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Implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Elementary Reading Instruction

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MPH, Mercer University, 2017

BA, University of Georgia, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) has been shown to help educators address the unique educational needs of African American students. While research has supported the belief that CRP promotes a sense of belonging and positively influences academic achievement, there remains a lack of research regarding elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP specifically when teaching reading to African American students. Framed by Ladson-Billings's CRP framework, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. Using a basic qualitative design, data were collected through semistructured interviews with 12 elementary teachers who had at least 1 year of teaching experience, including teaching African American students. Thematic analysis using open coding determined that teachers (a) articulated specific barriers to implementation and noted approaches to overcoming those challenges, (b) recognized the importance of noncurricular aspects of creating successful environments for CRP, and (c) were clear on their role in providing appropriate curricular and instructional approaches that supported CRP. These findings may support positive social change by providing stakeholders with insight into teachers' experiences, which can inform efforts to promote equitable reading outcomes and foster culturally responsive learning environments for African American students. In turn, this approach may promote academic and social success for African American students and contribute to a more just society that values the identities and experiences of all learners.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to God for His guidance and blessings throughout this journey. To my family and friends, your unwavering support and love have been my foundation. A special thanks to Dr. Ruby Burgess, my chair, for keeping me grounded and encouraging me every step of the way. Your mentorship has been invaluable.

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I thank God for granting me the strength, perseverance, and clarity of purpose to complete this work. I want to express my deepest gratitude to my chair, Dr. Ruby Burgess, for her unwavering guidance and mentorship throughout the doctoral process. Her wisdom, patience, and encouragement have been invaluable in helping me navigate the challenges of this journey. I am also immensely grateful to Dr. Amy White for her insightful comments and expertise in methodologies, which have greatly enriched this dissertation.

I sincerely thank my family and friends for their constant love and support. Your belief in me has been a source of strength and motivation. I am especially thankful to my parents, Donna and Willie Little, whose sacrifices, prayers, and lifelong examples of hard work and faith laid the foundation for this achievement. This achievement would not have been possible without your encouragement and understanding. Thank you for standing by me every step of the way.

Table of Contents

List of Tables v

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study 1

Background 2

Problem Statement 4

Purpose of the Study 5

Research Question 5

Conceptual Framework for the Study 6

Nature of the Study 7

Definitions 7

Assumptions 8

Scope and Delimitations 9

Limitations 10

Significance 11

Summary 12

Chapter 2: Literature Review 13

Literature Search Strategy 13

Conceptual Framework 14

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts 20

CRP and Teacher Education 20

Teacher Self-Efficacy and CRP 24

Teacher Dispositions and Understandings of CRP 30

Creating Inclusive and Engaging Classrooms Through CRP 35
Community and Family Engagement 40
Summary and Conclusions 46
Chapter 3: Research Method 48
Research Design and Rationale 48
Role of the Researcher 50
Methodology 51
Participant Selection Logic 52
Instrumentation 54
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection 56
Data Analysis Plan 60
Issues of Trustworthiness 63
Credibility 63
Transferability 64
Dependability 65
Confirmability 65
Ethical Procedures 66
Summary 68
Chapter 4: Results 69
Setting 69
Demographics 70
Data Collection 71

Data Analysis 73
Preparation of the Data for Analysis 74
Coding Procedures 75
Codes to Categories 77
Development of Themes 78
Evidence of Trustworthiness 80
Credibility 80
Transferability 81
Dependability 81
Confirmability 82
Results 83
Theme 1 83
Theme 2 88
Theme 3 92
Summary 95
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations 97
Interpretation of the Findings 98
Teachers Articulated Specific Barriers to Implementation and Noted Approaches to Overcoming Those Challenges 99
Teachers Noted the Importance of Noncurricular Aspects of Creating Successful Environments for CRP 103
Teachers' Instructional Approaches Supporting CRP 107

Conceptual Framework 112
Limitations of the Study 115
Recommendations 116
Implications 117
Conclusion 119
References 120
Appendix A: Interview Protocol 140
Appendix B: Alignment of Interview Questions With Research Question 145
Appendix C: Coding Table 146

List of Tables

Table 1 *Participant Demographics* 70

Table 2 *Examples of Codes With Corresponding Participant Quotes* 77

Table 3 *Examples of Coding Categories and Corresponding Codes* 78

Table 4 *Theme Development* 79

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

African American students and other students of color have not consistently experienced equitable learning outcomes in the reading classroom (Terry, 2021). According to the most recent administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only about one in five African American fourth graders were reading at or above proficient levels, compared to about one in two White students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Research has consistently highlighted the disproportionately low reading achievement scores of African American students (Fitton et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2023; Scullin, 2020). Ladson-Billings (1995) introduced culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), a conceptual framework designed to support teacher effectiveness with African American students across diverse classroom settings. Ladson-Billings identified three core tenets of the CRP framework: academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness. However, current research on elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP in the classroom remains limited (Cantrell et al., 2023; Debnam et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ortlieb et al., 2023).

CRP is advantageous in diverse educational settings, as it promotes academic success for all students, fosters cultural competence, and addresses issues of social justice (Hernandez, 2022). However, a gap in research remained regarding elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students (Cantrell et al., 2023; Debnam et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ortlieb et al.,

2023). This study addressed that gap by exploring how elementary teachers perceive their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students.

The remainder of this chapter presents the introduction to the study. It begins with background information, followed by a description of the problem and the study's purpose. Next, the research questions, drawn from the literature reviewed in the background section, are followed by the conceptual framework and an explanation of the study's nature. Finally, the chapter concludes with key definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, the significance of the study, and a summary.

Background

CRP, as conceptualized by Ladson-Billings (1995), is an educational approach that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by integrating cultural references into the learning process. CRP is guided by three core principles: ensuring students' academic success, fostering cultural competence by helping students appreciate their own cultures while becoming proficient in others, and developing critical consciousness by encouraging students to question and critique societal injustices. Research has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of CRP on student outcomes across academic disciplines (Capper, 2022; Cherfas et al., 2021; Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021; Yu, 2022).

CRP significantly increases student engagement, particularly among students of color, by making learning more meaningful and connected to their cultural experiences (Capper, 2022). For instance, Ciampa and Reisboard (2021) found that culturally relevant materials enhanced students' comprehension by linking content to their background

knowledge. Yu (2022) demonstrated that integrating students' cultural contexts into math and science instruction through CRP significantly improved their academic performance and attitudes in a multicultural urban setting. Additionally, CRP-based interventions such as Fresh Prep have been linked to higher test scores and pass rates on state exams among high-risk high school students (Cherfas et al., 2021).

The use of CRP has also fostered a sense of belonging among students by creating inclusive classroom environments that support their overall academic and social development. Vaidya and Battey (2022) highlighted that CRP practices help build a sense of community and academic competence. Frederic (2022) emphasized the importance of incorporating African American history and experiences into curricula to enhance students' sense of identity and belonging. Several authors have also underscored the critical role of CRP in reading instruction, noting that it fosters inclusive, engaging, and equitable learning environments (Ha et al., 2021; Jensen, 2021; Perez et al., 2021).

Despite the benefits demonstrated, several systemic and instructional challenges continue to hinder the implementation of CRP. Standardized testing pressures, inconsistent leadership support, and varied understandings of CRP have contributed to barriers for teachers (Brown et al., 2023; Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021). Although CRP has been studied extensively across diverse instructional settings, limited research has examined elementary teachers' perceptions of CRP implementation, particularly in teaching reading to African American students. While researchers like Flores-Koulish and Shiller (2020) and Hernandez (2022) have documented diverse understandings of CRP among teachers, there has been limited research on how elementary teachers

perceive their CRP practices in reading instruction for African American students. Although Francois (2021) identified instructional strategies that support culturally relevant literacy practices, further research is needed to understand teachers' perceptions in this specific context.

This study addressed this gap by examining elementary teachers' perceptions of implementing CRP in reading instruction for African American students. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for gaining insight into how CRP can be effectively integrated into reading instruction for African American students. Such insights can guide efforts to enhance academic achievement and cultural competence among African American students.

Problem Statement

While research has supported the belief that CRP promotes a sense of belonging (Dee & Penner, 2021; Vaidya & Battey, 2022) and positively influences academic achievement (Husband & Kang, 2020; Walker & Hutchison, 2021), there remains lack of research regarding elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP specifically when teaching reading to African American students (Cantrell et al., 2023; Debnam et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ortlieb et al., 2023). Although preservice teachers may have acquired knowledge about CRP in their coursework (Andrews & Leonard, 2023) and in-service teachers may have gained an understanding of CRP through professional development (Lin et al., 2023), it has not been clear how or if they have applied these practices in the classroom (Lavín et al., 2021; Manuel et al., 2022; Zhu, 2023). This gap in research remains critical, given the persistent academic

achievement gaps between African American students and their White peers, which emphasizes the study's relevance and significance to the educational discipline (Henry et al., 2020; Olson et al., 2020; Preciado et al., 2023). I aimed to address this gap by exploring elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP in reading instruction for African American students. A qualitative approach was most suitable for gathering in-depth insights from teachers through individual interviews.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. Studies have explored the adoption of asset-based, culturally relevant, and responsive pedagogies in science education (Smith et al., 2022), computing (Leonard & Sentance, 2021), and music education (Vodicka, 2022). However, there has been a lack of research regarding elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP, specifically when teaching reading to African American students (Cantrell et al., 2023; Debnam et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ortlieb et al., 2023). The investigation of elementary teachers' perceptions through individual interviews provided insights into the CRP practices they had used when teaching reading to African American students.

Research Question

The research question (RQ) that guided the proposed basic qualitative research approach was as follows:

RQ: What are the experiences of elementary teachers implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework that grounded this study was Ladson-Billings's (1995) three tenets of CRP. Three foundational tenets define CRP: academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Academic achievement focuses on maintaining high expectations and providing support to ensure all students can learn effectively. Cultural competence involves integrating students' cultural values, knowledge, and traditions into teaching methods to validate their identities. Critical consciousness empowers students to critically analyze and challenge societal norms and structures that perpetuate inequality. By integrating these tenets, CRP emphasizes inclusive learning environments that respect and leverage cultural diversity to enhance educational outcomes.

CRP was an appropriate conceptual framework for this study because I explored the perceptions of participating elementary teachers regarding their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students from the perspective of the framework's three tenets. The three tenets guide educators in fostering an inclusive learning environment that values and leverages cultural diversity to enhance educational outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Utilizing these tenets, I investigated teachers' perceptions regarding their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. Interview questions for data collection incorporated elements of these tenets, and I drew upon them to explore participants' views on their application of CRP to African American students.

Nature of the Study

Through this study, I employed a basic qualitative research design. I used this design to examine how individuals interpret their experiences, construct their realities, and ascribe meaning to those experiences (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015). A basic qualitative approach was suitable for this study, as the primary objective was to investigate the experiences of elementary school teachers in implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students. Data collection procedures for this study included semistructured interviews with elementary teachers who (a) had at least 1 year of experience teaching reading and (b) had taught African American students at some point during their careers. The participants were selected based on purposeful sampling. The original data collection plan called for recruiting participants from a population of approximately 360 elementary school teachers working within one of the seven learning zones in a southeastern U.S. school district. Participant interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions underwent open, axial, and selective coding for data analysis.

Definitions

African American/ Black: For this study, the terms "African Americans" and "Blacks" refer to individuals living in the United States who are descendants of the African diaspora (Ridley-Merriweather et al., 2023).

Academic success: For this study, academic success is defined as meaningful learning students demonstrate as a result of pedagogical practices that cultivate their

intellectual lives, critically engage with the curriculum, and connect instruction to students' cultural contexts and lived experiences (Nolan & Xenofontos, 2023).

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP): CRP is a pedagogical framework that requires educators to develop students academically, nurture their cultural competence, and foster critical consciousness (Sellers & MacKenzie, 2023).

Critical consciousness: For this study, critical consciousness involves teachers first developing an awareness of local and broader sociopolitical issues affecting their students' lives, then guiding students to use academic skills to analyze, critique, and take action against inequities in their social context (Nolan & Xenofontos, 2023).

Cultural competence: For this study, cultural competence involves helping students honor their own cultural identities while gaining access to the dominant culture, equipping them to make informed life choices and engage in meaningful change, while teachers learn about students' backgrounds and connect classroom learning to their lived experiences (Nolan & Xenofontos, 2023).

Reading: In this study, reading extends beyond basic letter recognition and word decoding. It involves understanding written text, knowing different types of writing and their purposes, reading with ease, and having a desire to read (Hairston-Dotson & Incera, 2022).

Assumptions

One assumption of this study was that all participants would respond to the interview questions honestly and openly. I also assumed that participants would actively engage in the interview process, providing detailed and thoughtful responses instead of

superficial or brief answers. Furthermore, I assumed that participants were willing and able to reflect on their experiences, feelings, and perspectives, thereby contributing rich and meaningful data. Another assumption was that participants believed incorporating CRP was essential for fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment for African American students. Finally, I assumed that participants' beliefs about cultural relevance in teaching influenced their instructional practices and choices in the context of reading instruction.

Scope and Delimitations

Through the study, I examined elementary school teachers' perceptions of their CRP implementation when teaching reading to African American students. I chose this focus to address the literature gap regarding elementary teachers' perceptions of their application of CRP in reading instruction for African American students (Lavín et al., 2021; Manuel et al., 2022; Zhu, 2023). The data collection plan involved inviting elementary school teachers from one of the seven learning zones in a southeastern U.S. school district, where the selected zone included approximately 360 teachers. Eligible participants were defined as those who (a) had at least 1 year of experience teaching reading and (b) had taught African American students at some point during their careers.

Braun and Clarke (2021) suggested that determining sample size for data saturation should consider the RQ, data collection method, desired sample diversity, and study goals. They recommended selecting a sample size range to ensure sufficient data for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. In basic qualitative inquiry, researchers often favor purposeful sampling to acquire information-rich data that addresses the RQ

(Patton, 2015). I employed purposeful sampling as my strategy, intentionally selecting participants according to specific criteria derived from the core constructs of the RQ (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Elementary school teachers were selected as participants if they (a) had at least 1 year of experience teaching reading and (b) had taught African American students at some point during their careers.

Delimitations specify exclusions regarding participants, time, and/or location, defining the study's population (Burkholder et al., 2016). This study excluded principals and other school administrators, focusing solely on teachers because the research specifically required data from elementary educators directly engaged in classroom instruction. I also excluded teachers who taught students at levels above elementary and those who taught outside the specified learning zone for the study. Because small qualitative studies are generally not transferable, I provided a comprehensive description of the research context, including rich and detailed depictions of the study setting, participants, responses, and findings. By providing these descriptions, readers can evaluate the applicability of the results to their specific contexts.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was the potential bias of self-reporting. Sher and Oliver (2023) noted that participants might give socially desirable responses during interviews to present themselves more favorably and shape others' impressions. Participants may have overemphasized their commitment to culturally relevant pedagogical practices that align with educational ideals. Additionally, teachers may have reported positively on their implementation of CRP to maintain or enhance their

professional identity. To mitigate this limitation, I built a rapport with participants. Patton (2015) emphasized that building rapport at the beginning of a qualitative study creates a comfortable and trusting environment for participants.

A second limitation was researcher bias. As an African American with experience in CRP, I may have had biases due to my knowledge of effective but underused strategies for African American students. To mitigate this, I used self-reflective journaling. Zafeer et al. (2023) noted that reflective writing helps develop self-awareness and a sense of control. Self-reflective journaling prompted me to explore and analyze my beliefs, attitudes, and potential biases through self-reflection.

Significance

The findings from this study advance knowledge in the education field by providing insights into elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. Teachers, specialists, and administrators may gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their reading program, particularly in terms of their perceptions and implementation of CRP practices, when teaching reading to African American students. Given the ongoing need for more understanding of elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP during reading instruction for African American students (Lavín et al., 2021; Manuel et al., 2022; Zhu, 2023), further investigation remains necessary. The study may promote positive social change by highlighting teachers' experiences with CRP, fostering greater collaboration among teachers and administrators to create learning environments that affirm and support the cultural identities of African American students.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I introduced the topic, discussed the gap in knowledge about teacher perceptions of their implementation of CRP in elementary reading classrooms for African American students, and explained the need for my study. I provided the purpose of the study and the RQ I formulated to explore teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. I also described Ladson-Billings's (1995) CRP as the conceptual framework and identified the nature of the study as a basic qualitative design. Additionally, I defined key terms and discussed the study's assumptions, scope, and delimitations, as well as its limitations and potential significance. In Chapter 2, I identify the strategy I use to search the literature, describe Ladson-Billings's (1995) CRP as the conceptual framework, and provide an exhaustive review of recent research literature related to key concepts of CRP.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This basic qualitative study addressed the significant lack of research regarding elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP, specifically when teaching reading to African American students (Cantrell et al., 2023; Debnam et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ortlieb et al., 2023). This study aimed to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. There has been substantial evidence of the positive effects of CRP, such as increased student engagement for high school students (Capper, 2022), heightened student achievement for middle school students (Yu, 2022), and a greater sense of belonging for middle school students in math courses (Vaidya & Battey, 2022). However, a noticeable gap exists in the literature regarding elementary teachers' perspectives on implementing CRP, particularly within the specific context of instructing African American students in reading. In this chapter, I discuss the literature search strategy, describe the conceptual framework, and provide a comprehensive review of current literature on the key concepts of culturally relevant pedagogy. The chapter concludes with methodological considerations and a transition to Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched for literature across multiple databases, including the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), EBSCO, Gale Academic OneFile Select, Ebook Index, and Education Source. I used the following search terms to ensure a thorough search*: culturally relevant pedagogy, student engagement, African Americans, Black Americans, Black, literacy, reading, reading skills, literacy skills, elementary school,*

primary school, grade school, school environment, curriculum, student empowerment, faculty development, and *reading achievement*. The iterative search process involved multiple steps and database searches. Initially, I identified key terms such as *culturally relevant pedagogy, teacher implementation, reading instruction*, and *African American students.* These terms formed the basis for constructing search queries in educational databases such as ERIC, PsycINFO, and Education Full Text to ensure a comprehensive exploration of relevant scholarship.

Conceptual Framework

Ladson-Billings's (1995) CRP provided the conceptual framework for this study. CRP has focused on the collective empowerment of African American, Native American, and Latino students by making education more inclusive and responsive to diverse cultural backgrounds (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Johnson & Elliott, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings identified three components of CRP: students must experience academic success, develop and maintain cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness.

