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Teachers' Perceptions of Contributing Factors to, and Strategies for Addressing, Academic Disengagement Among Minority Middle School Students

Aster Kifle-Thompson
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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Aster Kifle-Thompson

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2024

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of Contributing Factors to, and Strategies for Addressing,

Academic Disengagement Among Minority Middle School Students

by

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

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Abstract

Academic disengagement of middle school students increases the risk for later criminal activity, substance use, and school dropout. A positive academic dynamic between teachers and students, however, can improve students' self-esteem, well-being, and academic achievement. The research problem addressed the lack of understanding of teachers' perceptions about factors that caused academic disengagement among minority students. The aim of this study was to understand middle school teachers' perceptions about internal and external factors that may cause academic disengagement and strategies that may assist in fostering academic engagement among minority middle school students. Ogbu's theory of academic disengagement was the theoretical framework for the study. Data were collected by conducting semi structured, individual interviews with 10 middle school educators with a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience. Deductive thematic data analysis was used, based on the research questions, interview questions, and previous research on the phenomenon of interest. The results indicate that vocabulary gaps, classroom cell phone and social media use, a negative dynamic between teachers and students, lack of teachers' knowledge of students' culture, and lack of parents' involvement in their children's education are contributing factors to students' academic disengagement. This study may contribute to positive social change by identifying factors that inhibit the creation of a positive academic dynamic between teachers and students. With this knowledge, teachers and parents may be able to work together to support and encourage students' academic achievement.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my niece, Bethlehem Kifle-Delgado, and her two beautiful daughters, Lorena Kifle-Delgado and Leah Kifle-Delgado, and to all present and future generations of students. I am grateful for the opportunity to be a good role model for all of you. I would like you, Lorena and Leah, and, of course, Mom (Beth), to always remember that you are amazing and that you can do anything that you put your mind to because nothing is impossible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Disengagement among minority middle school students can result in increased dropout rates (Goux et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2017; McManus, 2020). Although disengagement in academics can be a problem for students at both the primary and secondary levels, middle school students are at an especially high risk for academic disengagement (Allensworth et al., 2014; Anderson et al., 2019; Balfanz et al., 2007). Furthermore, whereas the middle school years are correlated with disengagement, so is attending middle school in high-poverty urban neighborhoods. Poor neighborhood schools lack educational resources to attract good teachers. Students in poor neighborhood schools have the lowest educational attainment (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2021). According to Quillian (2017), children from poor neighborhood schools present with reduced educational attainment and when they become an adult, they have lower earnings, worse health, and reduced levels of happiness.

Balfanz et al. (2007) explained that when minority students enter middle school in high-poverty neighborhoods, they are more likely to experience chaotic, under resourced classrooms leading to academic disengagement than when they enter the primary grades in these neighborhoods. Balfanz et al. asserted that minority middle school students in high-poverty neighborhoods continue to perform poorly compared to students in more advantaged U.S. neighborhoods or in other countries. Balfanz et al. performed a longitudinal analysis in which they followed about 13,000 students from 1996 to 2004. The analysis demonstrated how three predictive indicators—poor attendance, misbehavior, and course failures in sixth grade—could account for why 60% of these

students did not graduate from high school. Further, Balfanz et al identified that academic engagement often decreased when students transitioned to middle school; this decline occurs more often with minority students in extreme poverty urban schools.

A longitudinal study conducted by Lewine et al. (2021) countered the popular view that students from a poverty background fall short academically compared to their more advantaged peers. The researchers pointed out that after full academic years, there was a lack of difference in dropout rates and grade point averages between poor students and their more advantaged college peers. The researchers concluded that “it is not poverty per se that leads to poorer college academic performance, but rather the demand on their time and energy to meet ongoing financial needs” (p. 686). They agreed with Ogbu (2003), who stated that the achievement differences among students of diverse cultures and races cannot be attributed to inherited attributes; instead, these differences are due to other factors.

To address disengagement, educators can implement interventions in schools to further engage minority middle school students before irreversible impacts are realized (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; McManus, 2020). Goux et al. (2017) conducted a large, randomized, intervention study that was facilitated by school principals. The study was done in 37 middle schools in deprived neighborhoods in the suburbs of Paris. The researchers targeted low-achieving students who were at high risk of dropping out from ninth grade. The principals had meetings with each child’s family to discuss their child’s academic performance and to provide parents with feedback. At the end of the intervention study, the researchers noticed that parents become more involved in their

child's school and, consequently, students' grade repetition rate decreased from 13% to 9%, and their dropout rate reduced from 9% to 5%.

McManus (2020) reported on a study conducted by the government of Alberta in 2011–2013 called "Your Future Starts Here." The aim was to improve school attendance and academic engagement among high school students. The study was conducted in a symposium style that allowed the students' voices to be heard. McManus noted that students' drop-out process begins long before high school. However, the researchers did not explore the possibility of early identification of students at risk (p. 1). The study further explained the relationship between poor attendance and low academic achievement that leads to an increase in high school students' dropout rate. McManus asserted that chronic school absenteeism is the primary factor in the increased dropout rate among high school students. According to McManus,

The supportive recommendations consisted of building a positive learning environment; a safe and caring school initiative; silent mentoring, assigning specialized personnel to support indigenous families; solving transportation issues; fostering goal setting; career awareness; and support for transition. (p. 71)

Loera et al. (2015) investigated the variables in learning and motivation among high school Latinx students and concluded that students' learning and motivating factors are predictors of academic engagement. However, Loera et al. asserted that although much research has been done at the high school level, little is known about academic disengagement among minority middle school students. As such, I sought to identify factors that contribute to minority middle school students' academic disengagement. This

knowledge may help educators to create strategies for early identification of disengaged students. Educators may also be able to develop interventions with the purpose of enhancing minority middle school students' academic success, resulting in positive social change.

In this chapter, I provide the background and discuss the problem and the purpose of the study regarding minority students' academic disengagement as they transition to middle school level. I explain the research purpose and present the research questions (RQs), theoretical framework, and nature of the study. The chapter also includes definitions of key terms and discussion of the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. I conclude the chapter by highlighting the key details from the introduction to the study and providing a transition to Chapter 2.

Background

Students' engagement declines as they progress through middle school and into high school (Anderson et al., 2019). Similarly, Allensworth et al. (2014) asserted that "high school failures are partially a function of poor middle grade preparation" (p. 3). Thus, it is imperative to identify middle school students who are at high risk of failing classes as early as sixth grade. Y. Li et al. (2017) pointed out the importance of identifying academic performance issues to reduce the achievement gap for middle school students from low-income backgrounds. Y. Li et al. further suggested that an increase in family involvement during the transition from elementary to middle school may help increase students' academic engagement.

School disengagement for minority students is also rooted in an historical and national educational gap between White students and minority students that arose from the time of slavery and continues in the present (Ogbu, 2003). Ogbu (2003) further suggested that the core factor that contributes to minority students' disengagement is lack of academic support from their mostly White teachers. Ogbu stated that "a common complaint against teachers was that they did not believe that Black students could perform academically like White students" (p. 124). Ogbu asserted that teachers who are majority White as an aggregate group in the United States may not understand minority culture and other factors that affect minority students' achievement in school.

The difference between Black and White students' academic achievements in a multicultural and multiethnic school environment goes beyond academic gap. Chapman and Bhopal (2019) pointed out that the race and racism experienced by students through teacher–student relationships, student–student interaction, and school policies is the contributing factors in minority students' academic disengagement. Chapman & Bhopal (2019) asserted that there is a shift in White teachers' standard of practice in the classroom. The White teachers were holding Black students to lower academic expectations to avoid conflict; Chapman & Bhopal further explained, White teachers believed that their action is an indication that showed their sensitivities toward cultural responsiveness.

In the classroom, White teachers enact implicit bias against minority students, according to Chapman and Bhopal (2019). Furthermore, Chapman and Bhopal interviewed Black students who stated that "their teachers exhibited low expectations for

Black students' behavior and academic achievement compared to their White counterparts" (p. 9). Liang et al. (2019) stated that Black students reported that in the classroom, they receive different attention, are mistreated and disrespected, and face a power struggle in their relationships with their White teachers. Minority students face challenges in their learning process due to being discriminated against (Ogbu, 2003). He further asserted that the students at Shaker Heights school believed that Blacks were "stereotyped & judged by the color of their skin rather than abilities in many areas of their life" (p. 251).

One critical piece that may improve students' positive educational outcome is to implement strategies to strengthen White teachers' abilities to form a strong bond with their minority students (Chapman & Bhopal, 2019). In addition to teacher bias, Chapman and Bhopal (2019) pointed out the other factors that lead to school disengagement—that teachers' limited classroom interaction with minority students encourages teachers to rely on stereotypes about minority students' academic ability and social behavior. Anderson et al. (2019) determined that student self-efficacy was a protective factor against disengagement. However, a sense of self-efficacy stems from other lived experiences. As such, factors outside of students' sense of self-efficacy should be considered. These elements can be categorized into in-school and out-of-school factors.

In-school factors that lead to academic disengagement are present within the structure of the school environment such as in the classroom where teachers lack a significant role in providing academic motivation to students. Another in-school factor that contributes to academic disengagement is bullying. Borman et al. (2019) asserted

that bullying contributed to middle school student academic disengagement; however, reducing bullying and preventing disciplinary problems resulted in improved attendance rates and a reduction in failing grades. Lack of peer contact and inadequate adult support contributed to disengagement; therefore, the role of isolation is important to consider (Fredricks et al., 2019).

Improving engagement and preventing dropout rates among minority middle school students is an area of interest for educators, policymakers, and educational researchers. Ross (2009) asserted that a positive academic relationship and appropriate praise between teachers and students provides students with a sense of fairness and competence that contributes to students' positive academic engagement. Loera et al. (2015) asserted that a supportive school climate utilized by teachers and school counselors provides a considerable amount of positive motivation to students' academic achievement. Improved academic engagement leads to increased graduation rates that can result in enhanced individual and societal outcomes. Other in-school factors that contribute to disengagement among minority middle school students are poor school attendance, risky behaviors, and low course grades (McManus, 2020). According to Fredricks et al. (2019) classroom teaching content perceived as dry by students has also been found to be a factor that leads to academic disengagement.

When students feel respected by their teachers and peers, they may experience higher levels of security and increased academic engagement (Liang et al., 2019). Classroom disciplinary referrals are part of school protocols; however, it is critical for teachers to understand students' perception in their school climate, their students'

relationships to their teachers, and students' academic experience (Liang et al., 2019).

Implementing evidence-based interventions for middle school teachers that will support students' social development to energize students' interest in their coursework will most likely reengage and strengthen students' motivation and academic outcomes (Renninger & Hidi, 2017). Fredricks (2019) asserted that the use of intervention strategies will improve teachers' perceptions and experiences, increase students' engagement, promote positive academic outcomes, and reduce negative behaviors, leading to academic success.

In addition to in-school factors, Fredricks et al. (2019) asserted that the out-of-school factor that primarily contributes to academic disengagement is lack of support from adults in the community. Providing adolescents opportunities to make individual choices and having family members provide incentives, such as rewards for doing well, may contribute to students' academic engagement. Parker and Hodgson (2020) addressed out-of-school factors that contributed to students' disengagement, the concept of childhood experiences of trauma contributed to students' disengagement and challenging behaviors. Parker and Hodgson further described that these childhood traumas could encompass "physical or sexual abuse to a child, but also familial and socio-environmental influences such as parental drug use, poverty, neighborhood, or domestic violence" (p. 2).

Another out-of-school factor that contribute to students' academic disengagement and difficulties with schoolwork, according to Minkkinen et al. (2019), is smoking. Their longitudinal study was conducted with 9497 seventh-grade students from Finland. Data were collected using a questionnaire about participating students' current smoking status. The researchers concluded that smoking contributes to lower academic engagement. If

adolescent smoking persists to adulthood, poor academic achievement may generate feelings of loss in students' sense of belonging in the school environment and loss of teachers' and parents' appreciation (Minkkinen et al., 2019).

Poor academic achievement in school children is a stressor and may lead to material loss; poor academic achievement predicts low-pay employment in adulthood (Minkkinen et al., 2019). According to Garrett-Peters et al. (2019), another out-of-school factor that contributes to academic disengagement is household chaos. Garrett-Peters et al. asserted that school-age children affected by household chaos demonstrate lower academic competences; further, the household chaos may overwhelm these children to the level of withdrawal. Garrett-Peters et al. explained that children may extend this withdrawal to the classroom, which leads to academic disengagement.

Implementing an effective early warning system could improve students' academic outcomes. For example, Marken et al. (2020) asserted that teachers monitoring students' progress by proactively intervening when students present with early signs of disengagement, such as poor attendance, behavioral problems, or academic problems, will lead to students' success. Diehl (2019) asserted that when students transition from elementary to middle school, their levels of disengagement become more evident. Diehl suggested that middle school may be the last chance to redirect disengaged students who are at risk of leaving school prior to fulfilling graduation requirements. Developing an early disengagement identifying indicator will help direct struggling students toward graduation path.

Problem Statement

The problem that was addressed in this study was the lack of understanding of middle school teachers' perceptions about internal and external factors that may cause academic disengagement and strategy factor that may assist in academic engagement within minority middle school students. Ouillette (2019) asserted that the cultural disconnect between educators and students can be considered as a potential influence of lack of teachers' perceptions and understanding about minority students' academic disengagement. Ouillette explained that teachers' negative perceptions of minority students may have a limited effect on the students' potential academic performance.

Insufficient number of teachers are prepared for the disparities presented by cultural integration, and many educators are not equipped with the cultural competence and resources to bridge the divide (Ouillette, 2019). Therefore, providing cultural awareness strategies training to educators may enhance teachers' understanding of students of color and socioeconomic status (Ouillette, 2019). Students' disengagement has been identified and studied as early as middle and elementary school among children at risk for early school dropout (McManus, 2020).

