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Perceptions of Paraprofessionals on the Grow Your Own Teacher Program in Three Rural School Districts in Eastern North Carolina

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PERCEPTIONS OF PARAPROFESSIONALS ON THE GROW YOUR OWN
TEACHER PROGRAM IN THREE RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN EASTERN
NORTH CAROLINA

By
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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Tony Faison under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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but never give up, and I did not. Although you lost the battle in 2018, you found sweet relief in the arms of God. Rest in peace, Mother. Oh yes! As promised, I am still taking care of Buddy and Dad, I am supporting my family, and I had almost finished what I started the night before you were called home to be with the Lord. As we sat on the porch that fall afternoon, you told me I was carrying on the family legacy. I do not know how I am going to accomplish this task, but I have been doing it for over a decade. As my path grows hard and weary, I cling to the lyrics of a song by the late Reverend James Cleveland, "I don't feel tired. I'm so far from where I started; no one told me the road was easy. I don't believe he took me very far." In the trials and tribulations along the way, God never left me and never forsook me.

Abstract

PERCEPTIONS OF PARAPROFESSIONALS ON THE GROW YOUR OWN

TEACHER PROGRAM IN THREE RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN EASTERN

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The Grow Your Own Teacher (GYOT) program addresses the shortage of qualified

teachers by recruiting and training community residents to become qualified teachers.

These programs look and feel like community-building strategies instead of teacher

pipeline strategies. The GYOT initiative is not new, but the mainstream absorption of the

GYOT initiative presents an exciting opportunity to link education policy and

neighborhood revitalization more closely. The purpose of this qualitative study was to

explore the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the GYOT program in three rural school

districts in eastern North Carolina. The conceptual framework was based on Yosso's

(2005) Cultural Wealth Model, which is shaped to understand better how a program,

school, college, or other institution can promote each specific type of capital. Data were

collected from individual interviews with 10 experienced paraprofessionals. Data analysis

involved open coding and categorization to identify patterns and themes. Results revealed

that juggling daily school duties and attending classes afterward is challenging. Results

also revealed that participants overwhelmingly mentioned the need for financial

assistance for teachers in this program. Further results indicated that it would be useful to

provide teachers with adequate training specific to diversion and inclusion to learn new

teaching strategies to improve the quality of instruction. This study emphasized that

paraprofessionals are essential to teaching students with disabilities, language barriers,

and other needs in the learning environment; therefore, support is critical.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Educational reform, increased focus on accountability, improved teacher education standards, and improved student achievement are critical today (Whitford et al., 2018). Faculty members significantly impact student success and long-term outcomes and can significantly impact college attendance and graduation. Despite the importance of teachers, training courses aimed at educating and equipping them with the essential skills to become good teachers differ in quality curriculum format (Yin & Partelow, 2020). With the increasing importance of holistic education, there is a growing reliance on paraprofessionals, or unlicensed teachers, to provide the necessary support to all students, including students with disabilities (Sobeck et al., 2021).

Paraprofessional teachers are school employees who perform many essential student-related functions in the school but are not licensed educators. These duties include private after-school tutoring, classroom management assistance, activities with parents, library or computer lab support, interpreters, and working with teachers to provide educational support (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). This definition is consistent with the federal requirement for appropriate supervision of teaching assistants (Individuals With Disabilities Act, 2004) and empowers the licensed professional to take full responsibility for creating instructional guidelines for students with disabilities in the classroom (Sobeck et al., 2021).

A Ministry of Education (2018) report found that a significant number of educators serving children with disabilities ages 3 to 21 outnumbered subject teachers. This indicates that future educators will have a variety of responsibilities that make their role more essential and multi-faceted (Sobeck et al., 2021). When the paraprofessional

role is unfairly challenged by the public, unintended yet negative consequences can affect students with disabilities. These adverse effects include but are not limited to vulnerability; overdependence; and limited involvement with the teacher, teaching assistants, and parents of students with disabilities. These consequences also contribute to the strained relationship with teacher participation, the limited access of students to quality education due to low teacher participation, and the dissimilation or disabling of peer acceptance of students with disabilities and stigma. Finally, these effects also include interactions with connected buddies (Sobeck et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to critically evaluate teacher education programs to ensure that future teachers have the expertise they need for their careers (Boyd et al., 2012; Shuls & Trivitt, 2015).

For students to gain 21st century learner skills, teachers need to have 21st century teacher skills to plan the learning process and increase learner success (Coşanay & Karalı, 2022). Teacher preparation courses have extensive hands-on experience built into them. Most courses include teaching placements for college students, but the nature of placements varies outside or even within the college students' teaching experience (Richards & Crookes, 1988). One group of researchers focused on whether teachers had the necessary expertise and capabilities to teach, while another group focused more on whether they had personal qualities such as curiosity, talent, creativity, and love (Coşanay & Karalı, 2022).

Currently, the National Education Association (2015) has adopted alternative certification pathways. In recent years, up to one third of teacher recruits have chosen an alternative pathway to certification, allowing them to start teaching even before meeting all the requirements for certification or licensure (Whitford et al., 2018). Education

leaders are always looking for new ways to empower teachers to improve the learning experience for all college students. Coşanay and Karalı (2022) indicated that the rapid development of information and communication technologies significantly affected the education system and defined the skills millennial teachers must have.

Teacher preparation programs are designed to develop educators with strong skills and competencies to impact K-12 students positively. Work experience occurs throughout the teacher training program, and this experience provides trainee teachers with meaningful opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge of effective teaching practices. Specific pedagogies are introduced, allowing class members to practice and improve in real time (Cheng et al., 2012). These structured experiences can be used to make connections in the school environment and to understand how feedback is applied (Wilcoxen & Lemke, 2021). This approach can also build confidence in teaching and managing challenging learning environments (Wilcoxen & Lemke, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Little was known about the perceptions of paraprofessionals in the Grow Your Own Teacher (GYOT) program in a rural eastern section of North Carolina. Teaching assistants/paraprofessionals depend on teacher supervision to improve classroom activities when supporting students with disabilities (Irvin et al., 2018). Teaching assistants are the backbone of the classroom because they support student learning and well-being (Will, 2022). Although the practice of utilizing teacher assistants has not received much attention, questions have been raised about how they are trained, their opportunities for career development, and their function in the classroom (Östlund et al., 2021). Professional teacher assistants, who implement essential student behavior

interventions, are continually hired to meet the needs of students with special needs in schools (Bronstein et al., 2021). They focus on student achievement holistically rather than on wellness and well-being tasks (Östlund et al., 2021). Educational aides' roles are vital when working with students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). One report found that paraprofessional teachers outnumber special education teachers, meaning nearly all students with IDD receive instruction or support from paraprofessional teachers while in school (Brock & Anderson, 2021). Children with IDD experience some form of trauma in their lives, and these children are characterized by intellectual disability and minimal adaptive function (Lapshina & Stewart, 2021). Teacher assistants can guide students with IDD under federal law if adequately trained and supervised (Brock & Anderson, 2021). Bendici (2022) encouraged political and educational leaders to engage in discussions, organically, with local teacher organizations, neighborhood colleges, and teacher pre-schools to discuss career development in the teaching profession.

As the number of paraprofessional staff increases, they are playing a more active educational support role in schools today. Since paraprofessionals are often not fully trained, career development opportunities for college students offer more direct support to assist students with disabilities, while teachers supervise them. These career development opportunities are often the primary source of on-the-job training for paraprofessionals (Irvin et al., 2018). School districts developing their own teacher preparation programs are gaining popularity in filling teaching positions in underprivileged schools. These programs are a way to offer more challenging positions, such as STEM or special education. These programs will also strengthen racial, ethnic,

and linguistic associations between teacher gender and student population nationally (Jessen et al., 2020).

When paraprofessionals are adequately trained and have a focused role, they can implement interventions with fidelity and contribute to better outcomes for IDD students, which is a unique finding consistent across research studies (Brock & Anderson, 2021). Paraprofessionals may first train with experts to implement learning strategies before working directly with other support staff and these students (Lerman et al., 2020).

As school districts are challenged with teacher shortages, more and more school districts are training their own future classroom educators. This "Grow Your Own" approach to teachers can help build school faculty and staff diversity and shape an instructional body that reflects the district's demographics (Bendici, 2022). Many teacher assistants never considered teaching simply because they were never asked or given the opportunity (Bendici, 2022). However, given the important role of paraprofessionals, it is essential to understand how best to train and supervise them. Due to the financial burden on school districts and the scarcity of qualified training faculty, among other reasons, teacher assistants have limited training (Lerman et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study examined paraprofessional perceptions of the GYOT program in three school districts in eastern North Carolina. Paraprofessional educators have been touted as "bridges," "critical team members," as well as "connectors" in the process (Sobeck et al., 2021). Identifying effective professional development and training strategies for paraprofessionals is important, as emerging research shows that paraprofessionals can faithfully implement various practices with appropriate support

(Walker et al., 2021). Paraprofessionals need proper supervision and support from licensed, experienced teachers to contribute effectively to the inclusion and instruction of students with disabilities (Sobeck et al., 2021). There is increasing awareness of the important role of paraprofessionals in the classroom. Adequate support of paraprofessionals is paramount as they are needed to support students with special needs in schools, as paraprofessionals are tasked with implementing student behavior interventions, which is an important classroom element (Bronstein et al., 2021). If given the right opportunities, adequately trained paraprofessionals may be able to devote more time to relieving teachers of these time-consuming duties, as they carry out interventions with fidelity (Hendrix et al., 2018).

Conceptual Framework

Yosso's (2005) Cultural Wealth Model is designed to better understand how a program, school, college, or other institution can promote each specific type of capital. Yosso's Cultural Wealth Model represents a framework for understanding the experience of how students access college from a strengths-based perspective. There are six types of capital included in the Cultural Wealth Model that education leaders can use to structure their interactions with students (Longmire-Avital, 2019). The Cultural Wealth Model benefits educators working to increase students pursuing higher education to develop empowerment skills in a nontraditional way. These six cultural capitals include aspirational capital, which Yosso defined as hopes and dreams, linguistic capital, which deals with different expressions and communication acquired by students; and familial, referring to the pre-college environment. The social and personal human resources derived from networks extended to familial and community. Yosso defined social capital

as a form of capital for a student's peers and other social connections. Social capital

focuses on how students use these connections to enter college and navigate other social

contexts. Navigational capital is the skills and abilities to navigate "social institutions,"

including educational spaces, while resistance capital is based on community experience

to secure equal rights and collective freedom. All these forms of capital can be used to

empower individuals, according to Yosso. This Cultural Wealth Model intends to capture

the experiences, strengths, and talents of students' college environment (Longmire-Avital,

2019).

GYOT

The GYOT program initiative, developed by Long Island University in New

York, is critical to bridge the teacher shortage, particularly in STEM subjects. K-12

teachers who can culturally relate to students and serve as role models for STEM-related

careers are essential in this program (Kamler & Goubeaud, 2018). Since its inception,

The GYOT initiative has spread nationwide. Many individuals studying to become

teachers are provided financial, academic, and emotional support for this initiative

(Martinez Expands Eligibility for Grow Your Own Teacher Program, 2018). For decades,

research has provided valuable insight into what constitutes high-quality teacher

education. Although more rigorous research is needed, we now understand the benefits of

specific characteristics of teacher preparation, such as the value of hands-on experience

tightly integrated into teacher preparation courses (Muñiz, 2020).

In addressing the teacher shortage and filling the teacher diversity gap, the GYOT

program has been frequently cited as one of several potential solutions to address the

critical teacher deficiency (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019). The GYOT program is defined

as various strategies to recruit teachers from the local community in the hopes that candidates will continue teaching (Valenzuela, 2017). The GYOT program is prepared to adopt the best teacher preparation practices while providing nontraditional indigenous candidates with the support and flexibility needed to become certified teachers (Muñiz, 2020). In filling the teaching gaps in specific populations such as rural schools, STEM fields, specific teacher racial demographics, and special education, the GYOT and hybrid-type programs can be beneficial. These programs provide the university and the district with a robust and ongoing teacher mentoring system. These programs also have the potential to strengthen partnerships within the broader education community and between community organizations, districts, and higher education institutions (Jessen et al., 2020).

The path to teaching certification and licensure is littered with pitfalls and detours for many nontraditional candidates. They are required to pay ever-increasing course and certification fees, take courses that are difficult to maneuver with work schedules, and sacrifice salaries to meet the demands of unfunded college student education. These barriers prevent valuable local talent including paraprofessional educators, extracurricular staff, substitutes, parents, and students from desiring to become teachers (Muñiz, 2020). Jessen et al. (2020) emphasized the growing popularity of the GYOT preparation programs, which are gaining popularity nationwide. They continue highlighting the GYOT programs to fill teaching positions in high-need schools and traditionally more challenging positions such as STEM or special education and to increase racial, ethnic, or linguistic congruence between teachers and student populations.

A significant contribution to the education setting would be to help schools

improve the demographic match between students and teachers. While traditional educational pathways primarily attract White, female, and monolingual teachers, GYOT programs recruit from an untapped pool of local candidates who reflect student demographics (Muñiz, 2020). While school districts often offer traditional careers such as engineering, automotive technology, or computer science, teaching is often not encouraged in the same way (Bendici, 2022). Many states utilize competitive grants to expand and strengthen GYOT programs, providing more enthusiastic career paths for applicants with the same community and demographic background as students (Muñiz, 2020). The GYOT program was explicitly created as environmental support for students to aid their successful transition from high school to college and obtain a degree in math or science education and initial teacher certification within 3 years and allow for their return to their home district to teach (Kamler & Goubeaud, 2018).

Research Questions

This qualitative study examined paraprofessional perceptions of the GYOT program in three school districts in eastern North Carolina. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the perception of GYOT programs from participating teachers?

2. How impactful has the GYOT program been?

3. What steps/actions must school districts take to strengthen paraprofessionals to teacher programs?

Definition of Key Terms

Educational Partnerships

Long-term collaborations aimed at improving education or transition through

participation in research. These partnerships are carefully constructed to connect different forms of expertise and transform power relations in research work to ensure that all partners have a voice in joint work (Farrell et al., 2021).

Federal Funding

Assists ordinary citizens by identifying local and statewide funding opportunities created by federal, state, and private sources (Dragoo & Lomax, 2020).

GYOT Program

Various strategies used in the recruitment of teachers from the community, hoping that candidates will continue to teach in their community (Jessen et al., 2020).

Paraeducator

The support person involved in classroom instruction under the direction of the teacher (Nevin et al., 2009).

Paraprofessional

Students receiving paraprofessional support are often hourly workers who support students with disabilities, help with behavior management, manage classroom setup and cleaning, and supervise individual or group work (Will, 2022).

Pathway

Interrelated academic and elective courses around career or subject topics. It combines experiential learning and links secondary and postsecondary education, training, and learning (Meeder, 2016).

Design

The research study's primary focus was to examine the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the GYOT program in three school districts in eastern North

Carolina. This qualitative study focused on a social phenomenon. Examining the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the GYOT program highlighted a phenomenon predominantly experienced in rural areas. Interviews were used to collect data from 10 teachers who participated in the GYOT program in elementary and middle schools in three school districts in eastern North Carolina.

Assumptions

It was assumed that teachers would be honest with their interview responses regarding their perceptions of paraprofessionals in the GYOT program. It was also assumed that being interviewed would help evoke memories of experiences of the treatment as a paraprofessional in the classroom and that teachers would reflect on their classroom practices and strategies used with college students as they expressed their perceptions of the GYOT program. Purposive sampling was intended to find critical participants from a specific research setting, and it was assumed that the study participants were sincerely interested in participating and did not harbor any motives.

Significance

The significance of the study was that it helped fill the research gap in determining perceptions of paraprofessionals in the GYOT program. Since the GYOT programs partner with community-based organizations and institutions of higher education to identify, recruit, and retain GYOT candidates, it is essential to ensure that training programs are accessible, affordable, and culturally relevant (Greenberg-Mortamedi et al., 2017). These alternative pathway programs, in which candidates can work as teachers while they earn their teaching credentials, are beneficial to stakeholders as these programs establish partnerships and other key elements of design, such as a

shared vision, clearly defined roles, methods for ongoing communication, and procedures for data collection (Greenberg-Mortamedi et al., 2017).

A recent national analysis by New America (Muñiz, 2020) confirmed that there was no universal model for these programs, yet this study can bring positive social change to programs by reaching out to students, paraprofessionals, after-school program staff, and other community members providing financial backing, through the completion of training programs in the hopes candidates will return to teach in their communities (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Summary

Chapter 1 identified the qualitative study research design. It also identified the problem, and research questions outlined the purpose and significance of the study. It provided definitions of key terms and gave an overview of the following chapters. The study examined the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the GYOT program in three school districts in eastern North Carolina. Three research questions were grounded in the conceptual framework of Yosso's (2005) Cultural Wealth Model, which guided the study. Chapter 2 presents the literature review on the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the GYOT program.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This qualitative study examined paraprofessional perceptions of the GYOT program in three rural school districts in eastern North Carolina. This study was supported by examining the literature review of scholarly journal articles, books, dissertations, and internet sources, which provided a thorough association of the perception of paraprofessionals on the GYOT program in three rural school districts in eastern North Carolina. The use of relevant materials significantly contributed to understanding this phenomenon. This GYOT program targeted individuals already associated with the partnering school districts, primarily language support paraprofessionals, to become teachers. It was offered as part of a larger K-12 simultaneous renewal initiative funded by a Teacher Quality Enhancement grant from the Department of Education (Morales, 2018). However, few contemporary research evaluations are accessible to grasp what we know about how these teachers are trained. GYOT initiatives are mentioned in recent policy papers as potential solutions for solving teacher shortages and boosting the racial/ethnic variety of teachers (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Learning Policy Institute, 2016). GYOT programs are different from conventional efforts to increase the racial/ethnic diversity of the teacher workforce in that they focus on hiring teachers of color with local community commitments, experiences, and expertise that may increase their likelihood of being effective teachers and staying in the teaching profession as well (Gist, 2019). Many college students enrolling in the program were first-generation college students and came from low socioeconomic status and low-income homes, which are characteristics of students who often have lower

college graduation rates than the general population (Kamler & Goubeaud, 2018). This study examined the perceptions of paraprofessionals of the GYOT program and how it prepares college students for a career in education. It also provided a better understanding of the education profession and allowed paraprofessionals to have a voice in matters affecting their profession as future teachers. GYOT strengthens connections in the field of education while promoting leadership development in their community and opportunities for community service.