Research has defined academic success within CRP as students achieving academic excellence while maintaining their cultural identity and connecting learning to lived experiences, emphasizing cultural responsiveness and inclusivity (Capper, 2022; Hernandez, 2022; Johnson & Elliott, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) explained that academic success in CRP is not solely about mastering content but also about preserving and nurturing students' cultural identities. This approach aligned with Freire's (2000) critique of traditional education, where students are viewed as

passive recipients of knowledge in a banking model. Freire argued that this model dehumanizes students by treating them as passive recipients of information rather than active participants in their education. Similarly, Delpit (1992) critiqued the power dynamics in education, arguing that educators often expect students from marginalized communities to conform to dominant discourses without acknowledging their cultural backgrounds and experiences.

In contrast, CRP fosters active learning, where students engage with their cultural identities, ensuring that education empowers them rather than reduces them to mere receptacles of information (Delpit, 1992; Freire, 2000). By integrating cultural experiences into the learning process, CRP enables students to excel academically while fostering a strong sense of cultural pride. Mathis et al. (2023) highlighted this connection by demonstrating how culturally relevant pedagogy, through hands-on activities and discussions, helped students relate academic concepts to their everyday experiences, as illustrated by one teacher's use of everyday objects, such as soda bottles, to teach physics concepts. Similarly, Mark and Id-Deen (2022) emphasized how pre-service teachers successfully integrated CRP by framing instruction around real-life experiences, such as addressing environmental racism in science lessons, allowing students to connect academic content with the realities of their communities.

CRP echoes Hooks's (1994) vision of education as a liberatory practice. Hooks argued that education should be transformative, enabling students to challenge systems of oppression like racism, sexism, and classism. She promoted an engaged pedagogy where teachers and students co-create knowledge through active participation, moving beyond

passive reception (Hooks, 1994). Hooks criticized traditional teaching methods for their excessive focus on hierarchical dynamics in her work. She advocated for an inclusive, participatory model that recognized students' cultural identities and incorporated their personal experiences into the learning process (Hooks, 1994).

Similarly, Mathis et al. (2023) emphasized that teachers must actively engage with students' cultural backgrounds to ensure that lessons are meaningful and relevant to their lives. This engagement is central to fostering an inclusive and culturally responsive environment. Mark and Id-Deen (2022) further supported this emphasis on integrating cultural experiences into instruction by highlighting its importance through an example of a pre-service teacher who addressed systemic racism and White privilege in a predominantly White classroom, fostering both cultural awareness and critical thinking. In her seminal work, Gay (2002) emphasized the importance of educators developing a deep understanding of cultural diversity. She advocated for curricula that resonated with students' cultural experiences, making education more relevant and effective. This connection between curriculum and students' cultural backgrounds underscores the essence of CRP—creating meaningful, culturally reflective educational experiences that support academic and personal growth. Prayitno et al. (2024) further supported this by demonstrating how CRP incorporated culturally reflective materials, teaching strategies, and alternative assessments, such as performance-based tasks and culturally responsive evaluations, allowing students to maintain their cultural identity while excelling academically. Caingcoy (2023) emphasized that CRP promotes academic success by recognizing students' cultural backgrounds, adapting instructional strategies to reflect

their lived experiences, and fostering a sense of belonging and critical consciousness. This approach fosters an inclusive learning environment where students feel validated and empowered, enabling them to succeed while maintaining their cultural identities. Mathis et al. (2023) found that teachers who were aware of systemic inequities and adjusted their teaching strategies to serve diverse learners better were more effective in promoting academic achievement and cultivating cultural awareness in their classrooms. Similarly, Mark and Id-Deen found that preservice teachers who actively engaged with students' lived experiences were able to create culturally relevant lessons that resonated with students, further reinforcing the potential of CRP to bridge the gap between school and home.

Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasized that CRP empowered students to develop critical consciousness, using their education as a critical thinking and problem-solving tool. This approach enables students to recognize and address societal inequalities, thus extending the definition of academic success beyond traditional measures. Similarly, Freire (2000) argued that education should not be a process of depositing information but rather a dialogical process that fosters critical consciousness and transformation. He underscored that education should extend beyond knowledge acquisition to include active engagement with and transformation of the world around the students. Delpit (1992) also emphasized the importance of educators explicitly teaching students, particularly minority students, the codes of power necessary to succeed in the dominant culture. This instruction is crucial for helping students navigate and challenge the societal structures that may otherwise marginalize them. Mathis et al. (2023) demonstrated how, by

fostering critical consciousness, teachers empowered students to challenge systemic inequities, highlighting one teacher's efforts to engage students in discussions about social and political challenges they may face. Mark and Id-Deen (2022) similarly observed how preservice teachers incorporated critical consciousness by encouraging students to analyze social justice issues, such as systemic racism, through academic subjects, linking learning to broader societal change.

Hooks (1994) similarly highlighted the need for students to engage actively with societal structures, arguing that education should serve as a means for them to challenge and dismantle systems of oppression. Her concept of "engaged pedagogy" underscored the importance of critical dialogue and active learning, in which students were not merely passive recipients of information but were encouraged to apply their education to real-world issues and contribute to societal change. This idea aligns with CRP's goal of fostering socially aware and culturally responsive learners who can apply their education to make meaningful contributions to their communities. Mathis et al. (2023) similarly described how some teachers fostered critical consciousness by addressing equity and social justice issues, thereby preparing students to navigate and challenge societal inequalities. Mark and Id-Deen (2022) also noted that teachers who integrated critical consciousness into their lessons successfully empowered students to critically examine social systems and take action based on their learning.

Cultural competence in education is the ability of educators and institutions to effectively engage with and support individuals from diverse backgrounds by understanding, respecting, and responding to cultural differences (Eden et al., 2024). It

also involves teachers recognizing and addressing their own beliefs and those of others, as well as their biases and assumptions, while developing the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for successfully interacting with culturally diverse populations (Johnson & Elliott, 2020). CRP emphasizes the need for teachers to integrate students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process, ensuring that their experiences and perspectives are recognized and valued within the educational environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In fostering cultural competence, teachers may encourage self-reflection, integrate students' home cultures into the curriculum, and expose students to diverse perspectives through guest speakers (Kondo, 2022). They can also validate local knowledge through community partnerships and emphasize sustained critical inquiry to promote cultural understanding and student empowerment. Mathis et al. (2023) found that teachers who understood and engaged with their students' cultural backgrounds could create learning environments where students felt more connected and engaged in the content, reinforcing the importance of cultural competence in fostering academic and personal growth. Likewise, Mark and Id-Deen (2022) underscored the importance of cultural competence by demonstrating how pre-service teachers created culturally responsive lessons that reflected their students' backgrounds and promoted a more inclusive learning experience.

CRP served as the framework that guided the study, as it explored elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. The study explored how teachers supported academic success by incorporating students' cultural identities into the curriculum, promoted cultural competence by acknowledging and addressing their own biases, and fostered critical

consciousness by empowering students to question and challenge social injustices. Through these investigations, the study provided valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges teachers faced in adapting their instructional methods to align with CRP principles.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

I identified five patterns in the research literature: CRP and teacher education programs, teacher self-efficacy related to CRP, teacher dispositions and understandings of CRP, strategies for inclusive and engaging learning environments, and community and family engagement. To determine what is currently known and not known about culturally relevant pedagogy, I examined relevant studies and compared their findings. I also addressed methodological issues in the existing literature to better understand gaps and strengths in prior research.

CRP and Teacher Education

The research literature on CRP has focused on preparing teachers for diverse classrooms. Several studies examined the role of teacher education programs in helping educators develop knowledge about prejudice and antiracism. These studies also examined how teachers developed the ability to hold high expectations for all students and adopted culturally relevant teaching practices.

Research studies have underscored the importance of equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills to address prejudice and racism as part of their professional preparation. Andrews and Leonard (2023) conducted a phenomenological study to explore the individual perspectives of middle-grade teacher candidates as they begin

developing critical consciousness within an equity-oriented teacher education program. These candidates documented everyday injustices using Justice Journals, fostering critical reflection and awareness of social inequalities. Similarly, Gabriel et al. (2023), who analyzed teacher candidates' responses to voice clips and poetic counter-stories, found that these multimodal approaches significantly enhanced empathy and deepened educators' understanding of the racialized experiences of Latinx students. Both studies emphasized the need for educators to be prepared to effectively address equity and inclusion issues in educational settings. Studies like those by Andrews and Leonard and Gabriel et al. emphasized the importance of fostering critical consciousness and empathy among teacher candidates, highlighting the need to address social inequalities and promote racial understanding. However, while these studies effectively promoted awareness, they lacked practical strategies for implementing CRP, specifically in reading instruction, focusing more on raising consciousness than providing instructional techniques.

Other studies have examined the effectiveness of teacher education programs in preparing candidates to hold high expectations for their students. Aronson (2020) explored a teacher's early career transition from a multicultural, urban-focused teacher education program, highlighting how the program's emphasis on critical pedagogy and race theory prepared her to navigate and respond to the complexities of urban school environments. The study revealed the teacher's implementation of CRP, emphasizing a caring community and high expectations for students. It highlighted the teacher's flexibility in accommodating individual needs and her awareness of deficit-based

thinking, guiding pedagogical decisions to support all students and foster a collaborative class culture focused on rigor and independence. After administering pre- and post-surveys to preservice teachers entering and exiting a certification program, Kwok et al. (2023) found that participants' attitudes had shifted towards recognizing and building on student strengths rather than focusing solely on weaknesses. The findings highlighted the importance of differentiation, support, and inclusive strategies, indicating that preservice teachers believed all students could academically succeed when given appropriate support and opportunities. Aronson's and Kwok et al.'s research underscored the importance of fostering high expectations and recognizing students' strengths, emphasizing the implementation of CRP and flexibility in meeting individual needs. However, despite promoting these high expectations, the studies did not address the specific challenges of teaching reading to African American students or provide tailored literacy instruction strategies.

Recent research on teacher preparation and CRP examined how teacher preparation programs assisted educators in embracing culturally relevant teaching practices. Idrus et al. (2023) examined the preparation of preservice teachers for implementing culturally relevant teaching (CRT) strategies. They found that assuming the role of facilitator and fostering a student-centered environment promoted engagement and deepened understanding of the lesson. The teachers enhanced comprehension by guiding discussions and encouraging student-generated questions while incorporating cultural context into learning activities, allowing students to connect personally with the material. Adams and Kaczmarczyk (2023) examined teacher preparation programs

supporting elementary preservice teachers. They found that assigning preservice teachers to select culturally authentic children's texts and designing interactive read-aloud sessions engaged students effectively in conversations about social justice topics, helping them integrate culturally responsive teaching practices with reading methods. Other practices promoted in teacher preparation programs to promote CRP included family and community engagement (Eliyahu-Levi & Ganz-Meishar, 2023; Paulick et al., 2024), personal and cultural reflection to improve teaching practice (Sexton, 2024), and viewing individual cultures and experiences as assets (Diaz et al., 2023). In summary, these studies offered practical examples of integrating CRP into classroom practices, such as fostering a student-centered environment and using culturally authentic texts (Adams & Kaczmarczyk, 2023; Idrus et al., 2023). However, while these studies provided concrete strategies, they did not fully address the unique challenges of teaching reading to African American students or the complexities of literacy instruction.

CRP in teacher education programs has shown promising initial results in increasing preservice teachers' (PSTs) awareness and ability to implement equity-focused practices (Koubek & Wasta, 2023; Livers & Willey, 2023; Martell, 2023). However, uncertainties remain regarding the long-term impact of these pedagogical approaches (Livers & Willey, 2023). The research indicated that while PSTs often left their programs with a strong foundation in CRP, transitioning into professional teaching environments posed challenges that could lead to reversing traditional norms (Livers & Willey, 2023). For instance, Livers and Willey (2023) noted that despite being trained in equity-focused, culturally relevant pedagogy, PSTs often reverted to traditional "skill and drill" methods.

This approach emphasized rote memorization and repetitive exercises over deeper conceptual understanding, mainly when teaching students of color.

Focusing on compliance behaviors rather than meaningful engagement with the content influences this reversion (Livers & Willey, 2023). Moreover, studies have underscored the importance of continuous professional development and the need for longitudinal studies to assess how well PSTs maintain and evolve their CRP practices over time (Koubek & Wasta, 2023; Martell, 2023). The variability in PSTs' ability to sustain culturally responsive teaching in diverse and sometimes unsupportive school contexts highlights the need for more robust support systems and research to ensure these practices have a lasting impact (Koubek & Wasta, 2023; Livers & Willey, 2023; Martell, 2023).

Teacher Self-Efficacy and CRP

Kotluk and Kocakaya (2020) described self-efficacy as the belief in individuals' capacity to accomplish tasks, emphasizing that it is a perception of competence rather than actual competence. CRP and teacher self-efficacy are essential to transforming educational outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Research has demonstrated that teachers with higher self-efficacy are more likely to implement CRP strategies effectively. These strategies included engaging families, differentiating instruction, and fostering an inclusive classroom environment (Carbonneau et al., 2023; Ialuna et al., 2024). As teacher preparation programs integrate CRP into their curricula and provide hands-on experiences, educators gain the confidence and skills necessary to

meet the diverse needs of their students, ultimately contributing to more equitable learning experiences.

Self-efficacy plays a critical role in adopting CRP practices, as it directly influences teachers' confidence and willingness to engage with CLD students. Carbonneau et al. (2023) conducted a survey-based study with preservice and in-service teachers. They discovered that higher self-efficacy, measured by a specialized self-efficacy scale, was strongly linked to a greater likelihood of implementing CRP strategies, including family engagement, differentiated instruction, and advocacy for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Comstock et al. (2023) further reinforced this connection by analyzing survey data from secondary teachers in seven urban districts. They found that engaging in equity-centered professional development helped teachers feel more confident in applying culturally responsive practices, ultimately improving their ability to implement CRP in the classroom (Comstock et al., 2023).

Eliyahu-Levi and Ganz-Meishar (2023) examined 12 preservice teachers in Israel to explore their development of CRP through authentic, intercultural experiences. The findings showed that experiences—such as visiting diverse neighborhoods, meeting with multicultural community leaders, and reflecting on classroom practices—helped preservice teachers build cultural awareness, empathy, and pedagogical strategies to incorporate students' home cultures into their teaching. The authors emphasized the importance of reflective practice in developing self-efficacy among preservice teachers (Eliyahu-Levi & Ganz-Meishar, 2023). Their study showed that through authentic experiences and reflection, preservice teachers built the confidence to integrate students'

cultural backgrounds into their teaching (Eliyahu-Levi & Ganz-Meishar, 2023). This reflective process strengthened their self-efficacy and aligned their theoretical knowledge with practical application, making them more adept at employing CRP.

Teacher preparation programs have been crucial in fostering CRP and teacher self-efficacy. Young and Young (2023) analyzed culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy (CRTSE) among 1,026 preservice teachers, finding they were moderately confident (70-83%) in implementing culturally responsive practices, with CRTSE varying by specialization and representation of teachers of color. The authors highlighted that providing preservice teachers with authentic opportunities to practice culturally relevant teaching in real-world settings significantly enhanced their self-efficacy, as hands-on experiences enabled them to apply the skills they had learned with confidence. Additionally, diverse educational environments promoted culturally relevant teaching by exposing preservice teachers to various cultural perspectives. The presence of teachers of color in these programs also strengthened self-efficacy, suggesting that diversity in teacher representation fostered a more consistent and practical application of CRP.

Integrating comprehensive training in CRP within teacher education programs is another critical strategy for fostering pedagogy and self-efficacy. Gulya and Fehérvári (2024) conducted a systematic review of recent research on teacher education programs, highlighting the importance of integrating cultural competence and critical reflection in preparing preservice teachers for culturally relevant teaching. Their analysis revealed that hands-on experiences in multicultural settings, combined with structured critical reflection, enabled teachers to recognize their personal biases and develop the confidence

necessary to implement culturally responsive practices. They further argued that embedding CRP throughout the entire teacher education curriculum is essential for developing comprehensive knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective engagement with diverse student populations.

Practical, hands-on experiences and individualized support activities are crucial for developing teachers' self-efficacy, particularly in implementing CRP. Schwarzenthal et al. (2023) analyzed survey responses from educators who participated in teaching abroad and cultural immersion programs. Their findings showed that these mastery experiences significantly boosted teachers' self-efficacy and practical skills for effectively managing diverse classrooms using culturally responsive practices.

Mok et al. (2023) explained that mentors and coaches implemented individual support activities, such as feedback, modeling, and guided reflection, to improve teacher self-efficacy. Feedback included detailed input on lesson plans and observed teaching practices, modeling provided vicarious learning experiences by demonstrating effective teaching techniques, and guided reflection facilitated teachers' critical thinking about their instructional decisions. Collectively, the support activities helped teachers refine their skills and boost their confidence in applying culturally responsive teaching strategies. Increased confidence enabled educators to implement CRP more effectively in diverse classroom settings.

Teachers implementing CRP have faced barriers related to low self-efficacy, particularly when attempting to integrate students' diverse cultural backgrounds into their instructional practices. Many educators reported lacking confidence in applying CRP

strategies effectively due to inadequate training (Comstock et al., 2023), limited resources (Li et al., 2022), and insufficient institutional support (Eliyahu-Levi & Ganz-Meishar, 2023). For example, some teachers expressed discomfort when addressing sensitive cultural topics and remained hesitant to fully engage with CRP due to fear of making mistakes or causing offense (Idrus & Sohid, 2023; Prayitno et al., 2024). The absence of continuous professional development contributed to educators' hesitation, leaving them inadequately equipped to manage the demands of culturally diverse learning environments and limiting their ability to foster equity and inclusion through culturally responsive practices (Narayanan et al., 2021).

Through semistructured interviews, Idrus and Sohid (2023) found that teachers frequently defaulted to standardized, traditional teaching methods that were ineffective in engaging culturally diverse students. The study attributed this tendency to low self-efficacy among educators, which limited their confidence and ability to implement culturally responsive practices tailored to meet the diverse needs of their students. Narayanan et al. (2021) demonstrated that low self-efficacy among teachers often resulted in lowered expectations for student capabilities, leading to a preference for safer, traditional teaching methods that were less likely to address students' diverse cultural needs. Through in-depth interviews, the researchers revealed that teachers who doubted their abilities tended to avoid culturally responsive practices, which ultimately limited student engagement and perpetuated existing educational inequities, as their lowered expectations constrained the potential benefits of CRP. Building on these findings, Gordon et al. (2023) conducted a systematic literature review of empirical studies and

identified institutional resistance, inadequate professional learning, and insufficient support as additional barriers that hindered the adoption of culturally responsive practices. The review revealed that the lack of high-quality training and insufficient time for implementation left teachers ill-prepared to confidently adopt equity-focused methods, further compounding the effects of low self-efficacy and limiting the effectiveness of reforms aimed at meeting the needs of diverse student populations.