These students at risk for dropout showed warning signs of poor attendance, poor engagement in learning, and behavioral issues (McManus, 2020). Marken et al. (2020) recommended a schoolwide effort to identify students who are showing signs of disengagement and providing them with support systems by assigning appropriate interventions program and monitoring their progress. McManus further asserted that applying individualized intervention approaches may accurately identify at-risk students

during the early stages of their educational years. Eckey-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) asserted that disengagement is multidimensional and encompasses different aspects in students' behavior, cognitive, and emotional while in school and after they drop out.

It is important for researchers and educators to consider factors that might help heighten and foster students' engagement in school and academic-related activities as participation may eventually enhance students' performance outcomes. Despite the issues associated with disengagement, there is little research, according to my review of the literature, on teachers' perceptions about academic disengagement among minority middle school students, specifically focusing on interventions and strategies that can be used to improve educators' understandings of academic disengagement. Therefore, further research is needed in the field of education to inform teachers and to help resolve academic disengagement among minority middle school students.

Students who are academically disengaged lack the appropriate emotional, psychological, cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral states that are necessary for learning, critical thinking, and intellectual maturation to occur (Alrashidi et al., 2016). McManus (2020) examined the multiple interrelated reasons for disengagement such as bullying, anxiety, and poor attendance that create a snowball effect in the process of disengagement which can start early in the student's school career. Alrashidi et al. (2016) discussed the overabundance of empirical studies that suggested several motivational and social experiences, such as task value and academic mastery goal orientation, that could encourage and cultivate students toward positive academic engagement. Steinberg et al. (1992) defined the term *academic disengagement* as the "degree to which students are

‘disconnected’ to what is going on in their classes” (p. 131). Steinberg et al. collected data from a large sample study of different ethnic high school students. The authors addressed what students’ beliefs are about the factors that contributes to their superior academic performance; African American youngsters believed “the absence of peer support for achievement undermines the positive influence of authoritative parenting”; however, European American youngsters believed “the benefit from the combination of authoritative parenting and peer support that contributes to their academic achievement” (p. 723).

Fredricks et al. (2019) interviewed middle and high school students and discovered that students who were given support from adults and peers to make choices had a higher academic engagement, deeper conceptual understanding, and increased achievement. Fredricks et al. noticed that other students who were in a stricter disciplinary and controlling classroom structure presented with higher rates of academic disengagement. Schrag et al. (2020) noted that students who are disengaged have lower grade point averages, poorer assignment completion rates, and higher dropout rates, thereby contributing to short- and long-term problems for themselves as individuals and for society. Schrag et al. asserted that academic disengagement is a red flag and can present psychological, behavioral, and emotional components.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand middle school educators’ perceptions about internal and external factors that may cause disengagement among minority middle school students and to suggest educational strategies that teachers

can potentially use to help reduce academic disengagement. I conducted this study to better understand teachers' perceptions of factors and strategies that cause the minority middle school students' academic disengagement.

Achieving students' engagement strategy requires multiple sources and consideration. To contribute to disengagement prevention guidelines, Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) reviewed intervention techniques for preventing disengagement among middle school students. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela noted that incorporating a multimodal educational approach could benefit a wide variety of learners and could result in improved student engagement. Alrashidi et al. (2016) suggested that involving students with engagement activities will avert students' boredom and enhance their motivation and their academic achievement level. Douglas et al. (2008) asserted that there is a need for teachers to communicate about their concerns in Black students' abilities to face and solve students' own problems in the school, in the home, or in the community settings.

When adults empower students' competence, they help to foster students' self-esteem. Fredricks et al. (2019) determined that support from adults, opportunities to make individual choices, and incentives from external sources will provide students with a sense of academic accomplishment. Examples of external factors from teachers could be giving students tokens, extra credit points, or stickers. Examples of external factors from family members could be, during movie day, allowing the student to choose the movie or whether to go out for a pizza. These support systems contribute to improving student engagement. Fredricks et al. asserted that dry curriculum, lack of peer contact, and inadequate adult support contributed to disengagement. Fredricks et al. provided evidence

that implementing strategies may curtail disengagement among minority middle school students.

Implementing an intervention plan could be an ideal goal to further engage minority middle school students before irreversible impacts are realized (Eckey-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; McManus, 2020). Marken et al. (2020) proposed monitoring students' progress by proactively intervening when students present with early signs of disengagement such as poor attendance, behavioral, or academic problems will lead to students' success. Marken et al. explained that the purpose of data-driven intervention is to provide a support system to schools and districts so that leaders can identify students at risk for dropping out and match them with appropriate intervention programs.

Minority students face unique challenges in the classroom such as negative feedback from their teachers, which is perceived as less care from teachers. This form of dynamic interaction or lack of between teachers and students tends to create negative impact on students' academic achievement (Strambler & Weinstein, 2010). Strambler and Weinstein (2010) further explained the psychology of African Americans' perspective of education—"how messages of ethnic injustice are passed on from parents to children and how this in turn impacts children's perceptions of the legitimacy of school" (p. 9).

Students' internal and external factors affect their academic success and self-perceptions (Jones, 2012). Jones (2012) conducted a research study on students' internal and external factors that impact their academic success and self-perceptions. The participants were African American Title I eighth grade students from Green Wave School in Atlantic County, New Jersey. According to Jones, the internal and external

factors consisted of parental involvement, teacher quality, school morale, resource materials, parental achievement, and community involvement. The author suggested that educators and stakeholders address factors that contribute to African American success and/or achievement in urban middle schools. Teachers who work with minority middle school students may have insights and experiences about the challenges faced by this population; therefore, they may positively affect students' level of academic engagement (Jones, 2012).

Research Questions

I sought to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: What are middle school educators' perceptions of internal factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?

RQ2: What are middle school educators' perceptions of external factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?

RQ3: What are middle school educators' perceptions on strategies to reduce minority students' disengagement?

Theoretical Framework

I evaluated the perceptions of middle school teachers about minority middle school students' academic disengagement to answer the RQs. The research problem was examined through the lens of Ogbu's theory of academic disengagement. Ogbu's (2003) theory of academic disengagement is comprised of three guiding principles. The first principle explains that no racial group does better in school because that group is superior to another racial group. The second principle of Ogbu's theory of academic

disengagement is that no cultural group better educates their children than another cultural group. The final principle of Ogbu's theory of academic disengagement is that no specific language is better suited for in-school learning. Ogbu's three principles reinforce that achievement differences among students of diverse cultures and races cannot be attributed to inherited attributes and, instead, reinforce that these achievements are based upon other factors. Use of Ogbu's theory of academic disengagement assisted me in understanding the perceptions of middle school teachers by gaining the dynamic view of in-school and out-of-school factors that contribute to minority middle school students' academic disengagement.

Ogbu (2003) argued that disengagement among ethnic minority students is due to marginalization and discrimination. Furthermore, Ogbu explained that disengagement is sometimes due to a lack of emphasis placed on education in the home environment. Various internal and external factors contribute to disengagement, thereby reinforcing the importance of this study. A basic qualitative design was used to identify and understand the perceptions of middle school teachers about minority middle school students' academic disengagement. I used basic theory as my qualitative research methodology to answer the RQs about middle school teachers' perceptions of internal and external factors that contribute to academic disengagement among minority middle school students.

Nature of the Study

I used basic qualitative methodology to identify and understand teachers' perceptions about in-school and out-of-school factors and strategies that influence disengagement among minority middle school students. I based the study on Ogbu's

(2003) theory of academic disengagement and his assumption that internal and external factors contribute to minority students' academic disengagement. According to Cleland (2017), basic qualitative research design is a commonly used method in educational research. Researchers who use this design concern themselves with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, or constructed in all its complexity and in all its natural settings.

In a basic qualitative study, a researcher collects data through an interview process, which they then analyze to identify the recurring patterns that characterize and support the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research design was critical to my interviewing middle school teachers regarding the factors that contribute to minority middle school students' academic disengagement. I selected 10 middle school teachers as participants in the study. Data were collected from online transcripts and evaluated to determine common themes. The collected data show the participants' opinions; therefore, the findings are not generalizable outside the research study scope. The limited research supported this investigation. The findings may allow future researchers to formulate a consistent understanding regarding teachers' perceptions toward their students' educational disengagement.

The interview questions for this study were open-ended so that participants could expand on, disregard, or provide unique answers to the interview questions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted ways that qualitative researchers investigate how individuals make sense of a phenomenon based on their own interpretations of life and experiences. It is critical to understand the philosophical stance of qualitative research and work from this

to develop the RQs, study design, data collection methods, and data analysis (Cleland, 2017).

Definitions

The following are definitions of key concepts used throughout the study:

Basic qualitative research: A type of research design that is used to explore individuals' interpretations and meanings that are attributed to a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Minority students: Students who are Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaska Native (X. Li, 2007).

Students' academic disengagement: Student's lack of meaningful involvement in education as represented by low interest, curiosity, and motivation for learning; academic disengagement is associated with varying degrees of challenges for students within the school setting (Klassen et al., 2021).

Teachers' perceptions and experiences related to students' academic engagement: Teachers' perceptions and experiences of their interpersonal behavior, their feelings of self-efficacy, and their understandings of the importance of didactic and pedagogical competence as they are related to perceived student engagement (Uden et al., 2013).

Assumptions

According to Wolgemuth et al. (2017), "critically examining constructs in scholarly literature is important for understanding underlying assumptions about what counts as good education and for whom" (p. 7). For this basic qualitative research study, I

assumed that the information acquired during data collection pertained to the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers. The second assumption I had was that the middle school teachers who participated had provided a complete and honest response to the semi structured interview questions to the best of their knowledge. I assumed that the participants adhered to the research process and requirement that was provided to them during the introduction stage.

I assumed that the participants were transparent in their perceptions and experiences about minority middle school students' disengagement. I also assumed that participants answered all the interview questions genuinely and without any form of bias. In addition, the collected data was deemed accurate and valid. However, the dynamic nature of the research may preclude any formal step-by-step process (Walters, 2001). During the interview process, I assumed that the participants provided vital information and explained themselves profoundly. Through face-to-face communication, I was able to explain my feelings, experiences, and opinions. I assumed that I remained fair, transparent, and free from prejudice, non-biased, considerate, and friendly.

Scope and Delimitations

The basic qualitative research design method determined the scope of the research which consisted of 10 middle school teacher participants. The delimitations were teachers' perceptions of internal and external factors and strategies of academic disengagement among minority middle school students. The specific focus was chosen to address the current gap in literature about teachers' perceptions about disengagement among minority middle school students and to explore methods for improving academic

engagement. Candidate inclusion criteria consisted of middle school teachers from diverse backgrounds (i.e., different ages, genders, and ethnicities). Diversity sampling allows the researcher to examine common experiences across diverse demographic criteria.

To be eligible for the study, participants needed to be middle school teachers with a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience. Candidate exclusion are elementary school teachers, high school teachers, vocational schoolteachers, trade schoolteachers, and college professors. Candidate recruitment process was done by emailing an invitation letter to prospective participants. Since recruitment takes place through an on-line process, another delimitation is that the participants must have access to the internet. All participation was voluntary. The researcher established evidence in the study that explained the perceptions of middle school teachers about in-school and out-of-school factors that influence disengagement among minority middle school students. Other delimitations to the study, the researcher was unable to validate the potential transferability of the finding to other contexts, situations, times, and populations due to the small sample size.

The study is rich in detail in data collection, thereby providing the reader with information necessary to decide whether the findings of the study might be transferable to other settings of research study. Stenfors et al. (2020) suggested that detailed description of the research study's context will shape the findings that may be transferrable to another setting, context, or group. Stahl and King (2020) point out that transferability of a study from one setting to another is only possible when a thick description provides a rich

enough representation of circumstance for application to others' situations. The study presented a credible and rich representation of data collection and analysis. However, due to the small sample size, it may limit its transferability. Rahman (2017) asserted that small sample size occasionally makes the research study's results unreliable and ungeneralizable. Further research will be necessary to understand teachers' perception of internal and external factors that cause disengagement among minority middle school students. Other researchers can conduct their own investigation of this study's applicability to another setting, context, or group.

Limitations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand middle school educators' perceptions of internal and external factors that may cause disengagement within minority students and to suggest strategies to reduce this disengagement. The limitations in the study involved the shortcomings from various phenomena, small sample size, and limited methodologies, basic qualitative study. The data collected from the Zoom interview do not reflect the perceptions of other middle school teachers.

This study was limited due to the use of the qualitative methodology because qualitative research limits how researchers can protect participants' rights, choose a methodology and research design. Collecting, managing, and analyzing data was a challenge. There is limitation in dependability of the study, during data collection and analysis process, audit trial and triangulation procedures were not conducted as part of the data collection process method. There is limitation in transferability of the study due

to small sample size which affects research results, therefore, it would be harder to generalize the findings. I also had limited access to literature and secondary data.

Expanding the sample to non-public schools, charter schools, and private middle schools would have given the researcher the opportunity to an alternative data. During data collection analysis, there was limitation to conduct audit trial and triangulation procedures. There was limitation in the study's confirmability because member checking and debriefing was not conducted. None of the participants requested a copy of the interview transcription emailed to them for their review and feedback, therefore, debriefing was not done. During participant recruitment, I was limited to only one male participant, creating limitation to one male teacher's perceptions of internal and external factors that contributes to academic disengagement among minority middle school students. All 10 participants responded to the interview questions and the small sample size was adequate enough to reach data saturation.

Significance

To address the current gap in literature about disengagement among minority middle school students and to explore methods for improving engagement, middle school teachers' perceptions about in-school and out-of-school factors that contribute to minority middle school student academic disengagement was explored. Researchers (Goux et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2017; McManus, 2020) have created and analyzed the effectiveness of engagement interventions among high school students, yet this research does not address the needs of middle school students. When disengagement is identified at the high school level, it is often too late for interventions to be effectively implemented that can curtail

disengagement (Diehl, 2019). Therefore, the identification and prevention of disengagement should take place before high school.