Conceptual Framework

Urban community leaders face unique challenges in supporting underserved minority students in the classroom. These problems include overcrowded classrooms, lack of culturally competent teachers, high teacher turnover, and low parental involvement. Despite these challenges, previous research suggests that community participation and stakeholder cooperation improve educational success rates (Person et al., 2021). The importance of community cultural heritage highlights the benefits and resilience students derive from local resources. Teenagers must prepare for college by attending school and living in places that help children develop and maintain their postsecondary aspirations (Brown et al., 2022).

The benefits to student academic performance regarding the availability of cultural and linguistic backgrounds during literacy classes have been observed by several researchers. Although the classroom reflects the increasingly diverse nature of American society, few examples in school literature reference the knowledge children learn in their homes and communities. For example, to grow academically while learning English as a secondary language, you must be fluent in your primary language (DeNicolo et al.,

2015); however, children of minorities must learn to manage the emotional conflicts and stress from complex racial dynamics (Medina, 2019).

These minority groups often tapped into the cultural richness of the region as well as the information, skills, and connections held and utilized by oppressed communities. In practice in the field, individuals learned how to manage competing and conflicting emotional norms that determined how they should behave and feel (Larey, 2018). The community's cultural richness is a source of inspiration for educational equity leaders to consider how to address diverse equity initiatives and perspectives in rapidly diversifying school districts. It can be used by school leaders in their community experience and cultural richness, as people of color, to inform leadership methods (Fisher, 2021). Community college administrators nationwide are making structural adjustments, such as introducing guided educational pathways to help students bypass organizational bureaucracy and academic programs (Huerta et al., 2022).

The percentage of students who graduate from high school can increase in educational settings that value the cultural diversity of students and families, according to Yosso's (2005) research. An asset-based strategy may help communities of color realize their advantages and capabilities while communicating with them. According to Yosso's model, there are six different types of capital in communities of color. The six capital assets comprising the community's cultural riches are familial, social, navigational, resistant, linguistic, and aspirational capital, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Yosso's Cultural Wealth Framework

Communities of color do not lack "cultural" capital, in contrast to the deficit theory challenged by the cultural wealth of the community as an asset-based framework (Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021). Institutions that can be globally assessed, recognized, and ranked, such as job titles and academic degrees, can hold this capital. These forms of cultural capital are important to our society, but education can limit access by maintaining a conventional definition of what constitutes capital (Denton et al., 2020). The Community Cultural Wealth model developed by Yosso in 2005 highlighted the positive aspects of neglected groups. To help readers understand real-world events, many capitals are detailed with real-world examples (Singh et al., 2022).

Familial Capital

Pre-college students have access to human and social resources through their extended family, and the social network is called "family capital" (Yosso, 2005). Students actively consult with their families to raise family funds during college, and this family funding manifests in family support and messages about the value of teachers. Students also try to engage with others who fit the cultural concept of family and "recreate" family relationships with classmates, teachers, and staff to channel their family capital into the environment of the university (Fernández et al., 2021).

Students of color or other minorities often find their educational experience negatively perceived by society. However, they overgeneralize minority students and fail to realize how sociocultural events affect people's lives. For this reason, they cannot appreciate the advantages that minorities can bring to their academic endeavors (Luedke, 2020). Many of these students, being first-generation college students, depend heavily on their families for mental and emotional support while they attend university (Fernández et al., 2021).

According to a study by Shapiro (2018), family engagement for youth from culturally and linguistically diverse families often takes the form of indirect involvement and often takes place at home and in the school ethnic community rather than taking place at school. Because these types of family involvement are often invisible to school staff, they may believe that the families of these students are not involved in or invested in their education, especially in the transition to university (Shapiro, 2018). Yosso (2005) argued that pre-college social experiences give children knowledge that schools can help them use to their advantage in college. Research shows how family capital is a

foundation for other types of capital, such as how students can activate and encourage aspiration capital (Fernández et al., 2021).

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often pursue careers because of a family history of health problems or a desire to improve the family's financial situation (Fernández et al., 2021). The cultural collectivism of the Black and Latino student participants should be reflected in the student's collectivist just ethics. This can especially be seen in the enthusiastic support of the participants toward their neighbors and others (Fernández et al., 2021).

Families greatly influence a student's educational career, and students of color report that their family influences the secondary school they choose to attend (Fernández et al., 2021). Likewise, families of Latina(o) students often encourage them to pursue higher education. Parents inculcated the importance of pursuing higher education even in families where the parents did not attend college. Strong family ties are associated with children's participation in learning (Luedke, 2020). It is essential to recognize and encourage children to use information, stories, and values from their family community and to create an environment that values and encourages family involvement (Yosso, 2005).

Social Capital

Social capital emphasizes how students use their peers and other social connections to participate in higher education and negotiate with other social organizations (Yosso, 2005). There are benefits of local social networks and family ties for one's own cognitive and social development (Herrero, 2018). The question of how to help students maintain the relationships with groups and individuals critical to early

academic success considers the admissions and selection process and the types of successful support students need to increase social capital (Yosso, 2005).

Social prescriptions can facilitate the growth of new relationships in social settings, thereby strengthening social capital. Students can stay connected by creating a network of interactions among those who live and work there. This ensures the smooth functioning of society and improves living conditions for individuals and communities. Social capital is necessary for societies to survive, and higher levels of social capital can be associated with better health and a higher standard of living (Ehsan et al., 2019). According to Smith-Doerr et al. (2022), social capital helps us understand how people express class culture in different contexts and achieve positive educational outcomes. Social capital is developed through relationships with professors and other students in the network. Connections with other students, especially doctoral students, provide important information about the learning process. Smith Doerr et al. (2022) argued that understanding networks is essential to understanding educational equity.

People absorb tacit information through experience, morality, and intuition. This is also known as tacit or illogical knowledge. Students gain social capital as they learn in the classroom and share their knowledge and skills with others through interactions with teachers and peers (Razzaque, 2020). A central premise of the social capital theory is relationships, and in order to have social capital, a person must have relationships with other people, giving them an advantage over others rather than themselves (Han et al., 2020). Social capital is connected to people, which makes it interesting and applicable to different fields and disciplines of research, unlike other types of capital. Social capital is a framework for examining and conceptually understanding the strength and importance of

connections, relationships, and resources and how these affect access and outcomes for different people in different geographies and industries (Oyefuga & Shakeshaft, 2021).

Navigational Capital

According to Yosso (2005), students must have the necessary navigational capital to move through social institutions, such as the educational environment. According to Yosso, student orientation allows them to navigate dangerous or hostile situations with agility. To help them navigate hostile environments, we must first determine how to support students traveling through our facilities, communicating with faculty and instructors, interacting with student support staff members, and interacting with their colleagues. We must also determine the extent to which we are willing to acknowledge that the cultures and structures of our institutions have infuriated students and their communities and perhaps still do so in different ways (Yosso, 2005). Transitioning to postsecondary education can be difficult for students, especially those wanting to pursue STEM careers (Listman & Dingus-Eason, 2018). People from disadvantaged groups have become adept at interacting and operating in institutions not designed for easy access (Salisbury, 2022). When it comes to staying in the field, students of color often rely on substantial reserves of navigational capital and resilience and a combination of social networks, such as collaborative networks and friction between different groups in the community and family, such as family resources and value capital (Gist, 2019).

First-generation college students of color use their skills to navigate higher education, being a minority and low-income group. Institutions systematically neglect this navigational capital, making it ineffective and wasting student learning opportunities. Institutional policies fostered misunderstanding by prioritizing whiteness, encouraging a

flawed view of student abilities, and limiting access to campus resources. Students can use their orientation capital to make specific recommendations on how organizations can better recognize and support their life experiences (Covarrubias et al., 2022). The cultural richness of the community and the knowledge that communities of color exploit resources sometimes overlooked by big narratives, help recognize the activities and leadership skills that actors bring to understand and redefine transformational school leadership (Salisbury, 2022).

Resistance Capital

Resistance capital is built on the experiences of communities of color in achieving equality and collective emancipation. According to Yosso (2005), relatives, neighbors, and a long history of social justice activism are sources of this capital. Because of their long history of protest, students of color are uniquely positioned to use their college education credentials to enter society ready to tackle issues affecting health, education, and other social outcomes. Accordingly, there are two things to consider. How can we better prepare students to participate in a diverse democracy by giving them opportunities in and out of the classroom? How can we support students determined to act and support their homeland (yet identified; Yosso, 2005)?

Resilience capital, also known as an influence, is achieved by engaging in actions aimed at subverting unfair systems and practices. Resilience capital is built on a pillar of stories of family and parent resistance, consciously training children to engage in behaviors and maintain attitudes that defy the status quo (Salisbury, 2022). Increasing disadvantaged student retention and graduation rates in schools is an important strategy for sustaining the country's research and innovation potential. Specific characteristics

associated with attrition include a culture of individualism, a lack of encouragement and support from faculty, and hostile or competitive environments (Revelo & Baber, 2018). Unusual antagonism can motivate students to persevere in the face of difficulty and navigate capital, the ability to move between social organizations to obtain resources and achieve goals, supported by new research (Gist, 2019).

Linguistic Capital

The variety of language and communication skills students bring to their college environment is referred to as linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) discussed the relevance of storytelling, particularly for students of color, to identify this type of capital further. Since telling stories is a frequent practice for college-bound adolescents, she claims that they bring with them "skills that may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, humorous timing, facial emotion, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, and rhyme" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Instructors and personnel working in student affairs can use these abilities as a solid foundation for their academic achievement. It is important to consider how we can improve student language and communication abilities and how inclusive pedagogy can work into our lesson plans (Yosso, 2005).

Since the dominant and legal languages are the byproducts of historical events and battles, language and symbolic power are closely intertwined (Bishara, 2022). Speaking in the "official" or idealized language involves grasping linguistic tactics linked to authority, power, and terminology pertinent to the circumstance. This requirement goes beyond simply having the proper syntax and vocabulary. This implies that those who lack linguistic capital and language competency are marginalized or silenced (Roth, 2019). The value of learning and using a number of languages or communication techniques is

known as linguistic capital. Despite the fact that bilingual students and families are frequently emphasized when talking about linguistic capital, the phrase also refers to students' and families' capital obtained from participating in various epistemic literacies at home, such as storytelling (Salisbury, 2022). Multilingualism is portrayed as a strength in linguistic capital. Because of their strong linguistic and cultural ties, instructors of color and their students are more likely to develop long-lasting relationships (Gist, 2019).

Aspirational Capital

Yosso (2005) described aspiration capital as a student's hopes and dreams. Yosso explained that despite persistent educational disparities, African American and Hispanic students and their families have high educational expectations. This resource asks, "How do you encourage the maintenance and growth of ambition in children? Furthermore, what assumptions do you make about your student's goals?" (Yosso, 2005, p. 81).

A rewarding asset is the ability of communities of color to face bright challenges that at first seem insurmountable. This supports the notion that teachers of color will likely have strong confidence in the ability of their students of color to succeed while facing significant personal challenges (Gist, 2019). The desirable capitals include optimism, confidence in prospects, and a sense of a different and better future (Salisbury, 2022).

Young people from low-income families are participating in educational programs that their parents would never have been able to achieve (Klein & Carmo, 2019). These artistic career choices can lead to areas of high artistic expression, such as art, music, fashion, publishing, software design, and film, thus helping people reach their full potential (Lois & Gregson, 2019). However, these job markets are characterized by

an influx of job seekers and a shortage of jobs due to the high demand for these skills and a sluggish market for creative goods. As a result, creative professionals often work tenaciously, yet have higher barriers to entry than workers in other industries due to the close relationship between work and personality (Lois & Gregson, 2019).

GYOT Program

The initial GYOT program aimed to create an environment in which students could successfully transition from high school to college, obtain a basic teaching qualification in math or science within 3 years, and then return to work in their district (Kamler & Goubeaud, 2018). Long Island University in New York created the program in response to the urgent need for teachers to culturally connect with students and become role models for STEM-related careers. A grant from Congress supports the GYOT program, which combines hiring science and math teachers with training young people from poor communities. This program targets a group of academically gifted, diverse, low-income high school 11th graders from Long Island, New York, to accelerate their entry into college and mathematics education in primarily underserved areas and to pursue a career as a science teacher in the school district.

There was, and still is, a significant shortage of teachers in many states. Analysts have pondered this issue for decades and are still campaigning for greater diversity in the teaching profession (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The GYOT initiative is often cited as one of the solutions to the acute teacher shortage and diversity gap in the teaching profession (Goings et al., 2018). Many early intervention programs aim to get high school students into teaching, but not all specifically target minorities (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019). Improving the quality of teachers in extremely poor and

underperforming schools is difficult and out of focus. For example, states and school districts can focus on the general problem of teacher supply, believing that increasing the number of teachers will benefit all schools; however, the neediest schools rarely benefit from such large-scale initiatives (Sutton et al., 2014).

Expanding do-it-yourself programs is often recommended to diversify the faculty (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Research on their effectiveness is often sparse and obscured by the literature on teacher recruitment and retention of color (Gist et al., 2019). Furthermore, it precludes systematic analysis of programming impacts through internal contextual self-study, external contextualized assessments, or longitudinal studies. The GYOT program is encouraging because teachers of color typically experience high turnover rates during the preparatory stage but high retention rates after transitioning to proven teachers (Gist, 2019).

Teacher Shortage in the United States

With the continuing shortage of qualified teachers in America's classrooms, unqualified teachers are routinely hired and assigned disproportionately to disadvantaged students. Demographic changes are causing further educational problems due to racial/ ethnic and cultural mismatches between teachers and students. One strategy to reduce shortages and skills gaps is to increase enrollment in preparatory programs, especially for teachers from culturally and racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds in the GYOT program (Carothers et al., 2019). Student achievement, special education, the difficulty of rural education with poverty, and the inability of most states to hire qualified teachers are at the heart of this shortage. When the No Child Left Behind Act (2001)   was passed, many states struggled to find enough qualified teachers, especially those trained in

special education, to fill classrooms. Many states have adopted GYOT programs incorporating alternative routes to accredited licensure to address the shortage and create trained and certified special education teachers (Sutton et al., 2014).

From 2020 to 2021, 47 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and other U.S. territories experienced shortages in one or more subject areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Teacher shortages are particularly acute in rural and urban areas in special education, mathematics, science, and bilingual education (Berry & Shields, 2017; Cowan et al., 2016; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This problem is exacerbated by a number of factors, such as the rising number of K-12 students in the United States and the retirement of teachers during the "baby boom" era (born between 1946 and 1964; Ludlow et al 2020); however, the number of schoolteachers may decline due to other factors (Hash, 2021). The effects of teacher shortages can be seen in school districts nationwide, and regulations should consider the potential impact of local labor markets on staff shortages in schools and districts.

There is a shortage of qualified and well-prepared teachers, especially in schools with many Black and low-income students. This is due to a lack of well-qualified and well-prepared teachers in specific content or subject areas and a shortage of teachers of color who reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of the student population. Policy interventions to address specific bottlenecks are more likely to create a stable and diverse workforce. Teacher quality issues should therefore be considered when developing strategies to mitigate teacher shortages. Unfortunately, to address teacher shortages, some jurisdictions are lowering standards for the teaching profession (Castro et al., 2018).

Despite the shortage of teachers, staffing issues are nothing new. There has been a

shortage of mathematics and physics teachers since at least the 1950s and special

education since the 1960s (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Since the state's evidence-based

funding model was introduced in 2018, the education workforce has grown, hiring more

teachers and diversifying professions to address the country's teacher shortage. Priority is

given to ongoing initiatives as Governor Pritzker of Illinois passed legislation to address

the nationwide teacher shortage in the United States (McKinley & Bauer, 2023).

Lawmakers are looking to reduce licensing costs, streamline the application process for

educators, and expand choices for future teachers.

Paraprofessionals

In special education, the use of paraprofessionals is essential. Formal career

development opportunities vary, but schools increasingly rely on paraprofessional

support to meet student needs. A lack of knowledge about proper teaching methods can

limit the effectiveness of these support staff (Sallese & Vannest, 2022). According to the

latest federal statistics, 488,000 ancillary professionals support children with disabilities

in schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Paraprofessional support has increased

significantly over time. This is likely due to the increasing placement of students with

disabilities in inclusive general education settings, where paraprofessionals outnumber

special education teachers (Walker et al., 2020). A recent survey found that associate

professionals generally do not have a formal education background when they first secure

a job. This lack of training contradicts the critical role played by paraprofessionals in the

provision of special education services.

While requiring paraprofessionals to receive appropriate training and supervision,

special education teachers lack the operationalized activities necessary to maintain the

agency responsibility of this federal recommendation (Sallese & Vannest, 2022). Given

the growing popularity of working with classroom teachers to address academic and

behavioral problems in children, paraprofessionals are among the treatments

recommended by school psychologists and other educational professionals. School

psychologists often work with classroom teachers and associate professionals to meet

student academic and behavioral needs, identify risk factors and environmental

influences on learning, select interventions, and support and monitor their

implementation in different learning settings. Paraprofessionals who work individually

with children continue to play an important role in helping schools meet their resource

needs (Reddy et al., 2021).

As the use of paraprofessionals increases in schools, they are expected to

demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to assist professionals in providing

excellent educational and related services to students with disabilities. Paraprofessionals

are expressly expected to implement teaching methods selected by academic experts

based on the support needs of each student (Walker et al., 2020). The expanded set of

paraprofessional support includes help with routines, actions, and instructions. Although

no formal training is required, paraprofessionals typically offer function-based

interventions. Paraprofessionals face challenges in getting training outside of the

classroom due to lack of funding, lack of staff to cover classes during an absence, and

lack of administrative support for career-related absences. Paraprofessionals often receive

informal hands-on training from classroom teachers (Gregori et al., 2022).