Research consistently highlighted the importance of teacher self-efficacy in implementing CRP, emphasizing its critical role in transforming educational outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Carbonneau et al., 2023; Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2020). Higher self-efficacy was strongly associated with the effective use of CRP strategies; however, barriers such as insufficient training, lack of resources, and institutional resistance hindered teachers' confidence and capability in this area (Comstock et al., 2023; Gordon et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022). Authentic, hands-on experiences and individualized support were crucial for developing the necessary skills and confidence among educators. Studies such as those by Mok et al. (2023) and Schwarzenthal et al. (2023) demonstrated the positive impact of teaching abroad programs, guided reflection, and mentoring. Ultimately, addressing training gaps and institutional barriers, while enhancing teacher preparation programs with comprehensive CRP training, was vital to fostering learning environments that are both inclusive and equitable, and that effectively support the diverse needs of all students (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2024; Idrus & Sohid, 2023).

Teacher Dispositions and Understandings of CRP

Teacher disposition refers to the professional attitudes, values, and beliefs that educators exhibit through their verbal and nonverbal behaviors in interactions with students, families, and colleagues. These dispositions support student learning and emphasize fairness, including the belief that all students can succeed (West et al., 2020). Bullough (2023) demonstrated, through conceptual analysis, that teacher dispositions—particularly hospitality and attuned listening—significantly influence educators' openness to diverse cultural perspectives and their willingness to engage with students from varied backgrounds. He argued that these dispositions shaped teachers' attitudes toward creating inclusive learning environments, guided their beliefs about instructional practices, and supported equitable, student-centered teaching. Similarly, Kwok et al. (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study and found that preservice teachers' beliefs about race, culture, and diversity played a crucial role in their ability to implement CRP in literacy instruction. The study showed that those who initially held deficit views about diversity struggled to integrate CRP effectively, whereas those with culturally competent perspectives successfully applied CRP principles. These findings demonstrated the significant influence of teacher dispositions on the adoption of equitable teaching practices.

Similarly, Cavazos et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative case study using interviews and reflective journals to examine the participation of STEM faculty members in a Faculty Learning Community focused on CRP. The study found that engaging in reflective practices helped faculty develop more inclusive teaching philosophies, recognizing the cultural wealth of Latinx students, and enhance their ability to effectively

implement CRP principles. These findings confirmed that teachers' beliefs about race, culture, and diversity are crucial in shaping their understanding and effectiveness in creating equitable learning environments. Sellers and MacKenzie (2023) conducted a qualitative study using focus groups and reflective exercises with faculty at a diverse urban secondary school to examine teachers' cultural beliefs and their impact on the implementation of CRP. The authors noted that many White teachers had a limited understanding of what constitutes culture. They struggled to incorporate cultural knowledge into their teaching, often relying on superficial approaches such as avoiding culturally specific content to maintain a "universal" appeal (Sellers & MacKenzie, 2023). In contrast, faculty of color demonstrated a deeper critical consciousness, frequently taking on additional cultural labor by integrating students' cultural experiences into their curriculum and addressing socio-political issues directly (Sellers & MacKenzie, 2023). The disparity between White teachers and faculty of color in their understanding and integration of students' cultural experiences highlighted how differences in cultural competence influenced the consistency and effectiveness of CRP practices, emphasizing the significant impact of teachers' beliefs on their approach to equitable teaching (Sellers & MacKenzie, 2023).

Lastly, Turner et al. (2023) conducted semistructured interviews and focus groups with teacher educators in an English education program to investigate how whiteness shaped the integration of CRP. The researchers reported that many White teachers had trouble recognizing their own cultural biases and often reverted to white-centric instructional practices, which limited the inclusion of diverse perspectives. According to

the participants, curriculum decisions—such as the emphasis on traditional literary texts—constrained the effective implementation of CRP. Turner et al. (2023) concluded that these patterns revealed systemic issues within educational institutions, calling for critical reflection and restructuring to promote inclusive teaching practices.

Teachers' dispositions towards social justice and equity are crucial in their commitment to implementing CRP in the classroom (Zhu, 2023). Gandolfi and Mills (2023) examined the lives of educators advocating for social justice. The researchers reported that participants' encounters with injustice influenced their efforts to challenge traditional schooling practices and promote equitable learning environments. These teachers integrated anti-racist strategies into their instruction, aligning their practices with CRP to meet the diverse needs of students. Maddamsetti (2024) employed semistructured interviews, reflective journals, and field observations in a multiple-case study to investigate how preservice teachers of color developed equity- and justice-oriented professional identities during their urban fieldwork. Findings indicated that engagement in community inquiry, collaborative learning, and critical reflection enabled participants to reject deficit perspectives and adopt culturally responsive practices. Zhu (2023) illustrated the role of teacher commitment to social justice through the case of an African American female educator who drew on community cultural wealth, funds of knowledge, and identity to empower culturally and linguistically diverse students using CRP and authentic caring. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that teacher dispositions toward social justice and equity are foundational for implementing CRP and fostering inclusive educational experiences.

Malone et al. (2023) and Nunes et al. (2023) investigated the impact of teacher dispositions on student achievement, specifically examining their expectations and level of involvement. Malone et al. conducted semistructured interviews and applied critical race theory (CRT) to analyze how low teacher expectations perpetuated racial hierarchies within a suburban school district. Their analysis revealed that many educators relied on white-centric, traditional practices that marginalized diverse student perspectives, highlighting the importance of critical reflection and structural reform to support equitable and inclusive instruction. Similarly, Nunes et al. conducted a survey-based study of high school students in Portugal and found that perceptions of supportive and engaged teacher behaviors significantly improved students' math performance. These findings demonstrate the substantial influence of teacher dispositions—particularly expectations and involvement—on student achievement, reinforcing the need for educators to foster positive, equity-centered attitudes that promote academic success.

Abdallah and Alkaabi (2023) and Eden et al. (2024) emphasized the critical role of teachers in incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into educational practices to promote equity and inclusion. Abdallah and Alkaabi conducted a descriptive and correlational survey with 339 teachers in Abu Dhabi schools to examine the impact of teacher-led cultural and heritage awareness programs. Their findings indicated that participation in these programs strengthened students' sense of identity and engagement, effectively supporting holistic development and aligning instruction with local cultural values. Similarly, Eden et al. reviewed cultural competence strategies in education, emphasizing the value of culturally responsive teaching in creating inclusive classrooms

that honor diverse identities. The authors concluded that including culturally relevant content and engaging in ongoing professional development enhanced students' sense of belonging and promoted equity, demonstrating the importance of cultural competence in fostering supportive and inclusive educational experiences. These findings support the idea that teacher dispositions—such as cultural competence and commitment to equity—are essential for successfully integrating students' cultural backgrounds into curriculum and instruction. Together, the studies highlight the importance of cultivating dispositions that foster student engagement and academic achievement through culturally responsive teaching (Abdallah & Alkaabi, 2023; Eden et al., 2024).

Teachers' dispositions and understanding of critical thinking have significantly influenced their ability to foster critical thinking skills in students. Jamil et al. (2024) conducted a quantitative, descriptive survey with 100 English teachers to investigate the development of critical thinking in secondary classrooms. Their findings indicated that although many teachers employed questioning techniques and acknowledged the value of critical thinking, a gap persisted between instructional practices and students' demonstrated abilities, underscoring the need for more targeted professional development. Similarly, Li et al. (2022) used a mixed-methods design, combining surveys and interviews, to assess teachers' understanding and classroom application of critical thinking. The authors reported that while participants valued the development of analytical skills, constraints such as limited time and resources hindered the consistent implementation of critical thinking strategies. Hipolito-Delgado et al. (2021) also applied a mixed-methods approach, incorporating surveys and focus groups with high school

students to explore the relationship between teacher reflection and sociopolitical learning. Results suggested that teachers who engaged in reflective practices more effectively supported students in developing critical consciousness and understanding systemic inequities.

Recent studies have emphasized that teacher dispositions, particularly their beliefs and understanding of critical thinking, are crucial for integrating critical thinking skills into classroom practices, especially when addressing complex social issues. Although research has examined the impact of teacher dispositions on implementing CRP, less is known about how educators' beliefs and attitudes can be developed and sustained through professional development and teacher preparation programs (Bullough, 2023; Kwok et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2023). Researchers have continued to debate how to transform educators' deeply ingrained beliefs and attitudes toward race, culture, and equity, especially when those perspectives are resistant to change (Gandolfi & Mills, 2023; Sellers & MacKenzie, 2023).

Creating Inclusive and Engaging Classrooms Through CRP

CRP fosters environments in which all students feel valued and engaged by incorporating their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences into instruction (Wilcoxen et al., 2020). Owens and Wells (2021) conducted a qualitative descriptive study using semi-structured interviews and lesson plan analysis to examine how elementary teachers implement culturally relevant instructional practices for English language learners (ELLs). Teachers who integrated students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum fostered welcoming and inclusive environments that improved student engagement and

academic performance. The use of culturally relevant materials and the affirmation of students' diverse identities helped teachers bridge cultural gaps and promote both academic growth and personal development (Owens & Wells, 2021). DeMatthews et al. (2020) employed qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, with school principals in Latinx immigrant communities to examine inclusive leadership practices. The researchers found that integrating students' cultural identities into the curriculum enhanced student engagement and fostered a sense of belonging, underscoring the importance of culturally relevant materials in creating inclusive learning environments.

Differentiated instruction strategies support CRP by addressing students' diverse learning needs within culturally inclusive classrooms. Pasira (2022) conducted a descriptive study using formative assessments, surveys, and classroom observations to evaluate the effectiveness of differentiated instructional strategies, including flexible grouping, tiered assignments, and environmental modifications, in diverse classrooms. The researcher found that these approaches personalized instruction by meeting students' cultural and linguistic needs and aligned with CRP principles. Instruction tailored to students' cultural backgrounds led to more equitable learning opportunities, improved engagement, and a greater sense of belonging, highlighting the value of differentiated strategies in effective teaching. Hersi and Bal (2021) conducted a survey-based study to examine the gap between Maryland teachers' intended and actual use of differentiated instruction in diverse classrooms. The results indicated that although teachers aimed to implement more student-centered and constructivist approaches, barriers such as limited professional development and insufficient planning time limited their effectiveness.

These findings underscore the importance of targeted training to help educators better meet the needs of culturally diverse learners.

Building strong teacher-student relationships has also been crucial in creating an inclusive learning environment. Li et al. (2022) emphasized that positive teacher–student connections contribute to improved instructional outcomes and foster supportive classroom climates. Teachers who cultivated trusting relationships with students demonstrated greater motivation and effectiveness in applying cognitively engaging strategies, including those that promoted critical thinking (Li et al., 2022). A relationship-centered approach reflects the principles of CRP by fostering equity, inclusion, and meaningful learning experiences for all students.

Poling et al. (2022) conducted a comprehensive narrative review of school-based interventions designed to strengthen teacher–student relationships. The authors highlighted strategies such as increasing relational closeness, reducing conflict, and promoting social–emotional learning. The review emphasized that these interventions helped foster inclusive classroom environments by enhancing students' sense of safety and belonging, which aligns with the principles of CRP. Prioritizing positive interactions and relationship-centered classroom management enabled teachers to create nurturing spaces that affirmed students' cultural identities and supported their social, emotional, and academic development (Poling et al., 2022).

Inclusive assessment practices are also a critical component of CRP. Tai et al. (2024) conducted a critical literature review on inclusive assessment practices, emphasizing the need to design assessments that accommodate students' diverse needs,

particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. The authors found that traditional assessment methods often overlooked the strengths of students with disabilities, international students, and linguistically diverse learners, highlighting the importance of frameworks such as universal design for learning. Universal design for learning provided equitable opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and aligned with CRP by recognizing and addressing diverse student identities, thereby supporting both academic success and personal growth (Tai et al., 2024).

Similarly, Nieminen (2024) conducted a conceptual analysis to develop the assessment for inclusion (AfI) framework. The framework emphasized the need for flexible and equitable assessment practices that address the diverse needs of all students, including those with disabilities and from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Nieminen argued that traditional assessments often failed to recognize the strengths of students with disabilities and linguistically diverse learners. By advocating for inclusive design principles, the AfI framework validated students' diverse identities and experiences, promoted agency and participation, and aligned with the goals of CRP (Nieminen, 2024).

Integrating multicultural literature into reading instruction supports the development of students' cultural awareness and empathy by exposing them to diverse perspectives and experiences. Texts such as poems, novels, and plays help students understand and appreciate different cultures and social norms, thereby promoting respect and tolerance in the classroom (Herminingsih & Isro'iyah, 2023). However, the mere inclusion of diverse texts does not suffice in achieving meaningful cultural representation. Enriquez (2021) emphasized the need to move beyond "foggy mirrors,"

which reflect only vague outlines of students' identities, and to avoid "heavy doors" that obstruct access to deeper cultural understanding. Enriquez further argued that educators must select texts that authentically represent students' complex identities, enabling them to see both themselves and others more clearly. When multicultural literature is incorporated consistently across the curriculum, teachers can foster meaningful connections between students' lived experiences and academic content, thereby broadening access to culturally relevant learning (Enriquez, 2021).

Tanase (2022) conducted a qualitative study to examine how urban secondary school teachers in mathematics and science integrated culturally relevant materials into their curriculum. The findings showed that teachers effectively connected students' cultural backgrounds with academic content by drawing on community assets and student interests. This approach fostered academic achievement and promoted critical awareness of societal issues. Similarly, Kelly et al. (2021) conducted an integrative qualitative review of early literacy practices, finding that selecting culturally specific texts that reflect students' heritage and languages enhances engagement and fosters a sense of belonging.

Lucy et al. (2020) used natural language processing to analyze U.S. history textbooks and found that the materials often underrepresented historically oppressed groups, such as Latinx individuals, while overemphasizing White male figures. This imbalance limited students' exposure to diverse perspectives and reinforced dominant narratives. Educators should select diverse curricular materials that reflect the contributions and experiences of all cultural groups to foster an inclusive and equitable

educational environment (Lucy et al., 2020). Integrating inclusive curricular materials supports literacy development, validates students' identities, and connects their cultural experiences to academic content (Kelly et al., 2021; Lucy et al., 2020). Meaningfully incorporating diverse books into daily instruction can clear the "foggy mirrors" of limited representation, offering students clearer reflections of their own identities and deeper insights into the experiences of others. This effort supports greater social understanding and justice (Enriquez, 2021).

Community and Family Engagement

McWayne et al. (2022) positioned parents as leaders and co-creators in the educational process by introducing a parent-led, staff-supported model of family engagement. The model emphasized collaborative decision-making, cultural exchange, and mutual capacity building between families and school staff. These practices helped create a welcoming school environment that recognized and integrated families' diverse cultural assets into school activities and governance. This approach fostered a sense of belonging and partnership by shifting away from traditional, compliance-driven models of parental involvement and toward a more inclusive, culturally responsive framework (McWayne et al., 2022).

Expanding on the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy, Johnson et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of community engagement in fostering cultural competence among educators through collaborative teacher study groups. The teacher study groups participated in community resource mapping, designed culturally relevant curricula, and formed partnerships with local cultural organizations. These collaborative

initiatives provided a platform for teachers to explore cultural diversity and integrate it into their instructional practices, thereby enhancing their understanding and ability to respond to the diverse needs of their student populations. The professional development model promoted critical discussions on race, culture, and identity, fostering greater cultural awareness and responsiveness in educational settings (Johnson et al., 2021).

Further emphasizing the need for culturally responsive engagement, Collins et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative study that highlighted the importance of reframing family-school partnerships through a social justice lens to address the systemic inequities faced by Black families. The authors emphasized the importance of engaging families in participatory discussions about racial and social justice issues, centering on the voices of marginalized communities to dismantle traditional power imbalances (Collins et al., 2024). This approach aimed to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment by acknowledging the historical and ongoing challenges faced by Black families, aligning with the goals of CRP to foster respect and affirm students' cultural identities (Collins et al., 2024).

Effective family and community engagement in education requires transitioning from traditional, compliance-driven parental involvement to collaborative partnerships that empower all stakeholders. Albrecht (2021) described the traditional approach as one in which parents assumed passive roles with minimal influence, such as attending school meetings and volunteering at events. In contrast, she advocated for a new model that values parents as equal partners, integrating their cultural assets and promoting practices like bilingual literacy programs and collaborative decision-making.

Similarly, based on a large-scale quantitative study, Smith et al. (2021) identified family and community engagement as a dynamic partnership that supports students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development. Gibbs et al. (2021) conducted qualitative interviews with parents and educators, critiqued traditional, narrow measures of parental involvement, and emphasized the importance of culturally relevant engagement that incorporates diverse strategies, such as leveraging community resources and advocating for children's needs. The researchers reported that traditional involvement metrics, such as PTA attendance, were unable to capture the full breadth of effective engagement, particularly among parents from diverse cultural backgrounds. These findings support a shift toward inclusive, community-based strategies that genuinely address families' unique needs and strengths.

Building on these ideas, Ma et al. (2022) highlighted specific policies and initiatives under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that promote culturally relevant family engagement by ensuring the meaningful involvement of parents and caregivers in student learning. The researchers discussed how federal funding, such as Title I and Title IV, can be utilized to implement engagement strategies that address the needs of families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including immigrant families and those with unique cultural traditions. They recommended leveraging federal resources to strengthen school-family partnerships that support social and emotional learning through inclusive and culturally responsive approaches.

Mayger and Provinzano (2022) further explored the influence of ESSA, demonstrating how the law's provisions contributed to the inclusion of family

engagement in teacher evaluation frameworks. Their analysis revealed that some evaluation rubrics prioritize culturally responsive collaboration with families and communities, highlighting the importance of systemic changes that foster equitable partnerships. The revised evaluation frameworks encourage educators to move beyond traditional, school-centric approaches and actively engage families and communities as essential contributors to school improvement and student success (Mayger & Provinzano, 2022).

Devlieghere et al. (2022) conducted a thematic content analysis of existing literature on parental involvement in early childhood education, critiquing the traditional, school-centric approach that often marginalizes the perspectives of minority families. The authors urged educators to adopt inclusive, culturally responsive practices that recognize and integrate diverse parental perspectives and actively include parents' cultural assets in a reciprocal relationship. Such inclusive practices are aligned with the broader emphasis on moving beyond superficial engagement to foster authentic partnerships that support holistic child development (Devlieghere et al., 2022). Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) expanded on this perspective by advocating for practices that incorporate the voices of rural parents and acknowledge their unique contexts. Using a phenomenological approach, the researchers conducted semistructured interviews with rural parents to examine strategies for enhancing parent-teacher collaboration in South African rural schools. The findings emphasized the importance of incorporating rural parents' voices and recommended empowering them through educational initiatives about their roles,

involving traditional community leaders in school governance, and adopting communication methods tailored to rural contexts.

