THE FUNCTION, CULTURE, AND CURRENCY OF LANGUAGE FOR BLACK

AMERICANS IN EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving and tremendously supportive husband, Karlin Warren, and my children Mackenzie, Ryan, and Jackson. Their patience has allowed me to realize my dream of a terminal degree in my field. Thank you to my mother, Melanie, who loved me into discovering the educator I was before I even knew. Thank you to my sister, Melissa, who encouraged me to discuss my passions to better develop my ideas. A special thanks to my entire family: a powerful village that lifted me up, extended every resource, believed in me and encouraged me to follow through.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine how the racial

makeup of school districts and buildings affect the reading and language achievement of

Black students. It examined the gaps between Black and White students on both the Ohio

American Institutes for Research (AIR) English/Language Arts (ELA) Assessment and

the state approved Northwest Education Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic

Progress (MAP) Reading Assessment. Utilizing secondary data collected from the Ohio

Department of Education (ODE) report card and a large urban school district, the study

found that, statewide, there was a statistically significant difference in the percentage of

students who were rated as proficient or above in reading. On average, across grade

levels, the percentage of Black students rated as proficient in reading was 24.14

percentage points lower than their White peers ($t=5.70$, $p=.0005$). When controlling for

mean years of teacher experience, performance index scores, district typology, and

student poverty, the percentage of teachers in a district who identified as Black was not a

statistically significant predictor of Black proficiency percentage ($B = 0.28$, $SE = .13$, $p =$

.14). However, the percentage of Black teachers was a statistically significant predictor of

district reading achievement scores ($p =.043$). The findings underscore the need for more

diverse approaches to the teaching of reading and writing for Black students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The varied academic needs of students complicate the ability to create equitable access to education. Despite the best efforts of education policy advocates, troubling gaps persist between White and Black American students. According to the most recent NAEP results (2019), there have been no significant advances in reading achievement scores for both grades four and eight for White or Black/African American[1] students. Additionally, in grade four reading, there was on average a 26-point gap between Black and White students and on average a 28-point gap in grade eight reading. The lack of progress toward narrowing the achievement gap exposes the need to explore more innovative methods of instruction and provide targeted interventions for struggling populations. However, new techniques do not always consider sociocultural issues such as language and values, which are of critical importance in African American Vernacular speaking communities.

Language assumes a particularly critical role in the identity and development of individuals (Evans, 2014). It also serves as a form of social capital, assisting individual

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[1] Black and African American are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation to describe the ethnic group of Americans with ancestry from any of the Black racial groups in Africa.

in navigating a "sense of self" and a place in society. Clark (2006) indicated that linking language, language that leverages institutional power, is an example of Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualization of cultural capital. He also reiterated the position of functional linguistic theory through his indication that networks have distinctive ways of addressing members, culturally familiar outsiders, and insiders. Since language is a social resource, it functions as a form of social capital. Thus, possessing limited access to higher levels of formal language also limits the spaces in which individuals may operate. In America, Standard American English (SAE) is the language utilized in formal spaces; it is the language of power to which reading fluency is linked in American education. Rasinski (2006) indicated that reading comprehension is dependent on fluent reading of complex text. This poses a significant problem for Black African American Vernacular[2] (AAV) speaking students who require access to increasingly complex language skills as they advance in English/Language Arts education. Black teachers, who are speakers of AAV and are more likely to affirm the usage of AAV, can assist students with code-switching between their mother tongue and SAE in order to increase the necessary decoding skills to meet the literacy demands of the American education system.

This quantitative descriptive dissertation explores the performance of Black students on a state approved reading assessment, which is a measure of Reading achievement and which includes the following components based on the Common Core State Standards Strands (2002): 1. Key Ideas and Details; and 2. Language, Craft, and Structure in both Literary and Information Text; as well as 3. Vocabulary Acquisition and

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[2] Vernacular originates from the latin word *vernaculus,* meaning native or indigenous. African American Vernacular (AAV) will be used consistently throughout this document to describe the native/mother tongue of Black individuals and honor the distinctive differences from Standard American English.

Usage and its relation to those instructing them. While the demographic of the teaching population is certainly not the only factor worthy of consideration in the instruction of Black students, it is a crucial factor in the conversation concerning reading and language instruction of Black students in American education. Additionally, it has some implications concerning the diversity of the teaching force and its impact on the education of Black students. Recent research has examined the effects of race-matching of students and teachers at the classroom level in elementary schools, grades Kindergarten through five, respectively (Dee, 2004; Gershenson, Hart, Hyman, Lindsay, and Papageorge, 2018; Gershenson, 2019). However, as students advance in reading education, the reading standards for language and vocabulary acquisition become increasingly complex. The present research provides a more concrete examination of race and English language acquisition at the middle to upper grades at the district and building levels, with a focus on the specific skills required to demonstrate grade level fluency. The next section will provide general background on the unique position of Black AAV speaking students within the discussion of literacy and academic achievement.

Background and Context of the Problem

While there have been numerous national education policy initiatives (e.g., Brown vs. Board of Education (1954), Title I of ESEA (1965), and *A Nation at Risk* (1983), No Child Left Behind (2002) was perhaps the most influential in the increased usage of standardized assessment to measure student performance. Amidst the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), President George W. Bush emphasized the importance of literacy. In his remarks at the National Institutes of Health (2004), he stated, "If you teach a child how to read, they will pass a reading test." His

3

statement generalizes the socioeconomic and academic position of every student. This statement assumes that students have all had exposure to the same preparation and experiences. This is both unrealistic and unfair to those students whose resources are scarce. His statement does not consider the varied levels of preparation for those who are literate although not fluent in SAE.

Black students are often grouped into the population of SAE fluent students, with the expectation that they read, write, and speak this language, as they have lived in the United States their entire lives. However, this generalization ignores the language differences of AAV speakers and their ability or inability to effectively code-switch in situations that require the use of SAE. This generalization also contributes to the persistence of the Reading and Writing achievement gaps in American education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), 34% of Black students performed below Basic on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in comparison to 9% for White students. These results should encourage policymakers and educators to evaluate not only tangible resources but also intangible resources, such as language and institutional agency, a function of social capital. Moreover, it is essential to consider the effect of institutional agents who may intervene and advocate on behalf of non-fluent SAE speakers. Bush (2004) further indicated that reading is a "new civil right" and that students do not have a chance at success without it. Thus, it is crucial that AAV speaking students have access to tools and agents to support their development of SAE language skills and fluency. This agency includes Black teacher AAV speakers who possess code-switching skills and abilities, and who can also serve as a tool for developing fluency.

Studies have noted the positive impact of race-matching, random assignment of students to classrooms with teachers of the same race, on student outcomes. Dee (2004) conducted an experiment in which students and teachers were randomly assigned to classrooms in grades K–3, finding that racial pairing significantly increased English/Language Arts (ELA) test scores of both Black and White primary school students. Gershenson et al. (2018) found that Black student-teacher pairing significantly increased the likelihood that Black students will graduate from high school and attend college. The research suggested that ethnic matching positively affects student academic performance. However, the ethnic divide between teachers and students in public schools is a growing concern. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) reported that 80% of teachers in public K-12 schools are White, while a mere 7% are Black. This considerable gap also presents an issue in representation of institutional agency for Black students. Unfortunately, this problem continues to worsen. Partelow (2019) reported that in the last decade, the United States has had a 26.46% decline in Black student matriculation to teacher education programs. Additionally, less Black students are awarded education degrees. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), 18% of degrees awarded in education were to Black students, a 2% decrease from the previous year's report. Furthermore, Black teachers only made up 5.2% of the enrollees in education programs in the state of Ohio.

Statement of the Problem

Beginning in 2005, multiple affiliates under the umbrella of the National Education Association advocated against the unrealistic goals of NCLB and its inception

of the testing and accountability agenda. Educators argued that NCLB promotes and requires a "one-size-fit all approach" to education and learning (Hoff, 2007).

Perhaps the most pertinent dilemma concerning the linguistic differences of Black students from their White counterparts is the weight and impact of standardized testing on ability and student success. Students are required to take several tests during the course of their academic careers in order to demonstrate proficiency or progress toward mastery of the standards. At the high school level, End of Course examinations are a required component for graduation, even when students begin high school coursework with significant deficits that make it statistically improbable that they will achieve a passing score. While the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (2010) and testing and accountability legislation attempts to level the playing field, these outcomes, as well as the performance of students in American classrooms, are dependent upon SAE fluency. However, not all Black students are native speakers of SAE; and, Black native AAV speakers lack SAE fluency due to their lack of exposure to SAE as well as due to the lack of institutional agents that may assist students in linguistic needs and translation. SAE utilized in school texts and on standardized assessments is generally more accessible to students from middle class backgrounds who have been socially exposed to SAE and thoroughly supported in literacy development (Hart and Risley, 1995), which differs for students from other dialect backgrounds.

Because written language plays a central role in determining students' school success or failure, dialect and language difference have important implications for institutional practice and educational policy. Yosso (2005) indicated that one of the most prevalent forms of racism in American education is deficit thinking, where educators and

educational leaders alike position that Black families are at fault for poor academic performance. Yosso further asserted that examining the standard of research, pedagogy, and policy through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens shifts the focus to the cultural wealth of communities of color. Rather than emphasizing cultural poverty and disadvantage, CRT focuses on the assets of the culture. In relation to the current research, AAV can be conceptualized as an asset that can be used as a tool to advance the education of AAV speaking students. Moreover, Wolfram (2000) indicated that respect for and knowledge of a student's community dialect aids rather than hinders the acquisition of standard English. Additionally, resources for language learners are not necessarily applicable to students with "dialectical" differences, thus posing an issue with Black students' access to linguistic capital (i.e., SAE). The American Education system has failed to appropriately address the linguistic needs of AAV speaking students. The demands of curriculum and assessment coupled with the unique needs of AAV speakers pose a systemic dilemma and continue to challenge academic institutions and educators who may not be equipped with the best pedagogical practices to meet these needs.

The embedded deficit view of AAV within society and education has negatively impacted attempts to validate and utilize AAV in instruction and stymied progress toward African American student reading achievement. In Rickford's (1999) overview of the issues, he responded to the conclusions, accusations, and impressions resulting from the 1996 Oakland School Board Resolution, which introduced the usage of AAV in the classroom. He resolved that while AAV is not a "panacea for all the problems that beset African American students in schools…it is potentially part of the solution" (p. 1). Though it is only one factor, it holds considerable weight as a part of the resolution to

closing the achievement gap. Additionally, he discussed what work needs to be done in response to the resolution. He called for all parties to recognize the nature of the problem, which involves not only linguistic issues, but administrative and executive factors. Rickford (1999) asserted that this complex issue involves the following factors: school resources and facilities; teacher pay, training, and collaboration; scarcity of qualified instructors; instructor expectations and student performance; low self-esteem and stereotypes; and socioeconomic background. Ultimately, equity in reading instruction involves improving the attitudes of teachers, students, and parents, and knowledge concerning AAV. The overwhelming negative attitudes of the public only hinders overall understanding and stifles movement toward dialect awareness and the use of this information to assist students in developing SAE skills. Since linguists and educators are concerned with the education of Black students, the teaching, writing, and speaking of SAE should be improved more generally to include a variety of teaching styles, linguistically informed discussions, and dialect readers.

As previously indicated, language use is crucial to overall identity development (Evans, 2006). Harper (2007) explored current practices involving the development of Black racial identity and achievement and offered practical applications of his findings. He resolved that crucial to African American development of a healthy racial identity is instilling a sense of pride, allowing students to investigate nonstereotypical representations of self, as well as utilizing cooperative learning strategies. Black teachers are a source of capital as a nonstereotypical model and can serve as institutional agents, navigating the use of both languages and assisting in SAE fluency for Black students. Black teachers are also a source of community wealth (Yosso, 2005) and can prove

valuable in the instruction of SAE, but the shortage of teachers of color presents a dilemma toward this effort. The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) not only reported the troubling gaps in the racial composition of teachers, but also predicted that the percentage of White students in public schools will continue to decrease and the student of color population will become the majority by 2024. This further emphasizes the lack of proportional representation of teachers of color to students of color and the loss of capital for Black students.

Significance of the Problem

Institutional agents, institutional support, and social capital are all factors in the complex role of language education for Black American students. Stanton-Salazar (2011) discussed the role that institutional agents play in the empowerment of youth from lower socioeconomic status households. In this discussion, he emphasized that institutional agents, such as teachers, counselors, and mentors are an essential factor when attempting to gain access to resources, which can assist individuals in attaining some success or gains in society. He asserted that students "gain access to vital resources through relationships with institutional agents situated within the various sociocultural worlds that comprise their social universe" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p.1068). Through discourse, students encounter opportunities and obtain knowledge. Moreover, through discourse with institutional agents, students receive key forms of social and institutional support.

Stanton-Salazar (2011) defined institutional agents as "societal actors who act to maintain the advantages of other actors and groups who share similar attributes, high-status positions and social backgrounds" (p.1069). Institutional agents may also serve as a model, representing the method by which individuals should navigate pathways to

elevation in society. They also empower low-status students, in that they can encourage competency and confidence so that students possess the control to change their lives.

Institutional support is also central to student success. He defined it as "key resources and forms of social support which function to ensure children and adolescents become effective participants within institutional spheres that control resources and network pathways associated with different forms of empowerment, during adolescence and early adulthood, including school achievement, class mobility, and self-determination" (p. 1078). According to Stanton-Salazar (2011), institutional agents, empowerment, and institutional support are all forms of social capital in communities and organizations. He affirmed that they are critical forms of support and contribute to the complexity of inequality in society. Additionally, he posited that there are a multitude of issues with providing these forms of support.

Lin (1999) defined social capital as a type of resource including influence, social ties, and access to information. It can be further observed as a resource that intervenes in moments of cultural and structural limitations. Social capital may include individuals who perform social acts in order to assist in maintaining an individual's position in a culture or a form of access in order to elevate an individual into an otherwise unattainable position. For example, Black teachers possess the ability to code-switch as well as access to higher level SAE skills. Thus, Black teachers are a form of social capital as they are institutional agents who can provide access to the information necessary to attain access to higher level language skills. Additionally, they possess the ability to interact with students in their mother-tongue to elevate their interactions with others outside of their cultural communities. Lin (1999) explored access to social capital at both the group and

relational levels, citing that "it is the interacting members that make the reproduction of this social asset possible" (p. 32). Borrowing from economic and investment principles, she also discussed how an investment in social capital can produce social return, that is, a resource that creates value for members of a community. Specifically, embedded resources can be "pooled and shared" for the purpose of advancing communities. Her work provides a contextual framework for evaluating the variety of accesses to social capital, the degree to which capital is available to some groups, as well as the magnitude of its importance. Lin (2001) emphasizes that both "who and what you know" are critical aspects in an individual's elevation in society. Black teachers can provide the "who" and "what" in Black student AAV speakers' academic lives.

Rickford (2016) emphasized the potential of AAV in English instruction through his discussion of Labov's contributions to the study of AAV. Labov published *The Social Stratification of English in New York* City in 1966. He was a pioneer in the discussion of how linguistics could be used to better literacy instruction for native vernacular speakers and people of color. He divided his analysis into four interrelated areas: synchronic analysis of AAV's structural features, AAV speech events and the verbal artistry of AAV speakers, diachronic issues of origination whether in Creole or English dialects, and applications including the interventions necessary to improve teaching of reading and writing to AAV speaking students. Through this thorough analysis of the language features, he attempted to validate the existence and complexity of AAV. Ultimately, Rickford suggested that AAV should be 'highly considered' during instruction.