Teachers of Color

Recruitment of paraprofessionals remains widespread, as 458,676

paraprofessionals assist teachers in providing special education services, and most work with students with disabilities. In a variety of formats, paraprofessionals are offered training aimed at different skills; however, paraprofessionals claim they cannot perform their duties well if unprepared, and special education teachers are not always confident in their ability to guide and train paraprofessionals. Researchers have made great efforts to identify these pathways, and effective paraprofessional preparation and training procedures are well established (Coogle et al., 2022).

Getting Black students to consider a career in education can be difficult. For many people, school is not always a safe or friendly place, especially for males who identify as African American, Latino, or Native American (Kohli, 2019). One only needs to look at national or state data by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status to see the disproportionate rates of school disciplinary actions, suspensions, special education placements, and lower graduation rates for students of color in order to understand the degree of disenfranchisement frequently experienced by students (Mongelli et al., 2020). The marginalization of students might act as a catalyst for instructing them to become community-responsive teachers to end the inequalities they have experienced (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019). Less than 18% of all instructors in the United States who deal with more than 50% of students of color are people of color. Research shows that the majority-White teaching force has lower expectations and underestimates the potential of pupils of color in the classroom. The academic performance of students of color is greatly influenced by the fact that teachers of color often have higher standards and are more aware of other cultures (Kohli, 2019).

Effectively preparing teachers to work with Black students in American

classrooms has long been a priority for teacher educators; however, these initiatives lack voice, perspective, and experience from teachers of color. As demands and initiatives to promote teacher diversity are raised, it is important to learn the perspectives of actual teachers and educators of color (Teacher of Color Collective & Souto-Manning, 2022). The program's curriculum makes them much needed as future educators, not only because they belong to a particular racial or ethnic group, but because their lived experience and deep knowledge of their communities must be intentionally designed to attract students by clearly emphasizing why they grow up and need it most. This encourages students of color to consider educator training (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019).

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Working with culturally and linguistically diverse students has always been challenging. Classroom teachers and English as a Second Language (ESL) certified teachers find it challenging to keep up with educational approaches and strategies for dealing with this group of students. Teachers can use effective teaching strategies to help culturally and linguistically diverse students succeed in the classroom. Many commissions, advocacy groups, and influential organizations, such as the National Association for Multicultural Education, the Cities to Improve Teacher Education Network, and the National Network for Educational Renewal, have worked on teacher education programs. If social justice education addresses injustice in the classroom and society, education is about improving student learning and future opportunities. Moreover, learning without considering existing knowledge can be difficult for all students (Espinoza & Taylor, 2021).

Many young Latinos collectively reflect on their predecessors' successes,

struggles, aspirations, and passions and rely on those traits to get through each day. Despite the cultural and linguistic advantages that Latino students bring, institutions and eminent teachers have not effectively tapped the potential of Latino students in teaching and learning (Morales, 2018). Traditionally, native career opportunities in education have made occupations accessible to people of color from various classes and social and linguistic backgrounds. Morales (2018) has a long history of altruistic service as a person and activist. The concept of community teachers is based on the sociopolitical and historical context of communities of color (Gist, 2019). Understanding students of color makes it easier to follow classroom procedures and activities. For people of color to succeed academically, the cultural harmony between home and school must be acknowledged. In other words, teachers can motivate these children by assessing their ethnicity and origin and seeing them as strengths rather than weaknesses (Espinoza & Taylor, 2021).

Teacher Professional Development

Successful continuing education fosters collaboration, is often used in workplace-relevant contexts, is content-oriented, and is a model for effective curriculum and teaching methods. It also provides expert coaching and support; feedback and reflection time; ongoing duration; and ample time for trainers to learn, practice, apply, and reflect on new strategies (Hubbard et al., 2020). All teacher preparation programs aim to provide graduates with a conceptual repertoire in the field and therefore follow essentially the same curriculum. Professional development programs for teachers should help prepare teachers for the challenges specific to their environment (Al-Harbi & Ahmad, 2022); however, not all educational experiences and environments are equal due to different

social, cultural, and developmental environments. For the development of teacher candidates, vocational education and training institutions offer a wide range of learning opportunities (Roybal-Lewis, 2022). A typical core implementation strategy should include appropriate training and templates rather than scripts, worksheets, and opportunities for educators to collaborate on teaching methods that facilitate student learning (Hubbard et al., 2020).

Mandatory rules at various levels are a recurring theme of school reform as educators address issues that impede student achievement. Recent legislative initiatives have made teacher professional development to improve student achievement required; however, research shows that necessary professional development rarely leads to positive outcomes (Martin et al., 2019). Educators at all academic levels must possess witty pedagogical aptitudes (a critical talent that relies partly on intuition) to navigate challenging classroom situations. Using a systems approach, college students should be taught how to deal with classroom complexity (Sipman et al., 2022).

The heavy investment in teacher professional development and professional development programs provides educators with the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes to improve and reform classroom practice. It is used worldwide (El Islamic et al., 2022). In contrast to teacher training courses, continuing education programs have a complex framework due to many conceptual and educational factors. In other words, circumstances always influence how trainers progress in their careers (El Islamic et al., 2022). Political and religious beliefs, educational philosophies, sociocultural factors, and classroom teaching methods influence teacher professional development initiatives. As a result, the development of professional teachers in different educational settings will

always be an individualized process (Al-Harbi & Ahmad, 2022).

Paraprofessionals are essential in supporting students with or at risk of developing an illness or disability but receive minimal supervision, limited training, and little or no support during service. Given the lack of paraprofessional training, a full assessment of the professional development literature is urgently needed. Reviews primarily focused on support for students with significant intellectual or developmental difficulties or included part-time professionals among various intervention providers (Reddy et al., 2021).

Teacher Preparation Programs

Research and experiments have long focused on how teacher leadership can improve teaching and learning outside the classroom. Teacher leadership recognizes the importance of a teacher's instructional skills in improving education. The rapid development and change of the world significantly impact social life. For at least 30 years, American school administrators and legislators have come under intense pressure from a standards-based, merit-based accountability system to fill every classroom with quality teachers. Despite these attempts, teacher shortages persist in many districts, particularly in schools with high poverty levels, rural and urban schools, mathematics, science, special education, bilingual education, and ESL (Mitani et al., 2022). In a world of growing interest in educational reform and accountability, standards are essential to teacher preparation and student achievement.

The U.S. Department of Education (2022) established a rigorous accountability process to ensure that all children are proficient in reading, writing, and mathematics and that teachers are prepared to teach in accredited areas (Whitford et al., 2018). More innovative and modern teacher training programs are urgently needed; however, not all

exercise programs are the same. Undergraduate and graduate students can participate in most of these programs. These programs are usually offered by universities and run for 5 years. Also known as traditional certificate programs, these courses have historically often required 1 or more semesters of clinical experience in addition to the subject matter and pedagogy courses.

The term "alternative accreditation program" is often used to categorize different programs (Mitani et al., 2022); however, other programs may award teaching credentials. The majority of students enrolled in traditional teacher training programs have no previous teaching or employment experience (Whitford et al., 2018). The primary beneficiaries of the alternative teacher preparation program are teachers currently employed in classrooms as participants in specific state-created acceleration programs. The alternative teacher preparation program allows active teachers full access to training students with little supervision, while the traditional teacher training program allows on-duty instructors to guide students under continuous supervision (Whitford et al., 2018). The term "teacher knowledge" is often used when describing teacher skills and job knowledge.

According to Morales (2018), standard teacher education programs actively promote diversity but support culturally and linguistically diverse student-teachers to make the most of these assets. They are seldom prepared to do so. They routinely underestimate these resources and ignore the diverse perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse educators and cultural cues that may help them engage with culturally and linguistically diverse students through outdated and culturally restricted program rules. The lack of postgraduation mentorship, lack of professional referrals in

the classroom, and the often-detrimental environment of White normative educational spaces have led to higher turnover rates for culturally and linguistically diverse teachers than for White monolingual teachers. In the face of these complex facts, they examine the training, development, and awareness of culturally and linguistically diverse teachers in teacher education and professional life through a more specific analytical scale (Morales, 2018).

Student teachers need teaching experience to develop pedagogical and reflective skills and effectiveness as teachers. By instilling these skills in the students of today's educational institutions, the youth of the 21st century can acquire knowledge in all areas and use that knowledge to improve their environment. This claim states that the teachers with whom they spend most of their time have the duty and authority to ensure that the students have those skills and that their instructors have those qualifications increased.

Teacher Certification Programs

As for the teaching profession, traditionally, they have completed general education courses. Teachers must complete a general education course, as most programs for eligibility to teach the general curriculum include an introductory college course. Teachers must also complete student instruction and be placed in a certain number of classrooms (Yin & Partelow, 2020). Traditional teacher certification is a great way to start a career, but many are now looking at other certification options. Before 1990, few states offered alternative certification programs that allowed college students with unique backgrounds to become teachers (Bennett, 2021). Over the past decade, there has been a steady increase in enrollment in alternative teacher certification programs that are diverse and offered outside higher education institutions (Yin & Partelow, 2020). Teacher

education can be defined as courses that include teaching, practices, policies and procedures, and teaching strategies (Creasy, 2015). A planned curriculum has been developed to help educators prepare student teachers within their institutions to become professionals.

A significant shortage of qualified teachers in many areas has forced school districts to use alternative certification programs to ensure they have enough teachers to fill classrooms quickly. Many states have incentive programs to encourage people to become trainers, especially in hard-to-find fields and institutions (Bennett, 2021). Many educators accredited by traditional institutions are concerned that inexperienced teachers who use students as learning objects undermine their students' academic performance (Bennett, 2021). Teachers can have a significant impact on the lives of their students, so teachers need to understand the importance of teacher preparation for learners at every stage. For this reason, students must receive instruction that supports their development as citizens (Keh & Swartzendruber, 2021).

Teacher Coaching

Although it can be used as a stand-alone intervention to support teacher improvement, teacher coaching is often integral to multifaceted induction programs (Mitchell et al., 2020). Coaching can take many forms with different goals, reasons, and methods, so no single definition applies to all instances. Nonetheless, the commonly accepted definition of coaching is by Ali et al. (2018), who stated that professional coaching is between a certified coach and an individual or team to support the achievement of excellence in accordance with goals set by the individual or team. Coaching is a long, intense, context-specific, focused one-to-one collaboration between

an experienced coach and an aspiring trainer. Second, our definition of coaching emphasizes collaborative rather than hierarchical interactions between coaches and educators (Mitchell et al., 2020). A summary of coaching definitions from various sources states that coaching is a coach helping a person learn, working with them, and helping that person achieve future goals through assessment and identification and is a one-to-one relationship that facilitates coaching achieving discovery, reflection, goal setting, and strategic action (Ali et al., 2018).

Research on coaching and peer coaching continues to provide evidence for several ideas and tactics. One such model is coaching as instruction. Collaboration between coaches and educators who share instructional knowledge to enhance learning in the classroom is known as coaching (Knight, 2021). The sense of community that coaches experience through frequent encounters is a shared commitment to education and new positions with equal experiences, joys, and challenges (Sheu et al., 2020). They liked the professional development, the sense of community and support, and the opportunity to learn from each other, which solidified their identity as educators and increased job satisfaction. Regular gatherings, strong administrative and managerial support, and opportunities for unstructured social interaction were all community builders (Sheu et al., 2020). Knight (2021) outlined his seven guiding concepts for establishing relationships between teachers and coaches. These seven guidelines are reciprocity, reflection, choice, voice, equality, dialogue, and praxis.

Teachers and coaches analyze observational data together to focus on a bottom-up approach to student learning and teacher development. Coaches are open to the teacher's perspectives and provide direct, specific, and nonspecific positive and negative feedback

(Keh & Swartzendruber, 2021). Although coaching is now used with student teachers, this method of professional development is more commonly used with classroom teachers. This makes it a particularly attractive paradigm for research in teacher education, unlike many other pre-practice experiences such as coursework, fieldwork, and internships.

U.S. Department of Education's Call to Action

The U.S. Department of Education is actively collaborating with schools nationwide to tackle the problem of teacher shortage. The U.S. Department of Education urges school districts and leaders to continue their efforts to boost the number of teacher candidates and provide support to schools. As aspiring teachers meet their certification requirements, they can simultaneously help address the lasting impact of COVID-19 on student academic, emotional, social, and psychological needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to many counties in terms of recruiting and retaining teachers, resulting in shortages in critical areas such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, bilingual education, special education, vocational and technical training, and early childhood education. These shortages had a direct impact on student educational opportunities, with research indicating that students of color, those from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and those in rural areas were disproportionately affected by teacher shortages (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

To increase the number of teacher candidates entering the profession in the near future and provide immediate support to schools, the U.S. Department of Education has

launched several initiatives for stakeholders such as state policymakers, state school chiefs, and governors. These stakeholders are encouraged to establish teaching as a registered apprenticeship, which will create a simple pathway for states to use apprenticeship funding to support teaching residencies. This will enable teacher apprentices to earn a decent wage while gaining essential skills on the job and through integrated coursework provided by higher education partners, crucial for providing quality education to the nation's students (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Stakeholders are also prompted to invest in evidence-based teacher residency programs, providing grant funding to increase the number of partnerships between educator preparation programs and districts supporting teaching residencies. Furthermore, stakeholders are advised to establish or expand loan forgiveness or service scholarship programs that require students to commit to teaching in high-need areas for a minimum number of years. Finally, stakeholders are encouraged to enhance teacher compensation by providing competitive and livable wages, including increasing starting salaries and salary caps for teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

The U.S. Department of Education calls on school district leaders to increase the number of partnerships between educator preparation programs and districts supporting teaching residencies and schools. Teacher residents can serve as substitutes, paraprofessionals, or tutors in schools as part of their clinical experience, as they complete their teacher certification requirements. School leaders are asked to increase the availability of qualified teacher residents to support educators, students, and staff; increase the number of teaching residency programs and their capacity; and work with states to establish teaching as a registered apprenticeship (U.S. Department of Education,

2022).

The U.S. Department of Labor has approved standards allowing states to use apprenticeship funding to support teaching residencies. With a long history of creating career pathways in various industries, registered apprenticeship is an effective "earn and learn" model that provides structured, paid, on-the-job learning experiences combined with job-related technical instruction with a mentor, leading to a nationally recognized credential. Institutions can use their Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund institutional funds, a federally provided fund, to expand their teacher training programs in response to the pandemic, such as hiring additional faculty and staff; providing stipends, scholarships, or other student aid; and creating additional course offerings (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Government Funding

Legislators expanded the GYOT program, which prepares people to teach in teacher-shortage schools (Martinez Expands Grow Your Own Teacher Program Eligibility, 2018). The program is open to all prekindergarten educators, including those working in public schools and students enrolled in dual-credit programs at participating colleges and universities. The GYOT program provides financial, academic, and emotional support to anyone seeking to qualify as a teacher. After graduation, the participant commits to working for at least 5 years in a high-needs setting, usually a school with many low-income children. The majority of grants to the GYOT program were financial support for these people to attend college, depending on the causal relationship between the cost of higher education and obtaining a college degree. A crucial part of the GYOT program was a one-on-one mentoring program to improve

student academic performance and resilience in the face of challenges at home and school (Kamler & Goubeaud, 2018).

Funding initiatives included an early college program, a summer institute designed for this cohort, and a series of career awareness events. By enrolling in AP courses, early college courses, and the university's college credit accrediting institution in the summer before and after senior year, these students can earn up to 30 credits by the end of their junior year when they graduate from high school (Kamler & Goubeaud, 2018).

These initiatives are becoming increasingly popular to address teacher shortages, increase teacher diversity, and strengthen links between schools and communities (Data Points, 2021). According to the report, most states (47 states and Washington, D.C.) have at least one program but different definitions and policies. Seven states (FL, ID, LA, NH, OH, RI, WV) have some GYOT programs, and nine (AR, CA, CO, KS, MN, MS, NY, OR, SC) have fewer than five program types (Garcia & Muñiz, 2020b).

Eighteen states fund some form of their GYOT program, and 28 states have policies towards their GYOT program. For example, 25 graduate students each year receive full scholarships through the Edmonds Scholar program at North Carolina Central University. In exchange, they agree to work as a teacher in a high-demand state for at least 4 years. According to Edward Crow, Director of Teacher Quality Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education, North Carolina Central University is one of 27 recipients of state grants to award these scholarships (Garcia & Muñiz, 2020b). This program is great, and the institution is an important source of information for minority educators in the state (Aydin et al., 2017).

Similarly, a competitive grant program is available in eight states (CA, IL, MA, MN, NY, TN, TX, WA) to encourage partnerships between school districts and educator preparation programs to create and administer GYOT programs (Garcia & Muñiz, 2020a). Nine states offer more than five distinct types of programs. Most programs, typically administered at the district level and frequently through vocational and technical education, target high school students as their primary recruitment pool. It is unusual because only 20 states contribute government funding to these initiatives (Data Points, 2021).

States nationwide are coming up with novel ways to change teacher recruiting, training, and hiring when there are localized teacher shortages, declining teaching interest, and calls for a more diverse educator workforce (Garcia & Muñiz, 2020b). Mississippi stands out for putting three initiatives into action in a novel way to address the severe teacher shortages: GYOT programs support neighborhood educators, a state-run teacher residency program, and a pilot project looking into the possibility of awarding teachers a license based on their performance (Garcia & Muñiz, 2020b). Both suburban and rural school districts offer GYOT programs. According to research, it is challenging to hire and retain highly skilled teachers in many districts because they cannot provide competitive salaries (Swanson, 2011).

Summary

Recently, there has been growing concern regarding the shortage of qualified teachers in K-12 schools across the nation. This shortage is due to factors such as teacher qualifications, relevant training, and experience. It is more severe in schools located in poorer communities, which makes it more challenging for them to provide a quality

education to their students. Teacher shortages negatively impact students, teachers, and the public education system as a whole. A lack of appropriately qualified teachers and staff creates a precarious situation, impedes student learning, and reduces teacher efficiency. High teacher turnover also consumes economic resources that could be better spent elsewhere. Furthermore, the lack of teachers makes it difficult to build a reputation and professionalize education, contributing to the continuing shortage of teachers.

It is noteworthy that the scarcity of resources is not evenly distributed among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. This uneven distribution creates challenges for the U.S. education system in providing a well-rounded education for all children. It also makes it difficult for school districts to retain and attract quality teachers, as low wages, difficult school environments, weak support, and lack of recognition for professional development are only a few of the challenges faced by schools. All schools need to address these factors and partner with community providers to provide additional support and financial assistance to schools with high poverty levels, where teacher shortages are an even bigger problem.