Park and Paulick (2021), using qualitative participant observation at two urban elementary schools, observed that many traditional family-school partnerships upheld white, middle-class norms, which marginalized families from diverse backgrounds. The authors proposed reframing home visits as a culturally sustaining practice by using them to integrate families' cultural and social capital into the educational process. This approach facilitated the development of more inclusive and meaningful partnerships that acknowledged and respected the lived experiences of marginalized communities. Nathans et al. (2022) conducted a mixed-methods study across four universities, applying the Parent-Teacher Education Connection (PTEC) curriculum to address gaps in preservice teacher education related to family engagement. The researchers noted that preservice teachers initially relied on their own cultural experiences when engaging with families. However, the inclusion of PTEC modules on cultural competence and field experiences enhanced their ability to apply CRP, resulting in more authentic partnerships with diverse families (Nathans et al., 2022).

Yulianti et al. (2022) discussed limitations in traditional school-family partnerships, explaining that schools often provided minimal home visits, offered few opportunities for parents to serve as volunteers, and lacked adequate professional development for teachers and leaders focused on building home-school collaboration. They also explained that schools typically offer limited educational programming for parents, which restricts meaningful family involvement and reinforces a school-centered

model that undervalues the contributions families can make. Wilcoxen et al. (2020) emphasized that preservice teachers should engage with culturally diverse communities through immersive experiences, such as culture walks and field placements, to deepen their understanding and incorporate cultural and social capital into their classroom practices.

Recent research has illustrated a shift from traditional, compliance-driven models of family engagement toward inclusive, culturally responsive practices that promote authentic partnerships between families and schools. McWayne et al. (2022) described a parent-led, staff-supported model in which parents participated as co-creators in the educational process through collaborative decision-making and cultural exchange. Johnson et al. (2021) contributed to this shift by demonstrating how collaborative teacher study groups that engage with local communities can strengthen educators' cultural competence. Park and Paulick (2021) and Nathans et al. (2022) emphasized the value of integrating families' cultural assets into instruction. Their work highlighted practices such as home visits and curriculum modules grounded in cultural relevance, which contributed to more meaningful partnerships. Researchers such as Devlieghere et al. (2022), Myende and Nhlumayo (2022), and Ma et al. (2022) have advocated for systemic reforms that incorporate diverse parental perspectives, utilize federal funding to support culturally relevant engagement strategies, and tailor practices to distinct community contexts. These changes aim to support holistic child development and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all children. Collectively, the researchers encouraged a reimagining of parental involvement and family-school relationships as equitable,

culturally responsive practices that empower all stakeholders in the educational community.

Summary and Conclusions

Scholars have emphasized the positive impact of CRP on student engagement, academic performance, and sense of belonging, especially among middle and high school students (Capper, 2022; Vaidya & Battey, 2022; Yu, 2022). However, limited research has examined how elementary teachers perceive their implementation of CRP, particularly when teaching reading to African American students (Cantrell et al., 2023; Debnam et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ortlieb et al., 2023). Existing studies have focused on older students or different academic subjects, leaving a gap in understanding how teachers implement strategies and instructional methods that respond to the cultural and academic needs of African American students in elementary reading instruction (Capper, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ortlieb et al., 2023; Yu, 2022). To address this gap, the current study explored elementary teachers' perceptions of how they apply CRP in reading instruction. The findings offer insight into teachers' lived experiences and may inform professional learning efforts that support culturally responsive literacy practices in elementary classrooms.

Through analysis of teacher perspectives and instructional experiences, this study deepened understanding of how culturally relevant pedagogy is perceived and enacted in elementary reading instruction. Participants described how they promoted academic achievement, incorporated cultural competence into lessons, and fostered critical consciousness through reading instruction (Kondo, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This

focus addressed a gap in the literature by elevating teacher perspectives on implementing CRP in elementary reading instruction and offering implications for improving teacher preparation and professional development (Adams & Kaczmarczyk, 2023; Andrews & Leonard, 2023; Idrus et al., 2023). The findings may inform educators' efforts to design more inclusive literacy practices that reflect and affirm students' cultural backgrounds. Overall, this study contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity by providing insight into how CRP is perceived and enacted in literacy instruction, to support the academic success and personal development of African American students (Delpit, 1992; Freire, 2000; Gay, 2002; Hooks, 1994).

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. Within this section, I outline the research design and rationale and describe my role as the researcher. I also describe the participant selection criteria, instrumentation, recruitment, data collection procedures, and the plan for data analysis. I also address trustworthiness and ethical considerations. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the research approach that was employed.

Research Design and Rationale

The RQ guiding this study explored the experiences of elementary school teachers implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students. The central phenomenon of the study was the perceptions of elementary school teachers about their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. The research tradition that informed this study was a basic qualitative design. Researchers employ this design to gain insight into individuals, groups, and phenomena in a contextualized way that reflects how people derive meaning from and interpret their personal experiences, self-perceptions, interactions with others, and the broader social environment (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A basic qualitative approach was suitable for this study, given the use of teacher interviews as a primary data source and the focus on understanding elementary teachers' experiences (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Other methodological designs were considered but ultimately deemed unsuitable, as they did not align with the purpose and RQ.

Case study research entails an in-depth examination of one or more cases within their real-world contexts, employing diverse data sources such as direct observations, interviews, focus groups, documents, artifacts, and other relevant materials (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This design was not suitable for the study because the data source consisted of interviews with a single group of elementary teachers, rather than multiple cases. Ethnography focuses on immersive, in-person field studies in which researchers build in-depth relationships with participants and use participant observation to uncover cultural meanings and gather detailed descriptive data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Participant observation, which encompasses direct observation, field notes, informal interviews, group participation, prolonged immersion, identification and review of pertinent information sources, and engagement in discussions, is the primary method in ethnography (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Ethnography was not appropriate for this research because it requires prolonged engagement in a specific setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This study focused on understanding teachers' perceptions across multiple schools. Although phenomenological research explores participants' subjective experiences (Patton, 2015), this study did not seek to explore subjective experiences. In a grounded theory study, researchers attempt to formulate a theory that emerges from data collected in the field (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This design was unsuitable for this study because its purpose was not to develop a theory.

Lastly, quantitative research involves investigating phenomena through numerical data and statistical analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Quantitative research designs were unsuitable for this study because the purpose was to understand participants' experiences

through analysis of their perceptions. This study sought to understand elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. Therefore, a basic qualitative research design was the most appropriate method for this study.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument, and their positionality and social identity play an essential role throughout the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Positionality refers to the intersection of the researcher's identity and role with the research context, influencing relationships with participants and shaping the overall approach to the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. As the researcher, I was responsible for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences. My role was that of an observer, and my position as an external observer allowed me to maintain a reflective stance while being mindful of how my identity might have influenced the research setting and participant interactions.

With 10 years of experience in education as an elementary school teacher, I brought both professional expertise and a deep understanding of classroom instruction to this study. I had no prior personal relationships with the participants. Therefore, it was essential to establish rapport and build trust during the interview process. To ensure ethical standards were upheld, participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary and ongoing, with the option to withdraw at any time without

consequence. Confidentiality was guaranteed, and no incentives were offered for participation in this study. Because I held no supervisory or evaluative role over any participant, the potential for power imbalances was minimal.

I remained mindful of my positionality as a fellow educator and deliberately managed any potential researcher bias to ensure the integrity of the data collection process. I maintained a reflective journal to acknowledge my biases and to identify steps I would take to prevent their influence on decisions made during data collection and analysis. Ortlipp (2008) noted that using reflective journals makes researchers' experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings more visible. Potential biases may arise from strong opinions about the research topic. By strictly adhering to my interview protocol, I ensured that my bias toward the research topic did not influence my questioning during the interview process. As the researcher, I refrained from excluding data that did not align with my anticipated findings, ensured a thorough analysis and reporting of all data, and drew conclusions based solely on emerging results.

Methodology

This section provides an overview of the process used to select participants for the study, ensuring alignment with its objectives. Specifically, I outline the criteria for identifying the target population, the purposeful sampling strategy, and the rationale for selecting elementary teachers with specific experience. By carefully defining these elements, I gathered relevant insights into the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding the implementation of CRP in reading instruction for African American students.

Participant Selection Logic

To explore teachers' perceptions of CRP in reading instruction, it is essential to define the study's population and sampling approach. The purpose of this study was to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. By focusing on elementary school teachers, I aimed to gather diverse insights into this critical area of educational practice. The following section outlines the population and sampling strategy used in the study.

Population

The original data collection plan involved recruiting participants from approximately 360 elementary school teachers working in one of the seven learning zones in a southeastern U.S. school district. Eligible teachers had at least 1 year of reading instruction experience and had taught African American students. These criteria ensured that participants had relevant experience to provide informed perspectives on implementing CRP in reading instruction.

Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy for this study was purposeful sampling, which involved selecting participants based on specific criteria that aligned with the RQ (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The sample was drawn from elementary teachers with at least 1 year of experience teaching reading and teaching African American students during their careers. The original plan was to recruit teachers from one of the seven learning zones in a southeastern U.S. school district. The goal was to recruit 10 to 12 participants to ensure diverse perspectives and experiences related to implementing CRP in reading instruction

for African American students. This strategy aligned with Patton's (2015) principle that sample size should reflect the research objectives, topic significance, and available resources. Guest et al. (2006) suggested that data saturation typically occurs between eight and 12 interviews. In this study, 12 participants were initially recruited, and saturation was achieved at that point. No additional participants were needed, consistent with Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) recommendation to continue sampling until redundancy is reached.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria for this study included elementary teachers who met two specific qualifications: (a) a minimum of 1 year of experience teaching reading, and (b) had taught African American students at some point during their careers. The data collection plan called for the selection of participants from one of the seven learning zones within a southeastern U.S. school district. The selection criteria were intended to ensure a purposeful sample of teachers with relevant experience to inform the study's purpose.

Recruitment

I designed the recruitment process for this study to select elementary teachers who met specific criteria: (a) had at least 1 year of experience teaching reading and (b) had taught African American students during their careers. The data collection plan called for recruiting participants from one of the seven learning zones within a southeastern U.S. school district, using employee emails for recruitment. The recruitment plan was eventually altered, which is further detailed in Chapter 4. I continued conducting

interviews until I reached data saturation, which occurred at 12 participants, aligning with best practices in qualitative research (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015).

Relationship between Saturation and Sample

The relationship between saturation and sample size was crucial to ensuring comprehensive data collection. Saturation occurs when additional data no longer provides new insights or contributes meaningfully to the research findings, indicating that the sample size is sufficient (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As Merriam and Tisdell (2015) noted, qualitative research should continue sampling until saturation, or redundancy, is reached. I aimed to recruit 10 to 12 participants to meet the minimum threshold for a basic qualitative study while allowing room for diverse perspectives. In this study, saturation was achieved with the initial 12 participants, and no additional interviews were necessary. This approach ensured redundancy and captured a thorough understanding of elementary teachers' perceptions of implementing CRP in reading instruction for African American students.

Instrumentation

Clearly defining the study's population, sampling approach, and data collection methods was necessary to explore the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding the implementation of CRP in reading instruction for African American students in a meaningful manner. For data collection, I developed an interview protocol to guide the interviews (see Appendix A). To ensure the quality of the qualitative interviews, I developed the interview guide using refinement strategies informed by Castillo-Montoya (2016) and Jacob and Furgerson (2012). The finalized protocol included an introductory

section, opening prompts, core questions, and concluding remarks. The interview questions focused on understanding how teachers perceived and implemented CRP in their reading instruction. I purposefully aligned all interview questions with the RQ (see Appendix B).

The original data collection plan called for audio recording and transcribing interviews during in-person sessions using Otter.ai. I also took detailed notes during the interviews and incorporated them into the transcripts to ensure that I captured all aspects of the participants' responses. This comprehensive approach to data collection allowed for an in-depth exploration of the study's focus.

I developed the interview protocol based on a thorough literature review to establish content validity, ensuring alignment with Ladson-Billings's three tenets of CRP and the RQ. Instead of asking participants about abstract academic theories, the questions focused on the specific behaviors and actions implied by CRP, making it easier for participants to provide meaningful and concrete responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2016). This approach ensured that the data collected was relevant and directly contributed to addressing the core constructs of the study.

I designed the data collection plan to ensure the sufficiency of the interview protocol by gathering input from a diverse group of participants. My initial plan involved sampling teachers from one of the seven learning zones within a school district in the southeastern United States, which included approximately 360 teachers. By recruiting participants from this diverse pool, I planned to collect responses from individuals with

varying experiences and backgrounds, allowing for more comparisons across perspectives and helping to confirm the consistency of data.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Before collecting data, I obtained the necessary approvals to ensure ethical and procedural compliance. Once the approvals were in place, I began recruiting participants who met specific criteria relevant to the study's focus. The following section outlines the steps I took to secure approvals, recruit participants, and conduct interviews to gather the data needed for the research.

Recruitment

Recruitment for this study began with obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Walden University. Obtaining IRB approval and district permission ensured that the study adhered to all ethical guidelines and secured the necessary authorization to contact potential participants. Once these approvals were in place, the original plan was to identify potential participants by focusing on elementary school teachers within one of the southeastern district's seven learning zones. This zone comprised approximately 360 teachers, from whom I intended to purposefully sample participants. The eligibility criteria for participation included (a) a minimum of 1 year of experience teaching reading and (b) experience teaching African American students at some point during their careers. I established these criteria to ensure that participants had relevant expertise and experience implementing CRP in reading instruction.

To identify participants, I planned to collect the email addresses of eligible teachers from the district's official website, which listed the contact details of its

employees. After creating a list of eligible participants, I emailed an invitation to each potential participant. I designed the email to include a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, the criteria for participation, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. The message also emphasized that participation was voluntary and included clear instructions for interested teachers to contact me if they wished to participate in the study. I also included my contact information for any questions or clarifications. Once a participant expressed interest in the study via email, I confirmed that they met all necessary criteria. After verifying eligibility, I emailed the participant an approved consent form. The consent form included a brief overview of the study, the specific criteria participants were required to meet, and background information on the study. It also explained that participation was entirely voluntary, outlined the procedures and potential risks, and explained the privacy protocols. Before scheduling any interviews, I asked participants to reply to the initial email with the statement, "I consent." I will outline the changes to the recruitment plan in Chapter 4.

Participation

Once I confirmed a participant's eligibility and received the required documentation, we scheduled a specific date and time for a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview protocol I developed served as the primary data collection instrument (see Appendix A). Each participant engaged in a single one-on-one interview lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The data collection plan called for conducting interviews at locations convenient for the participants. These locations included private spaces within the school district, such as classrooms or offices. Jacob and Furgerson

(2012) emphasized the importance of selecting quiet, semi-private settings, such as libraries, to ensure high-quality recordings and minimize distractions. The goal was to provide a comfortable and confidential environment that supported participant privacy and ease during the interview process. Participants were only asked to attend additional interviews if clarification or follow-up was necessary. Otter.ai was used to audio record the interviews and assist with transcription. I also took detailed notes during the interviews and incorporated them into the transcriptions to ensure that all aspects of the participants' responses were accurately captured.

Following the study, participants underwent a structured debriefing process to ensure closure and provide transparency regarding their involvement. Following each interview, I gave the participants a summary of the interview, allowing them to review it for accuracy and offer any necessary clarifications or corrections. This step, known as participant validation or member checks, enables the researcher to engage with participants to gather their thoughts and feelings about different aspects of the research process and the data relevant to them (Carlson, 2010; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). It helped ensure their perspectives were accurately represented in the study.

Once I had completed data collection and validated the transcriptions, I provided each participant with a summary of the study's findings. This summary explained how participants' contributions were used within the broader research context. Finally, I notified participants that their involvement in the study had concluded and thanked them for their participation. Throughout this process, I reminded participants of the

confidentiality and anonymity of their contributions and allowed them to ask any remaining questions about the study.

Data Collection

As the data collector, I conducted all interviews, managed participant recruitment, and ensured the ethical handling of data, including maintaining confidentiality and participant anonymity. I recorded the interviews using the Otter.ai platform, which automatically transcribes each conversation. Additionally, I reviewed and verified all transcriptions for accuracy before beginning data analysis.

At the start of each interview, I introduced myself and provided a brief overview of the study's goals, benefits, and potential risks to the participants. I informed each participant that the interview would last between 45 and 60 minutes. As part of the disclosure, I explained that participants could withdraw from the study at any point. If they chose to withdraw, I would exclude their data from the study. I followed the preset questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure consistency across all interviews. I asked the interview questions in a predetermined order and format. The data collection plan called for recording participants' responses using Otter.ai. I also took field notes during the interviews to help me track key points for follow-up, clarify responses, and identify potential themes for later analysis. Following the recommendations of VanderStoep and Johnston (2009), I thanked participants for their time and contributions, clarified how their input would be used, and addressed any remaining questions. I also conducted a follow-up member check to confirm the accuracy of their responses and interpretations. This process enabled participants to provide feedback, clarify any

misunderstandings, and ensure that the study accurately represented their perspectives. Lastly, I assured the participants that their data would remain secure, reminding them that their responses would be password-protected and accessible only to me.

Data Analysis Plan

The qualitative analysis process requires a systematic approach to managing extensive data, which includes condensing raw information, distinguishing between trivial and significant details, identifying key patterns, and creating a structured framework to convey the core insights from the data (Patton, 2015). Using open-ended, semi-structured interview questions, I gathered data on elementary school teachers' perceptions about implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students. The data analysis for the semistructured interviews on elementary school teachers' perceptions of implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students followed an in vivo coding approach. This method allowed for a deep exploration of participants' voices, ensuring their authentic experiences and language were at the forefront of the analysis, as recommended by Saldaña (2021).

Before beginning the coding process, I transcribed the interviews. This task not only transformed spoken data into written form but also served as an initial stage of analysis, allowing me to immerse myself in the data and start identifying potential patterns and themes (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although I had planned to use Otter.ai for the initial transcription, I listened to the audio recordings to correct any inaccuracies, ensuring a precise and faithful representation of the participants' responses. Member checking was conducted through direct email communication with participants. After

completing the transcription, I provided participants with a summary of the transcript for review and feedback as part of the member check process. Member checking was conducted after transcription to allow participants to review the accuracy of their responses, ensuring the transcription aligns with their intended meaning, experiences, and perspectives as conveyed during the interview (see Carlson, 2010).