The data may inform future school practice and academic research. It is the hope of the researcher that the information attained will be used to develop and evaluate policies and programs for preventing and addressing academic disengagement among minority middle school students. Understanding the perceptions of teachers concerning in-school and out-of-school factors of academic disengagement among these populations of students may help create interventions, thereby improving student engagement.

As a scholar-practitioner, I hope to have influence in education by helping implement positive social change and equal educational opportunities for *all* students both locally and globally, especially among the low socio-economic population, and their environment. The issues of equity in education among minority middle school students have not had enough research study done to correct the problems of academic disengagement. Because minority students are underserved with quality of education, when I graduate from Walden University with a PhD in Education with a concentration in leadership, policy, and change, I will be able to empower every individual child so each child can see their own role as the future leader and transform societal change within their community. According to Walden University (2017) social change consciousness mission is to help the University's students transform themselves into scholar-practitioners so they can commit to fostering social change through the education of a diverse community, locally and globally.

Education is related to the development of an individual and the community. Vaughan (2018) asserts that social change in education is a critical foundation for the future generation, further, Vaughan addressed the philosophical views of John Dewey, “if schools supported children and helped educate them to become active citizens and community members, they would create a better society” (p. 24). Education is the most vital system for economic development as well as social freedom. Nelson Mandela spoke at the Education Africa, Presidential and Premier Education Awards in Pretoria, South Africa on November 22, 1997. Mandela (1997), speaking on the power of education, said, “The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success.....we are steadily but surely introducing education that enables our children to exploit their similarities and common goals, while appreciating the strength in their diversity” (para. 3). Education is powerful and is one of the most influential instruments for social change. I assert that the findings of this research study will have significant contribution to address the need for further study at the middle school level to enhance engagement among minority students.

Summary

I seek to understand middle school educators’ perceptions of internal and external factors that may cause disengagement within minority middle school students and to suggest strategies to reduce this disengagement. In Chapter 1, the introduction chapter, I outlined a comprehensive background to understand middle school teachers’ perceptions and strategies under analysis. I outlined the problem statement, purpose of the study, RQs, nature of the study, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 includes an analysis of

the documented studies about middle school teachers' background concerning the factors in minority middle school students' academic disengagement. The literature review identified the existing gap based on basic qualitative study theory of academic disengagement. In Chapter 2, I summarized the literature relevant to the research topic under investigation. I discussed the gaps in the literature and how I filled these gaps. In the literature review, I addressed the current knowledge gap associated with the lack of understanding of middle school educators' perceptions and strategies about minority middle school students' academic disengagement. I provided evidence that I was familiar with what is known and unknown. The methodology and procedures used to collect data was discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 examined the findings and the number of data, results, and evaluation of the findings. In Chapter 5, I interpret the findings of the investigation. This final chapter includes research limitations and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand middle school educators' perceptions with internal and external factors that may cause disengagement within minority middle school students and to suggest teachers' educational strategies to help reduce academic disengagement among minority middle school students. Qualitative researchers explore individuals' interpretations and meanings that they attribute to a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell suggested that the purpose of basic qualitative design is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences.

The primary objective of educational qualitative research is to improve our practice and the basic qualitative research design is particularly well suited to obtain an in-depth understanding of effective educational processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The larger problem addressed by this study is that students who are academically disengaged lack the appropriate emotional, psychological, cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral states capabilities necessary for learning, critical thinking, and intellectual maturation to occur (Alrashidi et al., 2016). In addition, there is limited research done about teachers' perceptions of academic disengagement among minority middle school students.

According to Steinberg et al. (1992) when students understand and believe about the relation between education and life success, their academic performance and engagement improves. Schrag et al. (2020) asserted that disengagement results in

lowered grade point averages. Further, when students perform poorly, their assignment completion rates decline followed by higher dropout rates, thereby contributing to short- and long-term problems, which influence individuals, groups, and society. According to Eckey-Lyster and Niileksela (2016), disengagement impacts students while in school and after the completion of their educational journey. Although disengagement is a problem at all educational levels (i.e., primary, and secondary), Strambler and Weinstein (2010) found that middle school minority students are at an especially high risk for being disengaged in academics. Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007) explained that lower levels of academic engagement become prevalent when students transition to middle school.

With an effective early warning system, educators have an opportunity to identify middle school students at risk for poor academic engagement. Balfanz et al. (2007) noticed that identification, prevention, and intervention strategies provided educational support to minority middle school students to guide them back on a path to graduation. Educators have an important role to play in helping students who are at risk of failing to complete their academic requirements necessary for graduation (Diehl, 2019). Disengagement among minority middle school students can result in increased dropout rates (Goux et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2017; McManus, 2020). Therefore, Eckey-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) and McManus (2020) asserted that in hopes of curtailing disengagement rates, interventions can be implemented to further engage minority middle schools' students before irreversible impacts are realized. Marken et al. (2020) assert that commonly used early warning signs of student's disengagement are an important

determination of students' being off track. Early identification and intervention can improve minority middle school students' academic engagement and subsequent success.

To curtail high student disengagement rates, interventions must address engagement before a student begins high school. According to Diehl (2019), there is a growing amount of research suggesting that middle school students who present with early stages of disengagement have a higher chance of dropping out of high school. In educational systems where students engage among faculty, students' interactions with learning activities and levels of academic engagement are often higher (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Okilwa (2016) explained that youngsters who feel accepted, included, and supported in their school are more likely to perform well academically. Contrarily, when students experience bullying and other negative peer interactions, they do not have community support (e.g., lack of or limited access to community resources such as libraries and after school programs) and are exposed to various home-based environmental stressors (e.g., a disorganized and chaotic household, domestic violence, drug, and alcohol use/abuse, etc.), disengagement may occur (Garrett-Peters et al., 2019).

Although many factors can result in student disengagement, Strambler and Weinstein (2010) noted that ethnic minority students are more likely to be disengaged. According to McManus (2020), the decision of ethnic minority middle school students to drop out of school is not a sudden choice, in fact, the decision to discontinue one's education "... takes several years of accumulative in-school and out-of-school factors" (p. 68), furthermore, these students often struggle with the transition from middle school

to high school, furthermore, a potential high school disengagements can be identified as early as elementary school.

McManus (2020) suggested that establishing a strong educational foundation at an early stage of the students' schooling can have a significant impact on their academic achievement in later years. Some of the key factors that lead to minority students' drop out are classroom disengagement, their sense of disconnectedness, and feeling of isolation or alienation (Strambler & Weinstein, 2010). Strambler and Weinstein asserted the critical importance of teacher–student relationships, contributes to student's academic success when teacher express care and respect towards student.

Y. Li et al. (2017) investigated the psychological factors that contributed to minority middle school students' lower academic success. The researchers conducted a 2-year longitudinal study of 942 sixth graders from a high-poverty district. The researchers measured four psychological factors (academic commitment, emotional control, family involvement, and school climate) that contributed to poor academic performance among minority middle school students. The study highlighted the complex relationship between the social emotional factors and academic outcomes in early adolescence. Y. Li et al. suggested the key ingredients that help prevent middle school students' academic decline is support from school and family environments. Furthermore, Chacon and Pereira (2014) asserted that when teachers promote engagement in the classroom, students' learning process and development of activities come more easily. However, "if students show a lack of engagement, many negative situations may arise about the learning process like negativity towards the subject matter, low achievement performance" (p. 12).

Loera et al. (2013) suggested that when teachers function as a mentor to students, students start to develop a strong relationship that enhances their academic success, furthermore, teachers' academic support has been found to play a critical role in increasing students' school engagement. According to Angus and Hughes (2017), mentoring has been regarded as the best approach to nurturing students in an academic setting so students can remain connected to schools because "school performance is an increasingly important predictor of students' self-concepts as they get older" (p. 8). Angus and Hughes added that if students run into social problems, such as lack of parental guidance or lack of support from mentor, that circumstance will push students to participate in crime which will negatively affect their potential achievement.

Regarding school engagement, McManus (2020) predicted that students who do not feel accommodated in the school environment due to their behavior, cognitive issues, or emotional challenges, and may feel frustrated which will lead them to become disengaged from their academic performance. McManus and other researchers (Hughes et al., 2017) have cited that minority students who do not graduate from high school experience higher unemployment rates, are more likely to develop mental health issues, are at an increased risk of being incarcerated, have higher early pregnancy rates, and experienced reduced life expectancy. Improving engagement and preventing dropout rates among minority students is an area of interest for educators, policymakers, and educational researchers. Loera et al. (2015) asserted that supportive school climate utilized by teachers and school counselors provides a considerable amount of positive

motivation to students' academic achievement. Increased graduation rates can result in enhanced individual and societal outcomes.

Literature Search Strategy

The following strategy was followed to create this study's literature review: I accessed multiple sources of research data such as Walden University library's databases and search engines, Walden University library's literature search, Google Scholar, ERIC, EBSCOhost Online Research Databases. The literature search strategy process results in locating the appropriate articles and sources that relate to the study topic. In the search, these key words represented the main concepts of the research topics: *minority middle school students' disengagement, middle school teachers' perception in students' disengagement, school and community partnerships, and parents' involvement in their child's education process*. By searching these key words and terms, the above-mentioned database search engines returned literature relevant to the problem statement and RQs.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study was Ogbu's (2003) theory of academic disengagement. Ogbu's theory of academic disengagement is comprised of three guiding principles. The first principle explains that no racial group does better in school because that group is superior to another racial group. The second principle of Ogbu's theory of academic disengagement is that no cultural group better educates their children than another cultural group. The final principle of Ogbu's theory of academic disengagement is that no specific language is better suited for in-school learning. Ogbu's three principles reinforce that achievement differences among students of diverse cultures and races

cannot be attributed to inherited attributes and, instead, reinforces that these achievements are based upon other factors.

Ogbu's (2003) three principles reinforce that achievement differences among students of diverse cultures and races cannot be attributed to inherited attributes and, instead, reinforce that these achievements are based upon environmental factors. Ogbu argued that disengagement among ethnic minority students is due to marginalization and discrimination. Furthermore, Ogbu explained that disengagement was sometimes due to a lack of emphasis placed on education in the home environment. Various internal and external factors contribute to disengagement, thereby reinforcing the importance of this study. To further understand in-school and out-of-school factors that influence disengagement among minority middle school students, the perceptions of middle school teachers will be explored.

Anderson et al. (2019) asserts that students' academic motivation and engagement decline as they move through middle school and on to high school. Students often struggle with the transition from middle school to high school, furthermore, a potential high school disengagements can be identified as early as elementary school. Jones (2012) pointed out that students whose parents are from low socio-economic background do not usually have the educational resources that those students with parents and/or families of a higher socio-economic background to maintain academic achievement. Jones further explained establishing a strong educational foundation at an early stage of the students' schooling can have a significant impact on their academic achievement in later years.

This study addressed some of the key factors that leads to minority middle school students' drop out are classroom disengagement, their sense of disconnectedness, and feelings of isolation or alienation. Strambler and Weinstein (2010) asserted that these key factors that lead to minority students' drop out can be resolved by implanting a system of critical importance such as teacher–student relationships, the system will contribute to student's academic success when teacher express care and respect towards student. Montero-Sieburth and Turcatti (2022) asserted schools can further students' engagement by partnering with parents and training parents and teachers to view the school as a joint learning enterprise.

Conner (2016) asserted that the most important issues facing educators is lack of student engagement, furthermore, cost of withdrawal from the education system is extremely high both for the student and the society. Loera et al. (2013) addressed the factors connected to students' lack of educational success with future high paying career options, students are more likely to be disengaged and unmotivated in their education. Students who receive academic motivation from their teachers actively engage with academic activities and maintain good grades (Kotera et al., 2021). Kotera et al. (2021) further explained the relationship between motivation, engagement, self-criticism, and self-compassion. In their study, they explored how students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors are positively associated with engagement whereas amotivation factors are negatively associated with engagement. Higher self-criticism weakened the pathway to academic engagement, whereas higher self-compassion strengthened it, moreover,

enhancing self-compassion and reducing self-criticism can strengthen academic achievement.

Minority students who do not graduate from high school experience higher unemployment rates, are more likely to develop mental health issues, are at an increased risk of being incarcerated, have higher early pregnancy rates, and experienced reduced life expectancy (Hughes et al., 2017; McManus, 2020). Teachers' perceptions of their own inter-personal behavior, their feelings of self-efficacy and their understandings of the importance of didactic and pedagogical competence are related to perceived student engagement (Uden et al., 2013). Zee et al. (2021) asserted that teacher's quality relationships to their students may be one of the strongest predictors of students' academic motivation and engagement. Zee et al. further suggested that "teaching teachers' skills for fostering high-quality relationships with their students will likely deliver a valuable return on investment in terms of student success" (p. 1). Higher rates of academic engagement among students enhance graduation rates which can result in individual and societal positive outcomes. Okilwa (2016) asserted youngsters who feel accepted, included, and supported in their school are more likely to perform well academically.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Middle School Teachers' Strategies to Redirect Students to Prevent Disengagement

Achieving students' engagement strategy requires multiple sources and consideration. To contribute to disengagement prevention guidelines, Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) reviewed intervention techniques for preventing disengagement among

middle school students. Thus, asserting the benefits of identifying and tracking early warning signals associated with student disengagement. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela noted that incorporating a multi-modal educational approach could benefit a wide variety of learners and could result in improved student engagement. Alrashidi et al. (2016) suggested that involving students with engagement activities will avert students' boredom and enhance their motivation and their academic achievement level. Allensworth et al. (2014) further addressed the challenges and concerns educators face in what the best way to track and identify middle school students who are at high risk of disengaging. Allensworth et al. asserted a large population of students who struggle with the transition from the middle grades to high school and educators are concerned that "high school failures are partially a function of poor middle grade preparation, as a result, middle school teachers are trying to identify middle school students who are at high risk of failing classes as early as the sixth grade" (p.1).