To address this issue, many states and districts across the nation have already established or are scaling up their partnerships and programs to support a strong and diverse pipeline of teachers. The GYOT program, for instance, recruits, trains, and supports paraprofessionals, extracurricular program staff, and other residents to teach in their community. This program supports employees who wish to pursue a bachelor's degree or a teaching qualification, such as paraprofessionals and teaching assistants. Studies show that approximately half of the program participants are African Americans and Hispanics. School districts claim that this is a great way to find teachers to fill the

huge job market gap that will allow the program to continue. This confirms the heritage model, a paradigm for understanding how students of color access and experience college from a strengths-based perspective.

The idea that the teacher labor market automatically adapts to demand is a classic criticism of policies to address teacher shortages. Gradual changes could occur over the next few years as government funding improves and more people become interested in education; however, shortages are still a significant problem and may take many years to resolve. In the meantime, proactive measures are needed to prevent financial hardship for the state's most vulnerable children.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Rural education has long faced unique challenges. Education of students with disabilities and subpar living conditions that are common in many rural areas are two central issues. Rural teacher turnover is higher than in urban and suburban schools, and new teachers are more difficult to find in rural schools (Sutton et al., 2014). Scholars and groups argue that American classrooms have been in dire teacher shortages for over 50 years (Swanson, 2011). School district superintendents in North Carolina have long struggled with declining populations, shortages of qualified teachers, and severe racial injustice in their communities (Mitchell, 2021), so schools in North Carolina seek to develop teacher talent. This idea of education for all is greatly realized through the GYO program.

One of the main goals of this program is to provide parents, community leaders, and paraprofessionals with barrier-free access to higher education, particularly teaching qualifications (Madda & Schultz, 2009). Injustice can be remedied with the help of this "grow yourself" initiative that encourages high school students of color to enter teaching (Goings et al., 2018). This research used a qualitative approach that went beyond the "what, where, and when" to examine why and how paraprofessionals face the challenges of the GYOT program (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The well-designed GYOT program aims to empower paraprofessionals by removing barriers and providing opportunities to reach their full potential (Worthen et al., 2022). Rising enrollment and teacher turnover led the researchers to hypothesize that the need for new teachers would lower the professional standards of educators by providing additional certification paths, allowing

less qualified trainers to enter the field (Swanson, 2011); however, this unique teacher program is one method used to address the problem of a low number of college degree majors entering the sector after graduation by school districts (Bounds, 2020).

Chapter 3 includes a brief description of the general issues and objectives of paraprofessional staff perceptions of the GYOT program in three school districts in North Carolina. The research questions that guided this study are stated. The survey design process is explained with emphasis on why qualitative research was the appropriate methodology for research. Populations and samples are discussed with information on instruments and interview questions. Data collection and analysis methods are presented along with safeguards for study participants. A summary of the research methodology concludes the chapter.

Problem and Purpose Overview

Students in today's schools are undergoing significant changes. By 2024, Black students are expected to make up 55% of public school students. Unfortunately, the educational community does not represent this diversity (Goings et al., 2018). All children benefit from having access to a teacher of color, but there is growing evidence that students of color are likely to experience more change, yet only 20% of teachers in the U.S. are teachers of color (Cherfas et al., 2021). Alongside educators, GYOT programs are needed to prepare educators to teach for change (Goings et al., 2018). A major obstacle is how difficult it is for trainers to prepare teachers for such changes while considering a teaching career (Heller, 2021).

Teachers who develop themselves develop academic identities, cultural relevance, linguistic and racial sensitivity shaping education, and critical perspectives that oppose

institutional hierarchies and dehumanizing discourses, policies, and practices. They are often trained in environments that encourage them (Valenzuela, 2017). Initiatives, like GYOT, work with school districts, teacher training programs, and sometimes community-based organizations. They want to recruit local people and prepare them to work as local teachers for a considerable period (Heller, 2021). Although the GYOT programs involve various types of partnerships, little is known about the perceptions of paraprofessional program participants.

GYOT and similar initiatives use local resources, such as bilingual or bicultural paraprofessionals who work as paraeducators, teaching assistants, or teaching aids. These initiatives use paraprofessional skills to diversify faculty and improve learning opportunities for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Worthen et al., 2022). These initiatives focus on finding and preparing teachers affiliated with local schools and represent the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of children and their families (Heller, 2021). Public scholarship has increased in recent years by examining the shortage of teachers of color and multiple languages in public schools and recommending tactics for attracting and retaining this important teacher demographic (Haddix, 2017). While governments and counties continue to invest in strategies to increase the ethnic diversity of the workforce, they are lacking one of the main drivers of diversity in the teaching profession, which is to prepare those who have experience working in after-school or out-of-school time programs to enter the teaching profession (Cherfas et al., 2021). After-school staff are racially and ethnically diverse and have meaningful experience, for example, leading groups of young people, and the commitment to support students and families in local communities across the country;

however, very few states and districts invest in specific programming dedicated to recruiting and preparing this population to become full-time teachers, and few teacher preparation programs focus directly on this population to leverage their experiences to create a strong and diverse workforce. This is a missed opportunity (Cherfas et al., 2021).

GYOT programs come in many shapes and sizes regarding employment, financial aid, education, and support. It has been shown that paraprofessional programs for culturally and linguistically diverse candidates should include mentoring and counseling as an integral component (Worthen et al., 2022). Some programs look for potential teachers at universities, while others look for teachers at middle and high schools. However, other programs seek paraprofessionals and college graduates with degrees in fields other than education. Some have been created at the state and college levels, some at the school district and local levels, and some are a combination of both (Valenzuela, 2017).

Some GYOT programs focus on finding high school students interested in teaching, giving them early exposure to the profession, and helping them get certified. Some focus on paraeducators or other faculty members thinking about becoming lead instructors (Heller, 2021). Nationwide, there is a teacher shortage. The number of students enrolling in programs to prepare teachers has significantly fallen recently. As a result, districts nationwide are beginning to hire campaigns and establish new positions for recruiting directors, talent management, and "human capital" (Haddix, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the GYOT program in three school districts in eastern North Carolina.

Role of the Researcher

All researchers must collect and review data (Burkholder et al., 2016). This process requires following the scientific method, adhering to moral standards, and employing much creativity. Researchers have ensured that understanding their role at each stage of the research process depends on their status and social status (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As a researcher, I was responsible for maintaining the transparency and credibility of my research.

Participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study, the expectations, the protocol, the timeline for the duration of the interview, and their role and associated responsibilities in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, the confidentiality and right to withdraw from the study were communicated to all participants. No coercion or promises were used to get participants to respond. Reliability and validity procedures were followed to reduce bias. I had no affiliation with the participants or the district; they were public school teachers working in neighboring districts. Maintaining objectivity throughout the process was very important. It helped participants see how their district views programs to develop their teachers.

Research Questions

Research questions must first be developed before identifying a study's major research aim and particular objectives. As a result, these goals dictate the study's design and the research findings (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). This qualitative study investigated how paraprofessionals in three school districts in eastern North Carolina felt about the GYOT program. The following questions were used to guide the study:

1. What is the perception of GYOT programs from participating teachers?

2. How impactful has the GYOT program been?

3. What steps/actions must be taken by school districts take to strengthen

   paraprofessionals to teacher programs?

A reliable interviewing process is necessary to gather data from interviews that are of high quality. A wide range of factors can impact the interview process; therefore, a solid understanding of the study topics can lead to excellent interview outcomes. This study aimed to enhance the predesigned interview process to overcome these challenges and guarantee accurate data collection. Table 1 demonstrates the alignment of the study's research questions to the interview protocol utilized.

Table 1

Alignment of Research Questions and Interview Protocol

Research question	Interview questions
1. What is the perception of GYOT programs from participating teachers?	1. Are you enrolled in a teacher preparation program? 2. What grade level (s) do you teach? 3. Do you think students benefit more if matched with a teacher of the same race? a. Why or why not? 4. What would be an ideal workforce to help the student progress better? 5. What is your perception of the grow your own program?
2. How impactful has the GYOT program been?	6. How do you encourage students' aspirations to remain high and grow? 7. What support has the district provided to you during this process? 8. How will this program benefit your community?

3. What steps/action must be taken by school districts to strengthen Paraprofessionals to Teacher Programs?	9. Do you think the program is meeting the needs of the teachers?
	    a. If so, in what capacity
	    b. If not, what would be your suggestion for improvement
	 10. How do you see yourself moving forward in this program?
	 11. What challenges, if any, do you face in navigating through the program?
	 12. What would you change about the program?
	 13. Is there anything else you would like to add to our interview?

The interview process followed a clear structure and covered all the research questions as stated by Yeong et al. (2018). Having a dependable interview protocol is crucial in obtaining high-quality interview data, according to the authors. The questions in this interview protocol allowed for in-depth and detailed qualitative insight into how participants experienced and described their experiences, as well as the significance they attached to them. The questions were designed to align with the research questions,

which enhanced their usefulness in the research process and ensured their relevance to the study, as pointed out by Castillo-Montoya (2016).

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the GYOT program in three school districts in North Carolina. This particular design was chosen because it allowed for the acknowledgment of how people see, approach, and experience the world and how their experiences relate to a particular setting. Additionally, this design was selected because qualitative research offers a genuine response to the study's research questions about teacher opinions of the GYOT initiative.

Qualitative research serves to provide researchers with a deeper understanding of a specific topic. Its outcomes include addressing issues related to the subjective nature of this type of research, offering detailed explanations of particular practice issues, and providing insight into professional practice in specific contexts (Lester et al., 2020). Qualitative research generates insight to guide practice, especially in understanding process-oriented phenomena. The research question aims to define an inquiry in sufficient detail, leaving no room for doubt or misunderstanding about the phenomenon under study (Dodgson, 2020). This type of research sheds new light on known issues and challenges and can operationalize concepts that have not yet been fully explored. It captures participants' actual experiences and contributes to a complete and comprehensive understanding of phenomena, emphasizing native experiences and detailed descriptions to reveal realities at specific local levels (Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

Understanding, organizing, conducting, and presenting qualitative data are

primarily based on qualitative research, as noted by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). This approach involves nonnumerical data such as speech and visuals to concentrate on the crucial elements or characteristics of the investigated event (Aten & Denney, 2021). Qualitative research design aims to provide a comprehensive description of the research subject, even if researchers use their own perspectives and frameworks to evaluate the research question. Furthermore, gathering information on contextual topics and research areas is crucial in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative research stands out from other scientific studies due to its unique characteristics. Patton (2015) highlighted 10 key features of this research method in Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, with design flexibility being one of them. Common qualitative techniques include phenomenology, case studies, and grounded theory (Aten & Denney, 2021).

When selecting a research strategy, it is crucial for researchers to consider the dynamics of the GYOT program. This program aims to elucidate the significance that individuals assign to their life experiences, as well as the unique meanings that individuals who have undergone similar events associate with their personal experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The emphasis is on comprehension and understanding rather than dictation and clarification. To obtain a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the phenomena unfolding in a given context, examining the participants' genuine experiences or written works, as suggested by Aten and Denney (2021), can be exceedingly helpful.

In this research project, I explored two other qualitative design methods: case studies and phenomenological studies. While both of these methods also involve using

data sources like interviews, case study research is limited by a specific place and time and encourages a thorough and detailed analysis of events, situations, organizations, or social units (Burkholder et al., 2016). Case studies aim to understand phenomena by examining specific cases or cases within restricted systems. According to Patton (2015), the primary goal of case studies is to gather comprehensive, well-organized, and detailed data on each relevant case; however, I did not utilize this technique in my research as the focus was not on generating instances that could be applied to other situations or specific spaces.

In the same way, phenomenology studies typically gather and analyze individuals' experiences related to a particular, clearly defined event. These experiences encompass lived experiences, individuals' reactions to and comprehension of phenomena, as well as their interpretation of these phenomena (Burkholder et al., 2016). While this particular research project focused on examining teacher experiences that may impact their perceptions and support of their students, it did not prioritize the curriculum in establishing efforts for promoting a positive classroom culture. As a result, phenomenology was not selected as the research design for this study.

Population and Sample

According to Burkholder et al. (2016), selecting the right sample size is crucial because it is essential to gather enough data to achieve conceptual data saturation. In the study, the research population comprised 10 participants from three different school districts. Although a sample size of 10 to 15 participants is small, it is appropriate if the sample is relatively homogeneous, the participants have cultural competency or understanding of the subject matter, and the research goals are clear. Tong and Dew

(2016) suggested that for qualitative interviews, a minimum sample size of 20 participants is necessary; however, the number of participants is often decided based on practicality, the scope of the research questions, and the conceptual saturation, which is taken into account when subsequent data collection does not introduce new ideas.

This study involved paraprofessionals working in the GYOT program across three districts in rural Eastern North Carolina. To ensure a well-informed sample, targeted and purposive sampling techniques were used, as recommended by researchers like Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Tong and Dew (2016). Participants were carefully chosen based on their qualifications and suitability for informing the research study, as advised by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Selection criteria included a minimum of 3 years of associate professional employment at one of the schools in the three districts and participation in the GYOT program in eastern North Carolina.

Instrumentation

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), researchers are considered the most important tool for qualitative research at any level. The objective of this survey was to gather the opinions of paraprofessionals about North Carolina's GYOT program. The primary method of collecting data was through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Both the interviewers and participants referred to the surveys as guides. The interview process was guided by three main questions and supported by 10 additional questions. Three preliminary questions were also developed based on the conceptual framework and other relevant materials.

The development of questions was based on the conceptual framework and literature relevant to the topic, which can be found in Appendix A. The first research

question aimed to gather participating teacher perceptions of GYOT programs. The question requested their thoughts and feelings about the program as paraprofessionals and their overall perception of the program. The second research question focused on understanding the impact of the GYOT program on teachers' careers and lives. Teachers were asked to share their experiences and how the program has influenced them. The third research question aimed to identify the necessary steps and actions school districts can take to strengthen paraprofessionals in teacher programs.

Data Collection

Participants were recruited from schools in three school districts in eastern North Carolina, after securing permission from district leaders. These participants were identified as paraprofessionals in the GYOT program. I wrote to the district superintendent requesting permission to use a school within the district for this research (see Appendix B). The letter introduced the researcher and explained the research. I contacted the principal and completed a letter of approval from the school district superintendent and a letter requesting cooperation in obtaining permission to recruit participants (see Appendix C). I then sought approval from the Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University to conduct this study.

Invitations (see Appendix D) were emailed along with the informed consent form (see Appendix E) containing detailed information about the study to recruit key participants and ask if they would like to participate. After participants returned the informed consent form and agreed to participate in the study, I scheduled an interview at a time and place of their choice. Due to limited participation responses to the initial invitation, I used the snowball strategy to recruit additional participants for the study. I

asked participants for the contact information of colleagues who met the inclusion criteria
to see if they would be interested in participating in the study. An interview was then
arranged. Participants were assured confidentiality and thanked for participating in the
study. A follow-up letter (see Appendix F) was sent to the participants, thanking them for
participating in the study. Participants were given the option to participate or decline in
the study. Interviews were conducted and recorded via the Zoom platform, with the
permission of each participant.

All data were stored on a password-protected file server to ensure confidentiality.
Recorded interviews were transcribed and reviewed. Copies of the interview were
provided to participants for review, as a form of data collection validation.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, linguistic or visual data are analyzed and interpreted to
uncover implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning. This process
involves making statements about what the data represents and can reveal insight into
human behavior and experiences (Raskind et al., 2019). Qualitative research draws on a
variety of data sources and employs various methods to collect data, including
researchers themselves who are viewed as tools by experts (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019).
Researchers play a crucial role in this type of research by taking notes, recording
responses, and identifying recurring themes and essential topics (Geddis-Regan et al.,
2022; Mezmir, 2020).

Through the use of semi-structured, open-ended questions, the data analysis
process aimed to gain insight into teacher perceptions of their development programs
within their communities. Individual interviews provided the data, which were then

analyzed using thematic analysis methods. There are various ways to analyze qualitative data, but thematic methods were chosen (Lester et al., 2020). The process of identifying patterns and themes within the data collection, transcription, reading, re-reading, analysis, and interpretation is integral to the thematic data analysis process (Evans & Lewis, 2018). As the researcher, I thoroughly read and analyzed the transcripts multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of the research questions and the participants' perspectives.

Qualitative research often involves coding, which is a crucial aspect of analyzing data and discovering new information. By deconstructing text data, researchers can identify important themes before piecing the data back together in a meaningful way (Elliott, 2018). Coding is a multi-stage process that involves assigning codes – words or letters that add significance to the information – to relevant data (Lester et al., 2020).

To collect and analyze data for my research, I conducted personal interviews and transcribed and coded them using Otter.ai software. The transcription generated nodes – words and phrases for each section of the interviews, which were then assigned tentative labels based on their meaning. Once this process was repeated for each interview, a list of open codes was generated.

In order to produce their themes, researchers first need to develop classifications. This involves two steps. Firstly, the researcher must group relevant categories to identify similarities, differences, and relationships between them. Once these connections have been established, a statement is allocated to each category. The theme name should encompass all underlying categories and be descriptive of their content, connections, and any similarities or differences that were observed. Themes are created in response to the study's main research questions or focus, as they are typically associated with the

conceptual or analytical goals of the investigation (Lester et al., 2020).

Throughout the secondary coding process, I utilized the recurring patterns discovered to create categories and subcategories. I reorganized the categories, deleted any unnecessary codes, and ensured that the codes aligned with our research objectives. To expand the categories, I investigated key concepts and patterns, examining them to identify subthemes. This aided in our description of the instructional coach phenomenon and provided answers to each of our study questions. I constantly evaluated the data to find recurrent themes and eventually grouped related categories until themes emerged. I reviewed the data multiple times until no new themes appeared, which is known as saturation, an essential element of qualitative research, according to Lowe et al. (2018).