The perspectives concerning the method and degree to which the usage of AAV in instruction should occur has been a source of controversy among the sociocultural

linguistic community. However, those who advocate for the usage of AAV in instruction agree that teachers are critical in student fluency in SAE. Lewis (2008) analyzed the literature concerning vernacular in order to determine the reasons speakers of AAV are hindered when attempting to learn SAE, and examined the reasons people disagree with using the foundation of dialects to teach SAE, as well as why it is critical for instructors to use foundation of dialects to teach SAE. Drawing on Labov and Rickford's examinations, Lewis concluded that miscommunication of the appropriateness of the dialect begins with teachers. Lewis stated that teachers fail to realize that it "is a part of the students' culture" (p.162). They fear rejection from their own community, yet attempt to use SAE. The lack of confidence in language contributes to the loss of cultural capital, that is, a familiarity with the legitimate culture within a society (Bourdieu, 1986).

Purpose of the Study

Issues with language gaps and troubling statistics concerning the deficit in the number of teachers of color with respect to the student of color populations suggests the need for a more thorough examination of the relationships between institutional agency and reading achievement. The purpose of this descriptive correlational study was to examine the differences between Black and White students' Reading and Language achievement on state approved examinations. The research examined the effect of Black teachers on the reading academic performance of Black students, as well as whether higher percentages of minority teachers will yield higher language and reading achievement scores. The research addressed the gaps in research concerning race and achievement by examining the correlation between teacher race and the performance of

the adolescent grades (grades 6 through 10) and the specific components used to determine reading proficiency.

This study will contribute to the discussion concerning English fluency from a unique perspective. Through statistically examining the relationship between Black student performance and the population of Black teachers, the research can inform discussion of best practices regarding Common Core era language instruction (particularly for Black AAV speaking students). Additionally, it will consider the importance of the racial composition of teachers for Black students who are non-native speakers of SAE. Through analyzing the correlation between the performances of a marginalized group and the racial composition of academic environments, the study may have implications concerning race, linguistic oppression, and the identification of the unique language needs of Black American students.

Validity and Reliability of Correlational Studies

Correlational analysis studies are subject to many threats of both internal and external validity. Validity is the degree to which the data collection method accurately measures what it is intended to measure (Creswell, 2012). In this correlational design, there were no manipulations of variables, as there is no experimental or treatment condition. Additionally, the study design does not permit inference to causality; thus, conventional threats to internal validity are not applicable.

One threat to internal validity is that teachers and students self-identified in their racial groups. It is possible that some individuals identify as multiple racial groups and were unable to specifically indicate the combination of racial groups to which they identify or may not have responded at all, resulting in an increase or decrease in the

actual percentages of individuals of a racial group. To address issues of validity, standard procedures during the "cleaning of data" were used. Many factors can affect external validity, which are problems that threaten the ability to draw correct inferences from the sample data to other persons, settings, treatment variables, and measures (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). In this study, a factor that jeopardizes the external validity is the sampled population from the secondary analyses. Since the sample regarding reading and language scores only included schools within one large midwestern urban district, the findings from those statistical tests may only be generalized to a similar population.

It is likely that given the same variables, the same groups would score similarly. The study utilizes the total population of schools in the state of Ohio with the exception of charter and community schools as language theory concerning Black students is situated within public school environments. This research was situated within one midwestern state, however, further research is needed to determine how the demographics of schools affect reading achievement in other areas of the country.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following overarching question: How does race impact the reading and language achievement of Black students in the American education system?

Research Question I: What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state examinations?

Research Question II: What effect does the racial composition of the teaching staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on state examinations?

Research Question III: What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on a state-approved building examination in an urban school environment?

Research Question IV: What effect does the racial composition of the teaching staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on a state-approved building examination?

Limitations

This study has limitations that arise as a result of the research context and data. Contextually, it is critical to consider that not all Black students and Black teachers are speakers of AAV. The extent to which AAV is considered or spoken is dependent upon the individual climates of each school or district. Additionally, the researcher was unable to identify whether the individuals were speakers of AAV. However, previous research studies have found that AAV is widely spoken in large, urban communities (Thompson, C. A., Craig, H. K., & Washington, J. A., 2004) and has spread to suburban areas in an increased interest to ensure better education for their children (Kaufman, 1992; Orfield, G., Arenson, J., Kalejs, E., Jackson, T., Bohrer, C., & Gavin, D., 1998). It is also essential to consider the varied contexts in which the students are operating. The populations of peer racial representation as well as staff representation, the expectations of each community or segment of a community, and other community demographics may affect the culture of an academic environment. This study will be conducted using pre-existing conditions, that is, the racial makeup varies in each district and building and may impact the dominant language and culture that make up the school climate.

Other limitations are related to the secondary data that is utilized in the study. Since the research is not designed as an experimental study, the racial composition of each building and district have already been preconstructed. These compositions cannot be manipulated, and the research is unable to manipulate other variables that may impact Black student reading achievement.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study expand the conversation concerning the needs of Black American AAV speaking populations. Recent research examined the impact of race-matching in classrooms and reading achievement (Dee, 2004; Gershenson et al., 2018; Gershenson, 2019) at the elementary levels. The present study examined how the racial proportions of instructors impact an overall district and building level academic climate. It adds to the discussion by statistically examining the relationship between teacher race and reading achievement, while specifically focusing on the middle to high school grades (i.e., grades 6 through 10). Unique to present race and achievement research, the study specifically examined a collective measure for reading and language achievement, the Northwest Education Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) reading examination. Using this measure for reading achievement, the researcher determined the effect of the proportion of Black instructors on reading language proficiency. The Common Core State Standards (2010) strands measured in this assessment include: 1. Key Ideas and Details, and 2. Language, Craft, and Structure in both Literary and Information Text, as well as 3. Vocabulary Acquisition and Usage. Finally, the research identified the magnitude to which Black teachers contributed to reading and language achievement of Black students.

The NWEA MAP assessment has been utilized in numerous studies. Utilizing this measure, researchers have drawn several conclusions regarding the importance of relationships, assessment usage, and achievement. One study found that higher school climate scores result in a positive effect on reading achievement (Sanders, Durbin, Anderson, Fogarty, Giraldo-Garcia, and Voight, 2018). Hegedus (2018) concluded that the use of achievement measures when evaluating school performance and achievement by states biases evaluations against schools who serve vulnerable populations with potentially adverse impacts on those who are most historically marginalized. Thus, publicly reporting low achievement can trigger negative attention and action. Wang, Walters, and Thum (2013) determined that student achievement was strongly predicted by student and school demographics. Although the results of previous studies highlight some critical conclusions regarding student achievement, they also indicate the need for further research examining the effects of specific student and teacher demographics on state assessments at state, district, and building levels.

This study will benefit school districts and academic institutions in their attempt to equitably serve AAV speaking students. Through determining the academic impact of Black teachers on district and building level reading achievement, the study emphasizes the need for a more diverse teaching force in order to meet the academic needs of students. By statistically examining the proportion of Black teachers on a language-focused reading examination, the research highlights the importance of language-based reading instruction for Black students. This information may be utilized to build a more culturally relevant reading curriculum and to strategically focus instruction on the identified areas of need. This study also provides a basis for subsequent research

concerning specific practice and/or the pedagogy and values that Black teachers employ in their instruction. Furthermore, this investigation sets a foundation for building more supportive academic contexts for Black students and provides a deeper lens into culturally responsive practice.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current study examined how the racial makeup of school districts and buildings affect the reading and language achievement of Black students. More specifically, it examined the gaps between Black and White students on both the Ohio American Institutes for Research (AIR) English/Language Arts (ELA) Assessment and the state approved Northwest Education Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading Assessment. It also investigated how the proportion of Black teachers affects the reading and language scores of Black students. In order to investigate these relationships, the following bodies of literature were examined:

1) theoretical foundations of language and language theory in practice

2) social, cultural, and linguistic factors that impact the achievement of AAV speaking students

3) structural and institutional barriers that affect AAV speaking students' reading achievement

The first section of this literature review discusses the theoretical perspectives of various sociolinguists regarding language development and dialectical differences. This

discussion makes connections between theories that inform the development of dialect and the issues of AAV speaking students. It also considers how the contribution of sociocultural linguistic theories have informed practice and in certain instances were used to advocate for AAV speaking students. The second section delves into the social, cultural, and linguistic factors that shape the schooling experiences of Black AAV speaking students. It also explores how biases within each of these factors may be prevented by interactions with Black educators. Finally, Section 3 examines the structural and institutional barriers that complicate the reading and language achievement of Black AAV speaking students. It further analyzes how these barriers are exacerbated by dominant language ideology embedded in the structure of traditional education.

Section One: Theoretical Foundations of Language and Theory in Practice

This section examines the theories of language that explain the development of dialect, the stigmatization of the language variations of the working class, and the devaluation of AAV reading failure. Then, it details how these sociolinguistic theories have informed the practice and usage of AAV in instruction, advocacy for the legitimization of the language, and the development of innovative curricular approaches. Finally, the section emphasizes how sociolinguists have provided attention to and advocated for AAV as a valuable asset of the culture.

Sociocultural Linguistic Perspectives of Language and Dialect

Oral language is the foundation for literacy development. It is through daily interaction and experiences with language that students exercise their opportunities to flourish at language fluency. Although there are multiple theories of learning, one most appropriate to English fluency within the context of Black student learning is social

constructivism. Amineh and Asl (2015) defined social constructivism as a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that examines the knowledge and understandings of the world that are developed jointly by individuals. Perhaps one of the most important social constructivists was Lev Vygotsky (1978) who stated that cognitive growth is first realized on a social level and the occurrence of this growth within the individual follows. This active process begins within the contexts in which students are situated and operate. Ultimately, Black students who are speakers of AAV learn this language through their interactions with peers, parents, and others in their neighborhoods. Additionally, socioculturalism invites the learner's own version of the truth that is impacted by his/her background, culture, and knowledge of the world. Black speakers of AAV make this meaning and are a part of social experiences that are connected to their unique environments. Unfortunately, these interactions are problematic, as they do not always mirror the features of SAE. Furthermore, SAE is the language on which success in 21st century America depends. From school standardized testing to employment interviews, the success of Black students is highly correlated with their ability to read, write, and express SAE fluently. Since the first language of some Black students is AAV, this poses a threat to the legislative goals of The National Literacy Act (1991), NCLB (2002), and the like.

Sociolinguists explore variations across individual speakers and groups. This involves an in depth analysis of differences in social and regional dialects as well as speaking styles. Among early prominent sociolinguists was Bernstein (1962), whose Code Theory was the catalyst into the investigation of speech barriers. He distinguished two kinds of English code: elaborated code and restricted code; and further indicated that

children from the working class were limited to restricted code, while those of the middle class had access to the elaborated code (Hussein, 2012). According to Bernstein (1962), speech variation is a result of economically wealthy individuals who are identified as the "elite social class" who determine different usages of speech in such a way that more privileges can be attained by the elite. Furthermore, underprivileged groups can only become socially successful if they acquire the linguistic abilities controlled by the dominant class through educational institutions. The elaborated code would thus be SAE, while the restricted code would be considered AAV. He presented acceptable interpretations of the effect of language variety in society and its usage as capital. However, according to his Code Theory, AAV would be considered an imperfect imitation of standard speech, operating under the assumption that "changes in language are dependent upon the prestige of the users" (Kroch, 1978, p. 21). This deficit notion contradicts the idea that phonologically systematic changes occur in social language variations, assumes that one variation is more sophisticated than the other and that underprivileged children are subject to linguistic neglect, and further contributes to the delegitimization of the language of the "lower class," specifically AAV speakers.

Perhaps the most influential work in sociolinguistics as it relates to AAV is the work of Labov (1972), who refuted the concept of verbal deprivation among urban Black children. He indicated that the widely accepted viewpoint that "children show a cultural deficit" and as a result are "impoverished in their means of verbal expression" has "no basis in reality" (Labov, 1972, pp. 201-202). In his study of populations in Harlem, he combined participant observation and statistical analysis in order to substantiate his claim that internal variation governs linguistic behavior. He observed extreme differences

between Black and White speech patterns and concluded that the devaluation of AAV was a function of the institutionalized racism in society and that this was the cause of reading failure. In this work, he established his theory of Linguistic Pluralism, arguing against the idea of Black dialect as a self-contained language system apart from English. He argued that standard and nonstandard dialects are closely related and reflect variations of grammatical rules. He also defended the home language of the Black community as an adequate vessel of logic and learning, including the specific speech of Black youth involved in the study. While his theory counters the cultural deficit position, his explanation concluded that social values are the driving force behind dialect variation and phonological innovation. Kroch (2012) indicated that "prestige dialects" such as SAE resist phonetically motivated change because the elite desire to discriminate themselves from the rest of the common man, and protect the language of the conservative social elite (p.19). Moreover, Labov's theory depends upon the idea that change originates equally at all social levels and social dialect variation is "linguistically random" (p. 23) Regardless of these shortcomings in explanation and theory, Labov has effectively demonstrated in his empirical research how vernacular speech patterns affect reading proficiency. This knowledge along with other theories of sociolinguists have been applied to the design of effective pedagogical resources.

Language Theory in Practice

Regardless of the disjuncture concerning the origins and categorization of AAV, sociolinguists have brought attention to the conversation concerning the literacy of Black student speakers. Rickford (1997) outlined the contributions of sociolinguists to the African American speech community. He indicated that in descriptive work, funded in

part by the U.S. Office of Education, sociolinguists have made the following contributions: demonstrated the systematicity of AAV and its variation by social class and style, rebutted misconceptions concerning cognitive limitations of AAV as suggested by non-linguists, assisted in the alteration of perceptions of educators, speech-language pathologists, and students concerning AAV as deficit rather than difference, researched the unfair disadvantages of IQ testing for AAV speakers, articulated how innovative methods might improve the teaching of reading to AAV speaking students, and co-constructed AAV pilot textbooks and dialect readers, including the Bridge reading program by Houghton Mifflin.

With respect to empirical evidence regarding the usage of AAV, multiple studies have concluded the effectiveness of involving AAV usage in academic instruction. These studies involved more direct curricular implementation of dialect readers or texts. Leaverton (1973) reported on the use of AAV and school talk (SAE) versions of texts in the instruction of 37 elementary school students in Chicago. He found that the students exposed to both variations made more progress in reading than those exposed only to SAE. Williams (1975), who coined the term "Ebonics," also reported that 900 Black students fared better on an Ebonics version of the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts than the Standard English Version. In a more recent study involving junior high school students, Maroney et al. (1994) tested responses of junior high school students using the dialect and standard version of the *Bridge* program stories. These researchers found that students preferred and performed better with AAV versions of the stories. Additionally, there was a higher frequency of correct answers for the AAV versions: *Dreamy Mae* - 95.8%

correct in AAV, versus 79.2% in SAE, *A Friend In Need* - 93.8% correct in AAV, versus 71.9% in SAE (as cited in Rickford, 1997, p. 180).