Stressors That Lead to Academic Disengagement

There are stressors that lead to academic disengagement. For example, Klassen et al. (2021) addressed the connection between academic disengagement and mental health among children and youth. They further explained that mental health impacts one in five children and youth, only 25% of these young students receive the required mental health support. The report finds that students who are displaying disengagement in the school setting may be indicative of underlying mental health challenges and therefore, is a reflective of mental health service intensity need. The authors further identified that more

than 25% of clinically referred students were at heightened risk for school disengagement and required high-intensity services.

Jones (2012) suggested that poverty as a stressor can affect minority students' capability to maintain academic achievement, and "instigates stressors that can make families vulnerable to violence, suicide, and lack of resource" (p. 4). Berkowitz (2022) argued that lack of supportive and safe climate from schools and communities creates an increase level of stressor to students and their families. Further, students' academic problems during childhood and adolescence have been associated with significant negative outcomes such as early school refusal and disengagement. Ayub (2010) explored the relationship between students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and their academic performance. The participants were 200 college students (100 men and 100 women). Ayub assessed the relationship between students' academic motivations and their intrinsic and extrinsic behavior. The researcher concluded that providing motivation to students improves their academic performance. Klassen et al. (2021) asserted that students' academic problems and other behaviors increase the risk for later criminal activity, substance use, and school dropout.

Strategies for Fostering a Sense of Competence in Student Learners

When adults empower students' competence, students' learning process leads to a critical outcome that will foster their self-esteem. Fredricks et al. (2019) determined that support from adults, opportunities to make individual choices, and incentives from external factors will provide students with positive outcome and a sense of academic accomplishments. Examples of external factors from teachers could be giving students

tokens, extra credit points, or stickers and examples of external factors from family members could be, during movie day, the student can pick their choice of a movie or can choose to go out for a pizza. These support systems contribute to improving student engagement. Fredricks et al. asserted that dry curriculum, lacking peer contact, and inadequate adult support contributed to disengagement.

The relationship between the teacher and their student is critical to the academic success of the student. Teachers have the capability and knowledge to foster positive relationships with their students. Ross (2009) asserted that positive academic relationships and appropriate praise between the teacher and the student provides the student with a sense of fairness and competence that will contribute to students' positive academic engagement. According to Liang et al. (2019), when students feel respected by their teachers and peers they may be linked to levels of security and increased academic engagement. Adolescent students' perceptions of respect in the classroom are associated with positive social behavior, academic engagement, and motivation.

Academic intervention can curtail disengagement rates. Therefore, it is an essential goal for educators to implement strategies to further engage minority middle school students before irreversible impacts are realized. Borman et al. (2021) found that well timed affirmations may help prevent African American and Latino students experience negative paths on a variety of measures of academic performance and social and academic well-being in school. Although some research (e.g., Eckey-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; McManus, 2020) has been done at the high school level, little is known about academic disengagement of middle school students. Eckey-Lyster and Niileksela

(2016) and McManus (2020) found that by creating a component of academic strategy for early identification and intervention to enhance minority middle school students' academic success resulted in positive social change.

The Effectiveness of Engagement–Intervention

Low-performing middle school students from deprived areas were able to improve their lifelong outcome with academic intervention choices. Goux et al. (2017) conducted randomized controlled study focused on selected low-achieving middle school students who experienced academic disengagement. The study shows that low achievers can be helped to formulate educational objectives that fit better with their academic aptitudes, through a series of meetings facilitated by the school principals. The researchers concluded that the intervention study was able to reduce grade repetition and high-school dropout rates by 25% to 40%. Kennedy (2017) asserted that identifying and preventing students who are at high risk of disengaging needs to start as early as sixth grade; “waiting until high school to identify individual students at risk for dropping out may be too late to provide benefits” (p. 40).

Goux et al. (2017), Kennedy (2017), and McManus (2020) have created and analyzed the effectiveness of engagements interventions among high school students, however, the research does not address the needs of middle school students. Diehl (2019) asserted when disengagement among high school students is realized at the high school level, it is often too late for interventions to be effectively implemented that can curtail disengagement. Diehl further suggested that the identification and prevention of disengagement should take place before high school. Jasińska-Maciążek and

Tomaszewska-Pękała (2017) asserted the importance of identifying and recognizing the first signs of students' academic disengagement to provide these students with appropriate academic support system.

Intervention aimed at preventing students from leaving school early is less costly than providing reintegration back into the education system (Jasińska-Maciążek & Tomaszewska-Pękała, 2017). Understanding the perceptions of teachers' concerns about in-school and out-of-school factors of academic disengagement among these populations of students may help policy makers create interventions, thereby improving students' engagement. These research findings may be used as initial references for further studies to develop and evaluate policies and programs for addressing academic disengagement prevention among minority middle school students.

Teacher–Student Interaction for Positive Academic Outcomes

Teacher–student positive relationships are factors that contribute to a student's academic achievement. In their meta-analysis, Liang et al. (2019), found that effective teacher–student relationships promoted students' academic engagement and achievement. Students who receive support and acknowledgement from their teachers show improved classroom engagement. Fredricks et al. (2019) suggested that teachers' positive interaction with disengaged students helps to break the cycle of unsupportive teacher–student relationships. Fredricks et al further discussed the negative emotional exchange between teachers and students that can result in students becoming alienated from academic and social contexts, which will lead students to give up school. Negative feedback from teachers can contribute to students' disinterest in the class activities.

However, if there is positive interaction between teacher and student, academic disengagement decreases, and students perceive that the teacher cares (Strambler & Weinstein, 2010). Engels et al. (2021) emphasized the value of positive teacher–student interactions and relationships in boosting student engagement and achievement(p. 2).

In their study of teacher–student relationships, Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim (2020) collected data from 675 students between the ages of 15 and 17 and their homeroom teachers. Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim focused on teachers’ sense of meaning and students’ feelings regarding whether their teacher cares for them. They had two findings. First, the key contributing factor in students’ feelings that their teacher cares for them is an increase in students’ self-esteem, well-being, and school engagement. Second, the key contributing factor in teachers’ sense of meaning is that when teachers feel their work is of value and can have positive impact on their students, they manage to overcome daily obstacles such as burnout, stress, heavy workload, and express caring toward their students. Positive and supportive teacher-student relationship is at the core of teaching and learning process. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) noted that incorporating a multi-modal educational approach could benefit a wide variety of learners and could result in improved student engagement.

Summary and Conclusions

There is limited research about teachers’ perceptions of internal and external factors and strategies about academic disengagement among minority middle school students. To date, despite the issues associated with disengagement, there is little research conducted on teachers’ perception about minority middle school students’ academic

disengagement specifically focusing on interventions and strategies that can be used to improve students' engagement levels. Therefore, further research is needed in the field of education to help resolve minority middle school students' academic disengagement problem. McManus (2020) explored indicators to figure out disengagement among students. The researcher noted that more information is needed to understand what indicators impact students' learning and to further explore why certain indicators are present.

McManus (2020) further elaborated that educators need to focus on middle school students' academic engagement level. The research is clear that early identification and intervention are critical components to avoid student's disengagement. McManus also addressed factors such as poor school attendance, behavior, and low course grades among minority middle school students that lead to disengagement. This study revealed that more research is needed to address the gap and to understand the indicators that affect students' disengagement.

Parental aspirations were strongly associated with young people's motivation and academic engagement (Barger et al., 2019). Parental involvement in education is a multidimensional concept that encompasses a wide variety of parental practices and behaviors in terms of students' education and learning processes (Schmid & Garrels, 2021). Schrag et al. (2020) noted the disengagement results in lowered grade point averages, poor assignment completion rates, higher dropout rates, and more, thereby contributing to short- and long-term problems, which influence individuals, groups, and society. According to Eckey-Lyster and Niileksela (2016), disengagement impacts

students while in school and after the completion of their educational journey.

Chapter 3 includes a discussion of qualitative study and systematic steps to address the RQs concerning teachers' perceptions of and experiences with in-school and out-of-school factors that result in academic disengagement among minority middle school students. Followed with an outline of the research design and rationale with the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, the population group, and the sampling method to reach an unbiased and balanced set of data. Chapter 3 will include discussion of the method for participant recruitment, participation, interview guide, and data collection. Chapter 3 will also discuss issues of trustworthiness and ethical consideration about the findings of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to understand middle school educators' perceptions of internal and external factors that may cause disengagement within minority middle school students and to suggest strategies to reduce this disengagement. Although there has been significant research examining academic disengagement among high school students, there is a shortage of research on disengagement among minority middle school students, specifically focusing on interventions and strategies that can be used to improve students' engagement levels. I conducted this study to address the gap in literature.

McManus (2020) asserted that there is empirical evidence that identifies young students who are at risk of academic disengagement, however, there is a lack of research showing effective application of this knowledge in the middle school years. A review of literature revealed that researchers have created and analyzed the effectiveness of engagements interventions among high school students, yet this research does not address the needs of middle school students, they further explained the need for academic interventions that targets disengaged minority middle school students (Goux et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2017; McManus, 2020). Anderson et al. (2019) found that students' engagement declines as they progress through middle school and into high school. Similarly, Allensworth et al. (2014) asserted that "high school failures are partially a function of poor middle grade preparation" (p. 3); as a result, it is imperative to identify middle school students who are at high risk of failing classes as early as sixth grade.

When disengagement is realized at the high school level, it is often too late for interventions to be effectively implemented that can curtail disengagement among high school students, therefore, the identification and prevention of disengagement should take place before high school (Diehl, 2019). Strambler and Weinstein (2010) asserted that minority students face unique challenges that can affect their level of academic engagement. The authors suggested that teachers who work with minority middle school students may have insights and experiences about the challenges faced by this population. These educators might offer unique insights into strategies that can be used to curtail disengagement among this group (Strambler & Weinstein, 2010). Marken et al. (2020) addressed the issue that students are identified as high-risk for disengagement when they demonstrate poor attendance, inappropriate behaviors, and poor course performance. These early warning indicators give guidance to schools and school districts to establish and implement processes to help students with academic success.

In this chapter, I discuss research design, the role of the researcher, followed by its method. This chapter also addresses the process of recruitment and description of participants, along with procedures for data collection, followed with a detailed outline of procedures for data analysis. This section will also discuss the issues of transferability, reliability, and trustworthiness on the phenomena of the study. Furthermore, the ethical considerations precede the summary of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

To further understand in-school and out-of-school factors that influence disengagement among minority middle school students, the perceptions of middle school teachers was explored by the following RQs that underpinned the study:

RQ1: What are middle school educators' perceptions of internal factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?

RQ2: What are middle school educators' perceptions of external factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?

RQ3: What are middle school educators' perceptions on strategies to reduce minority students' disengagement?

My interest in this research was to find individual teachers' interpretation and meanings that they attributed to a phenomenon of in-school and out-of-school academic disengagement among minority middle school students. The primary goal of educational qualitative research is to improve our practice. The basic qualitative research design is particularly well suited to obtain an in-depth understanding of effective educational processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The unit analysis of the collected data will show the recurring patterns that characterize and support the phenomenon of middle school teacher's perceptions about minority middle school students' academic disengagement.

Qualitative research design investigates how individuals make sense of a phenomenon based on their own life and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Cleland (2017), qualitative research is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, or constructed. Cleland further explained

that qualitative research address the “how” and “why” RQs to understand the experiences, phenomena, and context of participants’ lived experiences of a situation or activity that is focused on this study, teachers’ perceptions of in-school and out-of-school factors that contributes to minority middle school students’ academic disengagement.

I conducted this basic qualitative research design study which was used to gather middle school teachers’ responses to interview questions about their perceptions of students’ disengagement. Basic qualitative research designs are common methods used in educational research. In basic qualitative research studies, data is collected through an interview process. Analysis of the collected data showed the recurring patterns that characterize and support them. Qualitative research design investigates how individuals make sense of a phenomenon based on their own life experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

I have no personal relationship with the participants. I functioned as the interviewer and data collector; I remained neutral and objective. I kept a professional relationship with participants. However, since the participants are not anonymous to me, our relationship become stronger during the interview process. As such, my role as the researcher introduced the likelihood of potential bias. Establishing a relationship and building rapport with participants along with my ideas and beliefs of the phenomenon under study may influenced me.

A researcher’s biases can be managed in the following manners: By answering one’s own interview questions to create self-awareness of one’s own biases, by remaining

aware of one's own biases, and by paying attention to personal feeling during the questioning; that is not taking the interview questions personal but just by responding to the questions without any biases. It is important for the interviewer to be understanding and patient during the interview process as well as to identify a prior assumption about the participants (Chenail, 2011). In qualitative research the role of the researcher is both an observer and a participant. As participants meet the researcher, they are made aware of the research study, and interact with the researcher through data collection procedures.

Methodology

A basic qualitative method was used to understand the phenomenon of teachers' perceptions about in-school and out-of-school factors that influence disengagement among minority middle school students. In basic qualitative research studies, data is collected through an interview process. Analysis of the collected data showed the recurring patterns that characterized and supported the phenomenon. The interview questions are open-ended so that participants can expand, disregard, or supply unique answers to the interview questions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that the primary goal of educational qualitative research is to improve practice and the basic qualitative research design is particularly well suited to obtain an in-depth understanding of effective educational processes. This study was conducted to address the current gap in literature about teachers' perceptions of in-school and out-of-school factors that contribute to minority middle school students' academic disengagement.

Participant Selection Logic

The selected participants in this study consisted of 10 middle school educators.

Purposive sampling was the sampling strategy relevant to this study used to enable the researcher to set inclusion criteria. A purposive sample is the one whose characteristics are defined for a purpose that is relevant to the study and through purposive sampling, the resulting sample was homogenous (Andrade, 2021). The purposive sampling strategy enabled me to set inclusion criteria. Regarding the boundary of the study, candidate inclusion criteria were that participating middle school teachers have a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience. Those who taught in elementary, high, vocational or trade schools were not eligible for the study.