Ethical Considerations

Gardner-Webb University's Institutional Review Board ensures that all research meets the university's ethical standards. Approval from the Institutional Review Board is required prior to data collection. All requirements of the Institutional Review Board of Gardner-Webb University were met. This confirmed that proper procedures were followed and that all study participants were protected. All documentation was submitted prior to data collection. This included a letter of approval to the district superintendent, a letter of approval to the principal, a letter of participation to attract participants to the study, and an informed consent form stating the safeguards to protect the identity of the researcher, the objectives of the study, the benefits of participation, the risks to participant confidentiality, and assurances that participants may withdraw. As a researcher, I was responsible for all design and data collection layers. Email addresses, audio/video files, and transcripts were stored in password-protected file sets to be

retained for 5 years and then permanently destroyed. The anonymity of participants and school districts was ensured by providing pseudonyms.

Reliability

In order for research findings to be trustworthy, they must be both reliable and consistent (Hayashi et al., 2019). To establish reliability, it is essential to provide clear, comprehensive, and sequential explanations of each step taken, enabling other researchers to replicate the study accurately (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To enhance confidence, techniques such as data audits, member reviews of data interpretation, pilot testing, and transcript analysis can be employed. Data validation, which involves assessing data quality through various operations to ensure accuracy and reliability, can also be a useful tool (Mik-Meyer & Jarvinen, 2020). To guarantee reliability, all questions were posed uniformly, and participants were given detailed explanations of each step and method involved. I was meticulous in my approach and made sure to accurately repeat each question.

Maintaining a researcher's journal is an effective method of continually gathering data, identifying questions, addressing problems, and gaining insight. It enhances critical thinking about research techniques and eliminates bias. The journal documents the interview process and data gathered, ensuring accuracy and reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Employing techniques like triangulation helps ascertain that the data collection plan aligns with the research objectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers bring their unique perspectives to the research, making them crucial to the process; therefore, triangulation methods and external audits should be implemented throughout the research to showcase how decisions are made. It is vital to consider the researcher's

position and bias carefully (Guba, 1981).

Validity

Qualitative research can be evaluated in many ways, such as by its rigor, certainty, adequacy, and quality (Hayashi et al., 2019). Triangulation, as recommended by Noble and Heale (2019), helps to enhance the validity and reliability of research findings. Reliability refers to the persuasiveness and dependability of a study, while validity pertains to how well a study represents or assesses the concepts being studied. Triangulation allows researchers to access a variety of data sets to better understand fascinating phenomena (Hayashi et al., 2019). In addition, member validation of data interpretation boosts confidence in the data by ensuring that participants provide accurate information about their experiences. Lastly, member authentication ensures precise registration of participant data, which can have a positive impact on research outcomes (Candela, 2019).

To ensure the accuracy of data, various methods were employed. Interviews were conducted with individuals who possessed relevant experiences to answer specific research inquiries. Targeted sampling was used to select knowledgeable participants for this purpose. After recording the interviews, participants were given the opportunity to review them. This process, known as member validation, enhanced the credibility of the data and eliminated researcher bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Summary

Chapter 3 explained the methodology for collecting and analyzing data on paraprofessional perceptions of GYOT programs. The research design and rationale, the study's population, and the sample were discussed, highlighting the rationale for

selecting a purposeful sample. The instrumentation used for the study and data collection

and analysis processes was methodically explained. The chapter concluded with a

description of ethical considerations, as well as the reliability and validity of the study.

Findings resulting from the GYOT participant interviews are presented in Chapter 4. This

chapter focuses on the study's results and data interpretation of the GYOT programs.

Chapter 4: Results

The principal purpose for conducting this qualitative study was to examine paraprofessional perceptions of the GYOT program in three school districts in eastern North Carolina. In Chapter 4, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness are discussed. Additionally, the results of the data using open coding analysis concerning systematic theory construct and themes are presented. Three research questions guided the interview protocol, subquestions, and probing questions used for this study. The three research questions were as follows:

1. What is the perception of GYOT programs from participating teachers?

2. How impactful has the GYOT program been?

3. What steps/action must be taken by school districts to strengthen paraprofessionals to teacher programs?

Setting

The research was conducted in three school districts located in eastern North Carolina. School District 1 was comprised of 20 elementary, middle, and high schools with an enrollment of approximately 4,000 students, of which approximately 70% were from minority backgrounds. Approximately 65% of the students came from families facing financial difficulties. The student demographics in this district were 35% White, 36% Black, 0.1% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 20% Hispanic/Latino, 2% Native American or Alaska Native, and 5% were of more than one race. All teachers in this district were licensed and had 3 or more years of experience, with a student-teacher ratio of 15:1, which was below the national average. Twenty-nine percent of elementary school students scored above grade-level proficiency in reading, while 23% scored at

grade-level proficiency in math. Moreover, 37% of middle school students had reading proficiency or above, and 26% scored math proficiency or above. Lastly, 34% of high school students had reading proficiency or above, and 24% scored math proficiency or above.

School District 2 had 15 elementary, middle, and high schools with an enrollment of approximately 10,000 students. The minority enrollment in this district was 70%, with 74.4% economically disadvantaged children. The student demographics were 31% White, 21% Black, 0.4% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 45% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Native American or Alaskan Native, and 3% were of more than one race. Ninety percent of the district's teachers were licensed and had 3 or more years of experience, with a student-teacher ratio of 16:1, which was above the national average. Approximately 33% of elementary school students had reading comprehension or above, and approximately 27% of elementary school students had calculation ability or above. Additionally, 34% of middle school students were above proficiency in reading, and 28% were above proficiency in math. Lastly, 43% of high school students took a proficiency test or better in reading comprehension, and 34% took a math proficiency test or better.

School District 3 had five schools and approximately 1,800 students in Grades PK-12, with a minority enrollment rate of 10%. Approximately 60% of the district's students came from economically disadvantaged families. The student demographics in this district were 90% White, 0.9% Black, 0.1% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 7% Hispanic/Latino, and 0.2% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Additionally, 0.8% of the students were multi-ethnic. All instructors in this district were licensed, and 92% had 3 years or more of experience, with a student-teacher ratio of 14:1, which was below the

national average. In this district, 49% of elementary school students had above-adequate reading skills, and 34% had above-adequate math skills. Additionally, 38% of middle school students were tested at a proficiency level or above in reading, and 21% were tested at a proficiency level or above in mathematics. Lastly, 38% of high school students were at or above proficiency level in reading, and 23% were at or above proficiency level in math.

Interviews were conducted with 10 participants via Zoom in between and after instructional times, including weekends. All participants met the inclusion criteria, which stated that participants must have been employed as a paraprofessional for at least 3 years in a school in one of the three school districts, participating in eastern North Carolina's GYOT program, be knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest, and be representative of the larger target population. Of the 10 participants, four were special education teachers, while six were general education teachers. All 10 participants were certified to teach in their area of concentration.

Demographics

To answer the research questions, I selected participants with unique abilities using purposive sampling. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), purposive sampling involves intentionally choosing individuals to participate in a research study for specific reasons related to the research question's core constructs and context. I identified participants by working with the schools' principals and sent them emails inviting them to participate. Those who responded received a letter of participation and a consent form explaining the study's purpose, background, procedures, sample questions, risks and benefits, privacy, and contact information.

I was required to protect the participants' privacy; therefore, pseudonyms were used to safeguard their identity and keep the information confidential. Personal information was not used for any purposes outside of this research project, nor were participant names, school identities, or anything else identified in the study report, as doing so jeopardizes participant anonymity. More than 200 emails were sent, and 11 participants consented to join the study. I was able to interview 10 participants, as the 11th participant passed away 1 day before our scheduled interview. Table 2 displays the pseudonyms used to identify participants, the grade level they were teaching, and their concentration fields in the school districts.

Table 2

Participant Identification Grade Levels and Field of Concentration in the School District

Participants identification	Grade level	Certification/field
P001	K-6 grade	General education
P002	K-12 grade	Special education
P003	Pre-k - kindergarten	Special education
P004	Pre-kindergarten	Special education
P005	First grade	General education
P006	First grade	General education
P007	K-12 grade	General education
P008	Kindergarten	Special education
P009	Fourth grade	General education
P010	Third grade	General education

The participants provided data from across the spectrum of the school system. Of these participants, two were first-grade educators, two were K-12 educators, and one was a K-6 educator. There were two prekindergarten educators as well as a kindergarten educator. There was one third-grade educator and one fourth-grade educator. There were six general education teachers and four special education teachers.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

According to Guba (1981), reliability in research refers to the ability of researchers to analyze any complications that may arise during a study and address patterns that are not easily explained. This means that a study is considered reliable when the focus is on the depth of insight from participants rather than just the amount of data collected. To arrive at important conclusions, researchers need to use study designs and tools that effectively assess what they want to measure (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure ethical conduct and reliable results, the research studies employed methods such as data triangulation, recurrence, interview probes, and member validation. Data triangulation involves confirming interpretations through various sources or approaches, while identifying subject themes and categories necessitates looking at multiple responses from different perspectives. During the interview process, probing questions were used to elicit additional responses to ensure that the research questions were fully answered. These responses were verbatim recorded in a diary using the interview questions. To ensure validity, participants were sent email transcripts of their interviews for review, verification, and any necessary adjustments.

To ensure reliability without any preconceived notions, researchers have employed reflexivity. As per Schwandt (2015), this involves documenting all self-critical analyses of bias and reactions to the research process, along with adjustments made based on ongoing analysis, in a journal. Similar experiences are also noted in the researcher's diary when similar perspectives are expressed during the interview. Such a process helps researchers to concentrate on self-awareness; mental processes; and assumptions about self, others, and the environments that are crucial to their research.

Data Collection

Getting started with data collection proved to be a challenge due to unresponsive individuals. Despite sending over 200 emails to prospective participants in the first week, no responses were received. After the second week, the same participants were contacted again, resulting in the recruitment of two individuals. I then employed the snowball technique by requesting participants to recommend friends and colleagues who meet the inclusion criteria and would be interested in joining the study. I sent these individuals a letter of participation and consent form, informing them that their information was provided by someone who recommended them for the study. Once consent was given, I scheduled a Zoom meeting at their convenience.

At the start of each interview, I introduced myself and explained the objectives of the study in a clear and transparent manner, as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016). Participants were thanked for their voluntary participation and reminded that they could end the interview anytime or decline to answer any questions. The interviews were intended to last 45 minutes, but some were completed within 30-45 minutes.

The interviewee and I maintained a supportive and reassuring relationship throughout each interview, avoiding confrontation (Burkholder et al., 2016). Participants remained professional and polite and responded honestly to the interview questions designed to collect data on the perceptions of the GYOT program in North Carolina schools. Probes were utilized to clarify participant responses or encourage further discussion; however, in some instances, probes were unnecessary as questions had been previously answered. All participants were asked the same questions in the same order, and the discussion was free-flowing throughout the interview.

The process of collecting data spanned 5 weeks. Following the interviews, they were transcribed and reviewed by listening to the recordings. My journal notes were also utilized to clarify any information. Each participant was emailed a copy of the transcribed interviews to verify their accuracy and provide any necessary corrections or comments. Of the six participants, five confirmed that the transcription was correct, while one mentioned minor changes in some words but was okay with it. The remaining participants did not give any response. To ensure confidentiality, the transcripts used pseudonyms to anonymize the participants.

Data Analysis

As per the scientific method, my duty was to collect and interpret data (Burkholder et al., 2016). For conducting and transcribing interviews, Otter.ai software was utilized. To indicate the meaning of a data segment, thematic data analysis was applied to identify codes. The interview transcripts were read thrice to verify insights documented in the research journal and for gaining familiarity with the topic. The process involved carefully going through the data line by line and paying attention to specific words, sentences, or text parts.

Individual thought units were represented by phrases or sections of data. These values were entered into the spreadsheet as a single continuous column, from which 225 codes were generated. This was followed by axial coding, which enabled the clustering of recurring patterns to establish categories. These codes were then labeled with a phrase representing the code's sense or meaning. These labels constituted categories, themes, and subthemes of data as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes Aligned With Research Questions

Research question	Themes	Subthemes
1. What is the perception of GYOT programs from participating teachers?	1. Student-teacher relationships through race 2. Ideal workplace	
2. How impactful has the GYOT program been?	3. Impact of the GYOT program 4. Experience with the GYOT program 5. Support for the GYOT program	Student improvement Invaluable support Community support
3. What steps/action must be taken by school districts to strengthen paraprofessionals to teacher programs?	6. Support for paraprofessionals 7. Challenges with the GYOT program 8. Improving the GYOT program 9. Strengthening the GYOT program	

There were nine main themes and three subthemes derived from the data. Themes and categories were delineated into areas focusing on one of the three research questions. The findings for each research question are summarized, and examples from the interviews illustrate the categories. These 30 categories were grouped by similarity into nine themes and three subthemes from the process. Oftentimes, the responses would overlap and relate to one another when participants were asked to describe their thoughts, emotions, actions, and reactions in support of the perceptions of paraprofessionals in the GYOT program in three rural school districts in eastern North Carolina.

The interview transcripts and my journal were regularly reread throughout the data analysis process to strengthen ideas and uncover standard codes. The codes were

examined to ensure that only the most critical codes relevant to answering the study objectives were included. The redundant codes were removed after categorizing the information based on emergent nodes and similarities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process was repeated until no new themes or categories developed, indicating that saturation had been reached as the codes continued replicating themselves in all data sources. This data set had no erroneous information.

Thematic Findings

Two themes were identified in analyzing the data and aligned with Research Question 1. These themes are building student-teacher relationships through race and an ideal workforce. There were three themes from Research Question 2, which are impact of the GYOT program, experience with the GYOT program, and support for the GYOT program. There were four themes from Research Question 3. These themes were support for paraprofessionals, challenges with the GYOT program, improving the GYOT program, and strengthening the GYOT program.

Theme 1: Building Student-Teacher Relationship Through Race

The first recurring theme that emerged was building student-teacher relationship through race. Participants believed that building student-teacher relationships is important. Participants were asked if they think students benefit more if matched with a teacher of the same race, and if so, why or why not. Responses were mixed for this question. While some strongly feel it is important, others feel that race does not matter. Most participants believe building teacher-student relationships should be at the forefront of a student's education.

When asked the question, P001 said,

No, not really. I think there are benefits to both. It all depends on my personal

opinion. I think if you build that student-teacher relationship, that is needed. So

the student can feel safe and loved, and comfortable. It does not matter what race

you are because it does not matter what race you are. You can care for these

children how they need to be cared for. Moreover, as long as you can show that to

that child and that child feels love and knows that you care for them and want

what is best for them. They do not care what color you are. It is my opinion that

your color or race does not matter. It does not matter.

P003 also felt that race does not matter. She said,

To me, it does not matter. If you have that student-teacher relationship, that

rapport bill, and especially what are our grade level, you have to be a loving

person called those kids to know if you care for them And if you do not, it does

not matter what color you are, if they know that you do not care for him, you will

know it because he can come out for his behavior wise, the parents might retaliate

or at different. I mean, as long as you deliver whatever you need to be to the kids.

I mean, the Hispanic cultures, the blacks, your Caucasians, your Asian, I mean, it

does not matter what color you are, as long as you deliver the material to the

students.

P005 said in agreement,

I do not think it matters. I think that you know, I can only speak for myself, but I

hope that everyone has the same outlook. However, when my students come in, I

learn them by name, not race. So, whether they are black, blue, or green does not

matter to me. Their children need to be taught. Moreover, that is what I do. So, I

do not think that race matters at all, I think that we should be knowledgeable about every background, you know, to help them better, but I do not think that it matters. You know, by race and whom they are placed with, I do not think it should matter if you have a loving, caring teacher.

P006 had a double take on this question. She related the situation from both the positive and negative sides. She said she does not think that race should be a factor when discussing educating the child. She said this because she believed every child is created equal in her eyes; therefore, teachers should be the leader of the classroom. As a team player, she believed diversity and equality were beneficial. On the other hand, she believes that sometimes when students are not paired with their race, that could be negative because of social issues, social backgrounds, and things that are transparent at home. She believes this should be done prayerfully. P002, P008, and P009 agreed that paired with the same race benefits students in the classroom. P002 said,

I feel like, even though the students we get, we work with different cultures. However, to me, it helps that I am just saying, for example, that the black children had a chance to hit spirits with black teachers at least because, lots of times, we have had to deal with trade better. It is also good for them to get experience with other customers, so they can understand what you do when there is a lockdown. So, either way. It does not matter because we must get used to working with different cultures.

P008 said,

Yes, because I think students can view success from someone in their culture. I remember growing up. I had a lot of Caucasian teachers, but I did not have an

African American teacher until seventh grade. So, I think having a teacher like me they have the same experience I have had from the same place I come from. You can connect more on a deeper level, and they can understand me so that I can understand my students more.

P009 said, "Most definitely. Furthermore, in many cases speaking culturally, teachers have had the same experiences and rearing expectations and behaviors as their students' race. So, it makes it easier for the student to be understood."

P004 and P010 had mixed feelings about this question. While they realize that students have different backgrounds and cultures, they are unsure if students benefit more if they are paired with a teacher of the same race. P002 said,

So either way, while I am saying it doesn't matter because it needs to get used to working out different cultures, they see it as giving the teachers of our differences a chance to learn each other as an individual.

P004 said,

Well, I am kind of in between with that one. I have seen that children work better with someone of the same race. However, I think if we as teachers would get together with different races and have a chance to discuss and maybe help each other out. So, I do not think it is a race thing. I think more if we could come together and talk about different ways and cultures and how they handle students with learning disabilities and learn their cultures. So, I think that would help out. So, I am kind of in between with that one.

P010 said,

I do not think so. I do not know what to say when I first think of that question. As

an educator, my door is open to all students. As you enter my classroom, I know

we are all here for the same goal: to teach the student and for the student to learn.

So, I think building that positive relationship and having that positive

environment should help positively impact student and student achievement.

P007 said she does believe that every child can learn; however, a child has to be

interested in the subject. She continued to say that if the child is not interested, it does not

matter who teaches; they will not perform well. P007 said,

> I think if I do not have that interest, I do not have that push or enthusiasm for that
>
> class, and it will not benefit me. So, it is, and I do not think it is based on race,
>
> and I believe it is based on my interest and desire. Okay, okay.