Next, when participants confirmed the summary for accuracy, I carefully reviewed each interview transcript to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives and to recognize patterns in how they described their experiences. According to Saldaña (2021), the initial step in in vivo coding involves attuning to specific words and phrases that stand out due to their emotional impact, frequency, or unique descriptive qualities. During this process, I highlighted phrases that participants emphasized vocally, particularly those related to teaching strategies, challenges, or cultural references in their instructional practices. Following this initial review, I identified and marked salient words and phrases as in vivo codes. These were written in quotation marks to preserve participants' exact language (see Saldaña, 2021).

Applying in vivo codes required a reflective and instinctive approach, as I relied on professional judgment to identify meaningful expressions. I also wrote analytic memos to document my thoughts, reflections, and preliminary interpretations throughout the coding process. This reflective practice helped me remain aware of biases and interpretations, ensuring a more accurate representation of the participants' perspectives.

After the initial coding, I proceeded to a second cycle of coding to condense and refine the data. I grouped similar or redundant in vivo codes during this stage, looking for

emerging patterns embedded in the data. As Saldaña (2021) suggested, this second coding round enables a reanalysis of the initial work, helping to synthesize and condense the meanings derived from the participants' language. Additionally, as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2021), I grouped**,** combined**,** and deleted specific codes to identify conceptual similarities. I examined overlapping patterns and reduced codes to categories within the data.

To deepen the analysis, I documented emerging themes and used analytic memos to capture their meanings and trace how initial codes contributed to their development (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I ensured that each theme aligned with the RQs by examining how the coded data provided insight into teachers' experiences. After developing themes, I revisited and recoded the data to further refine the themes and address any gaps in the analysis (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This iterative process ensured that the analysis was comprehensive and reflected all aspects of the data.

I organized and reviewed the in vivo codes to support deeper analysis and extracted them into a list and table format for clarity. I used Microsoft Excel to sort and reorganize the codes, which facilitated the identification of patterns and connections among the data (see Saldaña, 2021). By clustering similar codes, I ensured a comprehensive view of the themes and avoided missing key insights.

Finally, I synthesized the findings into a narrative to address the RQ. I supported each theme with illustrative quotes from the participants, ensuring their voices remained central to the analysis. According to Saldaña (2021), presenting these findings with participants' direct language ensures that the study authentically represents their

perceptions and experiences. The narrative concluded with reflections on the implications of these findings for teaching practices and future research in culturally relevant pedagogy.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is essential for ensuring the rigor and validity of the study's findings. Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which researchers can have confidence in the sources and the methods used to collect and analyze data (Burkholder et al., 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained that researchers can achieve trustworthiness by focusing on four critical criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This subsection outlines the methods used to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, along with the ethical procedures followed in this study.

Credibility

To establish credibility in this study, I used member checking as a key strategy to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data. Member checking involves sharing preliminary findings, interpretations, or transcripts with the participants to confirm that their perspectives have been accurately captured (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), member checking helps explore participants' responses in greater depth and assists the researcher in interpreting data more accurately. By inviting participants to review transcript summaries and provide feedback, I corrected any misinterpretations or inaccuracies, ensuring that the findings reflected their lived experiences and insights. This iterative process enabled a more collaborative approach to

data interpretation, thereby strengthening the study's credibility by incorporating participants' voices into the final analysis.

I also enhanced credibility by reaching data saturation, the point at which no new themes, insights, or data emerge from additional interviews or data collection efforts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Saturation ensured that the data collected was comprehensive and covered the full range of participants' experiences. As I collected and analyzed the interview data, I continually monitored for saturation to determine whether I had gathered sufficient information to answer the RQ. Saturation was achieved when repeated patterns and themes emerged across multiple participants, indicating that further data collection would not yield new or meaningful insights. By achieving saturation, the study captured diverse experiences and perspectives, reinforcing the credibility and depth of the findings (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Transferability

Transferability pertains to how qualitative studies can retain their richness specific to the context while applying or transferring to broader contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Although limited by the study's qualitative design and sample size, I provided a detailed description of the research context. This included the characteristics of participating teachers, their school settings, and the relevant cultural and educational factors. Detailing the context will enable readers to assess the similarities and differences between the study context and other settings, facilitating transferability (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Dependability

To establish dependability, I documented all stages of the research process, ensuring transparency and enabling replication if needed. The audit trail included detailed records of data collection methods, changes in the research design, and the rationale for decisions made throughout the study. This level of transparency enabled other researchers to follow my process, evaluate the consistency of the findings, and assess how conclusions were drawn. By maintaining this detailed record, I enhanced the study's reliability and provided a foundation for others to trust the research process. Additionally, I engaged in reflective journaling to evaluate how my biases, assumptions, and decisions may impact the study, ensuring confirmability and dependability (see Ortlipp, 2008; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Confirmability

To establish confirmability in this study, I employed reflexivity and reflective journaling to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the participants' perspectives and experiences, rather than my biases or personal interests. Reflexivity involved continually examining and acknowledging my assumptions, motivations, and potential biases throughout the research process (see Burkholder et al., 2016). By straightforwardly addressing these biases, I critically assessed how they influenced data collection, analysis, and interpretation. As Ravitch and Carl (2021) suggested, openly acknowledging and managing these biases helped enhance the objectivity of the research. Additionally, documenting my reflections and decisions in a journal created a transparent record of how and why choices were made, further supporting the neutrality of the

findings. I also included a complete coding table in Appendix C, which outlines the codes, categories, and themes. This process helped ensure that the conclusions were grounded in the participants' voices, thereby strengthening the confirmability of the study (see Kyngäs et al. 2020).

Ethical Procedures

Before collecting data, I secured IRB approval from Walden University (approval no. 01-07-25-1054249) and institutional permission from the selected school district in the Southeastern United States. The approval process was to ensure that the study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants, safeguarding their rights and well-being. The IRB reviewed the recruitment process, informed consent procedures, and data privacy management to confirm that all steps met ethical guidelines. Additionally, as required I applied for institutional permission from the district to contact potential participants and collect data within their schools. Recruitment was limited to elementary teachers from one specific learning zone in the district, with a population of approximately 360 teachers who met the eligibility criteria.

I applied for permission to send recruitment emails to eligible teachers by following a systematic process to identify participants using the district's official website. The recruitment email provided detailed information about the study, the eligibility criteria, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. To confirm eligibility, I screened participants who responded to the invitation by reviewing their teaching background to ensure they met the study's criteria. Once eligibility was verified, I sent a

consent form containing information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and privacy measures. Participants provided their consent by responding with "I consent" before scheduling any interviews. All data collected were treated confidentially, with names and identifying details removed to protect participant privacy. I securely stored data on a password-protected computer and kept hard copies in a locked cabinet. Following IRB guidelines, all data will be destroyed 5 years after the study's completion.

Ethical considerations for this study included participant recruitment, data collection, and data confidentiality. To address concerns related to recruitment, the invitation email and consent forms clearly outlined the purpose of the study, potential risks, and the voluntary nature of participation. I provided transparency about my role within the school district and ensured that participants understood the safeguards in place to maintain confidentiality. Because I currently work in the learning zone, preexisting relationships might have introduced a potential risk of bias. To mitigate this, I employed reflexivity and maintained a reflective journal, as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2021), to document my thought processes and acknowledge any biases that arose during the study.

Data treatment involved ensuring confidentiality and protecting participants' privacy throughout the research process. All data were anonymized, with participants identified by numerical identifiers (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2). I had sole access to the raw data, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer and will be destroyed 5 years after the study's completion, in compliance with Walden University's IRB requirements. Conducting the study in my work environment also raised ethical

considerations related to potential power dynamics and the influence of my professional role. To address these concerns, I affirmed I would remain aware of possible power imbalances and took deliberate steps to ensure that participants felt no pressure to participate or respond in any particular way. During the informed consent process, I clarified that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the basic qualitative research design, provided the rationale for this approach, and explained my role as the researcher. I outlined the methodology in detail, including participant selection, recruitment procedures, use of the interview protocol for data collection, and the data analysis plan. Additionally, I discussed the steps of data analysis, strategies for establishing trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. I will present the study's results in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. To achieve this purpose, I used a basic qualitative design. The RQ that guided the study explored the experiences of elementary school teachers when implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students. The RQ aligned with the problem and purpose of this study, as limited research has explored elementary educators' perceptions of CRP in reading instruction for African American students (Cantrell et al., 2023; Debnam et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ortlieb et al., 2023). In this chapter, I will report on the results of the study. This chapter also includes the research setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary.

Setting

I conducted interviews via Zoom using a semistructured, open-ended format. Each interview was conducted remotely, with me participating from the privacy of my home office to maintain a quiet and confidential setting. All names were removed from the transcripts and replaced with numerical identifiers (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) to protect participant confidentiality. Participants were recruited voluntarily and contacted through email. Their participation was not influenced by any personal or organizational factors during the study. Each interview began with a brief introduction, and I proceeded with the questions once participants appeared comfortable and ready to engage.

Demographics

The 12 participants in this study were elementary school teachers across the southeastern region of the United States. The selection criteria for participants included (a) a minimum of 1 year of experience teaching reading and (b) having taught African American students at some point during their careers. All 12 participants had more than 1 year of reading instruction experience and had taught African American students at some point in their careers. At the time of data collection, participants ranged from four to 27 years of teaching experience, with an average of 12.42 years of experience teaching reading. Therefore, all participants met the study's selection criteria (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Years of teaching reading	Grade level taught	Current/ former teacher of African American students
P1	21	K/1/3/4/5	Current
P2	20	2/4/5	Current
P3	6	2/4/5	Current
P4	10	2/3/4/5	Current
P5	18	K	Current
P6	4	K	Current
P7	8	K/5	Current
P8	11	4	Current
P9	9	K/1/3/4/5	Current
P10	6	¾/5	Current
P11	27	K/1/2/3/4/5	Current
P12	9	2/4/5	Current

Note. K = Kindergarten.

Data Collection

As outlined in Chapter 3, the original plan was to purposefully select teachers from one of the seven learning zones within a southeastern U.S. school district that employed approximately 360 teachers. Recruitment was to occur through district-issued email invitations, to select 10 to 12 participants to capture a range of experiences related to implementing CRP in reading instruction for African American students. If data saturation had not been achieved with the initial group, I planned to recruit additional participants in increments of two until saturation or redundancy was reached, as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2015).

The target school district in the southeastern United States declined to permit teacher participation in the study, expressing concern that the focus on elementary teachers' experiences teaching reading to African American students was too narrow. District officials requested a broader scope that expanded beyond the original focus on African American students and CRP in reading instruction. As a result, they required revisions to the purpose statement, title, and RQ to reflect a more inclusive emphasis on students from all racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. However, making such changes would have significantly altered the original intent in the design, which specifically aimed to explore teachers' experiences implementing CRP in reading instruction for African American students. Because the district did not allow its teachers to participate in the study, I submitted a request to the IRB to amend my recruitment procedures, allowing the use of social media platforms to recruit eligible participants. After receiving IRB approval in January 2025 (approval no. 01-07-25-1054249), I began recruiting

participants using the amended procedures. I shared the study invitation flyer on social media platforms, including Instagram and Facebook. Interested individuals contacted me through private messages to express their willingness to participate. Once an interested individual met the eligibility criteria, I sent the consent form via email. After receiving confirmation of their consent, I followed up to request their availability and scheduled interviews based on their preferred times. I conducted all interviews via Zoom in March 2025.

I did not conduct face-to-face interviews because I recruited participants through social media rather than identifying them through the district's official website, which lists employee contact information. Instead, all interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, a video conferencing platform that enabled both real-time interaction and automatic transcription. Zoom's built-in recording and transcription features made it a suitable alternative to the initially planned use of Otter.ai. The change in data collection procedures was submitted to the IRB for approval prior to implementation, and approval was granted in January 2025. The shift to Zoom provided a secure, convenient, and consistent method for data collection while maintaining participant comfort and accessibility.

I conducted 12 semistructured interviews using an interview protocol designed to explore elementary teachers' experiences with implementing CRP in reading instruction for African American students. All interviews were held in March 2025 and recorded via Zoom using my laptop. Each interview lasted between 48 minutes and 1 hour. Throughout the interviews, I focused on building rapport with each participant to foster a

sense of trust. I informed participants that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. I used the interview protocol as a flexible guide, adjusting the order of questions or adding new ones based on participants' responses. I took handwritten notes to document key points, formulate follow-up questions, and encourage participants to expand on their answers when appropriate.

At the end of each interview, I expressed appreciation to participants for their time and for sharing their experiences. I encouraged them to contact me if they had additional thoughts or reflections after the interview. I also explained that I would follow up with them for member checking. This step was to ensure that I had accurately represented their perspectives in the data.

Data Analysis

I followed the data analysis plan outlined in Chapter 3 to guide the analysis of the interview data. The data analysis process involved an iterative series of steps. I began by familiarizing myself with the transcripts, applied in vivo coding to capture participants' exact language, and then conducted second-cycle coding to refine and organize the initial codes into categories. I used Microsoft Excel to sort and group the data, which helped identify patterns across participants' responses. Finally, I developed the categories into overarching themes. The following section provides a detailed description of each step in this process.

Preparation of the Data for Analysis

I analyzed the data from the semistructured interviews using an in vivo coding approach to explore elementary school teachers' perceptions of implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students. This method allowed me to center the participants' authentic voices by using their own words as codes. Following Saldaña's (2021) recommendation, this approach ensured that their lived experiences remained at the forefront of the analysis.

Although Zoom provided initial automated transcriptions of the interviews, I reviewed each audio recording to ensure transcription accuracy and preserve contextual meaning. I corrected transcription errors, clarified unclear phrases, and ensured that the transcripts accurately reflected participants' intended responses. I made edits to fix misinterpretations from Zoom's automated transcription, formatted the transcripts to enhance readability for data analysis, and redacted any identifying information that could compromise participant confidentiality. For example, some participants stated their real names or mentioned their workplaces during the interviews. I replaced such references with pseudonyms to protect participant privacy.

I created an edited version of each transcript by correcting errors, such as misprinted words that did not reflect what the participant said. I also added punctuation to improve readability and support a more effective analysis process. After transcribing the interviews, I provided participants with summaries of their transcripts for member checking to ensure the accuracy of their reported experiences. None of the participants requested changes. Throughout the transcription and analysis process, I engaged in

critical reflection by maintaining a personal journal to document my thoughts, feelings, and evolving relationship with the data. For instance, I considered how my identity as a Black educator may have shaped my interpretation of participants' experiences and the emotional connections I formed with their narratives. To deepen my understanding, I reread each transcript multiple times. As Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasized, familiarizing oneself with data requires repeated reading to fully grasp its depth and meaning.

Coding Procedures

For the initial cycle of analysis, I used in vivo coding, a method that draws directly from the participants' own words to preserve the authenticity of their voices (Saldaña, 2021). This process began with carefully reading through each transcript multiple times to become deeply familiar with the content. As I read, I highlighted key words and phrases that stood out due to their emotional intensity, frequency, or relevance to the RQ. These included expressions that reflected the teachers' beliefs, strategies, challenges, or cultural references within their reading instruction practices. Each code was recorded in quotation marks to indicate it was taken verbatim from participants' speech. In vivo coding required a reflective and intuitive approach, as I considered both the literal content and the context in which the words were spoken. I then entered the in vivo codes into an Excel workbook to organize, sort, and prepare them for further analysis.

Because in vivo coding is an interpretive process, I remained aware that my decisions about which words or phrases to highlight were shaped by what I found

meaningful or relevant. As I reviewed the transcripts, I consistently questioned whether I was privileging certain voices or statements over others and reflected on the reasons behind those choices. There were moments when I strongly identified with the participants' experiences, which prompted me to pause and carefully consider whether I was accurately capturing their intent or unintentionally interpreting their words through the lens of my background and beliefs. To address this, I relied on memo writing and frequent rereading of transcripts to remain grounded in the participants' actual language and perspectives.

During the second cycle of coding, I condensed and refined the data collected during the initial in vivo coding phase. I transferred all codes into an Excel workbook, which enabled me to sort, filter, and group similar or redundant in vivo codes. As Saldaña (2021) noted, the second cycle of coding provided an opportunity to reanalyze initial codes and synthesize the meanings derived from participants' language. Following Ravitch and Carl's (2021) guidance, I grouped, combined, and, in some cases, deleted codes that were overly similar or no longer analytically useful. As a result of refining the data through grouping, combining, and eliminating codes, a total of 141 final codes were created. Table 2 displays examples of codes along with data excerpts that illustrate how participant quotes align with specific codes.

Table 2

Examples of Codes With Corresponding Participant Quotes

Code	Participant	Example quote
Academic growth	1	He realized that score had went up. His spelling score had went up. So he was really excited.
Connection	3	It is my job to be able to relate whatever I'm teaching to students to real life.
Reflection	7	I'm always doing self-reflection. I'm always sitting down thinking about ways that I could do better within my instructional delivery.

Codes to Categories

Following second-cycle coding, I engaged in categorizing to further organize the data and derive meaning from the coded responses. According to Saldaña (2021), the purpose of categorizing is to identify which codes belong together, sort them by defining attributes, compare categories, and simplify the overall makeup of the data. During this process, I reviewed the refined codes in my Excel workbook to identify logical groupings and relationships. To ensure clarity and logical consistency, I reviewed the code groupings, which resulted in the identification of eight categories. Table 3 presents two examples of coding categories along with the specific codes grouped within each category.

Table 3

Examples of Coding Categories and Corresponding Codes

Cateogry	Corresponding codes
Humanizing the learning environment	Classroom environment Education appreciation Life-talks Survey Relationships Whole-child Informal discourse Behavior support Home school connection Understanding environment
Barriers to implementation	Resource development Resource misalignment Mirror lessons Unsupportive leadership Teacher sutonomy Sensitivity Assessment pressure Disconnection

Development of Themes

Finally, I considered the RQ. Throughout this analytic process, and after the categories emerged as a reflection of participants' responses, I considered the central focus for the study. I grouped the categories intentionally to align with the RQ. The RQ focused on the experiences of elementary school teachers when implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students. The development of themes enabled me to transition from fragmented data segments to more organized and meaningful

categories, which served as the foundation for further theme development. Table 4 presents the theme development of the findings.

Table 4

Theme Development

Category	Theme
Barriers to implementation Supportive strategies Suggestions for improvement	Teachers articulated specific barriers to implementation and noted approaches to overcoming those challenges
Empowering students Humanizing the learning environment	Teachers noted the importance of non-curricular aspects of creating successful environments for CRP.
Specific instructional strategies Culturally affirming curriculum Critical teaching Role of the teacher	Teachers were clear on their role in providing appropriate curricular and instructional approaches that support CRP.