Permission was not required by the school district to contact teachers and conduct the study; however, before recruiting prospective participants, I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). To recruit, researcher-developed flyers and letters of introduction was emailed to prospective candidates. The recruitment flyer contained detailed study guidelines, inclusion criteria, and my contact information. To protect their privacy, the prospective candidates who are interested were informed to contact me using their personal email addresses.

While researchers have debated the ideal sample size, Dworking (2012) indicated that involvement from 10 to 12 participants is beneficial in hopes of gaining data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no current information can be gleaned from the data gathered (Dworking, 2012). According to Sebele-Mpofu (2020), saturation is explained as the “point in data collection and analysis when new incoming data produces little or no new information to address the research question” (p. 6).

Instrumentation

The instrumentation consisted of semi structured, audio- and video-recorded interviews with the participants conducted on the Zoom platform. I developed a semi structured interview guide based on the literature review and RQs. Data collection and analysis aligned with the interview question being asked. The interview guide consisted of five questions about middle school teachers' perceptions about minority middle school students' academic disengagement. To assure interview question clarity, I asked follow-up questions. The interviews each lasted 30–40 min and produced seven to 18 pages of single spaced, typed transcriptions.

I conducted the interviews via the Zoom videoconferencing platform. Each interview was expected to last 30–40 min. If the participants had requested not to be audio and video recorded, I would have made verbatim notes and transcription directly from the interview. However, because all the participants agreed to have their interviews recorded, note-taking was not necessary. I used a transcription and a coding process using qualitative data analysis software by Quirkos. I chose to use Quirkos because the software is quick to learn and has flexible tools Quirkos Software (2017). The program allows the user to import text data from word documents or PDF documents. Bubbles in the software design represented the codes and themes. I could drag and drop them to annotate or explain the data.

Researcher-Developed Instruments

I developed a semi structured interview guide based on the literature review. The interview guide ensured that all participants were asked the same set of questions. The

interview questions focused on identifying participants' perceptions of in-school and out-of-school factors that resulted in academic disengagement among minority middle school students. Semi structured questions are proper when dealing with perceptions or sensitive topics. The interview questions are open-ended so that participants can expand, disregard, or supply unique answer(s) to the interview questions.

Walden University's IRB reviewed the interview guide to ensure that the questions would be easily understood by participants. Kallio et al. (2016) asserted that the procedure of having experts review the interview guide is to ensure that the interview questions remain free from bias, do not lead the participants to answer a certain way, and remain clearly worded. Rahman (2017) stated that qualitative research methods such as participant observation, unstructured interviews, direct observation, and description of records are the most used for collecting data. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative research design investigates how individuals make sense of a phenomenon based on their own life and experiences.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After obtaining Walden University IRB approval to conduct the research study, I emailed researcher-developed flyers and letters of introduction to prospective candidates. The recruitment flyer contained detailed study guidelines, inclusion criteria, and my contact information. The interested candidates were informed to contact me using their personal email addresses to insure their privacy. Once I received their email about their willingness to participate in the study, I emailed them an informed consent form to obtain their electronic signatures.

I allowed a 10-day period for interested candidates to decide whether they wish to participate in the study and clarify any further questions they have about the study. The first 10 respondents whose electronic consent forms were signed and received were selected as participants. To protect candidates' privacy, all the electronic consent forms were saved in encrypted format on my personal computer, which is password-protected and secured. The participants were middle school teachers at low-income, Title I schools from different parts of the states. Candidates were interviewed via Zoom in the privacy of their home.

The Zoom interview was video, and audio recorded and lasted approximately 30–40 min. All participants agreed to being recorded; if a participant did not consent to video-recorded interviews, I would have taken notes during the interview. Information was gathered using five interview questions to further understand teachers' perceptions about in-school and out-of-school factors that resulted in academic disengagement among minority middle school students. At the conclusion of the interview, the participants were given a debriefing procedure, where they were given the opportunity to request a copy of the transcript of the audio-recorded interviews for their review and feedback. I allowed the participants 7 days to email me their request. None of the participants requested a copy of the transcription; therefore, debriefing was not done.

Data Collection

The data source was semi structured interviews. The data related to themes and patterns of middle school teachers' perceptions about in-school and out-of-school factors that contribute to minority middle school students' academic disengagement. I scheduled

the interviews with participants through email correspondence. Each participant decided a suitable time for the interview session. The interview was conducted via the Zoom videoconferencing platform. I selected Zoom as a platform to conduct the interviews due to its feature allowing seamless muting and unmuting.

The call quality of Zoom was typically good, allowing me to audio and video record the sessions. All interviews were transcribed, and data was analyzed for themes. The transcription software that was used was Quirkos. I implemented Quirkos transcription, coding, and qualitative data analysis software. According to Quirkos Software (2017), the software program guaranteed 98% accuracy, specializes in research interviews, has a 24/7 support system, the data is stored securely, and it is compatible with Zoom.

Before the start of the interview, I ensured the reliability and sufficient ability of the audio and video recording device. A Zoom recording feature is the main choice to record each interview. Further, I was also prepared to keep a journal and pen ready to write down all notes, if any of the participants declined audio and video recording. However, since all the participants agreed to be interviewed in a Zoom video and audio recording, journalling the interview was not necessary.

I obtained a verbal confirmation to reiterate the participants' consent. If the participants did not give their consent to audio and video recorded interviews, notes would have been implemented instead of audio and video recording. Additionally, issues of confidentiality and protection of the participants' privacy were discussed to assure them of their protection and privacy. The interview guide was prepared by me and

approved by Walden University's IRB for clarity and bias. The interview guide consisted of five semi structured and open-ended questions that were informed by the RQs.

Data Analysis Plan

This study had three RQs, and all data collected from the participants by the researcher were focused on answering those questions. Deductive data analysis was the appropriate method to use based on previous research that identified in-school and out-of-school factors that caused academic disengagement among minority middle school students (Armat et al., 2018). The analysis was directed by RQs and the study's aim. After the interviews were concluded, I transcribed the audio-recorded data into Microsoft Word. The individual, semi structured interviews supplied the researcher with narrative information to conduct deductive data analysis. I used those data to determine the category and common themes (Xu & Zammit, 2020). The steps in data analysis were as follows:

1. I read and reread each participant's data for increased familiarity.
2. I reviewed the data section for specific words, phrases, or paragraphs that have a common theme for initial codes.
3. I sorted, collated, and combined codes to form a potential thematic map.
4. I grouped all the related codes together.
5. I identified patterns linked to the data.
6. The data were synthesized and analyzed to find consistent themes across the participants.

7. The consistent themes were then synthesized to form organized groups of the collected data which were the category that represented the phenomenon, related to the RQs.
8. In defining and naming the themes, I sought to determine the essence of each theme and organize the theme into a coherent and consistent account. I wanted to avoid overlapping themes.

I engaged in deductive data analysis. Discrepant cases were analyzed and noted and are described in the final report of the research.

Issues of Trustworthiness

By focusing on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, research can foster trustworthiness, according to Lemon and Hayes (2020).

Trustworthiness is the fundamental obligation that qualitative research study must be obliged with; further, it is the responsibility of the researcher to conduct the research interviews and data collection protocols in the most professional, ethical, and credible manner (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). I selected my participants in accordance with Walden University IRB guidelines for candidate selection protocol.

Credibility

As a researcher, I conducted the interview, used notes, and analyzed the coding process to address the RQs and stayed consistent to ensure the quality of the research study was not compromised in any way. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), in qualitative research the research study needs to be credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable. During the interview process, I made certain that any contradictory

conditions were controlled to prevent any influence that may be caused by my bias tendencies. Stahl and King (2020) asserted that member checking from various roles and participation levels can be implemented within the research practice. Further, Stahl and King addressed that form of credibility is where research participants are provided with a prepublication copy of research write-ups to ask for their feedback about the accuracy of data. A researcher can also undertake this action in a face-to-face interview. In this study, member checking and debriefing procedure was not conducted. At the conclusion of the interviews, participants were informed of the debriefing procedure and were given the opportunity to request a copy of the transcript of the audio-recorded interviews for their review and feedback. They were given 7 days to respond; however, none of the participants requested a copy of the transcription, and, therefore, debriefing was not done.

Transferability

Transferability is defined as researchers describing features of targeted context in detail and suggest additional contexts to which findings might be generalized and useful to other researchers who may be working in a similar study (Phillips et al., 2014). The recruitment, data collection, and data analysis procedures I followed might be applicable to similar research studies. However, due to the small sample size, the findings of this study may have little transferability.

Dependability

According to Phillips et al. (2014), dependability refers to whether the researcher is concerned with stability of the study over time in research and methods. The process of dependability includes audit trial and triangulation. These processes involve reviewing

project records to figure out the extent to which project procedures and changes are documented. The procedure ensured that any research bias and probable assumptions in my part were addressed.

Confirmability

The final phase of trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability is whether the researcher's practice is correct, there is the least researchers' contamination, and it involves objectivity (Stahl & King, 2020). Confirmability assessed by audits, which involve reviewing research records to figure out if findings can be traced to data and data to original sources (Phillips et al., 2014). During the study's data collection and analysis process, audit trial and triangulation procedures were not conducted as part of the data collection process method.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures encompasses research ethics approval processes such as developing research protocols, participant information sheets, informed consent forms, and other procedural documentation supporting research (Chiumento et al., 2020). I first obtained Walden University IRB approval (no. 05-30-23-0580211) before making any arrangements to contact the prospective candidates and to conduct the research. The regulations pertaining to the application for IRB approval were observed. I also noted all regulations and further restrictions for the research. Per Walden University IRB guidelines, I implemented ethical protocols to make sure that the participants are protected during recruitment and data collection. Participants received an informed consent form before any data collection procedure took place. In addition, participant's

data was protected using pseudo-names or identifiers to ensure candidates privacy and confidentiality.

Once IRB permission was granted to start candidate recruitment. I emailed researcher-developed recruitment flyers and letters of introduction to prospective candidates. The information on the recruitment flyer consisted of the type of study, the focus of the study, the purpose of the research study, the study site location with time frame, the inclusion criteria, and my personal contact information. Recruitment of prospective participants was done by emailing the flyer to several middle school teachers. Once the interested participants contacted me, I established their eligibility per the following inclusion criteria: (a) middle school teacher from a diverse background (e.g., age, gender, and/or ethnicity) and (b) a minimum of 1 year's teaching experience.

After eligibility was established, I emailed an electronic informed consent form to the prospective candidates. Each participant was requested to sign the electronic informed consent form by stating, "I consent;" and email it back to me. At this time, all participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, they could choose not to answer a question, and they were reminded of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time, without any repercussions. I explained to the participants the measures used to protect their privacy and data confidentiality.

Each participant was given a designated number code to ensure data confidentiality; these code names were stored in an encrypted format file which was password protected. All emailed consent forms were stored in a password protected computer file. Audio recordings made from the interviews are kept in the digital USB

recorder in an unmarked envelope and stored in a locked file cabinet. After 5 years, all gathered data and information be permanently destroyed to preserve participant privacy and data confidentiality.

Summary

I conducted a basic qualitative study to understand middle school educators' perceptions about internal and external factors that may cause disengagement among minority middle school students and to suggest teachers' educational strategies to help reduce academic disengagement. Further, the perceptions of middle school teachers were explored by the following RQs that underpinned the study:

RQ1: What are middle school educators' perceptions of internal factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?

RQ2: What are middle school educators' perceptions of external factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?

RQ3: What are middle school educators' perceptions on strategies to reduce minority students' disengagement?

After obtaining Walden University IRB approval to conduct the research study, I recruited participants by sending them flyers and introduction letters. Each participant provided the researcher with an electronically signed informed consent form with the word, "I consent" to take part as a volunteer in the study. Once the researcher received a consent from response from the participants agreeing to take part in the study, the data collection process started. Participants were 10 middle school teachers from low-income, Title I schools. Candidates were interviewed using a semi structured interview method.

Data was gathered using a total of five interview questions to further understand teachers' perceptions about in-school and out-of-school factors that result in academic disengagement among minority middle school students. The semi structured interviews took place in Zoom in the privacy of the candidate's home. In this study, member checking and debriefing procedure was not conducted. At the conclusion of the interviews, participants were informed of the debriefing procedure and given the opportunity to request a copy of the transcript of the audio-recorded interviews for their review and feedback. Participants were given 7 days to respond; however, none of the participants requested a copy of the transcription, therefore, debriefing and member checking was not conducted.

Data were analyzed for final interpretation through inductive analysis. After the conclusion of the study, all data will be destroyed and deleted after 5 years. IRB approval and permission from Walden University's research site were obtained before the study was conducted. Prior to participating in the study, each participant provided an electronic signed informed consent form with the word, "I consent." Chapter 4 provided more in-depth discussions on the data collection, analysis, and conclusion.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand middle school educators' perceptions about internal and external factors that may cause disengagement among minority middle school students, to suggest strategies to reduce this disengagement, and to address the gap in research. While disengagement research had been done at the high school level, little is known about academic disengagement of middle school students (Eckey-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; McManus, 2020). Researchers (Goux et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2017; McManus, 2020) pointed out that some research had been created and analyzed the effectiveness of engagements interventions among high school students, but the research does not address the needs of middle school. Diehl (2019) asserted academic disinterest during the early stages of the child's schooling is indicative of future disengagement which can lead to an increased chance of dropping out of high school.

After conducting interviews with 20 high school students who are attending a dropout recovery program, Abraham (2015) theorized that the onset of minority students' disengagement started in middle school. Abraham's research data synthesis shows that most of these high school students reported that they wished they had received an intervention program while they were in middle school. This qualitative study was aimed to help address the shortage of research conducted about disengagement among minority middle school students.