Theme 2: An Ideal Workforce

Theme 2 is aligned with Research Question 1. Participants were asked, "What

would be an ideal workforce to help students progress better?" Participants mentioned the

importance of collaboration and assistance from the district and agreed that putting the

students first is important. P001 said,

> In my opinion, an ideal workforce that puts the student's best interest first versus
>
> not being just a number, not just being money, not just being about that grade or
>
> that number of integration tests are the schools. I guess you say that putting the
>
> whole children's best interest first. It is not just about that integration test; we have
>
> to worry about what these children go through when they get home at night and
>
> what we have to deal with when they come to school. If we cannot help them deal
>
> with those situations, we will never get to what I need to be to get those scores up.
>
> We got to focus on the whole child, not just the academic part of the child. It is

just my personal opinion.

P002 said,

> You need to look at this as a whole. Because lots of time, many things are overlooked by children because they are too concerned about their test scores. All this stuff will be irrelevant if a child comes to school hungry. We have to give the child the support he/she needs. You got to look at the child as a whole and not worry so much about the academics.

P003 said,

> Even though our kids do not have to be tested, we still have to prepare our kids to go to maybe regular pre-K, kindergarten. You must look at the whole child because you do not know the home environment. Knowing their environment from home plays a part in school because. However, know if the child has eaten or even taken a shower the night before. Some of our children come to school late in the morning, and we still feed them because we know what their home life is about.

P004 said,

> I think, as with colleagues working together, we do have time, like gray-level meetings, but there should be more time to come together. We could sit down and collaborate on helping each other where needed. We can use our meeting time to collaborate on lesson plans and classroom ideas to help each other.

P005 said, "I would definitely meet children where they are and just try to grow them according to their growth needs, not as to what we think they should be, but what they are capable of doing." P006 responded to the question by saying,

I think kindergarten first grade needs to have full-time assistants. Having full-time

assistants would help fill the academic, social, and emotional gaps created by the

COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, one, of course, you know, give honor, where

honor is due, this is not necessarily decided upon by our district, but I believe on a

state level. You know, finances are not everything, so I believe that that is

important. However, having the backup with the finances creates some financial

stability.

P007 said,

Many times, I think you need to build those relationships. Relationships are

important in any classroom because if you do not build relationships and give

expectations, I do not see kids building either. In different instances, I let them

know that I cared about them. Moreover, we could be friendly but not friends. I

let them know my expectations of them.

P008 said,

As far as education, we have to teach the curriculum, but for kids with problems

and other differences, we hear them out. I have a roundtable for the kids in my

classroom where we sit and discuss issues that bother them.

P009 believes that differentiated learning and planning will create an ideal workforce.

P009 also believes that monitoring progress is essential to see how children progress.

P010 said,

I think you have got to have understanding. You must be willing to work together

to know the child's strengths and weaknesses. It would help if you created a

positive environment and collaborative learning opportunities and could work

together and share in their learning.

Theme 3: Impact of the GYOT Program

Three themes and three subthemes were derived from Research Question 2. These themes and subthemes were identified in data analysis and aligned with Research Question 2's purpose, research question, and interview protocol. In this first theme, the impact of the GYOT program, participants were asked how impactful the program has been in aspiring students to remain positive and grow. Participants gave various responses to this question. P006 said,

So, it is very impactful that we can move up in our job. I have seen people go from teacher assistants to academic coaches. So, you know how impactful it is because I am here. I do not know of any other place I would instead work, and I do not know if there is any other school district I would rather be in. I say that because I was a bus driver for years and then a teacher's assistant. I loved all of those things. However, thankfully, because of my opportunity, I now have my classroom.

P002 said,

I think the support we had at the beginning of the teacher program connected us to community college. I believe that our district is reaching out. We are spreading our wings to a degree, and I can be able to reach other capacities of people and give them more, give more opportunities. We are a community, not just a school district. We reach out to our community, and our community reaches out to us. We have the support of our community.

P007 said that she thinks the program has been very impactful since many people have

been a part of it and benefited greatly from it. She continued to say that the program has

helped with some of their retention or getting people in places with vacancies. P008 also

thinks the program is impactful because many teachers have been successful, especially

those at the elementary level. P009 thinks it is excellent and beneficial to students in

many ways. This is because parents assist with learning and setting specific goals for

their children. P010 said,

> I think being able to have the opportunity to continue my education and to grow
>
> has helped me to get to where I am now. Furthermore, once again, I am in the
>
> classroom teaching third grade and continuing to climb the ladder. So, this
>
> program has been very impactful.

Subtheme 1: Student Improvement. This subtheme is derived from Theme 3 of

Research Question 2. Participants gave responses on student improvement and their

expectations of their students. P001 said,

> I hold very high expectations for my students and do not expect them to be
>
> perfect. I let them know that I do not expect them to be perfect, but I expect them
>
> to try their best and do their best. I try to show them the love and respect needed
>
> and build that relationship, and if you do that, they will do their best for you
>
> because they want to try and please you. I want to build that relationship with
>
> them. You show them that you love them. You show them that you care. You give
>
> them that safe environment, and you show them the high expectations that you
>
> have.

P002 also said, "The first thing I do with students is develop a relationship with them,

letting them know that I love them, and they could come to me for anything." P003 said

that she teaches her students that in her class; they are expected to do their best. P006 said,

> I am a foundation teacher. I believe in building a strong, secure foundation because everything else rests on that. I am also a character education teacher. I teach and turn anything and everything I can into a character in building and listening. I want everything to be a teachable moment. I encourage my students to have a positive attitude in our school. I use Class Dojo. I do a lot of praising. I also redirect where needed. I believe in a positive learning environment.

Theme 4: Experience With the GYOT Program

The fourth recurring theme that emerged from the data was experience with the GYOT program. Participants were asked to give their perceptions of the GYOT program from the perspective of getting into the program and moving forward. Most participants mentioned that the program is excellent, and their perceptions are great. P001 mentioned that she got assistance from the consortium, which helped in finishing her studies. She also mentioned that she got a lot of encouragement from her principals and administration. P010 spoke favorably about the program as it is today from the point of view of others since she finished the program some time ago and is now in administration. P010 said, "Well, I think for some, it has allowed them to grow in the profession and continue to set and work towards those higher goals. It allows them to continue to set and work towards those higher goals."

P007 also now works in administration but went through the program some time ago. P007 responded to the question by saying, "Well, my perception is good. Grow Your Own means retaining those who invested in their county and having people that will stay

once they finish the program." P002 mentioned that her experience was positive as she had much help from school personnel, which allowed her to understand the program fully:

You know, the professors explained it to me and then let me know the different majors that I could do during the time, so I decided just to go on and do the general education and special education to get a dual major.

P005 and P006 had a positive experience with the program. P005 said,

Okay, I would say this, perception is a great resource. It is something to let you know that we are here for you in a program that lets us know that we are not alone. This is a new beginning but also a place for you to come for any additional help and ask questions. Just pretty much. The extra teacher for you. Many things come in that we do not know. So, you always have a group of people you can go to, and whether it is your mentor, or anybody else, they just let you know that this is your training for the next three years

P006 said,

Well, I think that it is a positive one, for sure. Because experience is the best teacher no matter what field you are in. But especially in education. If their heart is in it, I will encourage anybody as a teacher assistant to become a teacher. I believe it is important to spend time as a teacher in the system before becoming a teacher. Because you can never take away that experience, and you can never take away the support system that is built around you. Moreover, going from a teacher assistant into a teacher role was a great experience for me. So, I think it is important to spend time in the classroom before you leave the classroom.

P004 added,

> I just spoke to someone who dropped out of another program, but most agree it is
> a good program for them. That program was hard for me because working as a
> teacher's assistant, a single woman, and head of a household was hard. I did not
> want to do it. After all, I would have to quit my job or give up part of my income
> because I would have to go through the student teaching process. Thus, this
> program allowed me to do student teaching and keep my job. So that was a big
> plus for me. I decided to go for it because I have always loved teaching. I had just
> that certain situation, but this program took care of that situation.

Subtheme 2: Invaluable Support. This subtheme is also derived from Theme 4.
participants were asked what process helped get them through, what support they had
during the process, and what support the district provided. P002 said she got support from
her college, while P001 mentioned that her school principal and administration
encouraged her. P004 said,

> I have had much support from my principal. I have had support from the resource
> teachers, and they have come in, especially at the beginning of the year, all the
> different ones coming in to ensure that I have everything I need and that
> everything in the classroom is as supposed to be. They also come in to check my
> well-being and ensure I am okay. They would always ask if I needed extra help or
> anything. So, they have been very, very supportive.

P006 also commented about having mentors and leaders along the way:

> At our beginning teacher program, several leaders would constantly reach out to
> you to see if you have a mentor along with your teacher. The beginning teacher

would say the mentorship and availability in the program where you have support

in completing assignments. On the district level, you have your financial support,

human resources, and all those supports. So, they keep you aware of things like

that, their email, through weekly memos, you know, what is going on with all the

schools, what things will happen later, and things that you can become involved

in.

Support overwhelmingly came from the district. Most participants mentioned the

district's involvement with financial support and time management. P005 said,

So, with the entire process, we went through, we did classroom management, we

did lesson plans, we did standards, we went over everything that you would need

to know in a classroom and how to conduct the classroom, we went through it. So,

it was like a monthly journey, and we had homework assignments.

P002 said,

Well, whenever I had to resign from doing student teaching, they offered you a

$1,000 stipend a month. So, I am saying, to me, that was the support I got. You

get your $1,000 stipend for the month until I finish.

P007 said that within her school, human resources and administration always had

an open door and a quick reply. Teachers are offered tuition and book help. There are

also many professional development opportunities, and people always offer assistance in

different capacities. P008 said that the district has helped and encouraged her: "It has

been a success for me. I know that when we take classes, we will get financial assistance

back after we pass the class or test."

P009 liked that she could have quality time, materials were available when she

needed them, and the assistant was there when she needed them:

> They were there for me and ensured I participated in staff development.
> Furthermore, I think that is the key right there. Even though I was not a teacher,
> they allowed me to go in with the teachers and learn whatever they were learning.

P010 believed that she was now in the position to help those coming up to be teachers:

> So, you know, I have been able to reach out to others that have been able to give
> support with any field experience, any coursework that may be needed. Also, the
> school district provides some financial assistance. Once we pass the class, we turn
> that information in, and then we get some financial assistance that helps us as well
> so that we can continue mastering, you know, our education goals.

Theme 5: Support for the GYOT Program

Theme 5 is also derived from Research Question 2. Participants were asked, "What is their perception of the GYOT program?" This theme also led to one subtheme, community support. When asked, P001 responded,

> I think it is a great way to encourage people to enter the educational field,
> especially if they know they can receive help, like financing. It is great to take off
> work to go to school for classes, and that is amazing. It is amazing to have that
> support and encouragement and find ways to help, and that would be great.

P002 thinks it would be great for teacher assistants to become teachers. "You get to fit the part because many teacher assistants are doing the teacher role because they are short and have to go to the classrooms as teachers." P003 said it is good for teacher assistants to return to school and offer them support and financial help to help them

become teachers. P004 said,

> I like to support in coming together and having discussions. I like to be able to see
> the different resources provided by the different colleges. I am allowed to see
> what is being offered, get help financially, and be able to talk to mentors. So I
> think all of that plays a good part in any organization, but it did help me with this
> program. P005 said meeting the students where they are and just trying to grow
> them according to their growth needs, not what we think they should be, but what
> they can do.

P008 said,

> From what I can see, it has been very impactful. I know that there are a lot of us
> that have gone through this program and become very successful teachers. We
> have learned a lot because we first started from the bottom as assistants. So, it
> allows us to work under someone for a couple of years, go into the teaching role,
> and then know how to respect those working under us. So, I think it is very
> impactful that we can move up laterally in our jobs.

Subtheme 3: Community Support. This subtheme derived from participant
responses relating to the support of the GYOT program. Participants were asked, as a
subquestion, how the GYOT program supports their community. P002 said,

> Our school is because we are in an area where it is low economically, and the
> teacher assistants are beneficial to the community because they know the
> community already and have built relationships. They understand the kids and can
> work with them.

P003 said, "The program would be awesome if teachers got support when they entered

classrooms." P003 continued to say, "It is very overwhelming for new teachers to come in, and they do not have the support they need to help the children in the community." P004 believed that the community benefits when the children are exposed to their community since they are the children of tomorrow. P004 said, "When children are taught about their community, they will be able to see and appreciate how the community works and be helpful to the community in the future." P005 responded to the question by saying,

> I think that it allows parents to come in because there are many parents out there that are employed, or they can come in and work and end up being a teacher, or there are also times that the community gets to come in and learn about what we are doing. During meetings, they come in and talk with us and get to know us.

P006 said,

> Ah, well, I guess it is. It does not have to be obvious to everybody. However, your role is threefold if you are someone in this community. You have your church and family roles, then the educational role. Unfortunately, much brokenness must be fixed to strengthen the community. Because if the church is stronger, the community is stronger, then the school and the child are stronger. You are only as strong as the missing link. I believe that community is one of those links that must be mended regarding family, church, and education. I think that is critical. I do not think no community has got it right.

P007 thinks it benefits the community: "As I said, they get to retain people that know the community knows the students, and they have those connections through family connections. So, it is also beneficial to have those people we know." P008 said, "Yeah,

and with that, to help them keep pushing along, we are growing productive citizens and for our community for the future." P009 said,

> Okay, the communities in my area involve stakeholders such as teachers, parents, churches, and businesses. Getting everybody involved in children's education means a lot. Parents are willing to do their part, but sometimes they need push and encouragement. They can get that from the ministers at church. P010 also responded: Well, when I think about Grow Your Own teacher, you know, I think about when we started and where we are now. We give and become the opportunity to grow, be that light to others, and help others. So, when I think about community, I think about the school being the Lighthouse for the community. Being that place that is that safe place, that place that inspires us, helps us reach for our dreams, and then together, it is that place where we can build relationships with community stakeholders for the betterment of our communities.

Theme 6: Support for Paraprofessionals

Theme 6 is aligned with Research Question 3. Participants were asked, "Do you think the program meets the needs of the teachers?" Most participants agreed that the program was meeting the needs of the teachers, and three participants believed that the program was not meeting the needs of the teachers. P001 said,

> I would have to say no, just because we have such a big turnover, and we have many teachers leaving, they are not staying in the educational field, and they are going in a different field. So, I would have to say no.

> P002 and P003 also responded no, because, according to P002, most teacher

assistants are saying no. P003 said, "No because, in the past, there was not much. However, there might be support now because someone recently said they might be getting it." P003 was told that someone comes at least once or twice a week to check on teaching assistants to see if everything is in place.

P004 said, "Well, I think it meets the needs. Because, as I said, sometimes we must look at a new teacher coming in. We need to support them mentally. They come in to check to ensure everything is going well." P005 said,

> The program is not one that you could play through. Because you are being monitored and coming in, you have walkthroughs and always feedback. So, your classroom is like a revolving door, and you do not know who is coming in to observe and when they will leave feedback. There were opportunities for walkthroughs and an opportunity to talk with the district personnel.

P005 believes it was beneficial to go around and see the different classrooms and teachers' interactions with the kids of different age groups and levels: "It gives you a lot of positive feedback and a different view to see how things could be done." P006 does think that the program is meeting the needs of the teachers:

> Yeah, I do. I think that our district does what our district can do. Honestly, that is about the simplest way to put it. I do not think that anymore can be done. From our level, and I can only speak from my level, what they are allowed to do or can do because I believe we have high standards and expectations for ourselves, students, and the community. We strive to get everyone we know to meet those standards and those expectations. We have high standards, and I believe that that is a must. So as far as what we are allowed to do, I feel we are all pushing

forward. I believe that we are pushing forward. I believe we have the right vision, the right heart and the right motive, and the right momentum.

P007 said, "I think it is meeting the needs. However, there is going to have to be some more incentive, and that is something that needs to be pushed for it to happen." P007 continued, saying,

> There is got to be some more money or something that they do, and it does not always have to be monetary, but it could be a bonus, it could be just other incentives, even if they have a scholarship amount or help with tuition.

P008 also thinks the program is meeting the needs of the teachers: "I think it meets the needs of teachers; we have our mentors. So, you do have the support, and I think that they are meeting the needs of teachers." P010 said,

> Well, when I think about us educators that, you know, are continuing to seek those opportunities to grow in the profession. Furthermore, and I think about, you know, the resources and things the district provides us with. I know several colleagues that worked with, you know, that have maybe started as an assistant, or, and, you know, they have continued to work their way. So, I think it is very important that you know, as we here in the school, or the school district, we want to grow in the profession, to have that support from the district.

Theme 7: Challenges With the GYOT Program

Theme 7 is derived from Research Question 3. It asked, "What challenges, if any, do you face in navigating the program?" Participant P001 said,

> Probably the load of work. They keep piling it on, and they do not give you enough time to do it. We are all three in ECE, so we are with our children from

when they step into the building to when they leave to go home. There is no

planning for us, and there is no time for us to do anything but be with our children

all the time. So, all the extra work keeps piling up on us; guess when we do it?

We do it at home and spend time with our family. However, that is when we have

to do our work because we do not have the time needed during the day to do all

the work piling on us. On top of that, we do not get paid like the rest of them.

P002 said,

Well, the workload is difficult. It is a lot of reading up on stuff and trying to

understand yourself because it is nothing like you get to do it yourself. What I am

saying is that it is a lot. I spent seven and a half hours with the students. By the

time I get home, little is left to do.

P003 said paperwork is most challenging now as a classroom teacher. While P004 said

there was nothing that has been challenging going through the program, P005 also

believes that there was nothing that seemed challenging with the program. P005 said,

No, not really. Because it is like I said, the program the way it was running, I had

no problems and everything, and everybody was right there to assist me with my

needs. If I needed something, I could talk to someone about it. So honestly, I

would not change anything.

P006 said,

Oh, I think that, and this is not a district thing. This was a college thing. I do not

feel like they properly prepare anyone that wants to come into an educational

classroom and be a teacher and a leader. With no experience, I do not believe that

I was adequately prepared. If I had not, I would probably have thrown my hands

up probably within a couple of months. There was no, and there were many

bookworms but not enough applications. There was not enough, there was not

enough hands-on, you can look, but you cannot touch. There was not enough.

Everybody hates observation hours. So, I think it needs to be more centered

around experience than book knowledge. The book is important, do not get me

wrong, you have got to have some context. I get it. However, if you have context,

do not have commitment, or do not know how to manage a classroom, you can

have a class but do not know how to do it.