In addition to analysis of linguistic features and usage, sociolinguists have participated in both legal and local decisions regarding the usage of AAV in instruction. Some of these legal decisions include:

King vs. Ann Arbor. *King vs. Ann Arbor* (1977) resulted in AAV being legally recognized as a legitimate form of speech. The parents of the Black students indicated that their children had received inadequate education, being incorrectly placed in learning disability classes and misidentified for speech-language pathology services. They argued that the students were fully capable if properly taught. During pretrial, Judge Joiner ruled that the case needed to be focused on a single issue in the law and utilized a provision in the Equal Opportunity Act of 1974. The provision states:

> No state shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on
> account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, by… the
> failure to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation
> by its students in its instructional programs. (Smitherman & Baugh,
> 2002, p. 11)

Crucial to this case were the testimonies of linguists, educators, reading specialists, and psychologists. Citing the AAV research of sociolinguists, Judge Joiner ruled in favor of the children, indicating that the district was "guilty of failing to take the children's language into account in the educational process, and that the district had violated the children's right to equal educational opportunity" (Smitherman & Baugh, 2002, p.11). The major concern of national advocates, along with those involved in this

case, was literacy and survival for the children of King Elementary. King raised questions concerning language policy and practice. Since the language was legitimized as systematic and useful as a language of instruction, it could be used as an instructional strategy to elevate reading levels.

The Oakland Unified School District Resolution. In December of 1996, the governing board of the Oakland Unified School District unanimously adopted a written resolution on the issue of Ebonics pertaining to underachieving African American youth in Oakland Public Schools to outline the means for its usage in teaching SAE. The Oakland School Board emphasized Ebonics as a language and not a dialect, as this distinction was crucial to the adoption of its resolution. It indicated that "numerous validated scholarly studies have demonstrated that Black students, as part of their culture and history as African people, possess and utilize a language described in various scholarly approaches as Ebonics. These studies have also demonstrated that African Language Systems are genetically based and not a dialect of English" (Fields, 1997, p.24, as cited in Wright, 1998, p.8). The inclusion of the term "genetically-based" incited outrage and controversy among the general public. While the members of the task force claimed to apply the term to mean "origin," "source," or "familial," the inclusion of the term was purposeful in that it was a clear attempt to ensure the Ebonics was viewed as independent from and not a dialect of Standard English. In the midst of public outrage, the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) offered official affirmation with the intent to legitimize the resolution. The resolution stated, "the variety known as Ebonics...is systematic and rule governed like all natural speech varieties. From this perspective, the Oakland School Board's decision to recognize the vernacular of African American

students in teaching them Standard English is linguistically and pedagogically sound" (LSA, 1997). Despite both scholarly and organizational support, the United States Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, announced that the "federal government does not recognize Ebonics as a separate language, and therefore would not consider educational programs that utilize Ebonics eligible for bilingual education funds" (Harris, 1996, as cited in Wright, 1998, p. 10).

In conclusion, sociolinguists have given notice to the complexities of linguistic fluency through theoretical and empirical research. Operating from a social constructivist lens, they posit that language is socially constructed and developed within the unique context of the individual, including culture and background (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Individuals make meaning of the world utilizing the language resulting from these contexts. This is problematic for Black students whose language significantly differs from SAE, the language of power in the United States that is utilized universally in assessments of student knowledge. Ultimately, the statements of sociolinguists legitimizing the linguistic status of AAV are perhaps the most significant contribution to public discourse and perception. Through experimental research, sociolinguists have shown the effectiveness of utilizing AAV, via readers and texts, to demonstrate Black student achievement (Leaverton, 1973; Rickford, 1995; Williams, 1975). Finally, sociolinguists have justified the usage of AAV through testimony in support of legal decisions (*King vs. Ann Arbor*, 1977) and curricular changes (Oakland Resolution, 1996). Despite these various contributions, AAV speakers are still plagued with a complex intersectionality of factors that prevent a universal acceptance of the language and affect their educational experiences.

Section Two: Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Impact on Black Achievement

Literacy percentages vary greatly between Black students and their White counterparts. The 2015 report for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated that 46% of White students scored at or above proficient in Reading, while only 17% of Black students achieved this feat. The recently released 2017 report indicated that there was a significant widening of this gap in Reading achievement between Black and White students. While in much of the research the achievement gap is largely associated with socioeconomic status and poverty, the recent report implies that Black student reading achievement is stymied by other contextual factors such as the number of books in the household, participation in preschool, and teacher's experience. This section focuses on one additional factor worthy of consideration: SAE fluency, which is influenced by a number of social, cultural, linguistic, and school based components that affect the literacy achievement of Black AAV speakers.

The Generational Social Curse

National data have conveyed that Black students consistently score lower in reading than their counterparts from other racial groups. Many social factors permeate the discussion of the achievement of AAV speakers; of these, material factors such as socioeconomic status are the most utilized to discuss the disparity that students face in school. Reading scholars have frequently addressed several key factors in relation to the literacy achievement gap. These include the language, literacy experiences of families, the socioeconomic background of students, and teaching methodologies. Flowers and Flowers (2008) studied the influence of several social factors on the reading achievement of Black students. The variables included gender, family composition, parents'

28

educational attainment, family income, hours spent completing homework, watching television, parental assistance with homework, discussion of school courses, and parent expectations for the child's future. Consistent with much of the research, they found that reading achievement was indeed positively affected by family income. This means that a higher income is associated with higher levels of achievement. Additionally, African American high school students' reading achievement was positively affected by the amount of time they spent doing homework and positively correlated with parental expectations of future education, all of which are interrelated activities. It is appropriate to conclude that one definition of success in American society includes having an education and obtaining "a good job." Additionally, the norm operates under the assumption that having one is dependent on the other, that is, one must have education in order to be securely employed. Such is the cyclical complexity of this issue regarding student speakers of AAV.

Additional factors include home literacy and parenting style. Bingham, Jeon, Kwon, and Lim (2015) examined the parenting styles of 181 parents using structural equation modeling to determine the relationships between parenting styles, engagement in literacy, and children's oral language skills. They concluded that parental style is associated with engagement in literacy activities with Black children. They noted that Black families exhibited higher frequencies of authoritative style parenting ($M = 58.02$) and authoritarian style parenting ($M = 21.8$). The results indicated that "authoritative parenting style was positively correlated with the home literacy environment and parent direct teaching of literacy, while authoritarian parenting style was negatively correlated with the home literacy environment" (Bingham, Jeon, Kwon, and Lim, 2015, p. 10). The

study also demonstrated strong positive associations between parent educational attainment and oral language skills, with children raised in low educational attainment households displaying slower language development than children raised in higher educational attainment households. This has some important implications for AAV speaking children, in that access to quality education can be problematic. The study specifically focused on the skills of elementary school students. Considering that the reading achievement gap continues to widen, this may suggest that as literacy skills become more complex, the level of support received from an AAV speaking household decreases, dependent upon parental education level. Bingham, Jeon, Kwon, and Lim (2015) demonstrated that parental attitudes toward educational attainment are important to oral literacy skills, supporting Vygotskyian theory that cognitive development is primarily realized interpsychologically.

Peer influences can also impact the academic results of adolescents. Adolescent peers promote both pro-achievement and anti-achievement values and behaviors. Butler-Barnes, Estrada-Martinez, Colin, and Jones (2015) attempted to identify Black adolescent peer achievement values and attitudes about school. The study focused on how adolescents' feelings about school shape achievement, motivational beliefs, and academic grade performance. The findings suggested that social influences impact the academic outcomes of Black students and that having a connection to school matters. This further suggests that negative perceptions of school may be related to negative stigmas associated with the use of AAV, thus impacting reading achievement.

Cultural Difference and Ethic

The fact that social influences can impact the reading achievement of Black students may be due to the idea that Black students have little faith in the value of academic excellence. African Americans' experience, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, is that their opportunities for success in the working world are constrained by their race regardless of their level of education (McMillan, Carr, Hodnett, and Campbell, 2016). Influences to consider include perception of school, teacher-student relationships, and the distinct practices of Black educators in academic environments.

Perception and academic achievement. McMillan et al. (2016) attempted to determine whether gender differences in disidentification had developed in 94 Black students. Academic disidentification implies that a student's self-esteem is not connected to his or her academic performance. The study found that while there were no gender differences, there was evidence of "full blown disidentification," consistent with Mickelson's arguments concerning paradoxical belief systems of Black adolescents (p. 518). Ogbu (1992) similarly argued that the main reason for low achievement of many minority students in the United States is that the students are convinced that school success will not help them break out of the cycle of poverty. Additionally, "African American achievement was often described in the context of how Black students performed in relation to White students" which contributed to their disidentification (McMillan et al., 2016, pp. 521-522). Students also may not have felt challenged by their White teachers, as evidenced by student interviews in which they indicated that White

teachers should "push African American students more" (McMillan et al., 2016, p. 522) as Black students lacked the motivation to excel.

Teacher-student relationships. It is critical to note that teacher-student relationships also have an impact on student achievement. Liew, Chen, and Hughes (2010) examined the reading achievement of students who were predominately from low-income and ethnic minority backgrounds. They hypothesized whether pairing positive, supportive teachers with students with low task accuracy would result in performances that were similar to high task accuracy students. They found that positive teacher-student relationships contribute to reading achievement. Additionally, the study found that "teachers play a compensatory role for students with self-regulatory difficulties" (Liew et al., 2010, p. 60). This relationship can be fostered through ethnic connections with students (as evidenced in Downer, Goble, Myers, and Pianta, 2016). The racial and ethnic achievement gap is a challenge for the American school system in that there is a cultural mismatch between home and school environments for students of color. Absent or limited ethnic culture has an impact on reading achievement as well. Downer et al. (2016) indicated that "African American teachers are liable to see African American children in a more positive light and have higher expectations for African American children than do Caucasian teachers" (Downer et al., 2016, p. 36). In their study of 2,900 children in 11 states, they found that African American children taught by African American teachers received higher scores on early language literacy development.

The "Black Educator Touch." Darling-Hammond (1998) indicated that one of the many essential factors that influenced the extent to which urban schools actualize their capacity to support Black educational achievement involves the instructional

practices and approaches of educators. This can be supported through observing and implementing key characteristics of African American teachers. Acosta (2018) indicated that Black teachers are guided by a distinctive "ethic" or way of thinking about and demonstrating care. This includes assuming a maternal role coupled with the "insistence that African American children meet their high expectations" (Acosta, 2018, p. 985). Black teachers exhibit the same sense of urgency shown in Black homes, which is grounded in teacher connectedness. The teachers also view the students as their own. Additionally, she found that effective Black educators demonstrate a willingness and sense of duty to lead the class with authority in ways that facilitate students' academic and cultural success. They use "authority to increase student achievement and self-respect, promote a sense of community, and mitigate an often-oppressive educational system" (Acosta, 2018, p. 986). Furthermore, she concluded that unique to Black educators is the placement of a "liberatory value" on the education they impart to Black students. Thus, understanding the role of Black teachers' pedagogical practices would prove promising to determine specific strategies utilized by Black educators to enhance Black students' literacy skills.

Black educators can also be considered institutional agents for Black students who would otherwise have no access to certain privileges, including the language of "the masses" (Lin, 1999, p. 29). According to Lin (1999), language can also be a form of cultural capital, as it can be possessed by a group to facilitate the flow of information. Black educators who speak AAV can serve as agents to provide student AAV speakers access to SAE. Researchers have found that the unequal access to social and cultural capital in schools negatively affects students' achievement (Flowers & Flowers, 2018).

Black teachers can act as agents who help to ensure that students take advantage of a network of relationships and opportunities to help elevate Black students from the generational curse of poverty and illiteracy. Unfortunately, the racial and ethnic diversity of the teaching population does not mirror the growing diverse population of students. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), 80% of teachers in public education were White, while 20% were non-White. More specifically, only 7% were African American. By comparison, 51% of public-school students are non-White, with 16% of those students being African American. Furthermore, the percentage of White students in public schools consistently decreases. The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) predicts that White students will represent 46% of the public-school population by 2024. With less representation of Black teachers among students, Black students will likely continue to suffer in reading achievement. Research has even shown that higher levels of social capital within a neighborhood have an increasing effect on reading and math achievement. Furthermore, poor physical conditions in a neighborhood are associated with decreased reading achievement (Woolley, Grogan-Kaylor, Karb, Gant, Reischl, Alaino, 2008). Without access to social and cultural capital, Black students will continue to struggle in reading.

Recognizing Linguistic Difference

One of the primary debates concerning AAV is whether the distinctive features are an indication of a separate linguistic system, similar to the experience of bilinguals. As previously discussed, during the Oakland controversy, then Secretary of Education Richard Riley publicly spoke against the resolution. He stated that "elevating 'Black English' to the status of a language is not the way to raise standards in our schools"

(Harris, 1996, p. 2). His public denouncement labeled AAV as an illegitimate language or way of speaking. Deak (2007) argued that understanding that cultural capital is connected to AAV is a major step in raising its status in every sense, that is, making people see it as a rule-governed linguistic code, expanding its perceived suitability for use in education, and changing beliefs that lay in the linguistic nature (p. 115). Providing AAV symbolic status would mean approving of a non-assimilated culture, an action for which many assimilated Americans are not willing. Additionally, symbolic status is tied to economic capital, as other language varieties (i.e., immigrant and migrant officially recognized foreign languages) have received entitlement to funding under the law and access to linguistic human rights. These include academic translators and English as a Second Language (ESL)/English Language Learner (ELL) language instruction in schools. The negative rhetoric concerning AAV coupled with the lack of a universally accepted linguistically symbolic status is a detriment to Black student speakers of AAV, even though there are legal and organizational decisions that have attempted to elevate its status (e.g. *King vs. Ann Arbor,* 1977*;* Linguistic Society of America affirmation, 1997).

There are also research-based situations that have proven the effectiveness of using AAV as an instructional tool that encourages SAE development. Charity, Scarborough, and Griffin (2004) examined whether greater familiarity with School English (SE) would be associated with successful early reading acquisition in Black students. They found that higher familiarity with SE was associated with better reading achievement. The researchers examined both the phonological and grammatical ramifications of word identification, word attack, passage comprehension, and story recall. These results included students from different levels of socioeconomic status in

various regions in the United States. Possible explanations for the differences included instructional variation because of linguistically biased instructors, linguistic interference between oral, written, and dialectical features, and metalinguistic influences on the development of language and reading. The researchers indicated that linguistic bias by teachers has been hypothesized to result in a variety of instructional consequences, including being rated less favorably than speakers of SAE and the attribution of lower capability to AAV speaking students (Charity et al., 2004, p. 1352). In addition, some AAV speakers may or may not possess dialect awareness (i.e., being conscious of linguistic variation in their environments).

The ability to methodically transition from one variety of language to another across a variety of settings and within conversations is accepted as a linguistic strength labeled *code-switching*. AAV speakers may or may not learn to code-switch spontaneously, dependent upon their levels of exposure to SAE (Charity et al., 2004). Lee-James and Washington (2018) indicated that research has consistently shown that the ability to code-switch represents an academic strength for children who manage it. While much of the research attempts to explain factors that contribute to the reading gap, they do not necessarily explain why the gap expands over time. These gaps may be explained in part by the mounting impact of linguistic factors as curricular demands increase. As previously hypothesized, when linguistic task complexity increases, the necessary levels of support and knowledge should increase as well. This includes the ability to engage in dialect shifting, a practice that is associated with reading achievement. Reading acquisition is strongly related to knowledge of spoken language, including vocabulary and phonological awareness. Johnson et al. (2017) found that explicitly teaching second

through fourth graders dialect shifting skills can improve writing and reading achievement. Additionally, increasing AAV speakers' awareness of their dialect contributes to overall reading and writing skills.