After organizing the data into categories, I developed overarching themes to capture the essence of participants' experiences. This stage involved examining overlaps and patterns in the data to determine what the themes revealed about elementary teachers' experiences implementing CRP in reading instruction for African American students. To deepen the analysis, I documented each emerging theme through reflective memos, clarifying what each theme represented and how the in vivo codes contributed to its development (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I ensured alignment with the RQ by reviewing how the categories and coded data addressed the study's core focus. The development of themes was conducted collaboratively with my dissertation committee to ensure that interpretations were sound and grounded in the data. Through this iterative and

collaborative process, three major themes emerged: (a) teachers articulated specific barriers to implementation and noted approaches to overcoming those challenges; (b) teachers noted the importance of non-curricular aspects of creating successful environments for CRP; and (c) teachers were clear on their role in providing appropriate curricular and instructional approaches that support CRP. I did not identify any discrepant cases during data analysis.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which researchers and readers can have confidence in the data and the methods used to collect and analyze it (Burkholder et al., 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that researchers achieve trustworthiness by addressing four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following subsection outlines the specific strategies used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data.

Credibility

To establish credibility in this study, I employed member checking as a key strategy to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data. This process involved sharing interview transcript summaries with participants to confirm that their perspectives were represented accurately (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As noted by Ravitch and Carl (2021), member checking facilitates a deeper exploration of participants' responses and enables researchers to interpret data more precisely. Although I provided participants with the opportunity to review their transcript summaries and suggest changes, none of them requested corrections or modifications.

Another strategy used to ensure the credibility of this study was achieving data saturation, which occurred when no new commonalities, insights, or information emerged from continued data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). While collecting and analyzing interview data, I continually monitored for signs of saturation to determine whether the dataset was sufficient to answer the RQ. I reached saturation when similar patterns and themes consistently appeared across participants' responses, and the final interviews revealed no new categories or significant variations. As Ravitch and Carl (2021) noted, achieving saturation strengthens the credibility of qualitative research by demonstrating that the findings were thorough and well-substantiated.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied to other contexts while preserving the richness of the original setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To support transferability, I provided a detailed account of the research context, including information about the participating teachers and the relevant cultural and educational factors. This level of detail allowed readers to assess the extent to which the study's context aligned with or differed from their own, thereby supporting informed judgments about the potential applicability of the findings to other settings.

Dependability

To establish dependability, I documented each stage of the research process to ensure transparency and allow for potential replication. The audit trail included detailed records of data collection methods, any changes made to the research design, and the rationale behind key decisions throughout the study. This level of transparency enabled

others to follow my process, assess the consistency of the findings, and understand how I arrived at my conclusions. By maintaining a thorough and organized record, I enhanced the study's reliability and provided a foundation for others to evaluate the trustworthiness of the research. In addition, I engaged in reflective journaling to examine how my own biases, assumptions, and decision-making could have influenced the study, thereby strengthening both confirmability and dependability (see Ortlipp, 2008; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Confirmability

To establish confirmability in this study, I employed reflexivity and reflective journaling to ensure that the findings accurately represented the participants' perspectives and experiences rather than my own biases or personal interests. Reflexivity requires ongoing self-examination of my assumptions, motivations, and potential biases throughout the research process (Burkholder et al., 2016). By directly acknowledging these biases, I was able to critically evaluate how they might have influenced data collection, analysis, and interpretation. As Ravitch and Carl (2021) emphasized, intentionally recognizing and managing researcher bias enhances the objectivity and trustworthiness of qualitative research. I also maintained a reflective journal to document my thoughts, decisions, and analytic choices, creating a transparent record of the rationale behind key steps in the study. I also included a coding table in Appendix C, which details the codes, categories, and themes. This process helped ensure that the conclusions drawn were firmly grounded in participants' voices, thereby strengthening the confirmability of the findings (Kyngäs et al., 2020).

Results

The findings from the data analysis led to the development of three themes that aligned with elementary teachers' experiences implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students. In the following section, I provide an overview of each theme, illustrate key findings with examples from the raw data, and conclude with a summary of each theme. Finally, I explain how the concepts within the three themes relate to and inform the RQ.

Theme 1

Theme 1 was that teachers articulated specific barriers to implementation and noted approaches to overcoming those challenges. Participants in the study described several interrelated barriers that limited their ability to implement CRP in reading instruction for African American students. Despite these constraints, participants shared strategies to navigate, resist, or overcome challenges, demonstrating their commitment to culturally relevant, student-centered literacy instruction. This theme encompassed three categories: barriers to implementation, which appeared 159 times in the data; supportive strategies, which appeared 19 times in the data; and suggestions for improvement, which appeared three times across the data set. Together, these three categories appeared 181 times across the dataset. In this study, barriers to implementation referred to the institutional, curricular, and sociopolitical challenges that hindered participants' efforts to deliver CRP during reading instruction to African American students. Participants responded with supportive strategies—creative and collaborative approaches to navigate these constraints—and offered suggestions for improvement, including systemic changes

such as targeted professional development and increased curricular autonomy to support CRP during reading instruction for African American students.

One of the most pervasive barriers participants identified was the inadequacy of district-provided reading resources. Participants referenced this barrier 48 times. Many participants reported having to independently develop or locate instructional materials because the curriculum lacked depth, cultural relevance, and representation of their students' identities. Participant 8 captured this strain: "I have to create the curriculum myself… I create the lesson plans myself. I find my own resources." Similarly, Participant 2 described relying on external sources, noting, "I have to just find things on my own via Google or some type of other teacher website." These examples illustrate how the absence of institutionally supported materials created an additional burden, making individual participants responsible for addressing critical gaps in representation and relevance.

Despite this challenge, participants responded with resourcefulness. They actively sought out or created texts that reflected their students' cultural backgrounds and countered biased or exclusionary narratives. Participant 6 explained, "Most of the books have Caucasian people… It is no book that represents African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians... it does not talk about culture." Participants did not passively accept this; instead, they worked to correct it. As Participant 9 explained, "If that text sounded biased… I would find a different text… from the lens of what was it like as an African-American during that time." These acts of substitution and supplementation demonstrated how

participants attempted to overcome the curricular gaps by centering student identity and experience in reading materials, a core tenet of CRP.

Another commonly reported barrier was the imposition of scripted or standardized reading curricula, which limited participants' flexibility. Although school leaders introduced these curricula to promote classroom consistency, many participants felt they suppressed the adaptation necessary for culturally responsive teaching. Participant 1 shared, "Every classroom has to be teaching the same thing at the same time, in the same manner." Participant 5 echoed this: "You got to stick to the script… Sometimes, it's difficult just to deviate." These rigid guidelines hindered participants' ability to make real-time instructional decisions that reflected their students' needs, cultural contexts, or interests—another clear obstacle to implementing CRP.

In response, some participants actively pushed against these constraints, particularly when supported by leadership. Leadership support was referenced 14 times in the data set. Participant 3 noted, "I am allowed as a teacher to find different text," demonstrating how professional autonomy became a form of resistance to standardized instruction. Participant 1 reflected on a school context where "Teachers were given the freedom to deliver lessons... that benefited their class," emphasizing how supportive environments helped participants overcome institutional restrictions. Participant 12 reinforced this idea, noting, "You have to be willing to give people the opportunity to share their thoughts," and highlighted how collaboration and teacher voice were critical to navigating rigid structures.

A third barrier was the pressure of high-stakes testing, which participants described as shifting the instructional focus away from the whole child and toward narrow academic outcomes. Assessment pressure was referenced 16 times in the data set. Participant 8 expressed this concern: “Kids are more than just a test score… If you’re so focused on the test… they still treat those kids like they are a test score.” This pressure often discouraged teachers from using innovative or culturally relevant reading instruction, reinforcing rigid pacing and content requirements that did not always align with students’ lives. School leaders compounded this challenge by not sharing participants’ values around CRP. Participant 2 shared, “I did have one principal who felt as though the child’s background shouldn’t matter,” illustrating how unsupportive leadership could become another barrier to implementation. However, just as leadership could restrict CRP, it could also empower it. Participants repeatedly pointed to supportive administrators as the key to overcoming institutional barriers. Participant 2 described how her principal encouraged autonomy: "She just say, go for it." These examples underscore how leadership that trusts participants’ judgment and cultural insight can directly facilitate the implementation of CRP, especially in reading instruction where text choice and discussion content are so critical.

Another implementation barrier involved the sensitivity of classroom discussions, particularly those related to cultural or political topics in reading materials. Participant 2 noted, “You have to be careful about the subjects that you bring up… so that some of the kids don’t feel bad or offended,” and described the risk of parental backlash. Similarly, Participant 12 explained, “I just don’t want anybody to say, ‘Oh, well, Ms. [redacted]

said this," which reflected how fear of misinterpretation often resulted in self-censorship. These experiences revealed that even when participants found or created culturally relevant materials, using them in class required navigating complex social and political dynamics—another layer of challenge in CRP implementation.

Several participants called for improvements in teacher preparation and professional development to address these concerns and support more effective practices. Participant 7 advocated for more focused training: "I believe they could better support if they actually did more cultural relevant training." Others, like Participant 2, asked for support in "different teaching strategies, classroom management strategies, [and] ways to make the classroom conducive." These suggestions reflect the barriers participants faced and their awareness of what would help them overcome them, further illustrating their agency and commitment to CRP.

In summary, participants described a range of specific, interconnected barriers that complicated their efforts to implement CRP in reading instruction for African American students, including insufficient materials, rigid curricula, testing pressure, unsupportive leadership, and socio-political tensions within the classroom. However, alongside these challenges, they also identified and implemented strategies to address them, including building instructional resources, advocating for professional autonomy, collaborating with colleagues, and seeking stronger leadership support. These efforts revealed not only the implementation challenges participants faced but also the persistence and creativity they demonstrated in pursuing more affirming, equitable learning experiences for their students.

Theme 2

Theme 2 was that teachers noted the importance of noncurricular aspects of creating successful environments for CRP. Teachers consistently emphasized that the success of CRP relied not only on curriculum content but also on the noncurricular aspects of the classroom environment. This theme combined two key categories: empowering students, which appeared 55 times in the data, and humanizing the learning environment, which appeared 165 times. Together, these two categories appeared 220 times across the dataset.

One key noncurricular strategy teachers used to implement CRP was empowering students. Empowering students refers to the noncurricular practices teachers use to foster resilience, confidence, and accountability by encouraging student ownership and advocacy. This category included strategies such as providing encouragement, building self-confidence, promoting resilience, supporting student feedback, and reinforcing personal responsibility. Participant interviews consistently highlighted the importance of empowering students, and the data collected in this study reinforced this focus.

During the interviews, participants were asked to describe their experiences implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students, and the concept of empowering students was referenced 55 times. For instance, seven of the participants described intentionally using motivation, affirmation, and positive reinforcement to cultivate students' belief in themselves. For example, Participant 6 explained, "I tell them, I know you got this. You didn't do great the first time, but I know you can do much better this time," which illustrated how teachers encouraged students to strengthen their

academic self-efficacy. The focus on empowering students reflected teachers' recognition that fostering confidence and resilience was a crucial non-curricular strategy for creating successful environments for CRP.

In addition to providing affirmations, teachers emphasized the importance of cultivating student responsibility and resilience. This category appeared 19 times in the data. Participant 9 highlighted the importance of accountability, stating, "I preach academic ownership all the time… I don't allow my kids to make excuses." According to participants' reports, the deliberate promotion of academic ownership appeared to empower students to become active participants in their learning. Similarly, Participant 10 encouraged students to persevere through setbacks and described how she teaches, "Whatever actions and behaviors that you display during this time of your life… they set the foundation for the rest of your life," linking present learning to long-term success. Participants' descriptions of fostering responsibility and resilience further illustrated how teachers emphasized noncurricular strategies to create successful environments for CRP.

Participants also described efforts to amplify student voice by creating opportunities for students to express their views with confidence. Participant 1 explained that students used persuasive strategies taught in class to debate topics such as homework, noting that these opportunities helped students feel "heard and empowered," which supported the development of confidence and agency. These efforts to elevate student voice illustrated how teachers prioritized non-curricular strategies to create successful environments for implementing CRP.

Another key noncurricular strategy teachers used to implement CRP was humanizing the learning environment. Humanizing the learning environment refers to teachers' efforts to create spaces where students feel valued, respected, and understood through strong relationships, supportive classroom climates, and meaningful personal connections. This category included practices such as engaging in life talks, building home-school connections, using informal discourse, promoting education appreciation, and addressing the whole child's needs. These efforts aimed to foster trust, a sense of belonging, and emotional support within the learning experience. Participant interviews consistently emphasized the importance of humanizing the learning environment, and the study's findings reinforced the significance of this approach. References to humanizing the learning environment appeared 165 times in participant interviews. Participants described creating emotional safety, promoting a sense of belonging, and building authentic relationships as essential conditions for African American students to thrive. Participant 7 described their classroom as a community, stating, "We are one. We are a family. You know, you create that space, the kids started becoming less shy," which illustrated how a strong sense of community fosters student comfort and engagement.

Acknowledging the influence of students' home lives represented another essential element of humanizing the learning environment. Participant 2 stated, "All your learning starts at home," emphasizing that valuing and incorporating students' family and cultural backgrounds was essential to supporting their academic success. Participant 1 reinforced this idea by stating, "Students are more successful when their parents are involved." Participants emphasized the importance of family engagement, recognizing

that home–school connections were critical to humanizing the learning environment and fostering conditions in which African American students could thrive.

Participants consistently emphasized that strong, personal relationships with students provided the foundation for building trust, fostering classroom engagement, and supporting effective teaching, all of which were crucial to humanizing the learning environment. Teachers developed these connections through daily conversations, attentiveness to students' interests, and genuine investment in who students were beyond academics. Participant 9 illustrated this clearly: "If I don't connect with you, you're not going to listen to anything that I say… and it's going to be a long year," underscoring the essential role of relational trust in successful teaching. These relationships were often deepened through reciprocal sharing of personal experiences. As Participant 4 explained, "I also share about mine just for them to connect with me and I connect with them on that level," showing that human connection was integral to creating an inclusive classroom culture. Participants' responses emphasized that connection was often rooted in shared human experiences.

Finally, many participants expressed a strong commitment to helping students connect present-day learning with their future goals and responsibilities. Sixty-six percent of participants emphasized life skills, decision-making, and long-term consequences as central components of their teaching. Participant 5 reflected this belief in her statement, "I let them know that this is for you and when you are learning, you're learning for you because this will take you a long way and this is going to help you," illustrating how teachers encouraged students to view education as both an opportunity and a

responsibility. These reported efforts to link academic learning with real-world skills and future aspirations highlighted how teachers used non-curricular strategies to create supportive environments that nurtured African American students' success.

Empowering students and humanizing the learning environment were essential non-curricular strategies that teachers prioritized when implementing CRP in reading instruction for African American students. Empowering students centered on fostering resilience, ownership, and voice, while humanizing the learning environment emphasized building relationships, ensuring emotional safety, and strengthening home-school connections. These categories aligned with the broader understanding that implementing CRP requires attending to students' noncurricular needs to create supportive and thriving classroom environments.

Theme 3

Theme 3 was that teachers were clear on their role in providing appropriate curricular and instructional approaches that support CRP. Participants expressed a clear understanding of their role in delivering appropriate curricular and instructional approaches that support CRP. This theme encompassed three categories: specific instructional strategies, which appeared 513 times in the dataset; culturally affirming curriculum, which appeared 60 times in the dataset; and critical teaching, which appeared 69 times in the dataset. Specific instructional strategies refer to student-centered methods such as goal setting, differentiation, and conferencing to support academic growth. Culturally affirming curriculum involves selecting texts and experiences that reflect and validate students' identities. Critical teaching engages students in analyzing social issues,

challenging stereotypes, and viewing themselves as agents of change. Together, these categories reflected elementary teachers' intentional efforts to implement CRP when teaching reading to African American students.

Participants consistently described a range of instructional strategies designed to differentiate instruction, promote engagement, and center students as active learners. These strategies included goal setting, student data tracking, conferencing, and flexible grouping. Participants emphasized their role in helping students monitor their academic progress and take ownership of their learning. Participant 8 explained, "I make my students well aware with where they are and where they need to be," while Participant 1 shared, "I allow the students to track their data… so they can see their growth." These practices supported both academic outcomes and student motivation.

Several participants also emphasized the use of differentiated instruction as a key tool for meeting students' needs. Participant 1 explained, "My class is broken up into levels… the challenges would be working with the students at their level to get a project [done]." Conferencing further personalized instruction, especially in writing. Participant 6 shared, "I have my conferences with them, especially with writing… and it makes them want to do an awesome job." Across these examples, participants viewed their instructional role as one that balances high expectations with responsive, student-centered support.

Participants also viewed themselves as curators of a curriculum that reflected and validated students' cultural identities. Nine participants described intentionally selecting texts that featured diverse characters and culturally relevant themes. Participant 7

explained, “I try to make sure that I’m choosing people, characters that the kids can really, truly relate to,” while Participant 5 described using culturally adapted versions of familiar stories, such as an African American version of *Goldilocks*. Participants also incorporated current events, personal stories, and popular culture, such as music and social media, to make instruction more engaging and relatable.

In addition to text selection, participants created culturally inclusive learning environments through heritage-based projects and multicultural activities. Participant 1 recalled, “Everybody walks away learning about both religions and different holidays from each other,” and Participant 2 added, “All cultures were recognized.” These efforts extended beyond reading content to foster a sense of belonging, appreciation for differences, and connection to the broader world, all of which supported deeper engagement with reading instruction.

Beyond affirming culture and delivering differentiated instruction, many participants saw critical thinking and social awareness as essential parts of their role. They used reading and writing as opportunities to help students challenge injustice and explore real-world issues. Five participants described incorporating civic engagement activities, such as writing persuasive letters to public officials or analyzing current events. Participant 8 shared, “We have those important conversations of what needs to change, how do we go about changing it, and hopefully how they can be change agents.” Participants also described strategies for dismantling stereotypes and fostering empathy through reading discussions and historical analysis. Participant 10 emphasized the importance of “having them understand that you are more than what the world says that

you are," while Participant 9 described using perspective-taking exercises, such as asking students to imagine how others might feel in situations involving discrimination or exclusion. These examples demonstrate that participants saw their instructional role as extending beyond academic standards to include identity development and critical consciousness, core tenets of CRP.

In summary, participants clearly understood that implementing CRP required more than acknowledging students' cultural backgrounds—it demanded planning, strategic instruction, and a curriculum rooted in students' lived experiences. Participants demonstrated a commitment to fostering academic success, cultural competence, and critical thinking through the use of specific instructional strategies, culturally affirming curriculum decisions, and effective teaching practices. These practices were integrated into daily reading instruction, reflecting a belief that effective teaching affirms students' identities while promoting growth.