P006 said those classes were a real challenge, while P007 said they were not a challenge.

P007 said,

I really cannot say I had any challenges. Like I said, for me, and I think for many

people, getting to classes and staying on track is good. I think that those are some

of the challenges that I see. There is so much demand, and we are trying to make

sure we accomplish everything that we need to find ways of helping our teachers

succeed, even if we have to bring people to our districts.

P008 said,

The challenge I faced was adjusting to certain behaviors and kids. I had some

support on some level, like certain higher-ups, but it was just a lot of work. We

could say stuff to the central office, but at the end of the day, it goes back to the

local administration. So, it does not matter what we say. They are going to do

whatever they want to do anyway.

P009 believed that funding was always a problem. P010 said,

I think about going from a teacher assistant and being in the elementary education

program, you know, some of the challenges could be the time. We do not always

have enough time in the day for anything. However, as far as completing the

coursework here at school or throughout the district, I always had that support.

Theme 8: Improving the GYOT Program

Theme 8 emerged from Research Question 3. Participants were asked, "What

would you change about the program?" Participant P010 answered,

There can be some changes with some programs, and I may not be familiar with

updated information. However, I have been able to see that others that are going

through the program are working more with the understanding that, you know, we

are full-time in the school system working to continue to reach that degree. And

so, they have been able to offer more, I would say flexibility, as you cannot

complete some of your coursework, like your field experience, assignments, and

projects within the school setting of where you are.

P003 also mentioned the programs. P003 said,

When you get these programs, it does not need to be nobody that has not been in

the classroom before. It would be best if you had somebody in a classroom

setting. They need to be the ones heading these programs, not somebody that was

an administrative assistant over here, and then they get hired at the board, and

then you give them this job. So, you cannot give people jobs just because they

have a letter.

P005 said,

I would just change it where you can only do the second and third-year classes. In

the first year, I think we should be learning our roles at a school, our jobs, getting

to know the kids, and different things. It is just a lot to juggle the classwork and

the actual school day because That is the first year I took a lot of work home. And

so, I think it will be more relaxing to get comfortable with the job first, and then

pick up the classes maybe the second year.

P001 said,

What would I change? Given the sort needed, we have discussed Civil War,

communication, and fairness. Once they get into the classroom, do not just throw

them out to the wolves. Give them the support needed so that they will stay. So, if

they come to you and they need help, give it to them, find a way to give them the

help they need.

Likewise, P002 said,

Well, maybe start having more pieces training or workshops with them. See what

they are expecting. If they could call a meeting at the last minute, they could get

teachers' assistants to let them learn more about this program. If they need

teachers, they will have that support and all the information they need to learn

everything because questions always arise. This way, they will feel more

comfortable as a teacher assistant.

P006 also wants to see some changes in the programs:

As I said, if there is anything that I would change, as far as the program, it is to

add those things that would help them be successful, or if it is the incentives.

Whatever it is, bring it more home base. Beginning teachers are trying to balance

out how to make going to work and going to get assignments done. So I think

there has got to be some ways we can work with the beginner teachers to help

them succeed.

P007 would like to see changes in the misconception that it is always one good classroom:

> You might get the new teachers and put them into a more realistic classroom because when they go into from on their own, they already know how to handle this because they have been through it already. I know the right ways to handle it, especially when it comes to kids who may be in foster care or kids who are going through their parents are going through a divorce or death in the family. There are many obstacles that some teachers never went through and did not know how to handle.

P009 said,

> I do not know if there is much to do. However, timing is so important. So much time is used for preparation and getting ready for school, and time is an issue when working and going to school at night and on the weekends. So, if some Saturday morning or Saturday evening classes could be offered, that would be great.

Theme 9: Strengthening the GYOT Program

Theme 9 is the final theme that emerged from Research Question 3. Participants gave their opinion about ways to strengthen their GYOT program in their districts. P001 said,

> My opinion, and I communicate and treat everyone fairly and respectfully. Because the teacher assistants are not treated right, you know what is happening to them. If the teachers are not treated fairly, they will wonder why they are doing

what they do. I think a lot of that would benefit if there were better communication support, respect, fairness, and, and give us a little bit of leeway on completing these required courses. I also think financial help is because many people cannot just quit their jobs or resign and still take care of their home life.

P002 said that providing hands-on experience is needed because it is always good to get to know something by exploring. P003 believed that more advertising and communication are needed. P002 also believes that more financial support is needed because, without the support, there will not be a successful teacher in the classroom. P004 feels that sometimes elementary schools are neglected in different things:

> I see the superintendent out and everything, but sometimes we need more attention. I feel like we have forgotten. There was one instance when we were having trouble with our playground equipment. I would like to see more board members so that they can attest to what teachers are teaching and not just attend the play area.

P005 thinks that the district did everything it could do. P005 said,

> The only thing that I would say that we probably could have worked on is just those classes, the additional classes that you have to take, that was a lot. We could have had a little more time doing those with learning everything.

P006 said,

> I think, having more opportunities to be in the classroom. I think the district does a fine job and gives opportunity. I think they do a fine job by having an open-door policy. I am grateful for the vetting process that our district has with the background checks, the Board approval, the criminal checks, all of those things,

making sure that the right people are in the right place, doing the right thing, the
right way. I think that that is critical, and I am grateful for it. I think every district
should have that same type of focus regarding the safety of our children, our
schools, our peers, and our staff.

P007 said,

Well, I think that, for us to get people involved in that program process, there has
to be some incentives. There must be some benefits, so people want to get into the
program. More so because the teaching arena, the education arena, is getting very
slim.

P009 said, "First, I like how they encourage me as a paraprofessional to become a
licensed teacher. Staff development is provided. Not only staff development but financial
help since professionals do not make the money teachers make." P010 thinks being
positive, providing support, and helping to set those goals, whether mini goals that reach
the milestones, is helpful.

Summary

According to participants, the GYOT program was effective and successful.
Teacher assistants were encouraged to further their education by enrolling in a GYOT
program. With the support of the district, parents, administration, community, and other
stakeholders, the GYOT program can be beneficial in providing quality education to
students. The GYOT program is beneficial as it helps those who want to grow in their
profession.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine paraprofessional perceptions of the GYOT program in three school districts in eastern North Carolina. The study explored the following three research questions:

1. What is the perception of GYOT programs from participating teachers?

2. How impactful has the GYOT program been?

3. What steps/action must be taken by school districts to strengthen paraprofessionals to teacher programs?

The essential findings emerged from participant descriptions and opinions of the GYOT program offered by their school districts. The key findings also led to recommendations for actions in collaboration with participant experiences with the program. This chapter covers the interpretation of the findings, the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and recommendations for action.

Interpretation of the Findings

The study's findings depicted nine major themes and three subthemes that emerged from the interviews. Additionally, the interpreted findings of this research are viewed from the perspectives of the major conceptual frameworks of Yosso's (2005) Cultural Wealth Model. Participants presented several different viewpoints of perceptions of the GYOT program. One general agreement was that the GYOT program is beneficial because it allows paraprofessionals or teacher assistants to have an opportunity to grow and develop into certified classroom teachers. Participants agreed that this program benefits their students, the school, the district, and the community and provides opportunities for them to progress from being bus drivers to working in administration as

principals and beyond. There was also consensus among participants about the support given by each district. Most participants believe the district could be more helpful in providing financial support to the program. While some received a stipend along the way, others felt there was more the district could do to help a teacher in this process.

Interpretation of Themes Relating to Research Question 1

Building Student-Teacher Relationship Through Race. The findings of the first theme related to Research Question 1 revealed that building student-teacher relationships is essential for teachers to make a difference in their students' lives. Results revealed that most participants believed that race/ethnicity does not matter when it comes to education; however, others believe that race should be considered when it comes to educating our students. According to Carothers et al. (2019), due to changing demographics, additional educational problems are caused by the racial/ethnic and cultural mismatch between teachers and the students they teach. However, when it comes to matters of the classroom, Espinoza and Taylor (2021) stated that when social justice education tackles the injustices in the classroom and society, teaching becomes about enhancing student learning and future opportunities.

Participants revealed that building student-teacher relationships is needed so students can feel safe, loved, and comfortable when they come to school. Participants also believed that teachers should be familiar with every student background to help better enhance student learning. This finding parallels that of Bianco and Martin-Paris (2019), who stated that challenges exist when working with pupils who are culturally and linguistically diverse. They reiterated that classroom teachers and licensed ESL teachers find it challenging to stay up to speed with pedagogical approaches and strategies to

engage with this student demographic. There need to be program curricula intentionally designed to engage students by explicitly highlighting why they are desperately needed as our future educators, not just because they belong to a particular race or ethnic group, but also because of their lived experiences and in-depth knowledge of the communities in which they were raised and that need them the most.

An Ideal Workforce. The findings in this theme revealed that participants considered a workforce focusing more on the students than being a number on a state test. Participants believed that students are inundated with testing and little attention is given to developing the whole child. This result corroborated that of Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth theory which stated that we should maintain growth in our students so that they can be optimistic and confident in the prospect of their future and a sense of a different and better tomorrow. Participants believed that students would benefit more if students were met where they are and allowed to grow according to their needs. Results also revealed that a positive work environment and cooperative and differentiated learning would benefit students and create an ideal workforce.

Sutton et al. (2014) stated that improving teacher quality in high-poverty, underperforming schools has been challenging and unfocused. States or districts might, for instance, concentrate on the general issue of teacher supply and believe that employing more teachers will benefit all schools, even those that are difficult to staff. However, the neediest schools rarely benefit from such broad-based initiatives. Results revealed that more teacher assistants and teacher training would make for an ideal workforce, and participants believed trained assistants would better assist teachers in meeting their classroom expectations. To add to this dilemma, Castro et al. (2018)

revealed that some jurisdictions are lowering the standards for becoming a teacher. Walker et al. (2020) found that paraprofessionals generally lack formal academic background when they first enter the job, and this lack of training is at odds with the significant role of paraprofessionals in providing special education services.

Participants revealed that more collaboration with professionals on issues in the classroom is needed to create an ideal workforce. Collaboration would allow teachers to work together to know the child's strengths and weaknesses. Collaboration would also link the possibilities for professional advancement, the sense of community and support, and the learning from one another for consolidated identities as educators and improved work satisfaction. Regular gatherings, strong administrative and leadership support, and unstructured chances for social interaction were all community builders (Sheu et al., 2020).

Lastly, participants revealed that more financial assistance is needed so teachers can have financial stability in caring for their families. According to Martinez Expands Grow Your Own Teacher Program Eligibility (2018), legislation has expanded the GYOT program, which prepares people to teach in schools with a teacher shortage. The program is open to all pre-K educators, not just those employed by public schools but high school students enrolled in dual-credit programs at participating colleges and universities. The GYOT project offers financial, academic, and emotional support to those pursuing teacher certifications. Even so, paraprofessionals struggle to get training outside of the classroom due to a lack of funding, employees to cover classes in their absence, and limited administrative support for outside training. Paraprofessionals often receive informal, on-the-job training from the classroom teacher (Gregori et al., 2022).

Interpretation of Themes Relating to Research Question 2

Impact of the GYOT Program. The findings from this theme revealed a consensus about the impact of the GYOT program. Participants spoke favorably about the program that allows paraprofessionals to take advantage of opportunities to further their education. Results revealed that participants started out being bus drivers, then teacher assistants, and moved on to being classroom teachers. Results also revealed that some participants even made it to be principals of schools. These results were aligned with Kamler and Goubeaud (2018), who stated that the goal of GYOT was to create an environment where students could successfully transfer from high school to college, receive their basic teaching certification in math or science within 3 years, and then return to work in their local district.

Participants agreed that utilizing this program is a way to get teachers into the educational field, which corroborated that of Goings et al. (2018), who stated that the GYOT initiatives have frequently been cited as one of several potential solutions to the severe teacher shortages and the diversity gap in the teaching profession. Results revealed that the support of the teacher program connects the community to the school. Participants believed that many people had been a part of the program and benefited greatly from it. Participants also believed that the program has helped with retention and getting people in places with high vacancies.

Experience With the GYOT Program. The result from this theme revealed that participants had positive experiences with the program. Participants revealed they got invaluable support from the administration and other community assistance. They were constantly checked on by faculty, staff, and administrative personnel, offering assistance

with teaching materials and, in some cases, building morale. In support, Gist (2019) stated that the GYOT programs are encouraging since there is evidence that, despite teachers of color having high attrition rates throughout the educator preparation phase, they have high retention rates once they transition to being teachers of record. Walker et al. (2020) stated that as the use of paraprofessionals in schools increases, they are expected to demonstrate the knowledge and abilities necessary to support professionals in providing superior education and related services to students with disabilities. Implementing instructional methodologies selected by academic specialists based on each student's assistance needs is explicitly expected of paraprofessionals.

Support for the GYOT Program. Participants mentioned that lots of support came from the district. The result revealed that the districts helped financially and were flexible in allowing teachers to attend and work in the classroom. Most participants believed this was a good balance, as they could still support their families. Yosso (2005) supported this notion by saying that students actively consult their families to mobilize their familial capital during college, and this familial capital manifests as family support and messages about the value of education. Yosso reiterated that we must first figure out how to support students who are traversing our institutions, communicating with professors and instructors, interacting with student-support staff, and interacting with their peers.

Interpretation of Themes Relating to Research Question 3

Support for Paraprofessionals. The support for paraprofessionals was mixed among participants. The results showed that three teachers believed teachers do not always get the support they need. Participants revealed there was considerable turnover,

and teachers are leaving the profession. Participants also believed teachers are not getting enough financial assistance from the district. While participants felt that situations might improve with the program, it is still insufficient. Despite the findings, Garcia and Weiss (2019) mentioned that the teacher workforce has grown since the state's evidence-based funding model was implemented in 2018, and continuous initiatives to hire more teachers and diversify the profession to address the nation's teacher shortage have been at the forefront. As Governor Pritzker of Illinois approved legislation addressing the nationwide teacher shortage in the United States, lawmakers aim to lower license costs, streamline the application process for educators, and increase the alternatives accessible to aspiring teachers.

The results indicated that participants of the GYOT program are now getting the support of their educational institutions, where they have mentors who support them. Hubbard et al. (2020) stated that teacher professional development provides coaching and expert support; time for feedback and reflection; sustained duration; and adequate time for instructors to learn, practice, apply, and reflect on new strategies. Hubbard et al. believed that all teacher preparation programs follow essentially identical syllabi since their goal is to give graduates a conceptual repertoire in the field.

Most interview participants believed that teachers are getting the overall support they need, and participants believed that teachers have the support of the administration, staff, community, and district. Participants revealed that the program provides many hands-on activities for teachers to get firsthand field experience. This corroborates Roybal-Lewis (2022), who stated that for the development of teacher candidates, professional development institutions offer substantial learning possibilities (Roybal-

Lewis, 2022). Any common core implementation strategy must include proper training and templates, not scripts and worksheets, and chances for instructors to collaborate on teaching methods to encourage student learning (Hubbard et al., 2020).

Challenges With the GYOT Program. According to Bennett (2021), conventional teaching certification is an excellent way to begin a career, but many people are now exploring other certification options. Before 1990, only a few states provided alternative certification programs that allowed college students with unusual backgrounds to become teachers. However, teachers must pass courses linked to general education because most programs that equip them to teach a general curriculum include university introductory courses. Teachers must also complete student teaching and specific classroom practicum experiences (Yin & Partelow, 2020).

Participants further revealed that they face challenges completing their certification program due to the heavy workload, paperwork, and time management. Participants do not feel adequately prepared to come into an educational classroom and be teachers and leaders. Participants believed some classroom experience is needed to feel prepared to lead a classroom. This agrees with Morales (2018), who stated that preservice teachers need classroom experience to develop their pedagogical and reflective skills and efficacy as teachers. The students of the 21st century will be able to obtain knowledge from all sectors and use that knowledge to improve their surroundings if the students of today's educational institutions are given these skills.

Improving the GYOT Program. To improve the GYOT program, participants mentioned that changes in the execution of the program could create improvement in the program. Participants felt it was too much to juggle classwork and the school day, and

participants believed it would be more convenient to conduct classes on weekends instead of weekdays. Results also revealed that incentives are needed to attract more teachers to the program. Bennett (2021) conferred with these findings by saying that due to the significant shortages of highly qualified teachers in many subject areas, school districts must use alternative certification programs to have enough teachers to fill classrooms. Many states have incentive programs to encourage people to become instructors, particularly in fields and institutions that are difficult to staff (Bennett, 2021). Many educators who received certification through traditional institutions are concerned that inexperienced teachers who use students as learning objects will undermine their students' academic success (Bennett, 2021). Since they may significantly impact their students' lives, teachers must understand the importance of teacher preparation for learners at all stages; therefore, all students must receive teaching that will aid in their development as citizens (Keh & Swartzendruber, 2021).

Strengthening the GYOT Program. Participants felt that more hands-on learning is needed to strengthen the GYOT program. Participants also felt that schools are sometimes being neglected with regard to necessary resources in the classroom. The results revealed that participants are interested in seeing their districts thrive; however, they would like to see more action from those in authority. They felt that the administration should be more visible within the district.

Connection to Yosso's (2005) Conceptual Framework

In this study, the GYOT program in three North Carolina school districts was examined using Yosso's (2005) Cultural Wealth Model. This model focuses on the educational benefits of teachers who are dedicated to contributing to their schools,

families, and communities. The Cultural Wealth Model identifies six types of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance. According to Yosso, all of these forms of capital can be used to empower individuals. The model was initially developed to recognize the talents, strengths, and experiences of students of color in college environments. It provides a framework for understanding how students of color access and experience college from a strengths-based perspective. Figure 2 outlines Yosso's definition of the different forms of capital and offers questions to consider when examining the perceptions of paraprofessionals in the GYOT program.