According to the research, socioeconomic status, parenting style, peer interaction, and the language and literacy experiences that result are social issues that affect Black student reading achievement (Bingham, Jeon, Kwon, and Lim, 2015; Butler-Barnes et al., 2015; Flowers, 2008). Social constructivists and researchers alike have found that interaction highly impacts student experiences and shapes school performance. It is deeply intertwined with the cultural beliefs of Black AAV speaking students, whose perceptions of the school experience are altered by social experiences that both devalue their home language and affect their relationships with teachers (Liew et al., 2010; McMillan et al., 2016; Mickelson, 1990). Researchers have found that Black educators moderate this relationship through providing a school experience that mirrors a home ethic and assists in advancing the reading performance of students (Acosta, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Downer et al., 2016; Liew et al., 2010). Without Black educators, the culture clash of school and home prevent the system from recognizing the linguistic differences of Black AAV speaking students and misinterpret these differences as deficits. Ultimately, the intersectionality of the social, cultural, and linguistic factors create a very different schooling experience for Black AAV speaking students and complicate their ability to demonstrate fluency in SAE.

Section Three: Structural and Institutional Barriers

The system of education in America is a barrier to SAE fluency for Black students in and of itself, and complicates achievement, and has become even more complex even

with government intervention. Traditional education structures do not successfully accommodate the needs of Black students. The structure lacks the cultural and linguistic sensitivity required to assist Black AAV speaking students in addressing the academic challenges that prevent mastery of reading concepts. The section views the historical decisions in education that impact student achievement. It also elaborates on how the structure is organized to promote traditionalist attitudes and substructures in institutions that impede the reading growth of Black students.

A Wicked Problem

Numerous federal initiatives have been enacted in order to address issues in educational quality (Figure 1). In fact, discussion concerning the quality of education for American children extends as far back as the 1950s, with the United States Supreme Court Case, Brown vs Board of Education, declaring the practice of racially segregated public schools as unconstitutional. Title I of ESEA (1965) created a funding source to assist schools in educating the socioeconomically disadvantaged. In 1979, Congress established the United States Department of Education and began operations at the behest of the Reagan administration, during which *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was released (Michelman, 2018). The 1983 report was the very foundation of establishing standards and expectations for schools and teachers to ensure that American students received an adequate education. Less than twenty years later, in 2002, President Bush reauthorized ESEA as No Child Left Behind, ushering in standards-based testing reform and sanctions against schools that did not meet adequate yearly progress goals (Klein, 2018). This policy led to the 2009 launch of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, a reform that 42 states adopted and implemented within their public-school systems (Bidwell,

2014). The standards heavily relied upon reading and mathematics achievement, with the

goal of closing the achievement gap between students of color and their White

counterparts, specifically with the unrealized objective of 100% proficiency by the end of

the 2013-2014 school year (Kamenetz, 2014). Although the Every Student Succeeds Act

(ESSA) of 2015 shifted accountability back to the states, it maintained some

accountability measures and expanded on the ideals included in NCLB. The failures of

each federal intervention suggest the complexity of equitable education.

1954	1965	1979	1983	2002	2015
Brown v. Board of Education	**Title I of ESEA**	US Department of Education	A Nation at Risk	No Child Left Behind	Every Student Succeeds Act
Declared racially segregated public schools unconstitutional	*Established funding to assist schools that serve socioeconomically disadvantaged students*	*Created by Congress to ensure equal access to education for all groups*	*Report recommending massive reform of American schools*	*Federal legislation requiring yearly assessments, adequate yearly progress toward 100% proficiency, and sanctions for unsuccessful schools*	*Retained yearly assessments, but moved federal accountability to the states*

Figure 1.   A Timeline of Federal Legislation in Education

Rittel and Webber (1973) coined the term "wicked problem" to illustrate the

complexities and challenges of policy planning and social policy problems (p. 160).

Additionally, they indicated that problems such as these have 10 distinct characteristics

(p. 160-167):

1.   They do not have a definitive formulation.

2.   They lack logic that indicates when they are solved.

3.   The solutions are not true or false, but rather good or bad.

4.   There is no way to test the solution.

5.   Every trial can hurt or benefit the problem as the effects of proposed solutions are irreversible.

6.   There is an infinite number of solutions or approaches.

7.   They are unique.

8.   They are a symptom of other problems.

9.   The description of the problem determines possible solutions and varies based on the lens from which the problem is framed.

10. Planners (involved with solutions to the problem) are responsible for the consequences and effects and thus have "no right" to be wrong.

Undoubtedly, creating an equitable environment to ensure Black students are fluent in SAE is a "wicked problem" that possesses these characteristics. Furthermore, despite these numerous attempts to address the educational disparities of America's socioeconomically disadvantaged children, issues concerning student reading achievement persist. Perhaps the largest problem with educational policy in America is that it still seeks a one-size-fits-all solution to an issue that is not uniformly defined. However, the commonality of the most recent education policy (i.e. NCLB, 2002 and ESEA, 2015) and reform is the deep concern for the literacy of America's children. Although educational equity is indeed a "wicked problem," literacy is one component contributing to its complexity. One issue of particular interest is the literacy, reading fluency, and overall academic performance of Black students.

The Congressional National Literacy Act (1991) defined literacy as "an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English" (Section 3, p. 1) Congress further indicated that an individual should be able to perform these tasks at "levels of proficiency

necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential." While this definition is a broad description that may not fully capture the essence of the concept, it undoubtedly emphasizes that the value of literacy is immeasurable. As written in federal legislation, it is a required skill for the purpose of functioning in society. Individuals who are unable to demonstrate literacy and reading fluency may find it extremely difficult to function in the 21st century, as the demonstrative tasks required are associated with high school graduation and access to post-secondary opportunities. Furthermore, illiteracy and lack of reading fluency limits life choices, reinforces the cycle of poverty and subjugation, and contributes to social immobility.

Problems with Traditional Education

Given Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory coupled with research concerning cultural effects on the education of AAV speakers, it can be concluded that children who speak AAV participate in language activities in their churches, homes, families, and neighborhoods, and those activities are grounded in cultural rituals and traditions which are maintained by cultural socialization practices. These practices often clash with the structure of traditional education systems from the classroom to state levels, thus contributing to a climate that does not support the cultural background of AAV speaking learners.

Deak (2007) concluded that 90% of parents agreed that teachers needed to be aware of AAV in order to understand and help students. Parents valued AAV for cultural purposes but understood the importance of learning SAE in order to advance in society. Parents who did not present well controlled usage of SAE thought it especially important

that it be learned through the education system. However, AAV is viewed negatively by educators (Champion, Roberts, and Bland-Stewart, 2012), suggesting that the language that African American children speak in the classroom is devalued in the school setting because it lacks conformity with the teachers' language and linguistic expectations. Dominant language ideology blinds teachers and contributes to their biased misunderstanding of students' use of home language. Expectations, values, and beliefs of teachers can shape the instruction of students. Wheeler (2010) found that prior lack of training in the structure of English is a limiting factor in classroom instruction, which constrains a teacher's ability to implement a linguistically informed approach to stigmatized dialects. Furthermore, when teachers have low expectations or deficit views of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, teacher-student interaction is reduced to behavior management, contributing little to the improvement of literacy instruction (Champion et al., 2012). Thus, cultural discontinuity, the existence of conflicting home and school cultures, persists in school environments that serve AAV speakers.

Negative attitudes and rhetoric surrounding AAV place Black students at risk for educational failure. Furthermore, it contributes to the lack of school cohesion, which impacts reading achievement. Stewart (2007) found that school cohesion (i.e., trust, shared expectations, and positive interactions among students, teachers, and administrators) was significantly related to academic achievement. This suggests that the commonly understood issues of urban minority schools can be mitigated by strong cooperation between teachers and administrators, support for students, and clear expectations for students.

Having more awareness and acceptance of the cultural differences of the AAV speaking student population can also influence the judgement of school professionals. Caines and Engelhard (2012) examined characteristics and ratings of educator panelists who determined the cut scores on standardized examinations. They found that the educational context in which a panelist operates is systematically related to the cut score recommendations for both ELA and Mathematics. ELA panelists who taught in or had experiences with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds recommended lower cut scores. This suggests that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may "face challenges in mastering the same content as students from higher SES backgrounds" (p. 238).

As previously mentioned, the issue of equity and literacy, especially for America's marginalized students, has resulted in multiple acts of one-size-fits-all legislation. State education systems bought into and implemented accountability policies in an attempt to raise the standards and address these issues, although it has not created equal outcomes among racial groups. Wei (2012) found that accountability stringency revealed negative effects on Black eighth grade students' reading achievement. In fact, there is no evidence of any improvement in racial achievement disparities during the era of increased school accountability pressures associated with the implementation of NCLB. Furthermore, increased accountability pressures have resulted in the negative influence of schools on the racial achievement gap. Upon conducting a meta-analysis, Huntington-Klein & Ackert (2018) found that a noticeable portion of the Black test score gap is explained by school and classroom level factors. One school and classroom factor

yet to be thoroughly examined is the race of the students and the like experiences of those who share the same racial makeup.

Regardless of legislation and government advocacy, traditional ideas are embedded within the structure and complicate the attempt to provide an equitable experience for all. Traditionalist attitudes and structures devalue the cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) of language for Black AAV speaking students. Specifically, linguistic bias exhibited by teachers contributes to the risk of Black student reading deficit or failure (Stewart, 2007; Caines & Engelhard, 2012) and accountability measures exacerbate the issue (Wei, 2012). One-size-fits-all legislation raised standards without considering or addressing the school and classroom level factors that explain Black student score gaps, including race and teachers who impact the daily experience of students.

Conclusion

This dissertation assumes that Black teachers often speak and utilize AAV through code-switching as a technique to develop the reading skills of Black AAV speaking students. In this way, Black teachers act as institutional agents, drawing on the cultural wealth of Black language (Yosso, 2005), providing the necessary social capital students require to demonstrate SAE fluency. The most recent literature concerning reading achievement has examined race-matching in various districts and states at the classroom level (Dee, 2004; Gershenson et. al, 2018; Gershenson, 2019). These studies have investigated the overall reading achievement in relation to the race of classroom teachers, while heavily focused on primary grade levels. Similar investigations need to focus on the secondary level in grades 6-10, especially in high school grades where gaps increase and testing has a high impact on graduation. Additionally, research should be

44

extended to identifying those areas in ELA instruction that determine SAE fluency and comprehension, so as to isolate and address key academic areas of focus for Black students. While the quality of education in America has been of concern dating as far back as the 1950s, the policies enacted to address fair education fail to consider these factors, do not provide equitable access to education, and further complicate the "wicked problem" of literacy for Black students. This research contributes to the literature by examining how the components measured to determine English language fluency and comprehension are affected by the racial makeup of the faculty at the secondary levels.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This chapter details the conceptual framework and research methodology utilized for this study, a quantitative, correlational descriptive research approach that investigated the impact of race on reading and language achievement of Black American students. Specifically, the research explores the gaps between Black and White students on both the Ohio American Institutes for Research (AIR) English/Language Arts (ELA) Assessment and the state approved Northwest Education Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading Assessment. It also investigated how the proportion of Black teachers affects the reading and language scores of Black students. This chapter will include the following:

1) a conceptual framework for the study

2) research questions and hypotheses

3) the research design

4) the participants and sample

5) the measures

6) procedures to conduct the study

7) the analytic plan.

Conceptual Framework

As America searched for methods to provide a level playing field in education, federal legislation called for higher standards through educational reform. Although reforms seeking to address educational inequity have been introduced as far back as the 1950s, one of the most controversial was NCLB (2002), ushering in lingering notions of testing and accountability. Even as revised legislation was introduced (i.e., *Every Student Succeeds Act*, 2015), there was an overwhelming focus on reading achievement and a lack of consideration of the multiple factors that complicate the ability for Black students to show the significant growth they need in reading to close the achievement gap. One such consideration is the linguistic difference (Labov, 1972; Rickford, 1997, 2016) of Black students. Researchers have studied this phenomenon for decades, finding that Black students benefit from the recognition and usage of AAV in instruction (Hollie, 2001; Johnson, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Leaverton, 1971; Maroney et al., 1994; Simpkins & Simpkins, 1981; Stewart, 1969; Thompson et al., 2004). The most recent research found that Black teachers have a long-lasting impact on the success of Black students (Gershenson et al., 2018; Gershenson, 2019). The present study was embedded within the aforementioned research, but sought to determine the effect of racial composition of the teaching staff within districts on reading achievement. Conceptually, an alternative ideal should be considered: Black teachers act as institutional agents for Black students, in that they are more likely to know, value, and speak AAV. Therefore, they are able to teach Black students to code-switch between AAV and SAE; and, an increased presence of AAV in the building facilitates more sophisticated code-switching

47

skills. As students successfully develop these code-switching skills, they are able to exhibit higher reading achievement.

The key independent variables in this study were the teacher racial compositions. The term "teacher" includes any faculty member directly responsible for the academic preparation and delivery of instruction within the classroom. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) self-identifying race options include: White, Black/African American, Hispanic, American Indian, Multi-Racial, and Unreported. Teacher racial composition is defined as the percentage of teachers who self-identified within a specific racial category.

The dependent variables included district means for the Ohio American Institutes for Research Assessment (AIR) Reading scores, the building means in one urban district for the Northwest Education Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) Reading Rasch Unit Test (RIT) scores, and the students' individual RIT scores on the NWEA MAP. Figure 2 provides a visual framework for the suggested relationship between Black teachers and Black student reading achievement.
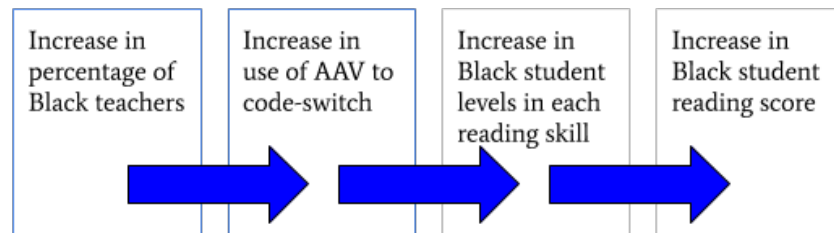
Figure 2. A Hypothesized Relationship Between Teacher Racial Composition and Reading Achievement

Answers to the following questions were essential to the discussion of factors that influence the language acquisition and reading skills of Black American students. The examination of this relationship will indicate to what degree race of instructors impacts the success of Black students in reading. Table I indicates the research questions,

corresponding hypothesis, and the data sets that were utilized in the analysis. A summary of each data set is included in Table II.