Summary

This study explored elementary teachers' experiences implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students. Three themes emerged from the data analysis, collectively addressing the RQ. First, participants identified multiple barriers to CRP implementation, including limited resources, rigid curricula, testing pressures, and unsupportive leadership; however, they also shared their creative strategies for navigating these challenges. Second, participants emphasized the importance of non-curricular efforts, such as empowering students and humanizing the learning environment, as essential to creating classrooms where CRP could thrive. Third, participants described

their instructional role as intentionally designing reading instruction that affirms students' identities, promotes academic success, and fosters critical thinking.

Together, these themes revealed how participants adapted their instructional practices to align with the principles of CRP, even when institutional or curricular constraints were present. The findings provide insight into the daily realities, values, and strategies of educators dedicated to providing equitable reading instruction for African American students. In Chapter 5, I interpret these findings in relation to existing literature and the study's conceptual framework. I also discuss implications for practice, offer recommendations, and reflect on the study's contributions to positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Through this qualitative study, I explored elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. I sought to understand the phenomenon of elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. A basic qualitative research design was used to explore how elementary teachers interpret their experiences, construct their realities, and assign meaning to their implementation of CRP in reading instruction for African American students (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015).

This study addressed a gap in the literature by focusing on elementary teachers' experiences using CRP when teaching reading to African American students. Student performance on the most recent administration of the National Assessment of Education Progress revealed that only about one in five African American fourth graders were reading at or above proficient levels, compared to about one in two White students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Although substantial research existed on CRP in various instructional contexts (Leonard & Sentance, 2021; Smith et al., 2022; Vodicka, 2022), a significant gap remained regarding elementary teachers' perceptions of CRP implementation in reading instruction for African American students. Understanding these perceptions was essential to uncovering how teachers implemented CRP in their reading instruction. The findings highlighted how elementary teachers actively design and adapt instructional practices to affirm students' cultural identities, promote engagement, and foster critical consciousness. At the same time, they navigate

systemic challenges, such as rigid curricula, limited representation in materials, and a fear of political backlash, which constrain the full implementation of CRP.

The data analysis yielded three major themes related to participating elementary teachers' perceptions about implementing CRP. The themes that emerged were (a) teachers articulated specific barriers to implementation and noted approaches to overcoming those challenges; (b) teachers noted the importance of noncurricular aspects of creating successful environments for CRP; and (c) teachers were clear on their role in providing appropriate curricular and instructional approaches that support CRP. This study contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity by offering insight into how elementary teachers perceive and implement culturally relevant pedagogy in reading instruction. These findings may inform future efforts to improve literacy outcomes and support the academic and personal growth of African American students (Delpit, 1992; Freire, 2000; Gay, 2002; Hooks, 1994).

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I present the study's findings, utilizing the research reviewed in Chapter 2 and the culturally relevant pedagogy framework. The findings reflect how elementary teachers described their experiences and perceptions of implementing CRP in reading instruction for African American students. I discuss how each finding confirms or challenges existing knowledge in the field, using the three tenets of CRP: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness.

Teachers Articulated Specific Barriers to Implementation and Noted Approaches to Overcoming Those Challenges

The findings of this study both confirmed and extended existing knowledge about the implementation of CRP. Participant responses revealed significant gaps in cultural representation, particularly in literacy instruction. Teachers explained that most curriculum materials centered on White experiences and failed to reflect the identities, histories, and lived experiences of African American students. This finding aligned with Lucy et al.'s (2020) content analysis of U.S. history textbooks, which showed that such materials frequently underrepresented historically marginalized groups and overemphasized White male figures. Echoing this concern, Participant 6 described a lack of representation in classroom materials, stating, "Because most of the books have Caucasian people on…the front cover and inside the book. It is no book that represents African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians... it does not talk about culture." Enriquez (2021) similarly warned against superficial inclusion, using metaphors such as "foggy mirrors" and "heavy doors" to describe books that offer vague reflections of student identity or block access to authentic cultural understanding. Participant 9 also noted this gap and described how they responded: "If that text sounded biased or if that text minimized the role of Black people in that society, I would find a different text from the lens of what was it like as an African-American during that time." Rather than rely on materials that distorted or erased cultural narratives, the teacher sought out texts that offered more authentic and inclusive perspectives. Other participants described taking similar action. Participant 8, for example, shared, "I have to create the curriculum myself… I find my

own resources. I create my own exit tickets," illustrating both the burden and agency involved in implementing CRP. Participant 9 also described modifying materials to ensure they reflected the perspectives of marginalized communities. Collectively, these examples show a pattern of teachers recognizing cultural gaps in curriculum materials and responding by adapting content. Their actions confirm critiques in the literature about mainstream curricula and extend them by demonstrating how educators compensate for these gaps using inclusive texts and culturally responsive strategies.

Teachers reported that strict curriculum mandates and scripted instruction limited their ability to implement CRP in reading instruction. This finding extended the literature on scripted curricula and reduced instructional autonomy. Livers and Willey (2023) found that even teachers trained in equity-focused pedagogies often reverted to rigid, standardized methods due to institutional pressures. Participants in the present study echoed this tension as they described the constraints of rigid pacing guides and scripted curricula. Participant 1 shared, "Every classroom has to be teaching the same thing at the same time, in the same manner," while Participant 5 added, "You got to stick to the script… Sometimes, it's difficult just to deviate and do some other things like that." These reflections confirmed the persistence of control-oriented instructional models that hindered teachers' ability to tailor instruction to students' cultural identities and lived experiences.

Participants shared that having autonomy and flexibility in instructional decisions—such as selecting texts, adapting lessons, and incorporating culturally relevant projects—allowed them to better meet the needs of their students. Participant 3 stated, "I

am allowed as a teacher to find different text," and Participant 1 described on a more flexible environment where "teachers were given the freedom to deliver lessons and conduct instructional methods within their class that benefited their class." These reflections highlighted how instructional autonomy served as a critical enabler of CRP, extending the literature by emphasizing the role of teacher agency in delivering relevant and inclusive instruction. This finding aligns with those of Adams and Kaczmarczyk (2023), who showed that when preservice teachers selected culturally authentic texts and designed interactive read-alouds, they effectively integrated CRP into their literacy instruction. Similarly, Aronson (2020) emphasized that instructional flexibility supported culturally responsive pedagogy by allowing teachers to meet individual needs and create inclusive, student-centered learning environments.

Supportive leadership emerged as another critical factor in the successful implementation of CRP, reinforcing the findings of Mok et al. (2023) and Schwarzenthal et al. (2023) on the value of mentorship and responsive guidance. Participants consistently reported minimal to no administrative pushbacks when implementing culturally responsive practices. Many described their administrators as supportive and open-minded, especially when instructional efforts aligned with academic standards or broader school initiatives. For example, Participant 2 recalled that their principal "just says, go for it" when they explained the culturally relevant goals behind a lesson, emphasizing how administrative encouragement empowered them to take instructional risks. Participant 7 shared, "I haven't received any pushback from administration," and others described school leaders as cooperative, culturally aware, and even proactive in

creating space for inclusive teaching. In a couple of interviews, participants shared that their administration supported CRP because of the school's International Baccalaureate (IB) focus, which promoted global and culturally inclusive perspectives. Participants also described collaborative environments, such as professional learning communities, that provided time to co-plan inclusive lessons, share culturally responsive strategies, and reflect on student needs—further reinforcing the role of leadership in sustaining CRP.

Although many participants described their administrators as supportive of culturally responsive efforts, concerns about parental backlash and uncertainty around administrative boundaries led them to approach culturally or politically sensitive topics with caution. Consistent with findings by Idrus and Sohid (2023) and Narayanan et al. (2021), participants expressed discomfort when engaging with topics related to race, culture, or current events. The perceived immaturity of some students further influenced their instructional decisions. Participant 2 noted, "You have to be careful about the subjects that you bring up… so that some of the kids don't feel bad or offended," and added, "There are some parents who want to keep their kids sheltered." Similarly, Participant 12 shared, "I just don't want anybody to say, 'Oh, well, Ms. [redacted] said this," highlighting the pressure to avoid controversial topics in order to protect their professional standing. Participants reported that these conversations were often avoided or approached with extreme caution due to political sensitivity, fear of misinterpretation, and the complexities of managing diverse classroom dynamics. These findings confirm earlier research that identified institutional culture and fear of conflict as significant barriers to fully enacting CRP (Idrus & Sohid, 2023; Prayitno et al., 2024). They also

illustrate how topic avoidance constrained teachers' ability to fully implement CRP in reading instruction.

Finally, the findings on student disengagement supported research by Owens and Wells (2021) and Wilcoxen et al. (2020), who found that culturally inclusive classrooms enhanced student engagement. Participants observed that students became disinterested or resistant when they could not relate to the instructional material. Participant 4 explained, "We're talking about stuff that they can't connect to or connect with. They seem very uninterested." Participant 8 described the curriculum as "very diluted," adding, "There's no culturally relevant pedagogy in it." Participants reported that students often struggled to engage with curriculum materials due to a lack of cultural relevance and developmental readiness. Many instructional texts failed to reflect African American students' lived experiences, which led to disinterest, behavioral disengagement, and limited comprehension. These observations underscored the significance of CRP in fostering cultural inclusion, enhancing student engagement, and promoting academic success. The connection between identity and comprehension is especially important in literacy instruction, where texts that do not reflect students' realities can impede both motivation and understanding.

Teachers Noted the Importance of Noncurricular Aspects of Creating Successful Environments for CRP

The findings confirmed prior research emphasizing the importance of student empowerment and identity affirmation within CRP. Kwok et al. (2023) highlighted how preservice teachers who were trained to recognize and build on students' strengths—

rather than focusing on deficits—were better equipped to implement inclusive strategies that promote confidence, resilience, and academic success. This study affirmed that orientation is achieved through the lived practices of participants, who described deliberate efforts to nurture student confidence and resilience. Participants consistently used encouragement, goal-setting, and affirmations to motivate students and build their confidence, particularly when students faced academic challenges. They described pushing students to persist, recognizing effort, and using culturally resonant language, incentives, and personal modeling to inspire growth. For example, Participant 6 stated, "I tell them, I know you got this. You didn't do great the first time, but I know you can do much better this time," highlighting the use of encouragement to build students' belief in their ability to succeed. In another instance, Participant 6 affirmed students' self-worth in a culturally responsive way by stating, "No matter what I look like, I am enough; no matter what my hair looks like, no matter what my clothes look like, I am enough." This statement reflects a deliberate effort to validate students' identities and foster a classroom culture where all learners feel seen, valued, and capable. These practices demonstrate a strong commitment to student empowerment, aligning with core principles of CRP.

In addition to reinforcing core principles of CRP, the findings shed light on emotional, relational, and future-oriented dimensions of CRP that are often overlooked in research. While studies such as Aronson (2020) and Kwok et al. (2023) emphasized high expectations and instructional flexibility, participants in this study described emotional safety, relational trust, and resilience-building as fundamental to successful teaching. For instance, Participant 10 reminded students that "whatever actions and behaviors that you

display during this time of your life… they set the foundation for the rest of your life," while also stressing the importance of self-direction, research, and civic engagement. Such statements reveal a broader view of student development that connects academic engagement with personal growth, an aspect that extends beyond the scope of much existing literature.

The findings also extended current understandings of student-centered learning. Idrus et al. (2023) and Adams and Kaczmarczyk (2023) described student-centeredness primarily in terms of facilitation and text selection. In this study, participants described student-centeredness as a process of actively co-constructing the learning environment. One key strategy used to support this was regular student conferencing. Participants intentionally scheduled one-on-one conferences, even with young learners, to discuss progress, identify supports and barriers, and set personalized goals. For example, Participant 9 shared that they regularly conferenced with students "all the time about their progress," explaining that such efforts encouraged students to take ownership of their learning. Similarly, Participant 6 noted that conferencing makes students "want to do an awesome job," highlighting its motivational impact. This approach framed students as active participants in their educational journey rather than passive recipients. In some cases, conferencing was initiated in response to student survey feedback to improve the learning experience, illustrating a feedback-informed, responsive instructional model. Moreover, students were encouraged to apply classroom-learned skills to real-world situations. Participant 1 described students using persuasive writing strategies to argue

their views on homework assignments, demonstrating how CRP extends beyond the classroom and fosters agency.

The findings also reaffirmed the importance of strong teacher-student relationships, echoing the work of Poling et al. (2022) and Li et al. (2022). Participants described such relationships as foundational to trust and engagement. Participant 9 highlighted the importance of connection by stating, "If I don't connect with you, you're not going to listen to anything that I say… and it's going to be a long year." Relationship-building often began with informal, daily conversations about students' lives outside of school. Participants shared how these casual interactions evolved into deeper conversations that offered insight into students' backgrounds, interests, and values. Participants also emphasized the value of reciprocal cultural sharing. Participant 4 explained, "I also share about mine just for them to connect with me and I connect with them on that level," reflecting how mutual exchange fosters relational depth and cultural affirmation. Participants described how these relationships created space for students to share stories, traditions, and even physical tokens from home, making the school feel like an extension of their lived experiences. These relational strategies confirmed and deepened the theoretical framing of CRP as a relational and emotionally grounded practice.

The role of family engagement and recognition of students' cultural backgrounds—discussed in works by McWayne et al. (2022) and Collins et al. (2024)—was also substantiated in the findings. Participants consistently acknowledged that learning begins at home. Participant 2 remarked, "All your learning starts at home," and

Participant 1 observed that “students are more successful when their parents are involved.” Participants further noted that students arrived with varying degrees of academic readiness, and their language development was shaped by their home environments. Participant 3 reflected, “Some students just don’t know because they don’t have those types of conversations at home,” while Participant 2 added, “There can sometimes be a disconnect with families or parents who don’t believe or support education because that trickles down to their child.” These insights aligned with CRP literature that emphasizes integrating family and community knowledge into school practices and underscored the importance of bridging school-home gaps to create equitable learning opportunities (Smith et al., 2021).

Teachers’ Instructional Approaches Supporting CRP

The findings from this study confirmed, extended, and in some cases challenged existing research on CRP in teacher education and instructional practice. Participants clearly understood their roles in designing and delivering culturally responsive instruction. Their practices aligned with key tenets of CRP, including the integration of students’ lived experiences, affirmation of cultural identity, and promotion of critical thinking and academic growth.

The findings confirmed prior research emphasizing the importance of culturally affirming curricular choices and instructional strategies (Adams & Kaczmarczyk, 2023). Participants consistently described intentional efforts to connect lessons to students’ communities, cultural backgrounds, and personal interests. For example, Participant 8 emphasized, “Whatever we learn inside the classroom, it can be connected to the outside

world that they live in," highlighting the role of instruction in bridging school learning with real-life experiences. Similarly, Participant 1 stated, "Everything that I'm going to do is going to be so that there is a connection that the students can sense with the lessons," reflecting a pedagogical approach grounded in relevance and authenticity.

Participants also described tailoring instruction to students' lived experiences, fostering engagement, and deepening learning. These efforts included drawing connections to students' neighborhoods, family traditions, and shared cultural references. As Participant 11 explained, "You're staying with the standard, but you're bringing in that piece that helps them to connect," reinforcing the idea that academic rigor and cultural relevance go hand in hand. The use of culturally responsive strategies—such as text-to-self and text-to-world connections, culturally relevant texts and music, local events, and student-centered inquiry—enabled participants to personalize instruction in ways that affirmed identity and strengthened academic engagement. These findings aligned with existing literature supporting the integration of cultural knowledge to promote meaningful learning (DeMatthews et al., 2020; Owens & Wells, 2021).

The findings also extended prior research by offering concrete examples of how participants implemented CRP in literacy instruction, a gap noted by several scholars (Cantrell et al., 2023; Debnam et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ortlieb et al., 2023). Participants described using culturally relevant texts, differentiated reading strategies, and scaffolded writing assignments that aligned with state standards while centering students' identities and experiences. For instance, Participant 5 explained the use of an African-American version of Goldilocks to support literacy development while

enhancing cultural connection. Participant 9 added, “I typically look for books that have topics that are not so far beyond my students’ birth year,” underscoring the dual goals of cultural affirmation and developmental appropriateness. In addition to text selection, participants described a deliberate process of evaluating characters, messages, and illustrations to ensure relatability and representation. As Participant 7 shared, “I try to make sure that I’m choosing people, characters that the kids can really, truly relate to.” Participant 9 also noted the value of varied modalities, including read-alouds and song lyrics, as instructional texts, highlighting the use of flexible and engaging formats to support comprehension and cultural connection.

In addition to culturally affirming content, many participants emphasized student-centered practices that promote agency and academic ownership. These included student goal setting, self-monitoring, and flexible grouping. Participants supported student empowerment by making learning goals transparent and engaging students in tracking their academic growth. Participant 1 explained, “I allow the students to track their data as well so they can see their growth,” while Participant 8 noted, “When students understand what the goals are, they tend to want to meet them.” These strategies aligned with the literature on differentiated instruction and inclusive assessment (Pasira, 2022; Tai et al., 2024), while also emphasizing students’ active roles in the learning process.

Participants expanded the scope of CRP by integrating popular culture and social media into their instructional practices. While previous research has addressed culturally authentic materials and identity-affirming texts (Enriquez, 2021; Kelly et al., 2021), few studies have examined how teachers leveraged platforms like TikTok or Instagram to

enhance instructional relevance (Aydogmus et al., 2023). Participants described strategically incorporating students' digital and pop culture interests, particularly music, social media, and community figures, into classroom instruction to boost engagement and foster real-world connections. For example, Participant 8 explained, "Me being able to be on these platforms to see what they're doing… has helped support me in my classroom," highlighting how teachers adapt to cultural shifts to maintain engagement and build relational trust. These efforts reflected a deliberate approach to meeting students where they were and connecting academic content to their lived experiences.

Additionally, findings revealed that participants actively fostered critical consciousness and civic engagement by encouraging students to analyze societal issues and take action. Hipolito-Delgado et al. (2021) found that teachers who engaged in reflective practices were more effective in developing students' sociopolitical awareness and critical thinking about social justice. Several participants described classroom moments where these efforts came to life. For example, Participant 8 stated, "We have those important conversations of what needs to change, how do we go about changing it, and hopefully how they can be change agents." This approach highlighted the participant's intentional role in guiding students to see themselves as capable of initiating change. Similarly, Participant 9 described how students integrated civic engagement into classroom literacy practices by writing letters to their congressmen and to the mayor, noting, "I want to say they got a few responses." This illustrates how literacy instruction was leveraged as a platform for authentic civic participation.