When disengagement is realized at the high school level, it is often too late for interventions to be effectively implemented for disengaged high school students that can

curtail disengagement (Diehl, 2019). Diehl (2019) asserted that the identification and prevention of students' disengagement should take place before students reach the high school level. Strambler and Weinstein (2010) reported that minority students face unique challenges that can affect their level of academic engagement. Teachers who work with minority middle school students may have insights and experiences about the challenges faced by this population. This research study is interested in addressing the individual teacher's interpretation and meanings that they attributed to a phenomenon of in-school and out-of-school academic disengagement among minority middle school students. I sought to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: What are middle school educators' perceptions of internal factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?

RQ2: What are middle school educators' perceptions of external factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?

RQ3: What are middle school educators' perceptions on strategies to reduce minority students' disengagement?

The chapter addresses the results derived from middle school teachers' perceptions of and experiences with internal and external factors that may cause disengagement within minority students. This chapter includes descriptions of the study setting, demographics, details of the data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. The overall findings consisted of categories and theoretical narrative. This chapter concludes with a summary and a transition to Chapter 5.

Setting

I conducted this basic qualitative study using the Zoom videoconferencing platform. After obtaining Walden University IRB approval to conduct the research study, I emailed researcher-developed and IRB-approved flyers and letters of introduction to 163 prospective middle school teacher candidates. The recruitment flyer contained detailed study guidelines, inclusion criteria, and my contact information. The interested candidates were informed to contact me using their personal school email addresses to insure their privacy. Once I received their email about their willingness to participate in the study, I emailed them an informed consent form to obtain their electronic signatures.

Out of the 163 middle school teacher candidates, 10 qualified and were accepted to participate in the study. The prospective candidates who responded to my flyer were screened for eligibility through the following inclusion criteria: (a) a middle school teacher from a diverse background (e.g., age, gender, and/or ethnicity) and (b) worked as a middle school teacher for a minimum of 1 year. The informed consent form and interview scheduling was processed through an email. The interviews started on July 10, 2023, and were completed on August 1, 2023.

Demographics

The study sample consisted of 10 middle school teachers whose teaching experiences ranged from 2 years to 40 years. The participants were from different ethnicities and genders. Table 1 show participant demographics:

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	No. of years taught
T1	Female	White	20
T2	Female	Hispanic	14
T3	Female	White	29
T4	Female	Black	40
T5	Female	White	30
T6	Female	Black	4
T7	Female	White	30
T8	Female	White	20
T9	Female	Hispanic	2
T10	Male	White	40

Data Collection

Electronic correspondence and semi structured interviews were conducted with 10 middle school teachers. The data collection process took place between July 10, 2023, to August 1, 2023. Prior to the interview, the signed informed consent form was collected online from each participant. Before I began the interview, I ensured that participants understood the study and further explained the informed consent form and the confidentiality protocol. I conducted individual, semi structured interviews with participants using the Zoom audio- and videoconferencing platform. Each participant picked a convenient schedule date and time from Zoom scheduling calendar website that I provided to them.

I followed the data collection protocol in posing each interview question to maintain standards and alignment. All 10 interviews were audio/video recorded with the permission of the participants. The interviews were conducted in participants' private secured home and in my private secured office, with the door locked. Before each interview began, I informed the participants of their right to discontinue the interview at

any time if they felt uncomfortable during the interview process. I followed Khalil and Cowie's (2020) recommendations about how a researcher can develop a good rapport with their participants prior to data collection. They advised

sending out several email correspondences to exchange information about the research study and to develop a connection and understand, before the interview begins, greet participants with respect, finally, need to understand that this form of mutual respect between researcher and participants would provide the researcher with the required information from the participant with confidence and trustworthiness. (p. 102)

While participants were answering the interview questions, I listened to their points of views on teachers' perceptions about their students' academic disengagement. During the interview, it was clear to me that all of the teachers were eager to answer the questions and shared with me their personal experiences as a classroom educator, about their challenges, and admiration they had with their students. All of the teachers showed their compassion and commitment toward their students' academic success. When the interviews had ended, I reflected on my understanding of the teacher's paradigm to gain insight into their perceptions about their students' academic journey.

The duration of each interview was 30–40 min. After the conclusion of the interview, I completed verbatim transcription of all interview recordings. A total of 10 Word files were made, one for each participant. All participants' electronic correspondence and interview transcripts were securely saved as Microsoft Word files on a password protected computer. I reviewed and rereviewed all transcription files and

imported them into Quirkos, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software program, for storage, organization, management, and data analysis protocol. After 5 years have passed, I will be responsible for depositing data, interview transcripts, all video/audio recording, and any private documents about the participants.

Data Analysis

I implemented deductive thematic data analysis. Deductive data analysis was the appropriate method to use based on previous research and the phenomenon of interest that identified in-school and out-of-school factors that caused academic disengagement among minority middle school students. The analysis was aligned with the RQs and the study's aim (see Armat et al., 2018). Thematic data analysis involved the application of codes, development of categories, and finally the production of themes. As recommended by Lester et al. (2020), I reflected on the data and my interpretations so I could denote potential biases that might influence the interpretation of the data.

Comparison of Incidents Applicable to Each Theme

During data analysis, I first broke down the data into smaller units and generated initial codes. The data were transcribed and analyzed using content analysis with the aid of Quirkos software. I began with Participant 1 whose Microsoft Word transcript I imported transcript to Quirkos and, then read the transcribed text searching for the concepts that align with the interview question. Once the understanding of the entire transcript was established, open coding was implemented where the transcripts were read line-by-line word by word to generate initial codes, searching, and reviewing themes, followed by defining, naming the themes, and producing the report (Xu et al., 2020).

Coding process required careful examination of the qualitative data, paying attention to the underlying code, concepts, and categories of concepts (Grace et al., 2020). Using the Quirkos open coding system, I assigned key words, phrases, and paragraphs into small units to represent codes. I identified the small units of codes that were relevant to the RQs of this study. I then color coded the codes that had similar meaning. The cluster of codes were then put into category and formed theoretical themes. I then delineated the connection between the collection of the codes into initial codes (see Table 2). The next step was to upload codes through Quirkos and analyze the data for categories and final themes (see Table 3). Group of codes were assigned for further identification and relationship between categories, sub-categories, and final themes that aligned with the RQs (see Table 4). Data analysis of the initial codes is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Initial Codes

Initial code	<i>n</i>
In-school factors caused by students	7 (PT1, PT2, PT3, PT5, PT7, PT8, and PT9)
In-school factors caused by teachers or school administrators	9 (PT1, PT2, PT3, PT4, PT5, PT6, PT7, PT8, and PT9)
In-school factors caused by peer to peer	4 (PT2, PT3, PT5, and PT6)
In-school factors caused by parents, culture, or home environment	4 (PT5, PT6, PT8, and PT10)
Out-of-school factors caused by students	7 (PT2, PT3, PT5, PT6, PT7, PT8, and PT9)
Out-of-School factors caused by parents, culture, or home environment	10 (PT1–PT10)
Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation caused by students	7 (PT2, PT3, PT4, PT5, PT6, PT7, and PT8)
Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation caused by teachers or school administrators	6 (PT1, PT5, PT7, PT8, PT9, and PT10)
Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation caused by peer to peer	2 (PT1 and PT2)

Integration of Categories and Final Themes

After developing category coding scheme by using Quirkos open coding system, I began integrating the core themes into the final theme and their properties using open coding which explained the relationships among the codes. According to Williams & Moser (2019) the efficacy of open coding is approaching the thematic fragments and coalescing concepts identified during data collection in an organized and systematic way. The sample quotes are organized by the participant's number. The numbers were assigned according to the order in which the participants interviewed, and the transcripts were analyzed. Thematic analysis of the collected data identified the recurring patterns that characterized the phenomenon and addressed the RQs. In this study the phenomenon of interest was middle school teachers' perceptions with in-school and out-of-school factors that influenced disengagement among minority middle school students. Using basic qualitative methodology, I identified and understood the phenomenon of teachers' perceptions with in-school and out-of-school factors that influence disengagement among minority middle school students. The categories and final themes that emerged from the relationships among the codes that were derived from the phenomenon are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Categories and Final Themes

Category	Finalized theme and initial codes
In-school factors	Theme 1 Students' classroom phone use and video gaming, poor teachers' engagement, teachers' bias, teachers' cultural differences from students, poor learning environment (large

Out-of-school factors	class and limited learning resource materials in the classroom) Theme 2 Parents work double shift, lack of learning resources at home to help with homework, lack of student's supervision at home (kids raising themselves and their siblings)
Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation	Theme 3 Students helping others, students being in charge, peer empowerment
Academic interventions and strategies	Theme 4 Students' tutoring, social emotional learning, mentoring, counselor support for behavioral intervention, and guidance toward students' self-respect
Community and school resources	Theme 5 School administrators provide to teachers, parents participation support in the classroom, and family program to avoid homelessness

Development of a Concluding Thematic Statement

The process of step-by-step data analysis was repeated for each of the participants. The categories synthesized and analyzed to develop the final themes that completed the theoretical narrative of middle school teachers' perceptions with internal and external factors that contributes to minority middle school students' academic disengagement. An overview of the final theme, descriptions, and RQs alignment is presented in Table 4.

Table 4*Alignment of the Categories, Subcategories, and Themes to the Research Questions*

Research question (RQ)	Category and subcategory	Description of final theme
RQ1: What are middle school educators' perceptions of internal factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?	<p>In-school factors/Internal factors</p> <p>Classroom cell phone and social media use, classroom distraction, vocabulary gaps, negative dynamic between teacher and minority students, lack of diverse and culturally responsive curriculum and lack of teacher's knowledge and understandings of their student's culture.</p> <p>Themes for In-school factor caused by Students: 7 out of 10 participants agreed. Teachers: 9 out of 10 participants agreed. Peers: 4 out of 10 participants agreed. Parents/Culture/Home environment: 4 out of 10 participants agreed.</p>	<p>Factors that contributed to academic disengagement: classroom cell phone and social media use, classroom distraction, negative dynamic between teacher and minority students which lead to poor student's academic engagement, poor learning environment, vocabulary gaps, student-to-student pressure (bullying/students trying to fit in), lack of teacher's knowledge and understandings of their student's culture, classroom out of control, students lack focus in class due to poor sleep and hunger, poor classroom attendance, teacher's style of teaching is just not feasible, school administrator is not involve in the classroom educational dynamic, lack of diverse and culturally responsive curriculum.</p>
RQ2: What are middle school educators' perceptions of external factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?	<p>Out-of-school factors/external factors</p> <p>Low-socioeconomic household, lack of parents' involvement in their kids' education, kids are at home unsupervised, limited access to available educational resources, and poor neighborhood.</p> <p>Themes for Out-Of-School factor caused by</p>	<p>Factors that contributed to academic disengagement: Students are from low-socioeconomic household and their home environment is not academically friendly to do homework, parents are not involved in their kids' education, student's home environment lacks educational resources such as computer, internet, a</p>

Research question (RQ)	Category and subcategory	Description of final theme
	Students: 7 out of 10 participants agreed. Parents/Culture/Home environment : 10 out of 10 participants agreed.	work desk, books, and lack of family support, single family home, parent work two jobs, therefore, kids are at home unsupervised and are raising themselves and caring for their siblings so, they have no time for homework, poor neighborhood, therefore, limited access to available educational resources.
RQ3: What are middle school educators' perceptions on strategies to reduce minority students' disengagement?	Academic intervention strategies Classroom support, focused learning, teachers provide social and emotional support, social worker's support programs, culturally responsive teaching, community, and parents' support.	Factors that contributed to academic engagement: Classroom support was implemented where teacher put students in a small group for focused learning, college students provide tutoring, field trip programs, vocabulary learning strategy, classroom homework during the first period, teachers provide social and emotional support to distressed students, school administrator provide teacher support system, school counselors, behavior intervention, & social worker programs, culturally responsive teaching, community, and parents' support.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The study was established through ensuring the trustworthiness of the research findings. Trustworthiness criteria in qualitative study content analysis uses credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). The participant selection process was conducted in accordance with Walden University IRB guidelines for candidate selection protocol.

Credibility

As a researcher, I conducted the interview, used notes, and analyzed the coding process to address the RQs and stayed consistent to ensure the quality of the research study was not compromised in any way. During the interview process, I made certain that any contradictory conditions were controlled to prevent any influence that may be caused by my bias tendencies. Stahl and King (2020) asserted that member checking from various roles and participation levels can be implemented within the research practice. Further, Stahl and King addressed that form of credibility is where research participants are provided with a prepublication copy of research write-ups to ask for their feedback about the accuracy of data. “Member checking can also occur in face-to-face interviews” (p. 27). In this study, member checking and debriefing procedure was not conducted. At the conclusion of the interviews, participants were informed of the debriefing procedure and were given the opportunity to request a copy of the transcript of the audio-recorded interviews for their review and feedback. They were given 7 days to respond; however, none of the participants requested a copy of the transcription. Therefore, debriefing was not done. During the data collection and analysis stage, I practiced reflexive where I

stopped to review and check the alignment of the process with the RQs for the relevancy of the findings while limiting my biases.

Transferability

Transferability defined as when researchers describe features of targeted context in detail and suggest additional contexts to which findings might be generalized and useful to other researchers who may be working in a similar study (Phillips et al., 2014). Participants recruitment, data collection, and data analysis procedures I followed might be an ideal method for other researchers to integrate into their research study because, this study findings may be applicable to other similar research studies' contexts, situations, times, and populations. However, due to the small sample size, there might be very little transferability on this study.

Dependability

According to Phillips et al. (2014), dependability refers to whether the researcher is concerned with stability of the study over time in research and methods. The process of dependability includes audit trial and triangulation. These processes involve reviewing project records to figure out the extent to which project procedures and changes are documented (Phillips et al., 2014). The procedure ensured that any research bias and probable assumptions in my part were addressed. However, during the data collection and analysis process, audit trial and triangulation procedures were not conducted as part of the data collection process method.

Confirmability

Confirmability is whether the researcher's practice is correct, there is the least researchers' contamination, and it involves objectivity (Stahl & King, 2020).