Table I Research Questions, Corresponding Hypotheses, and Data Sets

	Research Question	Hypotheses	Data Set	Sample
1.	What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state examinations?	H1: There are gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state examinations.	ODE	The unit of analysis is districts in the state of Ohio. The analysis includes 557 districts.
2.	What effect does the racial composition of the staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on state examinations?	H1: Districts with proportionate student-teacher ethnic ratios will have a smaller gap in reading scores on state examinations.	ODE	The unit of analysis is districts in the state of Ohio. The analysis includes 100 districts.
3.	What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on a state-approved building examination in an urban school environment?	H1: There are gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state approved building examinations in an urban school district environment.	CUE	The units of analysis are schools within one urban district in the state of Ohio. The analysis includes 96 schools.
4.	What effect does the racial composition of the staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on a state-approved building examination?	H1: There is a difference in reading and language achievement between schools based on the percentage of teachers who self-identify as African American.	CUE	The units of analysis are schools within one urban district in the state of Ohio. The analysis includes 89 schools.

Note: The ODE data set measure is the combined average % passage on the Ohio AIR Assessment for English Language Arts. The CUE data set measure for reading achievement are the student RIT scores for the NWEA MAP assessment. CUE and NWEA MAP data are utilized interchangeably.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions and corresponding hypotheses that guided this study are:

1. What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state examinations?

The researcher hypothesized that there are gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state examinations. Although there are 615 districts in the state of Ohio, the question was analyzed using 557 districts in the state of Ohio. The researcher removed 58 charter school networks and community

49

schools to maintain the integrity of the research and theory, as it is situated within public schools.

2. What effect does the racial composition of the staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on state examinations?

The researcher hypothesized that districts with proportionate student-teacher ethnic ratios will have a smaller gap in reading scores on state examinations. The question was analyzed using 100 public school districts, as this is the number of public districts within the state of Ohio that included Black teacher and Black student populations.

3. What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on a state-approved building examination in an urban school environment?

The researcher hypothesized that there are gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state approved building examinations in an urban school district environment. The question was analyzed across 96 schools, as this is the number of schools in the selected urban school district that had valid scores for the NWEA MAP assessment for ELA in grades 6 through 10.

4. What effect does the racial composition of the staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on a state-approved building examination?

The researcher hypothesized that there is a difference in reading and language achievement between schools based on the percentage of teachers who self-identify as African American. The question was analyzed across 89 schools, as this is the number of schools in the selected urban school district that included valid scores for the NWEA

MAP assessment for ELA in grades 6 through 10 and both Black teacher and student populations.

Table II Summary of Major Variables within the Data Sets

ODE

# of districts	%Black Enrollment	%Black Teachers	%Black Proficiency	%White Proficiency
557	21.1	4.5	45.34	69.48

CUE - Large, Urban School District

# of schools	% Black Enrollment	%Black Teachers	Mean Black RIT score	Mean White RIT Score
96	45.67	24.97	210.53	214.74

Note: Research Questions 1 and 2 are analyzed with data from the ODE dataset. Research Questions 3 and 4 are analyzed with data from the CUE dataset.

State Data Set

The study employed a quantitative, correlational research design to determine the relationship between the racial composition of teachers and student reading achievement. In order to address Research Question 1 and Research Question 2, it was necessary to gather secondary data for 557 districts from the ODE report card. The data collected include the percentage of teachers in each district, the percentage of students who scored proficient or higher in each district and grade level, the average percentage of students who scored proficient or higher on the Ohio AIR Math Assessment at each grade level, the median income of each district, the percentage of students in poverty in each district, the percentage of minority students in each district, and teacher tenure, which is calculated as the average years of experience of the teachers within the district.

Because the research sought to examine the relationship between proportions of Black teachers to student achievement, a correlational approach was appropriate. A quantitative, correlational study is recommended for describing and measuring degrees of association between variables (Creswell, 2012). While a correlation study fails to estimate causal effects (Schanzenbach, 2012), it allowed the examination of a naturally occurring variable, such as the varied population of the race of teachers and students, within a variety of district typologies.

Sample

The data analysis used archival data gathered from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). The data restricted the sample to public school students in Ohio who were in grades 6 through 10 during the 2017-2018 academic year. District level demographic data come from the ODE. The analysis also utilized archival data from the ODE regarding teacher demographics. The restricted demographic data came from the ODE and included school level teacher gender, race/ethnicity, and mean years of experience.

Statistical power is the probability that the null hypothesis will be correctly rejected, if it is indeed false. In order to determine the minimum sample size needed to have an acceptable power level of at least .95, an a priori power analysis was conducted using the G*Power application. The analysis was based on the linear regressions that will be used for this study as outlined in Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, and Lang, 2009. With a medium effect size (f^2) of .15, an alpha of .05, a standard power level of .95, and a total of 4 tested predictors, the results of the power analysis showed that a minimum of 129 participants would be needed to achieve an appropriate power level for this study.

Demographics. Student-level demographic data were gathered from the data provided by the ODE Ohio Report Card for districts and schools. Demographic data included gender, grade, race, socioeconomic status, and the district where the students were enrolled. Gender was measured as the percentage of students who are coded as male or female in the entire school population. Grade level was measured as the percentage of students in each grade level (grades 6 through 10). Socioeconomic status at the state level was measured using both median income and the school typology as outlined (Ohio Department of Education, 2014). The ODE classifies like districts together based on shared demographic and geographic characteristics. There are currently eight typology categories: Rural - High Student Poverty & Small Student Population, Rural - Average Student Poverty & Very Small Student Population, Small Town - Low Student Poverty & Small Student Population, Small Town - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size, Suburban - Low Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size, Suburban - Very Low Student Poverty & Large Student Population, Urban - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population, and Urban - Very High Student Poverty & Very Large Student Population.

The racial composition of school faculty and faculty tenure was obtained by request from a restricted-access repository monitored by ODE. The racial composition of the faculty was measured as the percentage of teachers who self-identify in any of the ODE race category options. Faculty tenure was measured as the mean years of experience for the teachers in each district. Figure 3 details the distribution of Black teachers and students across the typologies within the state of Ohio. Although the sample included a

low percentage of Black teachers, it should be noted that Black teachers and Black students are largely situated in urban contexts.

Figure 3 Distribution of Black Teachers and Students for Ohio School Typologies
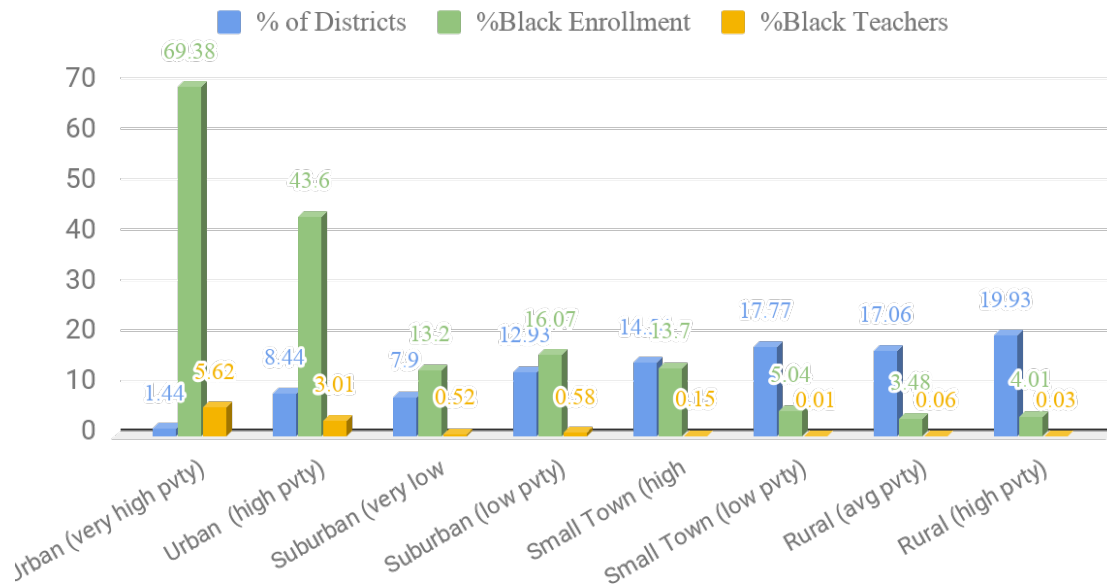
State Measure for Reading Achievement. Reading achievement comparatively across 557 districts was measured using the Ohio American Institutes of Research (AIR) Assessment for grades 6 to 8 and the Ohio End of Course (EOC) examination for grades 9 and 10, and included a combined percentage of students performing at or above the proficient level in each district at each grade level. The Ohio AIR assessment is a computerized machine-scored examination that measures the students' progression toward the Ohio Learning Standards. The results of this examination are also used to measure each public school's performance as reflected on the Ohio Report Card and the growth measure is utilized in a teacher's professional evaluation. Students are performance ranked using a scale score in five performance levels: Limited, Basic, Proficient, Accelerated, and Advanced (listed from lowest to highest performance,

respectively). Students are also normatively evaluated, as indicated by their percentile ranking on the assessment. The percentile ranking is used to determine student growth and the district's, building's, and teacher's value-added measures.

Validity refers to the degree to which test score interpretations are supported by evidence and speaks directly to the legitimate uses of test scores (Creswell, 2012). The American Institutes for Research (2018) conduct confirmatory factor analyses annually in order to establish validity by evaluating the fit of the structural model to student response data from each subject test administration. According to the AIR Annual Technical Report (2018), the statistics in the general achievement models for the ELA assessment indicated the general achievement factor model fit the data well across all grades. The CFI and TLI values were all greater than 0.93, and the RMSEA values were at or below 0.06, indicating reasonable fit for the base model.

Reliability pertains to the consistency or accuracy of test scores and performance levels and is an indication of how likely a student would achieve the same score, or be classified in the same performance level, across multiple administrations of identically constructed and administered assessments (AIR Annual Technical Report, 2018). Classical estimates of test reliability, such as Cronbach's alpha, provide an index of the internal consistency reliability of the test, or the likelihood that a student would achieve the same score in an equivalently constructed test form. According to the AIR Annual Technical Report (2018), each grade level ELA assessment yielded a Chronbach's alpha near .9, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Procedures

This examination of state level and district level teacher racial compositions and their impact on reading and language achievement was conducted during the spring of 2020. In order to obtain state-level data, the researcher submitted a formal letter to the Director in the ODE Office of Data Quality, indicating the purpose of the study and requesting archival data on teacher self-identified race statistics disaggregated by building and district, in order to obtain appropriate teacher demographic data for all districts in the state of Ohio. The ODE website includes racial populations of students for all buildings and districts in the state of Ohio as well as the student percentages in each of the five performance levels: Limited, Basic, Proficient, Accelerated, and Advanced. Scores are reported for grades 6 through 10, as the Ohio ELA learning strands are consistent at these levels and reported to the ODE.

Data Analysis

The research was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data. The data were downloaded from the ODE website, collected from the ODE, obtained from CUE, and imported into STATA 16, a statistical analysis software utilized to manage data sets. The program produced numerical representations of the study data. Statistics gathered included means, standard deviations, and regression coefficients. The findings were compiled and depicted utilizing tables. Descriptive and inferential analyses were utilized to determine the relationships and strength of the relationships between the independent variable of Black teacher population and the dependent variables of the Black student reading achievement percentages within each district. Figure 5 provides a

visual reference of the relationships between the variables in the state data set that were explored within the study.

      Statistical Models. Relationships were determined using correlation and regression models of statistical analysis. As indicated by an *r*, the Pearson's correlation coefficient is a measure of strength of a linear association between two variables. This statistical test was appropriate for this study because it measures the linear correlation between two variables. There are three types of correlation: positive, negative, and no correlation. A positive correlation is observed when an increase in one variable leads to an increase in another; or, when a decrease in one variable leads to a decrease in another. A negative correlation is observed when an increase in one variable leads to a decrease in another; conversely, when a decrease in one variable leads to an increase in another (Creswell, 2012). Finally, no correlation is when a change in one variable does not lead to a change in another. A Pearson correlation coefficient ranges between +1 and -1. A strong positive correlation is a value close to +1 and a strong negative correlation is a value close to -1. A lack of correlation will display a value near zero.

Research Questions 1 and 2 were examined as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state examinations?

      Using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test, the differences in achievement between Black and White students were documented. Then, the average percentage of students who scored Proficient or higher was compared for both racial groups.

Research Question 2: What effect does the racial composition of the staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on state examinations?

This question was studied using an ordinary least squares regression model with Black teacher race percentage in the state of Ohio as the independent variable and the combined percentage of Black students scoring proficient or above in each district and grade in the state of Ohio on the ODE ELA Assessment as the dependent variable. This model controlled for average percentage of mathematics proficiency, median income, percentage of students in poverty, percentage of minority students, and faculty tenure. Rather than performance index, average percentage of mathematics proficiency was used to control for school performance. This is due to the fact that the measure for performance index utilizes reading achievement scores as a part of its calculation.

According to Creswell (2012), a correlational study utilizing linear regression requires the following statistical assumptions to be met: multivariate normality, little or no multicollinearity, no autocorrelation, and homoscedasticity. Additionally, the research is not designed as an experimental study and utilized secondary data; thus, it was not possible to choose the experimental groups, since groups have already been constructed. The independent variable (teacher race) could not be manipulated and the researcher had no control over other variables that impact the dependent variable (i.e., Black student reading scores). It was improbable to identify all of the variables impacting Black student reading achievement, which could result in error variance and less significant correlation in the identified variable. While the research could not draw causal conclusions, the results were not intended to imply causality; rather, the results were intended to examine

the relationship of at least one naturally occurring factor within schools that may impact Black student reading achievement.

Sample District Data Set

In order to answer Research Questions 3 and 4, it was necessary to gather secondary data collected from the results from the NWEA MAP assessment from a sample large urban district. The data collected include the percentage of Black teachers in each school, the performance index[3] for each school, the reading scores for each student at each grade level during each administered term within each school on the NWEA MAP reading assessment, gender of each student within each school, and race of each student within each school.

Moreover, the study examined the relationship between the teacher racial composition and tested aspects of Black AAV speaking students' reading achievement with respect to the Ohio Learning Standards benchmarks in a large urban district as obtained in the CUE data set. This method was selected because it provided an opportunity to effectively determine whether teacher racial compositions within districts and school environments are correlated with overall Black student reading achievement and specific benchmarks related to the Ohio Learning Standards in ELA for reading and language achievement. Since the study is a correlational descriptive research approach of existing conditions, the researcher could not control the placement of students within the district or school.

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[3] The performance index is a number rating out of 100 and is defined as the average of the totals derived from calculations, for each subject area, of the weighted proportion of untested students and students scoring at each level of skill. (ODE, 2019)

Sample

  The data analysis used archival data gathered from the Cleveland State University Center for Urban Education (CSU; CUE). School level student demographic and achievement data come from the urban school district administrative records provided by the CUE. School level demographic data included gender and race/ethnicity. These records also include prior-year test scores on the NWEA MAP assessment for reading within the district by grade, subject, and administered term. The CUE redacted names prior to releasing data to avoid releasing personal or identifying information. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the purpose of gathering demographic and performance data is to attempt to determine if there is a correlation between teacher demographic and student achievement. Although no names were included in the data from each education agency, the researcher stored all information on an encrypted drive.