Moreover, participants emphasized practices that supported the development of cultural identity, such as hosting cultural weeks, designing student-led museum projects, and honoring historically excluded narratives. These practices aligned with research on identity-affirming instruction and inclusive curriculum development (Abdallah & Alkaabi, 2023; Eden et al., 2024). Abdallah and Alkaabi (2023) found that school programs celebrating heritage and student contributions fostered a sense of pride and motivation to learn. These culturally responsive initiatives also promoted student engagement and cultivated intercultural understanding within diverse classroom settings. Findings also revealed that participants and schools made intentional efforts to celebrate and affirm students' diverse cultural backgrounds through events such as Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and lessons introducing Ramadan. These efforts fostered cultural inclusivity, allowing students to see their identities reflected in classroom and school-wide programming. Participant 1 described, "My class will always create a Black history museum… and the students are to create then a museum piece based off that invention from that Black inventor," illustrating a hands-on approach to culturally affirming pedagogy that extended beyond surface-level celebrations.

Across the data, participants positioned themselves as instructional leaders and facilitators of inclusive, empowering, and academically rigorous learning environments. These findings contributed to the literature by offering a nuanced portrait of how in-service teachers sustained culturally responsive practices, even within potentially constraining institutional settings. In doing so, they offered insight into the long-term implementation of CRP, responding to calls in the literature for more sustained, practice-

based research on culturally relevant teaching in diverse classrooms (Livers & Willey, 2023; Martell, 2023).

Conceptual Framework

The findings of this study aligned with Ladson-Billings's (1995) conceptualization of CRP, which included three core tenets: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Participants described instructional and relational approaches that supported these tenets as they implemented reading instruction for African American students, often within constrained institutional settings.

Participants described several systemic barriers that limited their ability to implement CRP during reading instruction, including inadequate curricular resources, inflexible pacing requirements, and high-stakes testing pressures. Many participants noted that the reading materials provided by their districts lacked cultural relevance and failed to reflect the identities of their students. As a result, teachers often created or adapted resources to ensure that reading content was representative and affirming. These actions reflected CRP's emphasis on academic success as defined by both achievement and identity affirmation (Capper, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Rather than relying on prescribed materials, participants developed reading lessons that incorporated culturally meaningful texts and fostered deeper engagement, practices that aligned with Freire's (2000) call for student-centered, participatory learning environments.

In addition to modifying curriculum content, participants described strategies for navigating institutional constraints. Some reported using professional autonomy and leadership support to select relevant texts or adjust lessons in ways that honored their

students' backgrounds. Others described collaborating with colleagues to supplement standardized materials. These findings aligned with Eden et al.'s (2024) definition of cultural competence as the ability to respond to students' cultural contexts through intentional instructional decisions. Participants who had access to supportive leadership emphasized that autonomy in text selection and instructional planning enabled them to better affirm student identity and address students' academic needs simultaneously. These findings reinforced Gay's (2002) position that curriculum design must be reflective of students' lived experiences to be effective.

Participants also emphasized relational and emotional practices that complemented their instructional goals. Many described encouraging students through affirmations, goal setting, and opportunities for self-monitoring. Several teachers reported that building confidence and resilience was a foundational part of their reading instruction, particularly for students who had experienced academic challenges. These findings aligned with Caingcoy's (2023) and Mathis et al.'s (2023) conclusion that CRP must address the whole child by supporting emotional development alongside academic learning. Participants also described creating classroom environments grounded in trust, respect, and personal connection. Many noted that getting to know students' interests, home lives, and cultural backgrounds was essential to building engagement in reading. These relational strategies reflected Delpit's (1992) argument that culturally relevant teaching requires teachers to connect with students as individuals beyond academic content.

Participants further described how they incorporated elements of students' cultures and home environments into classroom instruction. Several participants reported that they acknowledged and incorporated students' family traditions and values into classroom discussions and literacy activities. Others described how family engagement played a critical role in shaping student success. These practices supported Gay's (2002) position that culturally responsive pedagogy must connect school learning with students' home knowledge and reinforced the importance of cultural competence in fostering inclusive and effective instruction.

Critical consciousness was also evident in participants' reported practices. Participants described using reading and writing as tools to encourage students to explore topics such as identity, fairness, and social change. For example, participants explained how they facilitated conversations about current events, guided students in writing to public officials, and helped students reflect on the perspectives of marginalized communities. These instructional moves reflected Hooks's (1994) and Freire's (2000) vision of education as a means of empowerment and transformation. Participants supported students in viewing themselves as capable of understanding and addressing real-world challenges, which aligned with Ladson-Billings's (1995) assertion that CRP must include a focus on sociopolitical awareness and agency.

Participants also reported using student-centered instructional practices to promote academic success and motivation. They described differentiating instruction, organizing flexible reading groups, and using one-on-one conferences to provide targeted feedback. Several participants emphasized the importance of making learning goals

transparent and involving students in tracking their own progress. These practices positioned students as active participants in the learning process and supported Freire's (2000) critique of passive educational models. In this way, the findings demonstrated how teachers integrated culturally responsive strategies with instructional rigor to support literacy development.

Overall, the findings revealed that participants implemented CRP by affirming students' identities, fostering academic ownership, and encouraging critical thinking. These efforts were consistently grounded in students' lived experiences and supported by both instructional strategies and non-curricular, relationship-building activities. The participants' reflections illustrated how CRP functioned as a flexible, responsive approach that adapted to institutional constraints while centering students' cultural knowledge, voice, and potential.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation that affected the trustworthiness of this study was the potential bias of self-reporting during interviews. As Sher and Oliver (2023) noted, participants may offer socially desirable responses to present themselves in a favorable light or align with perceived educational expectations. Despite efforts to build rapport and establish a comfortable and trusting environment—an approach supported by Patton (2015)—it remained possible that some participants overemphasized their commitment to CRP. Several participants spoke passionately about their culturally responsive practices; however, given the nature of self-reporting, it was not possible to verify whether all accounts fully reflected their day-to-day instructional behaviors. The desire to appear

competent, socially aware, or professionally aligned with current equity discourses may have influenced how participants described their actions and beliefs.

A second limitation of the study was the potential for researcher bias, which arose from my position as an African American educator with prior experience in culturally relevant pedagogy. While this positionality allowed for deeper engagement with participants and a nuanced understanding of their contexts, it also introduced the risk of interpretive bias. To mitigate this, I engaged in ongoing self-reflective journaling throughout the data collection and analysis phases. As Zafeer et al. (2023) explained, reflective writing enhances self-awareness and encourages researchers to examine their assumptions critically. Through journaling, I documented my reactions, challenged my perspectives, and consciously separated personal convictions from participants' reported experiences. Nonetheless, complete objectivity was not possible, and my identity, values, and educational background inevitably shaped my interpretations. While these limitations existed, they did not compromise the overall integrity of the study; readers should consider them when evaluating the findings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, future research is needed to further understand elementary teachers' perceptions of implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students. First, future studies could explore the use of classroom observations to complement self-reported data. This study relied solely on participant interviews, which provided rich insights into educators' perceptions and intentions. However, as noted in the literature (Sher & Oliver, 2023), self-reporting can introduce social

desirability bias, which may limit the accuracy of reported practices. Observational research could provide a more nuanced understanding of how CRP manifests in instructional settings and how it relates to teacher beliefs. Importantly, such studies should maintain a respectful and non-evaluative stance to preserve trust and authenticity in participant behavior.

Secondly, future research could investigate the role of leadership and institutional support in shaping the implementation of CRP. A significant strength of this study was the recurring emphasis participants placed on administrative autonomy and trust as enabling factors for culturally responsive instruction. Further inquiry into how principals and district leaders perceive and support CRP—especially in reading instruction—could help bridge systemic gaps and inform professional development practices.

Implications

This study has the potential to contribute to positive social change by shedding light on how elementary teachers perceive and implement CRP in reading instruction for African American students. The findings, rooted in educators' lived experiences, suggest implications across multiple levels. At the individual level, culturally affirming classroom environments—where students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and feel emotionally supported—can foster increased engagement, confidence, and a sense of academic ownership. At the family level, teachers' efforts to validate students' cultural experiences and strengthen home-school connections may encourage greater family involvement and promote long-term academic and social success. At the organizational level, the study highlights how supportive leadership and teacher autonomy enable more

inclusive and responsive teaching, offering school and district leaders practical insights for equity-focused literacy programs. Although not directly aimed at policy, the study also highlights systemic constraints, such as rigid curricula and insufficient resources, pointing to a broader need for educational stakeholders to consider how structural reforms could better support CRP implementation.

The study reaffirms the applicability of Ladson-Billings's (1995) CRP as a lens for understanding teacher practice in diverse educational settings. The findings demonstrate that CRP remains a relevant and robust framework for promoting equity in literacy instruction, particularly when adapted to local contexts. This study also extends CRP by highlighting the emotional and relational dimensions of teaching—areas emphasized by scholars like Hooks (1994)—as central to culturally responsive practice.

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations can support the effective implementation of CRP. Educators and school leaders should expand their professional development to focus on culturally responsive text selection, relationship-building, and equity-based instruction. Increasing teacher autonomy in planning can empower educators to tailor lessons that reflect students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. Schools should also audit and revise literacy curricula to ensure representation and inclusivity. Ultimately, fostering collaborative leadership and creating space for open, critical conversations can empower teachers to address sensitive topics and amplify student voices.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. The findings revealed that while teachers faced systemic challenges such as rigid curricula, limited culturally responsive resources, and pressure from standardized expectations, many remained deeply committed to affirming student identities and connecting instruction to their lived experiences. Educators demonstrated how CRP could create more inclusive and empowering learning environments through strategies that promoted academic growth, cultural affirmation, and critical thinking. Their voices underscored the importance of instructional autonomy, supportive leadership, and professional development grounded in cultural responsiveness. Ultimately, these findings reinforce that advancing educational equity begins with teachers' everyday choices to create classrooms where all students—particularly African American learners—can see themselves, succeed, and be heard.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Chelsea Little
Location:
Interviewee Identification Number:

Date:
Time of the Interview:

Introductory Script:

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study. Before we get started, I wanted to share a bit about myself and why I am doing this study as part of my doctoral coursework.

My name is Chelsea and I have been an elementary school teacher for nine years. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University and in this research study my goal is to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of their implementation of CRP when teaching reading to African American students. By exploring teachers' experiences with culturally relevant pedagogy, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of how we can support African American students in reading and help educators create more inclusive, meaningful learning experiences for all students.

I want to listen to and document your stories and experiences. Our conversation today should last about 45 minutes to 1 hour.
Before we begin, I want to let you know that your participation in this interview is completely confidential. This means that your identity and any personal information you share during this interview will be protected only used for the purposes of this research. Neither you nor, your school will be identified.
Additionally, I will be audio recording our conversation to make sure I capture everything you say accurately. This recording will only be used for research purposes, and it will be stored securely with access limited to myself. If at any point you feel uncomfortable or want to stop the recording, please let me know, and we can either pause or end the interview entirely. Do you have any questions or concerns about the confidentiality or the recording before we begin? [Discus questions]
[START RECORDING]

I have received your permission to participate in the study. Please confirm that you gave your consent for this interview. Thank you for agreeing to participate.
Table of Interview Questions:
Transition Statement: *My first question relates to your background.*

RQ	Interview Questions (IQs)	My Notes & Alignment to Framework/ Literature
	IQ1: Tell me about your teaching background, including how long you've been teaching	

	Probes: How did you get started? What grades or subjects have you taught? What inspired you to become a teacher?	

Transition Statement: *Now I would like to shift our focus to how you support the academic success of African American students in your classroom. I'm interested in hearing about how you approach helping these students excel academically while also honoring their cultural backgrounds and experiences.*

RQ	Interview Questions (IQs)	My Notes & Alignment to Framework/ Literature
What are the experiences of elementary teachers implementing CRPwhen teaching reading to African American students?	IQ2: In your opinion, what does academic success look like for African American students in your classroom?	
	Probes: How do you ensure that students achieve academic excellence while staying connected to their cultural identity?	
	IQ3: How do you help African American students succeed academically while honoring their cultural backgrounds?	
	Probes: Can you give an example of how you've incorporated students' personal or community experiences into your lessons?	
	IQ4: How do you encourage African American students to take an active role in their learning, rather than simply absorbing information?	
	Probe: What methods do you use to foster critical thinking and student engagement?	

Transition Statement: *The next set of questions will focus on how you encourage your African American students to think critically about the world around them.*

RQ	Interview Questions (IQs)	My Notes & Alignment to Framework/ Literature
What are the experiences of elementary	IQ5: How do you promote classroom discussions that allow African American students to voice their	

teachers implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students?	thoughts on social issues, like inequality or injustice?	
	Probes: Please give an example of a text or resource you've used to help African American students engage with real-world issues? How do your African American students respond when you bring up societal challenges in your lessons?	
	IQ6: How do you encourage African American students to apply what they've learned in class to address issues they see in their communities or the wider world?	
	Probes: Please share a project or lesson where your African American students applied what they learned to real-world problems or social issues? How do you guide students to connect what they learn in the classroom, like reading or critical thinking, to solving challenges in their everyday lives?	
	IQ7: How do you think your role as a teacher influences African American students' ability to think critically about issues of inequality and justice?	
	Probe: In what ways do you see yourself guiding African American students in recognizing and understanding societal issues? How do you create a classroom environment that encourages African American students to discuss and address issues of inequality or justice? Have you seen changes in your African American students' awareness of social justice issues as a result of your teaching?	
	IQ8: What challenges do you face in helping African American students think critically about societal issues, and how do you overcome them?	
	Probe: Describe any barriers, such as curriculum constraints or lack of	

	resources, that make it difficult to focus on critical thinking around social issues? How do you handle resistance from students, parents, or the school when discussing societal challenges in the classroom?	

Transition Statement: *The next set of questions relate to how you incorporate the cultural experiences of African American students into your teaching*

RQ	Interview Questions (IQs)	My Notes & Alignment to Framework/ Literature
What are the experiences of elementary teachers implementing CRP when teaching reading to African American students?	IQ9: What are your thoughts on the importance of connecting with African American students' cultural backgrounds in your classroom?	
	Probes: Share an example where understanding your students' cultural backgrounds influenced how you approached your teaching. How does this understanding affect your relationships with African American students and their families?	
	IQ10: How do you reflect on and address your own beliefs, biases, or assumptions when teaching African American students?	
	Probe: Describe any moments when you've had to reflect on your own cultural biases? How did that influence your teaching? What steps do you take to ensure your beliefs or assumptions don't negatively impact your African American students?	
	IQ11: How do you support African American students in understanding and appreciating cultural diversity in the classroom?	
	Probe: What types of classroom activities or discussions help your African American students understand and respect cultural diversity? How do you encourage your students to reflect	

	on their own cultural identities through your lessons?	
	IQ12: What challenges have you faced in bringing African American students' cultural experiences into your teaching, and how have you addressed them?	
	Probe: Please describe an instance where it was difficult to incorporate cultural experiences in your teaching? How did you handle that? Are there any barriers, such as lack of resources or institutional support, when integrating students' cultural backgrounds? How do you overcome them?	

Final IQ: *Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences or insights in teaching African American students that we haven't covered? Anything you feel is important for me to understand about your approach or challenges in the classroom?*

Closing Script:

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your experiences and insights with me today. Your input is incredibly valuable. If you have any other thoughts after today, feel free to reach out.

As part of the process, I'll be reaching out to you soon for member checking, which means I'll share a summary of your responses to ensure I've accurately captured your thoughts. Once the study is completed, I will also provide a summary of the final results. You can expect to receive that within the next few months. If you have any additional thoughts after today, feel free to reach out. I really appreciate your participation in this study.

Appendix B: Alignment of Interview Questions With Research Question

Alignment of Interview Questions with Research Question

Interview Questions	CRQ
IQ 1: Tell me about your teaching background, including how long you've been teaching.	X
IQ2: In your opinion, what does academic success look like for African American students in your classroom?	X
IQ3: How do you help African American students succeed academically while honoring their cultural backgrounds?	X
IQ4: How do you encourage African American students to take an active role in their learning, rather than simply absorbing information?	X
IQ5: How do you promote classroom discussions that allow African American students to voice their thoughts on social issues, like inequality or injustice?	X
IQ6: How do you encourage African American students to apply what they've learned in class to address issues they see in their communities or the wider world?	X
IQ7: How do you think your role as a teacher influences African American students' ability to think critically about issues of inequality and justice?	X
IQ8: What challenges do you face in helping African American students think critically about societal issues, and how do you overcome them?	X
IQ9: What are your thoughts on the importance of connecting with African American students' cultural backgrounds in your classroom?	X
IQ10: How do you reflect on and address your own beliefs, biases, or assumptions when teaching African American students?	X
IQ11: How do you support African American students in understanding and appreciating cultural diversity in the classroom?	X
IQ12: What challenges have you faced in bringing African American students' cultural experiences into your teaching, and how have you addressed them?	X

Appendix C: Coding Table

Themes	Categories	Codes
Theme 1: Teachers articulated specific barriers to implementation and noted approaches to overcoming those challenges.	Barriers to Implementation	Resource Development, Resource Misalignment, Mirror Lessons, Unsupportive Leadership, Teacher Autonomy, Sensitivity, Assessment Pressure, Disconnection
	Supportive Strategies	Leadership Support. Collaboration
	Suggestions for Improvement	Policy Change, Professional Development
Theme 2: Teachers noted the importance of non-curricular aspects of creating successful environments for CRP.	Humanizing the Learning Environment	Classroom Environment, Education Appreciation, Life-Talks, Survey, Relationships, Whole-Child, Informal Discourse Behavior Support, Home School Connection, Understanding Environment
	Empowering Students	Resilience, Encouragement, Confidence, Student Advocacy, Student Feedback, Accountability
Theme 3: Teachers were clear on their role in providing appropriate curricular and instructional approaches that support CRP.	Specific Instructional Strategies	Connection, Collaborative Reasoning, Differentiation Goal Setting, Academic Growth, Ask Questions, Experiential Learning, Learning Culture Lead Learning, Outside the Box, Reading Strategies, Research, Small Group, Standard, Data-Driven,

Themes	Categories	Codes
		Conference, Current Event, Social Media, Student Engagement, Student Interest, Reflection, Planning, Writing
	Culturally Affirming Curriculum	Heritage Recognition, Text Selection
	Critical Teaching	Positive Change, Dismantle Stereotypes, Social Injustice, Perspective Taking
	Role of the Teacher	Facilitator of Learning, Teacher Expectations, Teacher Feedback, Teacher Support