reasons for seventh and eighth low student academic achievement in high-poverty schools. I had an opportunity to research each theme identified in the data result. I gained insight from researchers' previous studies, peer reviews, and evidence-based practices that allow states and districts to design an intervention model to address needs and educational outcomes.

The researcher believes that adopting long-term solutions through student progress and providing an overview of how to structure and transform the landscape may meet educational needs in response to the purpose of the current study. I conducted semistructured interviews with ten teachers from three Title 1 schools that served students with education challenges that faced high poverty. The teachers perceived that most students faced barriers tied to living within low-income households contributed to low achievers. Teachers reported that students' different learning styles are critical if we are genuinely committed to closing the achievement gap, whether students are raised in poverty, lack basic skills, or lack student motivation.

To improve low student academic achievement, it is critical that one uses current research, adjust classroom environments, empower students, and alter the curriculum to support the needs of all students. Teachers linked poor and low academic achievement to a lack of basic skills and students who read below grade level. Transferring teachers' perspectives and actions relevant to low student academic achievement is vital to addressing severe student disengagement concerns. Based on low and high performers, whether students engaged or disengaged without relevant teaching might cause a greater risk of grade retention or dropping out of school. These strategic actions must be continued, assessed, modified, and enhanced in schools to cope with changes, including teaching and learning to meet the needs to respond to school accountability (Arend et al., 2017; Bryson, 2018).

Researchers theorized that parental involvement was an influential factor and could encourage children to become actively engaged in their academic achievement

(Epstein, 2018; Reinke et al., 2019). Teachers believed their students could learn with fewer class interruptions and more parental support. These results of the study indicated that parent involvement and teachers support students in developing basic skills to cope with rigorous learning material. In sum, the significance of understanding student disengagement and how doing so can transform individuals' perspectives and make them productive in school and life.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Participant and Center Code_____

Date and Time of Interview_____

Interview Guidance:

- Review the purpose of study and participation requirements.
- Review informed consent and confidentiality.
- Explain the interview process, including audiotaping recoding process and note-taking if needed.
- Clarify any concerns and answer any questions.
- Start the audio recorder and ask for the first question.
- Proceed with all questions until finished.
- Follow up to gather additional information, if needed.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about setting goals and developing specific measurable and achievable objectives for your seventh or eighth English Language Arts (ELA) or science classes (RQ1).
2. Could you please describe as many details as possible about your challenges experienced with low-achieving or nonproficient seventh or eighth students? What happens first, following, or last to increase student interest (RQ2)?
3. How would you describe a student that becomes “disengaged” in their learning? Would please walk me through what else was happening currently (RQ1)?
4. What specific professional development opportunities have you participated in that have supported your work with students’ academic achievement outcomes (RQ2)?
5. How have your perceptions changed since you started teaching? Would please walk me through exactly how the experiences unfolded.
6. How would you describe your current perceptions of the causes of poor academic proficiency (RQ2)?
7. What specific classroom practices do you find the most effective for students who struggle in ways that support instructional goals?
8. How would you describe your approach to encourage students to

participate in class? Can you please give any examples of things you do (RQ1)?

9. Would please tell me about a student who seemed disengaged in your ELA or science class in the past. How did you know that the student became re-engaged? Describe what did you do, think, or feel (RQ1)?
10. Do you have anything to share that we did not discuss that is relevant to the topic study?

Appendix C: Recruitment Contact and Timeline

Role	Email Invite	Date	Consent	Dates Times & Reserved
T1	Initial Email	10/16/2021	10/19/2021	10/22/2021@6:00PM
T2	Initial Email	10/16/2021	10/19/2021	10/24/2021@3:30PM
T3	Initial Email	10/16/2021	10/20/2021	10/25/2021@4:45PM
T4	Initial Email	10/19/2021	10/22/2021	10/27/2021@3:30PM
T5	Initial Email	10/19/2021	10/24/2021	10/29/2021@6:30PM
T6	Initial Email	10/25/2021	11/01/2021	11/07/2021@4:30PM
T7	Initial Email	10/25/2021	11/03/2021	11/10/2021@3:45PM
T8	Initial Email	10/27/2021	11/05/2021	11/12/2021@3:45PM
T9	Initial Email	10/30/2021	11/05/2021	11/15/2021@5:15PM
T10	Initial Email	11/12/2021	11/14/2021	11/20/2021@12:15PM

Appendix D: Defining and Naming Themes

Theme	Files	References
1-LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	7	15
Non or little engagement	6	8
Student lack of involvement	1	2
Non proficient in lesson learned in previous grade	5	5
2-FAMILY-RELATED ISSUES	6	10
Death of family member	2	2
Domestic issues among parents	3	3
Many issues at home	2	2
Mother Lost custody	1	1
Personal problems and trauma	2	2
3-LIMITED PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN STUDENTS' ACADEMIC LIFE	7	10
Lack of parental involvement affects academic performance	3	3
No one at home holds students accountable for assignments	2	3
Parents do not track students' academic progress	2	3
Parents have multiple jobs and no time for children	1	1
4-PEER INFLUENCE	5	6
Need for guidance on peer influence	1	1
Negative peer pressure and disengagement	2	2
Students' desire to gain attention and please friends	2	3
5-SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY USE OFF-TASK	6	9
Cell-phones cause distraction when used off-task	2	4
Distractions from Technology devices	2	2
Social Media Addiction	3	3
6-DIFFERENT LEVELS AND STYLES OF LEARNING	8	7
Flexible learning and reasonable workload	4	5
Engaging different types of learners	3	2
7-POVERTY AND LACK OF RESOURCES	8	11
Food insecurity reduces motivation to learn	2	3
Inadequate resources	3	3
Overcrowding in schools	1	1
Socio-economic status and academic performance	4	5