  Demographics. Student-level demographic data were gathered from the data provided by the CUE for schools within one large urban school district. Demographic data included gender, grade, race, and the school where the student was enrolled. Gender was measured as the percentage of students who are coded as male or female in the entire school population. Grade level was measured as the percentage of students in each grade level (grades 6 through 10). Performance index was used as a control measure for each school's academic quality.
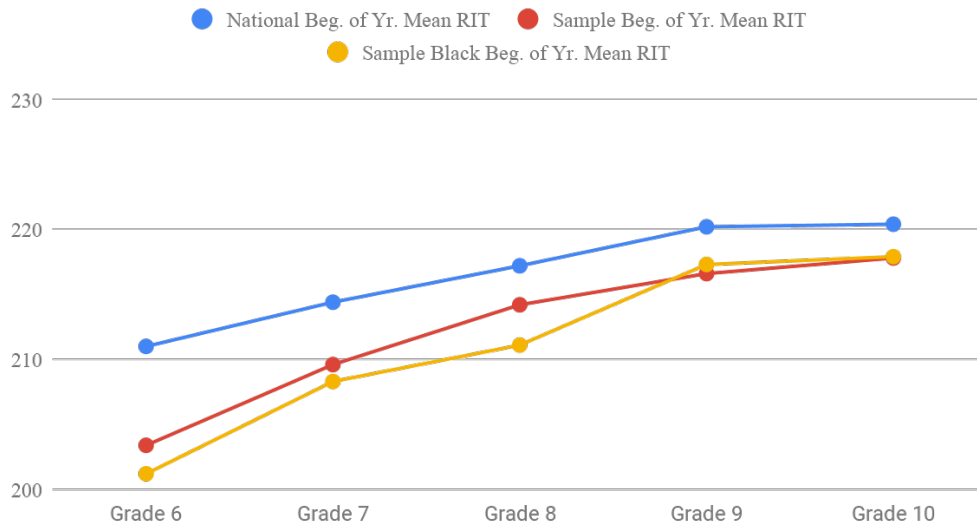
  District Level Reading Achievement. The researcher measured reading achievement within a large midwestern urban school district across 96 schools using the individual student Rasch Unit Test (RIT) scores on the Reading Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test of the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) for grades 6-10

as obtained by the CUE. The MAP reading assessment is administered three times per year in the sample district, Fall, Winter, and Spring, and the data included scores for each term. The MAP test is an adaptive computerized examination that measures student growth in instructional areas over time. According to the NWEA (2013) report, MAP assessments are a valid and reliable assessment based on Item Response Theory (IRT), under which the difficulty of test questions and student achievement level can be measured using the same scale. RIT scores assigned to a student represent the most difficult question that he or she is capable of answering correctly about 50% of the time. Students receive a statistically derived RIT score that teachers can use to understand current student achievement levels.

Based on the framework of categories for the Common Core State Standards, student performance on the MAP reading assessment is noted in five academic goal performance areas: Literary Text: Key Ideas and Details; Literary Text: Language, Craft, and Structure; Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details, Informational Text: Language, Craft, and Structure; and Vocabulary: Acquisition and Use. According to the national norms published by NWEA (2015), the national beginning-of-year mean scores for reading for each grade level applicable to the study are as follows: grade 6 M=211, SD=14.94; grade 7 M=214.4, SD=15.31; grade 8 students M=217.2, SD=15.72; grade 9 students M=220.2, SD=15.68; and grade 10 students M=220.4, SD=16.85. Figure 4 shows a comparison of the national and district mean RIT scores on the NWEA MAP reading assessment. The graph displays the gap between the national beginning-of-year mean reading scores and the sample district beginning-of-year mean reading scores, as well as the gap between the national beginning-of-year mean reading scores and

beginning-of-year mean RIT scores for Black students in the sample district at each focal grade level. It indicates that, on average, both the sample district and the Black students within the sample district perform below the national norm scores in all focal grade levels. The difference between district and national norms ranges between 3 and 9 points across the grade levels.

Figure 4 Comparison of National and Mean RIT Scores for the Sample

Procedures

In order to obtain district level data, the researcher sent a formal request stating the purpose of the study and requesting district reading achievement results disaggregated by building and grade level to the CUE for the purpose of analyzing the reading and language performance of a large, midwestern urban school district. The study utilized the 2017-2018 school year data, the most recent results of the reading assessments available. This allowed for the examination of current data across an entire school year.

Data Analysis

The research was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data. The data were obtained from the CUE and imported into STATA 16, and the program produced numerical representations of the study data. Statistics gathered included means, standard deviations, and regression coefficients. Descriptive and inferential analyses were used to determine the relationship and strength of the relationships between the independent variable of Black teacher population and the dependent variables of the Black student reading performance on the NWEA MAP reading assessment. Self-reported groups were examined at one period in time, and analyses explored the relationship between two variables: percentage of Black teachers within the schools and reading achievement. The findings were compiled and depicted utilizing tables. Figure 5 details the relationships between variables in the sample district that were explored within the study.

Statistical Models. Relationships were determined using correlation and regression models of statistical analysis. A hierarchical linear model was utilized to analyze nested data, that is, participants organized at more than one level, as well as to control for clustering. Whereas an ordinary least squares regression provides a single value indicating the proportion of variability in the dependent variable as explained by the combination of independent variables, a multilevel model allows the partition of total variance to within-group and between-group components. Research Questions 3 and 4 were examined as follows:

Research Question 3: What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state-approved building examinations in an urban school environment?

Using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test, the differences between Black student and White student RIT means was calculated. Then the collective average RIT score was compared for both racial groups at each grade level (grades 6 to 10).

Research Question 4: What effect does the racial composition of the staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on a state-approved building examination?

This question was studied using a multilevel model where the independent variable was the percentage of Black teachers in the district and the mean Black student score on the NWEA Map Reading assessment was the dependent variable. The controls included gender, grade level, and school performance index. Reading achievement, gender, and grade level were measured at the student level, while the percentage of Black teachers and performance index were building level variables.

Additionally, a linear regression was utilized where the independent variable was the percentage of Black teachers in the district and the mean score on the NWEA Map Reading assessment of all students was the dependent variable. The controls included gender, grade level, and school performance index.

The utilization of a multilevel model requires linearity, multivariate normality, homoscedasticity, and independence of observations. The study also assumed that the researcher will be impartial in the management and analysis of the data.
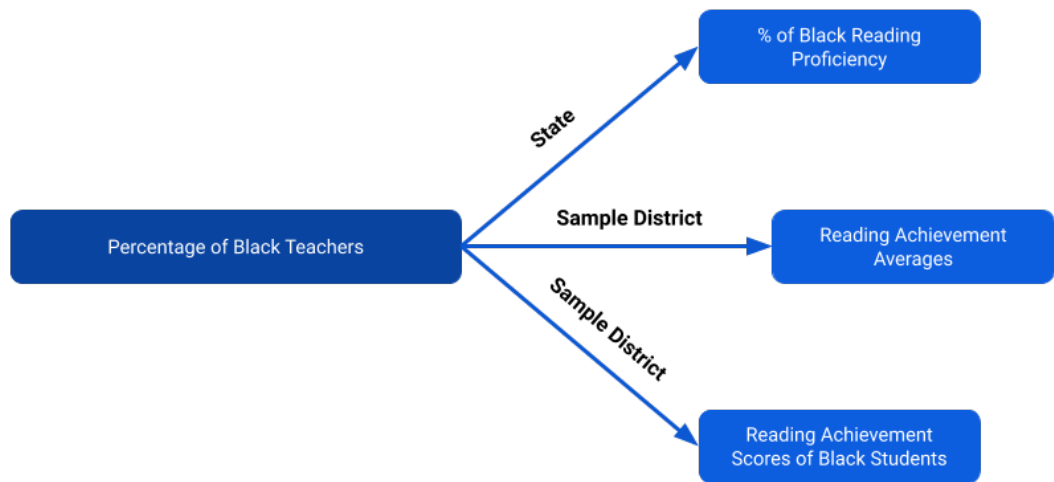
Figure 5. A Model for Analyzed Relationships Between Teacher Race and Student Reading Achievement

Conclusion

This chapter has described the methodology that was utilized to examine the secondary data that were retrieved from the Ohio Department of Education and a large midwestern urban school district within the state of Ohio. A quantitative descriptive correlational design was employed to explore the impact of the racial composition of teachers on student reading achievement. Using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test, the researcher documented differences in reading achievement between Black and White students across the state of Ohio. Using an ordinary least squares regression, the researcher documented the impact of the racial composition of Black teachers district-wide on the district average percentage of reading proficiency on the Ohio American Institutes for Research (AIR) assessment for English/Language Arts (ELA).

The researcher also used descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test to document the differences in Black and White reading achievement scores on the Northwest Education Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) in one sample district. Finally, the researcher used a multilevel model to determine the impact of the percentage of Black teachers on reading achievement scores on the NWEA MAP within the sample district. Chapter 4 will detail a comprehensive examination and description of findings as a result of the study.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine what relationship exists between racial composition of school districts and buildings and their effect on the reading and language achievement of Black students. More specifically, it examined the gaps between Black and White students on both the Ohio American Institutes for Research (AIR) English/Language Arts (ELA) Assessment and the state approved Northwest Education Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading Assessment. It also investigated how the proportion of Black teachers affects the reading and language scores of Black students. The following research question guided the subsequent questions and analyses: How does race affect the reading and language achievement of Black students during their secondary education in the American education system? A quantitative correlational research design was utilized for this study. The chosen method was most appropriate for the study as it allowed for effectively examining the relationship between two naturally occurring measures. The goal of the study was to determine the relationship between the racial composition of teachers and the reading achievement of students within the state of Ohio and within one large urban school

district. A sample district was drawn from a midwest state and included schools that administered the same state assessment for grades 6 through 10. This chapter details analyses of the data and results of the research study. It will provide the questions and procedures for examination, description of the sample, summary of the results, and detailed analysis of the findings.

Research Questions and Procedures

The four guiding research questions for this correlational study, including statistical procedures utilized to research the answers, can be found in Table III. Research Question 1 was designed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between Black and White student reading achievement statewide. Research Question 2 was designed to determine whether a statistically significant relationship existed between teacher racial compositions within districts and reading achievement in the state of Ohio. Research Question 3, based on findings from questions 1 and 2, was designed to examine whether there were significant differences between Black and White student reading and language performance on a district administered assessment in an urban context. Furthermore, Research Question 4 was designed to examine if a linear relationship exists, as well as the strength of the relationship, between teacher racial composition and reading and language achievement at the secondary level.

Table III Research Questions and Procedures

Research Question	Statistical Procedure
1. What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state examinations?	STATA *t-test*
2. What effect does the racial composition of the staff have on African American students' reading and language performance on state examinations?	STATA *Linear Regression*
3. Is there a reading achievement gap between black students and their white peers in an urban context?	STATA *t-test*
4. What effect, if any, does the racial composition of school building staff have on African-American students' performance in an urban context?	STATA *Multilevel Regression*

Description of the Sample

The study examined the effect of the percentage of Black school teachers who work within public school districts on the reading achievement of Black students in grades 6 through 10. Additionally, for subsequent analyses, the study needed to include an urban midwestern school district that serves secondary students in grades 6 through 10, had a large population of Black students, and administered the NWEA MAP assessment to the secondary student population. This is critical as the percentage of students who passed the Ohio AIR ELA test and the average reading and language scores for the NWEA MAP assessment are two measures that were examined for the study.

There are 615 total districts within the state of Ohio. Utilizing G*Power software, the suggested sample size needed for this study was 129 participants and was based on a 95% confidence level. To examine Research Question 1, 557 districts were utilized in the

69

analysis; as the researcher removed Charter Networks and Community schools in order to maintain the integrity of the research and theory, which is situated in public schools. To examine Research Question 2, 100 districts were utilized in the analysis; as this was the number of districts in Ohio with populations of both Black teachers and Black students. Nonetheless, the number of districts utilized exceeded the recommendation for the study.

Multilevel modeling procedures require a minimum sample size to achieve authentic estimates of the regression coefficients and their standard errors, as well as the variances and their standard errors (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2001). While recommendations of sample size for the utilization of multilevel models vary, the suggested sample is generally greater than 25 to prevent biased estimates of standard errors at the group level. To examine question 3, 96 groups (schools) were utilized, as this included all schools in the district that reported scores for grades 6 through 10 on the NWEA MAP ELA assessment during the 2017-2018 school year. To examine Research Question 4, 89 groups were utilized, as schools that did not have Black teachers were removed. The number of schools utilized to examine Research Question 3 and Research Question 4 also exceeded the required sample size.

Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables

The initial step in analyzing the data involved a review of the descriptive statistics for each variable. Using STATA, frequency charts were created for state-wide and district-wide characteristics.

This study includes 557 school districts. Descriptive statistics were calculated and disaggregated by typology. Table IV illustrates the frequency and percentage of each type of district, as well as the mean enrollment and median income. Table V illustrates the

70

mean teaching experience, student poverty rate, Black student enrollment, percentage of Black teachers, and mean performance index disaggregated by typology. Table VI shows the percentage of students who were proficient for each grade level for Black and White students in the state of Ohio during the 2017-2018 school year.

Additionally, descriptive statistics were compiled for the large urban midwestern school district. The sample included 96 buildings within the school district. Table VII details the number and percentage of students, the racial composition of students, and the gender percentages included in the sample at each grade level. Additionally, Table VIII details the means and standard deviations of the reading RIT scores, the mean racial composition of the teachers, the mean performance index of the buildings, and the levels of the variables included in the multilevel model.

Table IV Descriptive Statistics for School Typology

Typology	Frequency	Percentage	% Blk Enrollment	Mean Enrollment	Median Income
Rural - High student Poverty	111	19.93	4.01	1397.72	29128.26
Rural - Average Student Poverty	95	17.06	3.48	1015.42	32542.59
Small Town - Low Student Poverty	99	17.77	5.04	1656	34368.68
Small Town - High Student Poverty	81	14.54	13.7	2208.24	27612.93
Suburban - Low Student Poverty	72	12.93	16.07	4132.51	37566.18
Suburban - Very Low Student Poverty	44	7.9	13.2	5023.61	53301.18
Urban - High Student Poverty	47	8.44	43.6	4467.59	26534.77
Urban - Very High Student Poverty	8	1.44	69.38	24964.88	23631.25
Overall Typology	557	.	21.1	2733.75	33124.11

Note: The frequency is the number of districts in each typology that were included in the analyses. The % of Blk enrollment is the % of Black students within each typology. The mean enrollment is the average number of students enrolled in the typology.

Table V Descriptive Statistics for School Typology cont.

Descriptor	Tenure		% Students Pvty		% Blk Teachers		Performance Index	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Rural - High student Poverty	12.04	2.96	46.34	.11	.03	.14	72.14	5.21
Rural - Average Student Poverty	12.57	3.19	35.48	.13	.06	.57	75.83	6.31
Small Town - Low Student Poverty	12.23	2.76	30.51	.1	.01	.06	77.78	4.9
Small Town - High Student Poverty	11.99	2.41	50.12	.13	.15	.35	70.72	5.46
Suburban - Low Student Poverty	12.28	2.79	27.9	.12	.58	1.63	77.62	5.86
Suburban - Very Low Student Poverty	12.97	2.32	11.91	.07	.52	.97	85.52	4.65
Urban - High Student Poverty	11.92	2.79	63.02	.14	3.01	7.33	61.75	8.34
Urban - Very High Student Poverty	12.13	2.22	85	.1	5.62	3.96	52.15	4.42
Overall Typology	12.25	2.8	39.1	.39	.5	2.49	74.16	8.35

Note: Tenure is the average number of years of teacher experience, the % Students Pvty include the average % of students in poverty, and the Performance index include the average performance score within each typology. The % Blk Teachers include the raw percentage of teachers within the typology.