Confirmability assessed by audits, which involve reviewing research records to figure out if findings can be traced to data and data to original sources (Phillips et al., 2014). The study did not conduct member checking and debriefing procedures because none of the participants requested a copy of the interview transcription to be emailed to them for their review and feedback, therefore, member checking and debriefing was not done.

Results

The Results section contains the presentation of the categories that is supported by the participants' narrative. Each theme presented its description, narratives, and excerpts from the data. The theoretical narrative that emerged from data synthesis described the participants' stories. The participants were assigned numerical codes in place of their names (e.g., PT1, PT2, PT3, etc.) to protect their privacy and to ensure confidentiality.

I identified subcategories for in-school factors that contribute to students' academic disengagement, students' classroom distraction (phone use, video gaming, and bullying), students' lack of focus, a negative dynamic between teacher and minority students, poor students' learning environment, and lack of teacher knowledge and understanding of their student's culture. These subcategories provided an answer to RQ1, which was, What are middle school teachers' perceptions of internal factors that may cause academic disengagement among minority students? Subcategories related to out-of-school factors that contribute to students' academic disengagement: lack of parents

involved in their children's education, a home environment's lack of educational resources such as computer, internet, a work desk, and books, students are at home unsupervised and are raising themselves and caring for their siblings, parent works two jobs, and poor neighborhood leading students to have limited access to available educational resources. These subcategories provided an answer to RQ2, which was, What are middle school teachers' perceptions of external factors that may cause academic disengagement among minority students?

Categories pertained to academic intervention and strategies, and community and school resources: classroom support was implemented where teacher put students in a small group for focused learning, tutoring provided by college students, field trip programs, vocabulary learning strategy, teachers provided social and emotional support to distressed students, school administrator provided teacher support system, school counselors provided students with behavioral intervention, and school social worker provided supportive programs to the community and students' parents. These subcategories provided an answer to RQ3, which was, What are middle school teachers' perceptions of academic intervention strategies that may reduce academic disengagement among minority students? I grouped the subcategories into categories and, later, into overarching themes: in-school factors (Category 1), out-of-school factors (Category 2), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Category 3), academic intervention and strategies (Category 4), and community and school resources (Category 5).

Category 1: In-School Factors

Nine participants (PT1–9) stated that academic disengagement among minority middle school students in the classroom was contributed by teachers and school administrators. The participants shared their common concerns: classroom cell phone use; students grouping; poor teacher engagement; vocabulary gap; classroom out of control; lack of teachers having lesson plan. Participants 4 and 6 expressed the following concerns: teachers & cultural understanding; books and cultural representation; teacher's experience & teacher's bias; understand another culture; include everybody; exclusion of certain cultures; educator does not engage with minority students (educator not taking the time to engage with their minority students). Participant 4 explained the following:

Teachers aren't really willing to take that extra step to get training, to understand that there are a lot of different cultures. Teachers do not understand another culture. Books, a lot of times they really do not have good representation for diverse cultures.

Participant 6 explained the following issues that contributed to minority students' academic disengagement:

Lack of diverse and culturally responsive curriculum; teachers implicit bias and their low expectations and harsh disciplinary practices. A teacher's ethnic background is what they have been exposed to, and if they're aware of their biases. Minority teachers have a better understanding of what it's like to grow up in a minority household and educators not taking the time to engage with their minority students.

Seven participants (PT1, PT2, PT3, PT5, PT7, PT8, and PT9) stated that academic disengagement among minority middle school students in the classroom contributed by students themselves (cell phone use, social media, peer to peer negative interactions, sleeping in the classroom).

Category 2: Out-of-School Factors

All 10 participants stated that academic disengagement among minority middle school students contributed by parents/culture/home environment. Most participants expressed the following concerns: lack of parental participation in their child's education; cultural differences; issues with the home environment; and lack of educational resources in homes such as a quiet environment, work area, computer, and books. Participant 2 cited, "parents working, parents do have to work like two jobs, no parent/child interaction; not readily available to be fully engaged with their child. Single parent home, students care for siblings and don't have the time to do their homework. Poor living situation, students stated, gunshots last night, couldn't sleep and they come to school, they're tired."

Participant 6 addressed the following:

Socioeconomic challenges, family dynamics, neighborhood environments, and limited access to available resources. Parents having a lack of knowledge with the realm of education and public schools and policies. Parent involvement, depending on, I feel like parent involvement and the socioeconomic background of a student kind of go hand in hand and their lack of parents, potential lack of

knowledge. Raise themselves or their siblings over their own homework and parents do not speak English.

Category 3: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Seven participants (PT2, PT3, PT4, PT5, PT6, PT7, and PT8) stated that academic disengagement among minority middle school students was contributed by students themselves because sometimes the students were not interested in participating in the class activity, unless the teacher created a group participation such as a sense of community in the classroom. Participant 1 further stated, “I tell my students, ‘The first group that gets this done and has the correct answers gets to leave the room a minute early.’” Six participants (PT1, PT5, PT7, PT8, PT9, and PT10) stated that academic disengagement among minority middle school students was contributed by teachers and school administrators. Teachers agreed that providing an opportunity to students so students can feel that they are in charge and able to help somebody else is important. Participant 1 stated that, “it’s about building that feeling of community and giving students the sense of confidence so students can feel that they want to make a difference among their population of peer.” Participant 5 stated the following:

If we can fill the learning gaps and give them foundational skills, then that, you know, if we can give them that extrinsic motivation to, you know, to build those skills then hopefully it becomes their curiosity would kick in and then that would become their intrinsic you know like, “Oh, I want to know about this and I have the skills to do that now.” Relationships are a huge extrinsic, you know, if we can get staff members or mentoring. Pull kids from high school down to middle

school for mentoring. The other intrinsic/extrinsic motivation is goal setting, it becomes a good motivator and again that extrinsic but then, you know, because you're setting this goal but then hopefully it becomes something that becomes intrinsic and something that they can work towards and, you know, want to learn because they have a high interest in something not just to get food is such a huge, huge extrinsic in middle school.

Category 4: Academic Intervention and Strategies

This category refers to methods teachers and administrators implement that can assist minority middle school students to achieve academic success. All participants except Participant 2 stated that the teachers and administrators in their schools have implemented academic improvement strategies to help minority middle school students with their academic engagement. Participant 6 cited, "I implement curriculum to increase students' engagement by creating individualized support like identifying, analyzing, and addressing specific learning needs of students." Participant 7 said, "To make learning fun, you know, vocabulary things, I'll turn into cahoots, which is, you know, they get to like, it's like a competition thing." She also addressed the possibilities of referring students to behavior specialists who can guide them to resolve their academic issues. Participant 8 stated the following:

Focused on getting to know your kids, talking to them about what they need help on for review, she stated that every week I email what they're missing through infinite campus. I email it to the parents and to the students. My kids do better if I break up a test and test them for 15 min a day. Mentorship program at my current

class school where kids can come in for help. Skills, you have to give them the skills on the tricks on how to, and then test them on that one.

Category 5: Community and School Resources

The category addresses resources that are available to minority middle school students and their families that will assist in students' academic improvement. Participant 10 addressed the following:

Social worker on our campus. He does a tremendous job, in my opinion, talking to parents, getting parents in there, finding out what he can do to help the family. Things for families when they come in and they need something, including information, but also clothing and all just all sorts of things. So, I think he's a great resource as well. Then I would say the one last one, we also have on our campus, those two ladies, I do not know their title, but they're counselors and they deal with kids who are frequent flyers to the office..... And those resources are a great bridge between family who's not involved with the kids with their kids' education and the kids who basically don't understand or they're too busy taking care of their siblings at home or too many things happening at night.

Participant 7 cited

“Our school's been really good about providing community events and fun things for them to participate in outside of school--community park event, skate nights, after school clubs, online book clubs, and different fun things to try to help them remain engaged and feel like they're not just going to school, they're actually part of a community of learners.”

Theoretical Narrative

This basic qualitative study showed middle school educators' perceptions with internal and external factors that contributed to disengagement among minority middle school students and to suggest strategies to reduce this disengagement. Thematic analysis of the collected data identified recurring patterns that characterized the phenomenon of teachers' perceptions and addressed the RQs.

Summary

I broke the categories into five themes. Regarding Category 1: In-School Factors, nine participants agreed that poor teachers' engagement, teachers' bias, teachers' cultural differences from their students, and poor learning environment (large classes and poor classroom management) contributed to students' academic disengagement. Seven participants agreed that students' classroom disturbances (phone use, video gaming, and bullying) contributed to students' academic disengagement. Regarding Category 2: Out-of-School Factors, all 10 participants agreed that parents are working double shift, lack of parents' involvement in their children's education, lack of learning resources at home to help with students' homework, and lack of student's supervision at home (children raising themselves and their siblings) contributed to students' academic disengagement.

In regard to Category 3: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation, seven participants believed that students helping others & students being in charge in the classroom and getting peer empowerment and support from their teachers contributed to students' academic engagement. For Category 4: Academic Interventions and Strategies, nine participants agreed that teachers and school administrators contributed to students'

academic engagement by implementing intervention and strategies in the school system. Last, for Category 5: Community and School Resources, all 10 participants pointed out that teachers and school administrators provided school and community resource support systems to help students with academic engagement and to help students' families with home support (food, housing, clothing, etc.).

Overall, the majority of the participants reported that minority students who become disengaged in the classroom tend to have low academic performance. The participants responded to the interview questions and further elaborated about the importance of parents' involvement in their child's education. The participants further addressed that when parents get involved, it would free teachers to focus more on mentoring students toward academic achievement. Most teachers believed that minority students become disengaged because they do not understand the relevance of the subject matter that they are being thought of in the classroom. It is critical to identify minority middle school students' academic weaknesses in the early stages of the student's education levels so teachers can implement strategies to help reduce the disengagement and the achievement gap. The next chapter will include my interpretation of the findings and the theoretical framework. Chapter 5 will consist of the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, implications, and finally the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In conducting this basic qualitative study, I sought to understand middle school teachers' perceptions with internal and external factors that contributes to academic disengagement among minority middle school students. The study participants' responses about teachers' perception with internal and external factors that contributes to minority middle school students' academic disengagement can be used to inform future academic research on the topic. Some researchers (Goux et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2017; McManus, 2020) explained that disengagement among minority middle school students can result in increased dropout rates. Nieuwenhuis et al. (2021) asserted that students who attend poor neighborhood schools have the lowest educational attainment because the schools in low socioeconomic neighborhood lack educational resources to attract good teachers.

Although disengagement in academics can be a problem for students at both the primary and secondary levels, minority middle school students are at an especially considerable risk for academic disengagement (Allensworth et al., 2014; Anderson et al., 2019; Balfanz et al., 2007). Balfanz et al. (2007) explained that when minority students enter high-poverty middle school neighborhoods, they are more likely to experience chaotic, under resourced classrooms leading to academic disengagement, than when they enter the primary grades in these neighborhoods. Balfanz et al. asserted that minority middle school students in high-poverty neighborhoods continue to perform poorly compared to more advantaged U.S. neighborhoods or in other countries.

Berkowitz (2022) argued that lack of supportive and safe climate from schools and communities creates an increase level of stressor to students and their families. Further, students' academic problems during childhood and adolescence have been associated with significant negative outcomes such as early school refusal and disengagement. Therefore, establishing the paradigm that middle school educators examined and experienced about factors that contributed to minority middle school students' academic disengagements is incredibly significant in this study.

In this qualitative study, I aimed to understand educators' perceptions with in-school and out-of-school factors that result in academic disengagement among minority middle school students. I implemented basic qualitative theory to address the in-school and out-of-school factors that contributed to minority middle school students' academic disengagement. The relationship between the teacher and their student is critical to the academic success of the student. Teachers have the capability and knowledge to foster positive relationships with their students. According to Liang et al. (2019), when students feel respected by their teachers and peers they may be linked to levels of security and increased academic engagement. Furthermore, when adults empower students' competence, students' learning process leads to a critical outcome that will foster their self-esteem. Adolescent students' perceptions of respect in the classroom are associated with positive social behavior, academic engagement, and motivation. Borman et al. (2021) asserted that well timed affirmations may help prevent African American and Latinx students from experiencing negative paths on a variety of measures of academic performance and social and academic well-being in school.

Fredricks et al. (2019) determined that support from adults, opportunities to make individual choices, and incentives from external factors will provide students with positive outcome and a sense of academic accomplishments. Examples of external factors from teachers could be giving students tokens, extra credit points, or stickers and examples of external factors from family members could be, during movie day, the student can pick their choice of a movie or can choice to go out for a pizza. These support systems contribute to improving student engagement. Fredricks et al. asserted that dry curriculum, lacking peer contact, and inadequate adult support contributed to minority middle school students' academic disengagement. As such, the following RQs underpinned this study:

RQ1: What are middle school educators' perceptions of internal factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?

RQ2: What are middle school educators' perceptions of external factors that may cause disengagement among minority students?

RQ3: What are middle school educators' perceptions on strategies to reduce minority students' disengagement?

I collected data by conducting semi structured, individual interviews with 10 middle school teachers on Zoom. I analyzed the data inductively. The analysis yielded the following categories: (a) in-school factors (Category 1), (b) out-of-school factors (Category 2), (c) intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Category 3), (d) academic intervention and strategies (Category 4), and (d) community and school resources (Category 5).

Almost all of the participants perceived that the contributing factors to students' in-school academic disengagement were students' destructive classroom behaviors and teachers' poor classroom management. According to Participant 6, the factors that contribute to minority middle school students' academic disengagement are: Lack of diverse and culturally responsive curriculum, teachers' implicit bias, low expectations, and harsh disciplinary practices toward minority middle school students. All participants expressed the importance of parents' involvement in their children's education process to decrease the educational gap. Majority of the participants addressed the following factors that are important to improve minority students' academic achievements: Implementations of academic interventions and strategies in the school environment, including, educating teachers about diversity; and community and school resource availabilities.