Figure 2

Yosso's (2005) Cultural Wealth Framework
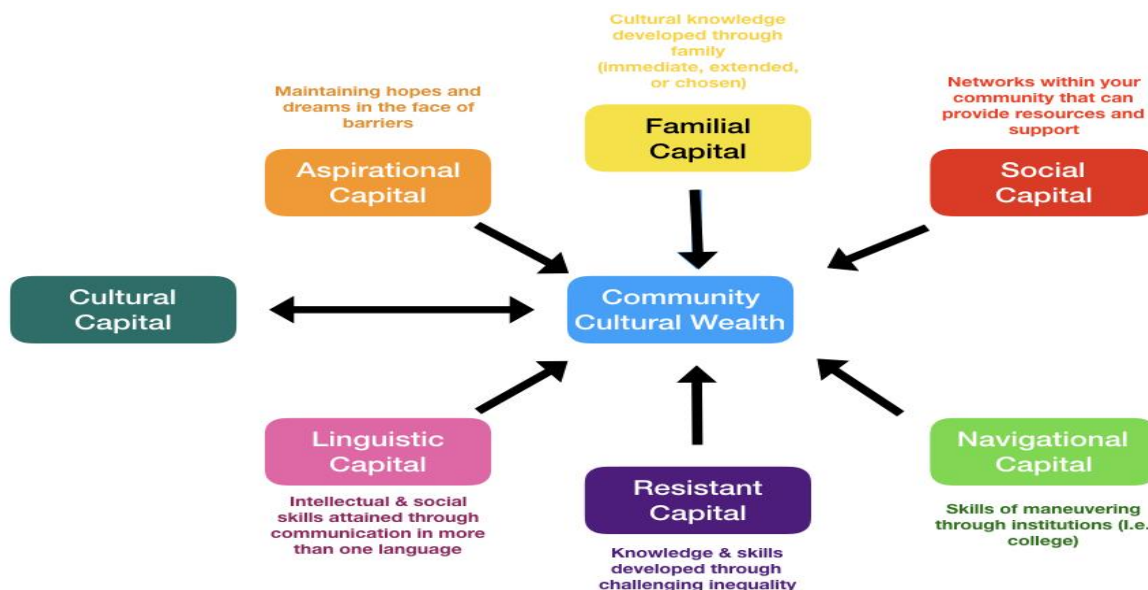
Note. Adapted from Community Cultural Wealth Theory; Yosso (2005). Source: San Francisco State University

According to Yosso (2005), aspirational capital refers to one's hopes and dreams. Despite the long-standing issues of inequality in education, teachers and their families hold high educational aspirations. Having the ability to picture a future beyond one's

current situation and taking steps toward achieving those aspirations confirms the concept of aspirational capital. The study found that participants in the GYOT program consistently supported and pursued their personal growth despite facing real and perceived obstacles. One participant shared their personal journey, starting as a bus driver and teacher assistant and eventually becoming an administrator, which inspired new visions and created new possibilities despite the ongoing challenges in education.

Yosso's (2005) navigational capital enables educators to effectively navigate social institutions, particularly within the education sector. This valuable skill empowers them to maneuver even in unsupportive or hostile environments. The GYOT program has helped participants overcome the challenge of balancing work and school, providing them with an opportunity to create new doors where they may not have existed before. While some participants faced challenges with workload and time management, they persevered and made valuable contributions to their community.

The term social capital pertains to the ability to connect with peers and other social contacts and highlights how teachers make use of these connections to gain access to college and navigate various social institutions. The participants expressed their appreciation for the valuable support they received from the administration, district, and community. They also mentioned utilizing the consortium in their district as well as financial assistance provided by their district, as these types of support cater to the needs of teachers.

Limitations of the Study

Research limitations are the weaknesses of the study, based on factors that are outside of the researcher's control (Jansen, 2022). The objectives of my study were

achieved, but the following limitations in interpreting the data should be recognized. The first limitation stemmed from only 10 individuals from the three school districts participating in the study. These districts were specifically selected to meet research needs. Initially, four school districts were selected; however, one district refused to participate in the study. Participants were recruited using the snowball technique or by replying to an email. Also, the number of participants who snowballed is small compared to the number of teachers solicited.

A second limitation arose from studies with small participant groups. In the district, there are over 90,000 instructors. As a result, surveying 10 participants may not be realistically representative of the schools in the participating districts. This is because qualitative interview research usually requires a sample size of at least 20 participants; however, the number of participants at this point was determined by feasibility, the scope of the research topic, and conceptual saturation (Tong & Dew, 2016).

Being in the education system for over 28 years and working with paraprofessionals throughout my career may have introduced personal biases. I used my experience as an administrator to understand the teacher's perspective and keep a research journal to record biases when shifting focus. I always checked my notes to ensure my biases were limited.

Recommendations for Future Research

After considering the study results, limitations, and literature review, I identified a number of recommendations for further research. First, I recommend research to examine the impact of classroom engagement on learning. Although the impact on learning is not considered, student behavior determines how learning occurs and affects teaching.

Next, I suggest expanding the study to include a broader range of representatives of each school in the district. The results of this survey represent the participants' views of the three districts featured and may not represent the school districts as a whole. Findings from this study have the potential to benefit districts by helping associate professionals progress from teacher assistants to classroom teachers and beyond, reducing teacher shortages. Mitigation could benefit the education system. I also recommend conducting research that focuses on the need to support teachers in maintaining a work-life balance. When it comes to mental health, teachers need to be focused and balanced when working with students. Participants said students come to school with personal needs that teachers must meet. For this reason, teachers must be prepared to help their students.

In conclusion, I strongly recommend paying attention to the relationship between student ethnicity and socioeconomic status, religion, and gender preferences. These interactions change over time, and students may play a minor role in influencing their own values and outlook on life (Jacobides et al., 2018). Understanding these interactions helps improve teacher-student relationships, academic success, self-esteem, and interpersonal and professional skills.

Recommendations for Action

My goal was to examine paraprofessional perceptions of the GYOT program in three school districts in eastern North Carolina. As a result, I propose the following recommendations from the findings of this research for others to consider when utilizing this research:

1. Paraprofessionals are essential to supporting students with disabilities,

language barriers, and other needs in the learning environment; therefore, support is critical. Firstly, I recommend time off from school duties to attend classes leading to certification. Participants revealed that juggling daily school duties and attending classes afterward is challenging. Also, the need exists for classes to be scheduled on the weekends.

2. Secondly, I recommend more monetary incentives to attract paraprofessionals into education. The result revealed that participants overwhelmingly mentioned the need for financial assistance for teachers in this program.

3. I would recommend professional development workshops for teachers specific to diversity and inclusion. I suggest providing teachers with adequate training specific to diversion and inclusion to learn new teaching strategies to improve the quality of instruction. This would allow them to change how they teach their students while incorporating innovative teaching methods in the classroom.

4. Finally, I suggest that participants connect with others through networking to establish collaborative classroom strategies. Many times, teachers need to collaborate on issues in a more detailed manner, and networking can help those who need to collaborate on issues they are struggling with in the classroom. One participant spoke about collaboration on lesson plan strategies, and others just mentioned the need for collaboration. When teachers collaborate, they bounce their ideas off each other and help each other analyze their thoughts.

Conclusion

The GYOT program is designed to recruit, develop, and retain teachers already in the community. It draws from people connected to the school or community who may not have considered teaching or who need or want additional support to enter the profession. GYOT programs typically include some financial support, guidance, and the promise of a job upon graduation. A school district runs the program or a partnership between a school district, a higher education institution, and a community organization.

This study explored teacher perceptions of the GYOT program in three school districts in North Carolina. The study's results depicted participant responses as they described the GYOT program using detailed descriptions of their experiences and provided details that assisted with the research study. Participants also allowed me to understand the ways they saw, viewed, approached, and experienced being a paraprofessional in the GYOT program. Participants spoke favorably about the program that allows paraprofessionals to take advantage of opportunities to further their education. Results revealed that participants started out being bus drivers, then teacher assistants, and moved on to being classroom teachers. Results also revealed that some participants even made it to administrative levels of schools.

One of the most important aspects of the program is building student-teacher relationships. Building student-teacher relationships is essential for teachers to make a difference in their students' lives. Results revealed that most participants believed that race/ethnicity does not matter when it comes to education; however, others believe that race should be considered when it comes to who is educating our students. Participants revealed that building student-teacher relationships is needed so students can feel safe,

loved, and comfortable when they come to school. In addition, participants believed that teachers should know every background to help better enhance student learning.

Having an environment conducive to learning is essential in a classroom. Participants considered a workforce focusing more on the students than being a number on a state test. Participants believed that students are inundated with testing and little attention is given to developing the whole child. Participants believed that students would benefit more if they were met where they are and allowed to grow according to their needs. Results also revealed that a positive work environment and cooperative and differentiated learning would benefit students and create an ideal workforce.

Participants indicated they received invaluable support from the administration and other community assistance. Faculty and administrative staff continuously screened participants, provided educational materials, and in some cases, helped to instill confidence and self-assurance in participants. Participants overwhelmingly talked about the support from their districts. The results revealed that the districts helped financially and were flexible in allowing teachers to attend school and work in the classroom. Most participants believed this was a good balance, as it allowed them to support their families. Participants revealed that they faced challenges completing their certification program due to the heavy workload, paperwork, and time management. However, participants did not feel adequately prepared to come into an educational classroom and be teachers and leaders. Participants believed some classroom experience is needed to feel prepared to be teachers.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

What is the perception of GYOT programs from participating teachers?

1. Are you enrolled in a teacher preparation program?

2. What grade level (s0 do you teach?

3. Do you think students benefit more if they are matched with a teacher of their same race?

    a. Why or why not?

4. What would be an ideal workforce to help students progress better?

5. What is your perception of the grow your own program?

6. **How impactful has the GYOT program been?**

7. How do you encourage students' aspirations to remain high and grow?

8. What support have the district provide to you during this process

9. How will this program benefit your community

10. **What steps/action must be taken by school districts to strengthen paraprofessionals to teacher programs?**

11. Do you think the program is meeting the needs of the teachers?

    a. If so, in what capacity

    b. If no, what would be your suggestion for improvement

12. How do you see yourself moving forward in this program?

13. What challenges if any do you face in navigating through the program?

14. What would you change about the program?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add to our interview?

Appendix B

Letter of Permission to Superintendent

October 30, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Tony Faison, and I am a doctoral student at Gardner-Webb University. I am conducting a research study to examine the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the Grow Your own Teacher Program in eastern North Carolina. I am conducting this research as a part of the requirements in completing my doctoral degree. I am requesting your permission to conduct research data in

_____. I am seeking to conduct interviews for 15 – 20 teacher participants who are currently employed as a paraprofessional for at least three years in a school in your school districts, are a part of the Grow Your Own Teacher programs in eastern North Carolina, knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest, and is representative of the larger target population.

The participants will be asked to complete a consent form detailing their roles in the study and partake in one open-ended interview that should take 30 to 45 minutes via Zoom or face-to-face at a time and place convenient to them. The interviews will be conducted at a time that does not interfere with participants' daily schedule or responsibilities. I am required to protect the privacy of all involved with this research, therefore, all information generated will remain confidential, and neither the school nor any participants identity will be identified in any report or submitted document. If I were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, I would be required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Participation is voluntary, and the participant has the right to decline or stop participation at any time. Foreseeable risks include taking 30 – 45 minutes out of the participants day to answer questions about their perceptions of the Grow Your

Own Teacher program of which they are involved. The results of this study and a description of anticipated benefits are that this study may provide data for school leaders and other stakeholders on the Grow your own Teacher program and possible ways of improvement. I will be in touch with you when my study is published so you can view my findings.

As a requirement of the University, data will be kept secure by having all its contents stored on a secure password protected flash drive. Once the research is completed, all information collected will be destroyed within a three year period and data collected will be permanently destroyed.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at XXXXX.

You can also reach my dissertation chair, Dr. Shelley West, at XXXX.

I look forward to the opportunity to partake in this critical study and appreciate your assistance and cooperation with this research. If you consent for research to be conducted, please respond to this email.

Sincerely,

Tony Faison

Doctoral Candidate
Gardner-Webb University

Appendix C

Letter of Permission to Principals

October 30, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Tony Faison, and I am a doctoral student at Gardner-Webb University. I am conducting a research study to examine the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the Grow Your own Teacher Program in eastern North Carolina. I am conducting this research as a part of the requirements in completing my doctoral degree. I am requesting your permission to conduct research data in _____ school. I am seeking to conduct interviews for 15 – 20 teacher participants who are currently employed as a paraprofessional for at least three years in a school in your school districts, are a part of the Grow Your Own Teacher programs in eastern North Carolina, knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest, and is representative of the larger target population.

The participants will be asked to complete a consent form detailing their roles in the study and partake in one open-ended interview that should take 30 to 45 minutes via Zoom or face-to-face at a time and place convenient to them. The interviews will be conducted at a time that does not interfere with participants' daily schedules or responsibilities. I am required to protect the privacy of all involved with this research, therefore, all information generated will remain confidential, and neither the school nor any participants identity will be identified in any report or submitted document. If I were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, I would be required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Participation is voluntary, and the participant has the right to decline or stop participation at any time. Foreseeable risks include taking 30 – 45 minutes out of the participant's day to answer questions about their perceptions of the Grow Your

Own Teacher program of which they are involved. The results of this study and a description of anticipated benefits are that this study may provide data for school leaders and other stakeholders on the Grow your own Teacher program and possible ways of improvement. I will be in touch with you when my study is published so you can view my findings.

As a requirement of the University, data will be kept secure by having all its contents stored on a secure password protected flash drive. Once the research is completed, all information collected will be destroyed within a three year period and data collected will be permanently destroyed.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at XXXXX.

You can also reach my dissertation chair, Dr. Shelley West, at XXXXX.

I look forward to the opportunity to partake in this critical study and appreciate your assistance and cooperation with this research. If you consent for research to be conducted, please respond to this email.

Sincerely,

Tony Faison

Doctoral Candidate
Gardner-Webb University

Appendix D

Participation Letter to Participants

October 30, 2022

Dear Participant,

My name is Tony Faison, and I am a doctoral student at Gardner-Webb University, an accredited institution of higher learning. I am recruiting participants to partake in a very important study in your district. The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the Grow Your Own Teacher program in your district. I have received approval from Gardner-Webb University and this school district to conduct this study. You are invited to participate in this study because you are currently employed as a paraprofessional for at least three years in a school in one of the four school districts. You are a part of the Grow Your Own Teacher programs in eastern North Carolina, are knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest, and are representative of the larger target population.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you are interested in participating in this study, please read and sign the enclosed letter of consent describing how I will collect data. I will interview 10 to 15 teachers in school districts throughout eastern North Carolina, therefore your input will be valuable to this research. Interviews will be scheduled through Zoom or face-to-face at a time convenient for you. If you understand this research study enough to decide whether to participate, please reply to this email. I appreciate your support of my study.

Sincerely,

Tony Faison
Doctoral Candidate
Gardner-Webb University

Appendix E

Informed Consent

Title of Study

The Perception of Paraprofessionals on the Grow Your Own Teacher Program

 Researcher

Tony Faison, EdD Candidate, Department of Education

Purpose

The purpose of the research study is to use a qualitative approach to evaluate the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the Grow Your Own Teacher Program in four rural school districts in eastern North Carolina. This study will examine the perceptions of paraprofessionals who are currently connected to the school or community and garner their perceptions on the program and ideally share their lived experience with the program and students they serve. The study will also provide insight to stakeholders on the support given to paraprofessionals by their districts.

Procedure

Elementary school paraprofessionals will be asked to participate in a brief interview. Individuals will be contacted through email to schedule a face-to-face interview that is convenient for them. A copy of the informed consent will be emailed to each participant. Responding to the email will indicate consent to participate. Participants will be briefed about the interview process and will be informed that they can skip any question that causes discomfort and can stop the interview at any time. Participants will be asked sixteen open-ended and probing questions. Participants will be allowed to answer freely. The interview will be recorded and transcribed to review the data. Participants will be asked to corroborate the information gathered during the interview. The data will be coded to create categories and themes to understand findings. The interview transcription will be kept secure and confidential until destroyed.

Time Required

It is anticipated that this study will require about 30 - 40 minutes of your time to answer the interview questions.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality
Data Linked with Identifying Information
The information that you give in the study will remain private and handled confidentially. The interview data will be collected via the Zoom platform or face-to-face. Interviews will be recorded. Your information will be assigned a code number (or pseudonym). The

list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study has been completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name or your institution will not be used in any report. The interview transcriptions will be assigned the same code number as your name. At any time after the transcription has been completed, you may request a copy of the transcription for your review. Once the research is completed, all information collected will be destroyed within a three year period. Data collected will not be available for future research.

Anonymous Data

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so, and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you or place of employment.

Risks
There are no anticipated risks in this study.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand the perceptions of paraprofessionals on the Grow Your own Teacher program in the district. Data collected will help school leaders in getting information concerning the Grow your own Teacher program and possible ways of improvement. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Payment
You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Right to Withdraw From the Study
You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your audio/video will be destroyed.

How to Withdraw From the Study
- If you want to withdraw from the study during or after the interviews, inform the researcher and all information collected will be destroyed. There is no penalty for withdrawing.
- If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact tfaison@clinton.k12.nc.us

If you have questions about the study, contact: (*List all researchers and contact information)*
Researcher's name: Tony Faison
Student Role: EdD Candidate
School/Department, Gardner-Webb University- School of Education- Educational Leadership

Researcher telephone number: XXXXXX
Researcher email address: XXXXXX

Faculty Advisor name: Dr. Shelley West
Faculty Research Advisor: Dr. Shelley West
School/Department: Gardner-Webb University- School of Education- Educational
Leadership
Faculty Advisor telephone number: XXXXX
Faculty Advisor email address: XXXXX

**If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained
prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If
you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have
questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB
Institutional Administrator listed below.**

Dr. Sydney K. Brown
IRB Institutional Administrator
Gardner-Webb University
Telephone: 704-406-3019
Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

<u>Voluntary Consent by Participant</u>
I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this
document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have
been answered for me. I agree to participate in this study.

_____ Date: _____

Participant Printed Name
_____ Date: _____

Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix F

Thank You Letter (Email)

October 30, 2022

Dear: _____

       Thank you so much for participating in my research study. You have provided valuable information about your perception on the Grow Your own Teacher program. This information will help me get closer to obtaining the answers to my questions. I will be in touch with you when my study is published so you can view my findings. I wish you good health and good cheer during the rest of the school year.

Sincerely,

Tony Faison

Doctoral Candidate
Gardner-Webb University