Table VI Descriptive Statistics for students in Ohio who identify as Black and White for reading proficiency

	n	M	SD	Min	Max
Black students					
Reading 6th	133	44.54	16.49	16.7	91.7
Reading 7th	121	46.33	16.58	15.2	83.3
Reading 8th	124	33.92	15.06	3.8	72
Reading 9th	128	54.25	18.2	14.3	92.9
Reading 10th	130	47.66	16.22	15.8	86.7
White students					
Reading 6th	552	67.13	13.89	13.3	95
Reading 7th	552	70.55	13.25	28.1	95
Reading 8th	550	60.87	14.34	17.6	95
Reading 9th	549	76.94	11.05	33.2	95
Reading 10th	551	71.90	11.87	29	95

Note: N is the number of students in each grade level that scored proficient or higher on the Ohio AIR examination for ELA. M is the average percentage of students who scored proficient or higher in each grade level in the state of Ohio across districts.. The table also include the minimum and maximum percentage of students who scored proficient or higher across districts in the state of Ohio.

Table VII Frequency Statistics for Students Within a Large Urban School District

	Frequency	Percent	%Black	%White	%Male	%Female
6	1268	20.42	19.48	25.25	52.41	47.59
7	1144	18.16	17.66	18.6	49.65	50.35
8	1182	18.76	17.69	20.13	50.51	49.49
9	1375	21.83	22.75	19.77	50.84	49.16
10	1312	20.83	22.42	16.26	45.73	54.27
Total	6299	100	57.7	17.67	49.82	50.18

Note: The table includes the raw numbers and percentages of students in each race and gender within each grade level

Table VIII Descriptive Statistics for a Large Urban School District

	M	*SD*
Level One Variables		
Overall RIT score	209.71	16.54
Grade 6 RIT	203.51	14.82
Grade 7 RIT	209.21	14.4
Grade 8 RIT	212.15	14.96
Grade 9 RIT	211.19	18.03
Grade 10 RIT	212.5	17.97
Level Two Variables		
% Black Tchrs	13.19	14.96
Mean PI	60.35	14.66

Note: Level One N=6299, Level Two N=96. The table includes the average RIT score for each grade level, the average % of Black teachers, and the average building performance index score across the urban district.

Hypothesis Test Results

Research Question 1: What are the gaps in reading and language performance between

Black students and their White counterparts on state examinations?

H_1: There are gaps in reading and language performance between Black students

and their White counterparts on state examinations.

H_0: There are no gaps in reading and language performance between Black

students and their White counterparts on state examinations.

The researcher employed an independent samples t-test to determine if there was

a statistically significant difference between Black and White student achievement on the

state of Ohio examination. The results from the test indicated that statewide there is a

statistically significant difference between White students ($M = 69.48$, SD = 2.67) and

Black students ($M = 45.34$, SD = 7.36) on the Ohio examination, t = 5.70, p < .05.

Moreover, on average, across grade levels, the percentage of Black students who scored

proficient or higher in reading was 24.14 percentage points lower than their White

counterparts. Based on these results (Table IX), the hypothesis was retained, and the null

hypothesis was rejected.

Table IX Comparison of State Assessment Results for Black and White students

Comparison of Black and White proficiency	White students (n = 5)		Black students (n = 5)		*t*	*p*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
% Proficient or above	69.48	2.67	45.34	3.29	5.7	.00

Note: n=10, p = .0005

Research Question 2: What effect does the racial composition of the staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on state examinations?

H_1: Districts with proportionate student-teacher ethnic ratios will have a smaller gap in reading scores on state examinations.

H_0: There is no difference in reading and language achievement between districts based on the percentage of teachers who self-identify as African American.

A multiple regression was employed to examine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between teacher racial composition and the percentage of Black students who are proficient on the Ohio examination. While the results indicated that there is a positive correlation between the racial composition of the teachers and the percentage of students who scored proficient or above on the state examination, this relationship was not statistically significant (F(6, 93) = 60.58, p = .14). The R^2 is .79, indicating that about 79% of the variability is accounted for by the variables (average math score, median income, student poverty, the percentage of minority students, and years of teacher experience) in the model. The equation that represents the model can be expressed as

$$Y^1 = 22.49 + .45x + .0003x + -11.18x + -4.42x + -.2x$$

These unstandardized coefficients represent the following: holding all other variables constant, for every one percent increase in percentage of math proficiency, a .45 increase in percentage of Black student ELA proficiency is predicted; for every one unit increase in median income, a .0003 increase in percentage of Black student ELA proficiency is expected; for every one percent increase in student poverty, an 11.18 decrease in percentage of Black student ELA proficiency is predicted; for every one percent increase

in the percentage of minority student population, a 4.42 decrease in the percentage of Black student ELA proficiency is expected; and for every one unit increase in the years of teacher experience, a .2 decrease in the percentage of Black student ELA proficiency is predicted.

Based on these results (Table X), the researcher rejected the hypothesis and retained the null hypothesis.

Table X Relationship Between District Level Teacher Race and Black Reading Proficiency

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5			Model 6		
	B	$SE\ B$	β	B	$SE\ B$	β	B	$SE\ B$	β	B	$SE\ B$	β	B	$SE\ B$	β	B	$SE\ B$	β
% Blk teachers	-.82	.24	-.31**	.21	.15	.08	.10	.14	.04	.16	.13	.06	.23	.15	.09	.23	.15	.09
Avg. Math Score				.74	.05	.89**	.52	.07	.63**	.47	.07	.57**	.44	.08	.53**	.45	.08	.54
Median Income							.00	.00	.31**	.00	.00	.16	.00	.00	.19*	.00	.00	.20*
Student Poverty										-13.61	5.23	-.24*	-11.65	5.62	-.21*	-11.18	5.66	-.20*
% Minority													-3.97	4.15	-.08	-4.42	4.19	-.09
Teacher Tenure																-.20	.26	-.04
R^2		.10			.74			.78			.79			.79			.80	
ΔF		11.13			136.05			112.22			90.94			72.87			60.58	

Note: $p < .05$*, $p < .01$**

80

Research Question 3: What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state-approved building examinations in an urban school environment?

H_1: There are gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state approved building examinations in an urban school district environment.

H_0: There are no gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state approved building examinations in an Ohio urban school district.

The researcher employed an independent samples t-test to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between Black student (N=894) and White student (N=2877) RIT scores on the NWEA MAP examination. The results of the test indicated that district-wide there is a statistically significant difference between White students (*M* = 214.74, SD = .52) and Black students (*M* = 210.53, SD = .29) on the NWEA MAP reading examination, t = -7.10, p < .01. Moreover, on average, across grade levels, Black students scored 4.21 points lower than their White counterparts.

Additionally, a t-test was employed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between Black and White RIT scores on the NWEA MAP examination at each grade level. The results from the tests indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between White students and Black students on the NWEA MAP reading examination at every grade level, with the exception of grade 9, t = -.54, p = .59. Based on these results, the hypothesis was retained, and the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table XI Comparison of Average Reading Scores on the NWEA MAP assessment for Black and White students

Comparison of Black and White reading scores	White students (n = 894)		Black students (n = 2877)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Average Reading Score	214.74	.52	210.53	.29	-7.10	.00
Grade 6	210.28	.82	202.64	.58	-7.25	.00
Grade 7	213.12	1.05	209.70	.55	-3.033	.00
Grade 8	218.93	1.05	210.37	.63	-6.94	.00
Grade 9	214.79	1.48	214.02	.63	-0.54	.59
Grade 10	219.15	1.33	215.66	.68	-2.17	.03

Note: n=3771, p < .01

Research Question 4: What effect does the racial composition of the staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on state-approved building examinations?

H_1: There is a difference in reading and language achievement between schools based on the percentage of teachers who self-identify as African American.

H_0: There is no difference in reading and language achievement between schools based on the percentage of teachers who self-identify as African American.

A hierarchical linear regression was employed to examine the relationship between teacher racial composition and the RIT scores of Black students on the NWEA MAP Reading examination. The first step was to estimate a base model with no

predictors in order to determine student and school level variances. The results of the variance decomposition model showed that 23% of the overall variation in reading scores is explained by school characteristics and 77% is explained by student characteristics. Since the variance decomposition model showed that reading achievement is influenced by school characteristics, a multilevel model was utilized to explore the relationship. The results (Table XII) from the multilevel model were statistically significant, indicating that there is a positive relationship between the percentage of Black teachers and the RIT scores of Black students (p = .043). The equation that represents the model can be expressed as

$$Reading\ Rit\ Score_{ij} = \beta j + \epsilon_{ij}$$

$$\beta_j = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 PercentageBlackTeacher_j + \zeta_j$$

These unstandardized coefficients represent the following: holding all other variables constant, for every 10% increase in Black teachers, a .7-point increase in the average reading RIT score of Black students is expected.

Table XII Effects of Black Teacher Percentages on Reading Scores of Black Students

Student/School Characteristics	Coefficient
Intercept	163.65**
Blk Teacher %	.07*
Perf. Index	.43**
Male	-3.38**
Grade	2.6**

Note: *p < .05, **p <.01

Table XIII provides predicted score increases for Black students based on the findings. For example, a building within an urban school district that increases the

number of Black teachers to 50% of the workforce is expected to yield a mean Black student RIT score increase of 3.5 points. Based on the average gap differences in Table XI, this could potentially close the gap in the overall mean reading RIT scores between Black and White students as well as between Black and White students at nearly every grade level.

Table XIII Black Teacher Percentage Increase with Corresponding Predicted Score Increase of Black Students

Percentage Increase of Black Teachers	Expected Score Increase of Black Students
1	.07
10	.7
20	1.4
30	2.1
40	2.8
50	3.5
60	4.2
70	4.9
80	5.6
90	6.3
100	7

Note: Calculated increases are based on statistically significant effects found in Table XII and may be compared to calculated differences in Table XI.

Additionally, a linear regression was employed to examine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between teacher racial composition and the RIT scores of all students on the NWEA MAP Reading examination. The results (Table XIII) showed that the model was statistically significant, indicating that there is a positive correlation between the percentage of Black teachers and the average RIT scores of all students ($F_{(4,5740)} = 349.73$, $p < .05$). The adjusted R^2 is .20, ($R^2 = .20$) which

indicates that about 20% of the variability of the RIT scores is accounted for by the

percentage of Black teachers. The equation that represents the model can be expressed as

$$Y^1 = 162.95 + .09x + .5x + -3.14.x + 2.15x$$

These unstandardized coefficients represent the following: holding all other variables

constant, for every 10% increase in Black teachers, a .9-point increase in overall average

RIT score is expected. Based on these findings (Table XII and Table XIII), the hypothesis

is retained, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table XIV Relationship Between Teacher Race and Overall Reading Achievement

Variable	B	SE B	β
% Blk teachers	.09	.01	.08**
PI	.5	.01	.42**
gender	-3.14	.39	-.1**
grade	2.15	.14	.2**
R^2		.20	

Note: $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$

Conclusion

To examine the research question surrounding the relationship between teacher

race and reading achievement, a quantitative design that includes independent t-tests and

linear regression analyses was utilized to investigate the correlation between the racial

composition of the staff and Black student reading achievement in the state of Ohio and

within a large midwestern urban school district. Table IX displays the results based on

Black reading proficiency percentages from across the state, while Table XI displays the

results based on RIT averages for Black students within a large urban district. While the

analyses indicated no statistically significant relationship between the percentage of Black teachers and the percentage of Black student proficiency in the state of Ohio (Table X), results from analyses indicate that there is a positive correlation between teacher race and measures of district reading achievement scores (Table XII and Table XIII). These findings contribute to the field of education as they underscore the need for unique strategies to service Black students and provide a rationale for future studies concerning approaches to teacher education and literacy programs. The final chapter will provide conclusions, possible implications, and suggestions for further research based on the study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of race on reading and language achievement of Black American students. The research examined the statistical relationship between teacher racial compositions and Black student reading achievement on state administered examinations. Furthermore, the research determined whether there was a statistically significant relationship between Black teacher racial compositions and the overall reading RIT averages on the NWEA MAP Reading Assessment within a large urban district. Previous research studies demonstrated strong correlations between race-matching and student achievement (Dee, 2004; Gershenson et al., 2018; Gershenson, 2019). However, there is a growing decline of Black individuals entering the teaching profession and graduating from education programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Based on findings from previous studies concerning race-matching and findings concerning Black teacher attrition and retention, the research tested the hypothesis that a statistically significant positive correlation existed between Black teacher race percentages and reading achievement across the state of Ohio and in buildings within a

large midwestern urban school district. The following four research questions guided the study:

1. What are the gaps in reading and language performance between Black students and their White counterparts on state examinations?

2. What effect does the racial composition of the staff have on Black students' reading and language performance on state examinations?

3. Is there a reading achievement gap between Black students and their White peers in an urban context?

4. What effect, if any, does the racial composition of school building staff have on Black students' performance in an urban context?

Summary of Procedures

The researcher requested teacher demographic data from the Ohio Department of Education. Once uploaded to the Ohio Department Education repository, archival data from the 2017-2018 school year were downloaded from the ODE website and retrieved from the CUE, then imported into STATA 16, a statistical analysis software utilized to organize and manage data. The sample from the ODE archival data set included 557 school districts in the analyses. The sample from the CUE dataset included 96 schools and the exam results of 6,354 students in the analysis. The guiding research questions were addressed through descriptive statistics, t-tests, linear regression, and hierarchical regression analysis reports. Supplemental analyses related to overall student averages were included as part of the linear regression analysis reports.

Summary of Major Findings

Analyses revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the percentage of Black students and the percentage of White students who scored proficient or higher on the Ohio Reading Test (Table VIII) and in overall RIT scores for the NWEA Reading Assessment (Table XI). While the results from the linear regression did not substantiate a statistically significant positive relationship between the district percentages of Black teachers and overall statewide Black reading achievement percentages (Table X), it is essential to consider that a large percentage of Black teachers across the state are situated within high poverty urban areas, as noted in Table V. Additionally, results from multiple research studies indicate that higher populations of AAV speakers are situated within urban contexts (Labov, 1972; Rickford, 1997; Rickford, 2016). Thus, it is critical to extend analyses to a high poverty urban environment, as supported by current analyses and previous research. An examination of a district within the aforementioned typology showed that an increase in Black teachers within an urban district significantly increases the average RIT scores of Black students, as indicated in Table XII. These findings are not limited to certified ELA teachers and highlight the effect of a balanced staff racial composition when serving Black students. Analyses also revealed that not only do Black teachers impact the reading achievement of Black students, they also positively impact the reading achievement of all students (Table XIII). Finally, the present study found that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between the percentage of Black teachers and the overall mean RIT scores of all the students. These findings highlight the overall positive effect of Black teacher presence.

Delimitations

There were a few delimitations associated with this study. First, the study was limited to faculty members coded as full-time teachers within the state of Ohio, and excluded other individuals such as principals, counselors, social workers, paraprofessionals, teacher's assistants, etc., who may identify as Black and be present or have some interaction with students. Secondly, while the analyses conducted to address the first two research questions include data from all districts within the state of Ohio, the data concerning reading and language achievement were only collected from one large midwestern urban school district.