In this chapter, I interpret the findings from Chapter 4 in relation to the literature I reviewed in Chapter 2. This chapter also includes discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. Future researchers may be able to use the limitations to further identify, understand, and study the research problem. I also discuss the study's implications for positive social change. In the last section of the chapter, I provide a conclusion to the study.

Interpretation of the Findings

The interpretation of the findings in Chapter 4 is based on the literature review of Chapter 2. I organized this section by themes to show the connection between literature and the research study for clear understanding of the study. The following are categories

found in Chapter 4: (a) in-school factors (Category 1), (b) out-of-school factors (Category 2), (c) intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Category 3), (d) academic intervention and strategies (Category 4), and (e) community and school resources (Category 5).

Category 1: In-School Factors

The in-school factors theme relates to the perceptions and experience of 10 educators about the causes of disengagement among minority middle school students. The participants shared their common experiences. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 9 expressed that classroom cell phone use destruction, poor learning environment, lack of teacher's connection to students' academic needs, and peer pressure such as bullying behaviors are the major contributing factor to minority middle school students' academic disengagement. However, positive teacher–student relationships are factors that contribute to constructive academic achievement. In their meta-analysis, Liang et al. (2019), found that effective teacher–student relationships promoted students' academic engagement and achievement. Students who receive support and acknowledgement from their teachers show improved classroom engagement. Fredricks et al. (2019) suggested that teachers' positive interaction with disengaged students helped break the cycle of unsupportive teacher–student relationships paradigm. Okilwa (2016) explained that youngsters who feel accepted, included, and supported in their school are more likely to perform well academically. Contrarily, when students experience bullying, and other negative peer interactions disengagement may occur.

Category 2: Out-of-School Factors

This theme involves factors in the home and community environment that contribute to minority middle school students' academic disengagement. All participants stated that lack of parents' involvement in their child's education, cultural and socioeconomic household challenges, and toxic home environment are the contributing factors to minority students' academic disengagement. Montero-Sieburth et al. (2022) asserted the importance of parents' involvement in their child's education, when school facilitate partnerships between parents and teachers, students' academic engagement advances. Participant 6 cited,

Parent involvement, depending on, I feel like parent involvement and the socioeconomic background of a student kind of go hand in hand and their lack of parents, potential lack of knowledge, parents don't speak English, so kids raise themselves or their siblings over their own homework.

These types of negative home environment that contributes to minority middle school students' disengagement are indicated in another research. For example, Jones (2012) suggested that poverty as a stressor can affect minority students' capability to maintain academic achievement, and "instigates stressors that can make families vulnerable to violence, suicide, and lack of resource" (p. 4). Berkowitz (2022) argued that lack of supportive and safe climate from schools and communities creates an increase level of stressor to students and their families.

Category 3: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

The theme intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are tangible and have a symbiotic relationship. When a teacher provides praise and positive motivation to a student who did well in their work (extrinsic), the student feels a sense of pride in their academic achievement (intrinsic). When adults empower student's competence, student's learning process leads to a critical outcome that will foster student's self-esteem. Participant 6 cites, "students finding joy and generally are interested in the subject matter that the teacher provided, the student wants to do a better job, want to make their parents proud, and want to make himself/herself proud."

Participant 10 stated that when students do well, specific and immediate positive feedback is necessary, like, I say, "Good job on doing all of your multiplication tables in, in 3 min or whatever." Borman et al. (2021) found that well-timed affirmations may prevent African American and Latino students from experience negative outcomes on a variety of measures of academic performance and social and academic well-being in school. Fredricks et al. (2019) determined that support from adults, opportunities to make individual choices, and incentives from external factors will provide students with positive outcome and a sense of academic accomplishments. According to Steinberg et al. (1992) when students understand and believe about the relation between education and life success, their academic performance and engagement improves.

Category 4: Academic Intervention and Strategies

Academic intervention and strategy's theme looks at the phenomena of effective academic guidance to achieve success among minority middle school students. Academic

intervention can curtail disengagement rates; therefore, it is an essential goal for educators to implement strategies to determine the critical skills and concepts minority middle school students are missing to further engage them before irreversible impacts are realized. Participant 4 cited, “making the curriculum more exciting so that the students are interested in, and they learn more, after school tutoring, homework while they're in that 1st hour, and provide tutoring and social/emotional learning.”

Participant 6 addressed the need to provide a sense of belonging and individualized support. Participant 6 cited the following “culturally responsive teaching by incorporating diverse perspectives and cultural elements into curriculum to increase learner, stuff like that.... Individualized support like identifying, analyzing, and addressing specific learning needs of students.” Jasińska-Maciążek & Tomaszewska-Pękała (2017) asserted the importance of identifying and recognizing the first signs of students’ academic disengagement in order to provide these students with appropriate academic support systems. Jasińska-Maciążek and Tomaszewska-Pękała further suggested that intervention aimed at preventing students from leaving school early is less costly than providing reintegration back into the education system. Understanding the perceptions of teachers’ concerns about in-school and out-of-school factors that contributes to academic disengagement among minority middle school students may help create intervention strategies, thereby improving student engagement.

Category 5: Community and School Resources

Community & School Resources theme refers to providing supportive services to students and their families so they can have successful life in their homes and school.

Participant 4 cited, “Avoid homeless children. Provide resources for parents. They have clothes. They know how to send them to food banks. One of my students needed help with housing... breakfast and lunch, free lunch at school-nutritional support.”

Participants 1 and 2 discussed providing parents with English Language Learner class and helping them with their general equivalency diploma. Communicate with parents and give them strategies. Counselors outside of the school to help family with resources.”

According to Angus and Hughes (2017), mentoring has been regarded as the best approach to nurturing students in an academic setting so students can remain connected to schools because “school performance is an increasingly important predictor of students’ self-concepts as they get older” (p. 8). Angus and Hughes added that if students run into social problems, such as lack of parental guidance or lack of support from mentor, that circumstance will push students to participate in crime which will negatively affect their potential achievement. It is important for teachers to encourage parents and families to be involved in their child’s learning. As parents become aware of the curriculum, homework or exams requirement, and understand the value of education, they can help monitor their child’s learning process (Montero-Sieburth & Turcatti, 2022).

Limitations of the Study

I aimed to understand the perceptions of middle school educators’ internal and external factors that may cause disengagement within minority middle school students and to suggest strategies to reduce this disengagement. The limitations in the study involved the shortcomings from various phenomena, small sample size, and limited methodologies. This study is limited due to the use of qualitative methodology. Because

sample size affects research results, it was harder to generalize the findings, therefore, the findings may not apply to individuals in other regions. I also had limited access to literature and secondary data, thus limiting access to previous research, which could have been used for comparison to the outcomes. The research sample entailed only middle school educators. I examined solely the perceptions of middle school educators about internal and external factors that caused disengagement among minority middle school students and to suggest strategies to reduce this disengagement.

There was limitation in member checking and debriefing of the study because none of the participants requested a copy of the interview transcription emailed to them for their review and feedback, therefore, debriefing was not done. During participant recruitment, I was limited to only one middle school male teacher, this will create limitation to only one male candidate about teachers' perceptions of internal and external factors that contributes to minority middle school students' academic disengagement. There is limitation in confirmability of the study, during data collection and analysis process, audit trial and triangulation procedures were not conducted as part of the data collection method.

Recommendations

Based on the research result and the limitations of the study, the researcher has a few recommendations. First, the data in this study suggested that the participants had addressed several factors that contributed to minority middle school students' academic disengagement, however, providing a support system to educators was not fully explored by the participants and the literature. Allensworth et al. (2014) addressed the challenges

and concerns educators face in what the best way to track and identify middle school students who are at considerable risk of disengaging.

Another recommendation derives from the participants citing that minority students who are in a low-socioeconomic household live in a home that is not academically friendly to do homework and their parents are not involved in their children's education. Jones (2012) suggested that poverty as a stressor can affect minority students' capability to maintain academic achievement, and it "instigates stressors that can make families vulnerable to violence, suicide, and lack of resource" (p. 4). Berkowitz (2022) argued that lack of supportive and safe climate from schools and communities creates an increase level of stressor to students and their families.

Based on the study's limitations, a similar study, with a larger sample size would further expand upon the research finding that is indicated in this study. Further, future researchers could study primarily the perceptions and experiences of minority educators about minority middle school students' academic disengagement. Furthermore, researchers could focus on middle school educators' levels of qualifications to understand minority middle school students' doctrine on academic disengagement.

Implications

The findings of this study led to few implications for social change. First, this study has implications for social change at the individual student's level. Education is related to the development of an individual and the community. According to Steinberg et al. (1992) when students understand and believe about the relation between education and life success, their academic performance and engagement improves. Second, this study

has implications for social change at the individual educator's level. Teacher–student interaction for positive academic outcome was addressed by Liang et al., 2019, when students receive support and acknowledgement from their teachers, they show self-empowerment and improved classroom engagement.

Third, this study has implications for social change at the school level. Education is the most vital system for economic development as well as social freedom. Vaughan (2018) asserted that social change in education is a critical foundation for the future generation, further, Vaughan addressed the philosophical views of John Dewey, stating that “if schools supported children and helped educate them to become active citizens and community members, they would create a better society” (p. 24). Education is the most vital system for economic development as well as social freedom.

Nelson Mandela spoke at the Education Africa, Presidential and Premier Education Awards, in Pretoria South Africa on November 22, 1997. Mandela, speaking on the power of education, said, “The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success.....we are steadily but surely introducing education that enables our children to exploit their similarities and common goals, while appreciating the strength in their diversity” (para. 3).

Education is powerful and is one of the most influential instruments for social change. I assert that the findings of this research study will have significant contribution to addressing the need for further study at the middle school level to enhance engagement among minority students.

Conclusion

In this basic qualitative study, I sought to understand the perceptions of middle school educators with internal and external factors that contributes to minority middle school students' academic disengagement. The study aimed to address the lack of understanding of educators about their students' academic disengagement. The basic qualitative study findings were derived from electronic correspondence and semi structured, individual interviews with 10 middle school educators. The data were analyzed inductively following the step-by-step process recommended by Lester et al. (2020). The data analysis generated the following themes: in-school factors, out-of-school factors, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, academic intervention and strategies, and community and school resources. These themes have potential theoretical implication about middle school educators' perceptions with internal and external factors that contribute to minority middle school students' academic disengagement.

Despite the increasing prevalence of academic disengagement among minority middle school students who live in underserved community, with an effective early warning system, educators have an opportunity to identify minority middle school students at risk for poor academic engagement. Balfanz et al. (2007) noticed that identification, prevention, and intervention strategies provided educational support to minority middle school students to guide them back on a path to graduation. Further, Diehl (2019) asserted that educators have a significant role to play in helping students who are at risk of failing to complete their academic requirements necessary for graduation.

Notwithstanding the issues associated with disengagement, there is a shortage of research conducted about disengagement among minority middle school students, specifically focusing on implementing interventions and strategies to improve students' engagement levels. Therefore, further research is needed in the field of education to help resolve minority middle school students' academic disengagement problem. Students who are academically disengaged lack the appropriate emotional, psychological, cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral states that are necessary for learning, critical thinking, and intellectual maturation to occur (Alrashidi et al., 2016). Middle schools that promote an inclusive, welcoming, positive, and interactive educational environment will attract parents who will want to send their child to such a school to help their child form a strong foundation in their academic advancement.

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Appendix A: Letter to Prospective Participants

Letter to Prospective Participant

Date:

Name of participant:

Dear Mr. / Ms.

I am in the Walden University Ph.D. program and looking for middle school educators with at least one year of teaching experience to interview for my doctoral research study (flyer attached). I worked as a guest teacher in many [redacted] schools, & I am familiar with your school. If you qualify, I would like to request a few minutes of your valuable time to answer five Zoom interview questions. Once you agree to participate in my study, I will email you the consent form. If you understand the study and wish to volunteer for a Zoom interview, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words “I consent.”

After emailing me, “I Consent,” please check out the following available Zoom interview schedule times at the link below, or if you need a different time, please let me know so we can arrange another time. I am excited to meet with you.

Please let me know by responding to this email.

Thank you,

Aster Kifle-Thompson

Doctoral Candidate, IRB approval #: 05-30-23-0580211

[email address redacted]

[telephone number redacted]

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Aster Kifle-Thompson, DC, MS, BA
Ph.D. Candidate
with Walden University
VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED
DOCTORAL RESEARCH STUDY
\$20 Gift Card Available for Participating

Type of Study: Qualitative

Focus: Teachers' perceptions about minority middle school students' academic disengagement

Purposes of the study: 1) To understand middle school educators' perceptions of minority middle school students' disengagement; 2) To suggest strategies how to reduce minority middle school students' disengagement; 3) To gather data that will be used to help fill in a gap in research knowledge.

Study site location: Online via Zoom

Study Process: Complete one Zoom interview with five questions

Time Commitment: 30-40 minutes

Inclusion Criteria: Middle school teachers from diverse backgrounds (different ages, gender, and ethnicity) with minimum of one-year teaching experience

Contact Information

Name: Aster Kifle-Thompson

Email: [redacted]

Phone: [redacted]

This study is part of the researcher's doctoral education program.

TEACHERS MATTER

Positive & Caring Relationships
Teachers exhibit to their students
is Critical to Students' Success!!

Appendix C: Concluding Statement

Greetings,

I appreciate your time and effort for participating in my qualitative research study which tries to answer the research questions about teacher's perceptions of and experience with minority middle school students' academic disengagement.

I welcome your input and expertise in answering the interview questions. Upon request, I can provide you with the results of the research. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [telephone number redacted] or email me at [email address redacted].

Thank you,

Aster Kifle-Thompson

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. What are some of the in-school factors that contribute to minority middle school students' academic disengagement?
2. What are some of the out-of- school factors that contribute to minority middle school students' academic disengagement?
3. What are students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that influence their academic disengagement?
4. What strategies in academic interventions are available to assist in minority middle school students' academic engagement?
5. What type of community and school resources are available to minority middle school students and their families to assist guide minority middle school students' academic engagement?