The rationale for only including full time teachers who identified as Black was to focus the study on Black teachers, as research suggests that they have long-term impacts on student outcomes (Camera, 2017; Charity et al., Griffin, 2004; Dee, 2004; Downer et al., 2016; Gershenson et al., 2018; Gershenson, 2019). Additionally, only collecting specific achievement data from schools within the chosen school district was to focus on the goals of the study within an environment where AAV is widely spoken (Labov, 1972; Rickford, 1997, 2016; Thompson et al., 2004).

Implications for Educational Theory and Practice

While these findings underscore the need for a more diverse teaching force, they also present a possible compromise. Many studies have argued the need to provide programs that specifically target and recruit individuals of color into the teaching force. Recommendations have included altering college admission requirements, funding new teacher residency programs, and/or loan forgiveness in exchange for commitment to high need areas, as well as strengthening school leadership and teaching conditions (Bireda &

Chait, 2011; Boser, 2011; Partelow, Spong, Brown, & Johnson, 2017). However, it is clear that these are longitudinal goals that may require years of intense focus, planning, and even changes in policy. In the United States, Black enrollment in teacher education programs continues to decrease (Partelow, 2019), less Black students are graduating from teacher education programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), and less than 10 percent of enrollees in Ohio teacher programs are Black. Thus, it is critical to consider effectively utilizing the current populations of Black teachers, including ensuring adequate racial proportions in staffing of buildings and districts. As previously noted, Black students may even have more positive perspectives of school given the presence of Black teachers who serve as institutional agents.

An aforementioned factor that significantly limited Black student SAE literacy was the inability to code-switch, due to a lack of acknowledgement of AAV in school structure, curriculum, and a lack of representation of Black teachers. Black students academically and linguistically benefit from race-matching (Dee, 2004; Gershenson et al., 2018; Gershenson, 2019) and the presence of Black teachers, even if they are not necessarily instructed by them, as evidenced by the current findings (Table XII). While multiple initiatives have encouraged schools to engage in more ethical hiring practices that invite teachers from diverse backgrounds, including teachers who emerge from common experiences and socioeconomic backgrounds as AAV speaking students, matriculation and retention of Black educators continues to be problematic (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Moreover, Black teachers possess pedagogical qualities that are intertwined with ethnic, familial, and cultural expectations (Acosta, 2015; Baker-Bell, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Downer et al., 2016; Villegas & Davis, 2007).

Black teachers, especially those that have acquired advanced linguistic and code-switching skills, are also sources of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006) that can affirm and support Black students in identity development, cultural linguistic awareness, cultural self-education, and academic achievement. Thus, it is essential that districts and educators engage in pedagogical practices that select from these qualities and honor Black students' academic and linguistic differences.

Murrell (2002) asserted that building a successful community of practice in schools predominantly populated by African American children involves critically redefining good teaching and successful learning. This can be accomplished through the application of critical language pedagogy, an instructional approach that encourages students to interrogate dominant notions of language while providing them space to value, sustain, and learn about the historical importance of their own language (Baker-Bell, 2013; Paris, 2011). Additionally, as Black students are supported in code-switching, students of other races should also be challenged to develop a multicultural competence. In doing so, all students will develop an increased sense of cultural awareness so as to challenge broader language structures, harmful narratives, and negative stigmas associated with racial groups and language varieties.

Districts and educators should promote an increased awareness and practices that include acceptance of language varieties, which can be realized through the implementation of the Linguistic Affirmation Program. Hollie (2001) outlined six key instructional approaches for this practice of linguistic affirmation: (1) build teachers' knowledge and understanding, (2) positive attitude toward non-standard languages and the students who use them, (3) integrate linguistic knowledge about non-standard

language into instruction, utilize second language acquisition methodologies to support the acquisition of school language and literacy, (4) employ a balanced approach to literacy acquisition that incorporates phonics and language experience, (5) design instruction around the learning styles and strengths of SAE learners, and (6) infuse history and culture of AAV speaking students into the instructional curriculum.

To alter attitudes and build knowledge, teachers should engage in extensive and focused professional development that challenges deficit models and increases limited understanding of Black language and culture through discussion of the history and development of cultural and linguistic differences. In keeping with some methods of second-language methodology, teachers should refrain from engaging in corrective practices that eliminate or reprimand the use of the student's mother tongue. Rather, teachers would engage in some aspects of the communicative approach in which students would be allowed to utilize the target language, native language, or a combination of both. Applying a balanced approach includes consistent modeling of SAE as well as the usage and incorporation of AAV in both oral and written critical discussions of text. Teachers should also utilize differentiated approaches drawing from a variety of strategies, such as flexible grouping that considers interest or readiness, as well as creating learning opportunities that are based on what students are able to accomplish rather than what they have not achieved. For instance, the NWEA MAP assessment groups students in this manner in each of the assessment categories and indicates skills that students are ready to approach. Teachers could utilize this information in order to prevent deficit grouping and allow for exploratory approaches to reading and language, while monitoring and participating in discussions that empower students to use their

93

expressive space through non-threatening approaches to discussion. Finally, teachers should pair literature and informational text of authors that interchangeably utilize AAV and SAE as well as honor the cultural experiences of Black people (e.g., Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Walter Dean Myers, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Angie Thomas, Sharon Draper, Jacqueline Woodson, Tomi Adeyemi, Ta-Nehisi Coates, James Baldwin, Frederick Douglas, Mildred Taylor, Virginia Hamilton, Jewell Parker Rhodes, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, August Wilson, Lorraine Hansberry, etc.). Ultimately, the consideration of language varieties and selection of authors to educate Black students can transform reading assessment and intervention, and the overall experience of AAV learners.

As reviewed, there have been numerous studies that have evaluated discourse patterns (especially written discourse), patterns of language acquisition, reading process, habits of Black children, and the impact of teachers on language diversity. Huntington-Klein & Ackert (2018) asserted that in order to address the variety of problems illuminated within these discussions in a productive and meaningful way, it is necessary to target multiple domains of Black students' lives. This includes incorporating culturally sustaining pedagogy that fosters linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris and Alim, 2014). Coined by Paris (2012), culturally sustaining pedagogy is a practice that seeks to "sustain" linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism amidst the implementation of current policy and practice that explicitly fosters a monocultural and monolingual society and applies equally explicit resistances that embrace and perpetuate the goal of cultural pluralism and cultural equality. Teachers should engage with students of all races in discussions that expose and linguistically

police assumptions that perpetuate linguistic discrimination, resulting in the development of students who not only are competent of linguistic difference, but alter personally adopted racially biased narratives and evaluations of language.

Lee (2017) indicated that contrary to contrastive analysis, which merely instructs students to code-switch, delegitimizes the language, and discourages them from believing that they should use it in the classroom, critical language pedagogy presents students with a critical understanding of the historical, cultural, and political underpinnings of AAV to heighten their consciousness and to interrogate dominant notions of language and to become active agents in their own language education. This includes specific curricular decisions which call for expanding AAV speaking children's linguistic repertoires (Beneke, 2015) and infusing explicit instruction of reading and writing while creatively and interchangeably utilizing AAV. Reaching beyond mere code-switching pedagogy, teachers should allow students multiple opportunities for writing and revision and encourage them to consider and cater their expression to the audiences for which messages are intended. This also includes breaking dependence on the influence and rigidity of eurocentric canonical texts and embedding opportunities to explore the wealth of language and culture in the works of authors that both honor and utilize AAV as well as speak to the experiences that aid in the development of positive Black identity in Black youth. Institutions can draw from initiatives with the goal of literary and linguistic multiculturalism, such as *De-Canon: A Visibility Project* or *#Disrupt Texts*. Furthermore, it is simply not enough to include selections that project the voices of Black individuals, but to consider the positionality and message of texts to prevent the perpetuation of

harmful messages and develop counternarratives to racist and biased notions to which students have been exposed across their education.

Black and White people alike still operate under the belief that SAE is the superior variety over all others. Deak (2007) confirmed that some members of the public desire to end discriminatory educational practices, but their own attitudes toward language varieties and their speakers prevent their acceptance of policy that uses the rhetoric of linguistic equality (as demonstrated in *King vs. Ann Arbor,* The Oakland Resolution of 1997, and the response to the Linguistic Society of America's affirmation of 1997). Educational institutions should garner a strong sense of family and community support in order to contribute to a grounded sense of identity or self-concept of AAV speaking students. Orrock and Clark (2018) noted that the importance of family values appeared to be "the core foundation" for academic success for Black youth. This involves collaborating with the community to ensure that Black students feel as if adults "actually care" and increase academic engagement through positive identity and positive linguistic exploration. This incredibly problematic, White supremacist, deficit framing also prevents teachers from training White children how to be culturally competent and value code-switching to other languages and dialects. Thus, to promote a sense of institutional support (Lin, 1999, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2011), anti-discriminatory practices should also be explored through a rigorous program that includes continuous professional development sessions for teachers that foster interrogations of White supremacist pedagogy and linguistic ideology in order to develop and embed antiracist practices. Additionally, it is essential that teachers utilize this training consistently within classrooms so that all students are trained to become multiculturally linguistically

competent individuals who are cognizant of and apply antiracist belief systems and language practices in their academic and daily lives. Educational institutions should be accountable to ensuring these practices even in the event that there is little to no representation within the school building of Black students, as the dynamic of schools consistently changes and all institutions, educators, and students should be knowledgeable and prepared to be culturally sensitive to others.

Implications for Educational Policy

Critical language pedagogy requires the reframing of the structure of traditional education organizations at the state level, as current systems do not support the cultural background of AAV speaking learners. As demonstrated in the study, Black students consistently score lower than their White counterparts in both Reading and Language (Tables IX and XI). Thus, inclusively supporting the needs of AAV speaking learners and ensuring that all children have equitable opportunities to be fluent in multiple language varieties requires critically analyzing and adjusting current educational policies that present significant barriers to employing culturally sustaining pedagogical practices.

Although reasonable measures should include some form of assessment to determine student growth and development, accountability is not the answer. Alexander, Jang, and Kankane (2017) found that the inclusion of student achievement measures within state evaluation models contributes to lower reading achievement, which reflects the importance of acknowledging language difference as it relates to student performance on reading tests. Additionally, the study found that the presence of testing and accountability policies did not eliminate wide gaps in achievement between racial groups, indicating that these policies did not eliminate racial disparities in the system. Thus,

policy should consider a shift in focus to an inclusive curricular framework that values the language, practices, and culture of Black people. A review of both the Common Core Standards Initiative (2010) and current Ohio Learning Standards for Language (2017) revealed the inclusion of the study of language varieties, but only in one standard and at one grade level. The standard reads in both versions that at Grade 5 students should be able to "compare and contrast the varieties of English (e.g., dialects, registers) used in stories, dramas, or poems." However, it is clear that this should be embedded and infused within all content area instruction, particularly in reading and writing instruction. Drawing from the wealth of language presented in Black literature, knowledge of language varieties should continue to be developed at the secondary level, when students begin the process of cultural and ethnic identity development, and when the understanding and usage of language becomes more complex.

Other potential policy changes could focus specifically on the literacy of AAV students, just as initiatives have provided for ESL students. Smitherman and Baugh (2002), along with others, recommended a modification of Title VII to the Elementary and Secondary Act and use of the ESEA Title II to include projects dealing with Black English and schools [using] Black Language and Black Experience as a resource for teaching standard English language arts skills (Task Force on Educational Policy, 1981, as cited in Smitherman, 2002). This would elevate the linguistic status of AAV consistent with the research and provide schools with tangible tools and monetary assistance to support AAV speaking students.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study utilized average RIT scores from the NWEA MAP Reading Assessment, a norm referenced examination which includes evaluation of student performance noted in five academic goal performance areas: Literary Text: Key Ideas and Details; Literary Text: Language, Craft, and Structure; Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details, Informational Text: Language, Craft, and Structure; and Vocabulary: Acquisition and Use. While the current study found positive correlations between Black teacher presence and overall reading and language performance (Tables XII and XIV), other studies may seek to focus on determining the relationship between Black teachers and student performance in each of the reading goal areas. Finding correlations with independent goal areas would specifically inform which reading-based language areas may be the focus for both instruction and curricular decisions. Additionally, the NWEA administers a Language Usage subtest that assesses student usage of language skills in writing strategies, application and style, mechanics, and grammar. Future studies could lend focus to this sub-assessment and individual goal performance areas in order to determine which aspects of writing-based language areas would prove an advantageous focus in classrooms. Ultimately, it is critical to specifically determine differences between groups, significant relationships by goal area and grade level, and the effect of Black English Language Arts teachers on these reading outcomes in order to ascertain how Black teachers impact those relationships within individual classrooms and by overall district presence.

Additional studies could also lend focus to the characteristics of Black teacher instruction that make them successful with urban Black students. This research should

seek to identify and analyze the instructional characteristics that curricularize equitable linguistic teaching and their connection to overall reading achievement. Additionally, studies could provide a lens to culturally sustaining pedagogy practiced by teachers in other racial groups and development of positive Black identity. Moreover, researchers should be careful to distinguish from deficit frames or models that reinforce narratives that limit or hinder linguistic freedom. This also includes being both cognizant of and acknowledging inherent bias in the perspective of the researcher. These ideals not only benefit Black students, but all students, as demonstrated in the results of the current study.

Conclusion

Perhaps most critical to the success of Black students are social capital, institutional agency, and empowerment, as the lack of any of these relate to adverse circumstances for marginalized youth. This study demonstrates the power of agency on Black student achievement, even in the event that Black educators are not directly responsible for instruction of each student. While many initiatives focus on building agency and empowerment through the recruitment of teachers of color, significant decreases in overall matriculation and retention within the field of education haunt these efforts toward equity. Undeniably, these worthwhile initiatives must continue, but an examination of strategies for the current population of teachers warrants consideration.

The specific language needs of Black students are consistently omitted from strategy and policy concerning reading instruction. Listed below are recommendations to move toward the democratization of language education and an extension of the right to said education for Black students:

1. Conduct similar studies that parse out the variables (within reading and writing instruction) related to achievement for the purpose of determining if there are differences, as well as possible significant relationships, by race, goal areas, and grade levels;

2. Identify specific characteristics of Black teacher reading and writing instruction that promote language development and positive Black identity in adolescents;

3. Determine key practices that reinforce culturally sustaining pedagogy and encourage an inclusive model that acknowledges and legitimizes the language of Black students;

4. Restructure curriculum to include a holistic and inclusive model that strategically and intentionally intertwines language instruction across content areas;

5. Provide instruction that encourages linguistic exploration and respects the diversity of language within school culture as an asset.

As demonstrated in countless studies and illuminated in multiple experiences, the achievement gap is a consequence of inaccurately addressing the needs of Black SAE learners. Additionally, refusing to acknowledge the language of Black people is another way to polarize and oppress AAV speaking students. Baldwin (1979, p. 19) stated, "It goes without saying, then, that language is also a political instrument, means, and proof of power. It is perhaps the most vivid and crucial key to identity: It reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger, public, or communal identity." While reframing the discussion of language instruction requires an immense amount of vision, it is also an opportunity for public education to acknowledge how Black students make sense of themselves and the world around them. To legitimize Black

language and invite Black students to utilize their native tongue to exercise their

linguistic freedom and use language as a learning tool in the classroom is to empower and

grow students that develop a strong sense of identity. In the words of James Baldwin

(1979, p. 19), "If Black English isn't a language, then tell me, what is?

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