A Deeper Look at the Literacy Achievement Gap and the History of Interventions

Anna Alden

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Fall 2021

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the
Honors Program of Liberty University.

_____
Maria Spaulding, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

_____
Dr. James Swezey, Ed.D.
Committee Member

_____
Dr. David Schweitzer, Ph.D.
Honors Director

_____
Date

Abstract

The literacy achievement gap is a prevalent topic of discussion in the field of education, specifically as it relates to socioeconomic status. This paper reviews programs from the federal, state, and local level that have been implemented to close the gap and analyzes what has been successful in doing so. The findings indicate that an authentic program that includes extensive hands-on activities that promote different type of literacy growth and development that starts early, preferably before kindergarten, and works closely with families to intervene in the lives of at-risk children is most recommended by research. This is consistent with social cognitive theory which places significance on outside forces on learning.

Keywords: *socioeconomic status, literacy gap, achievement, literacy interventions*

A Deeper Look at the Literacy Achievement Gap and the History of Interventions

Introduction

The ability to read is one of the most important skills a child learns in school. A child who can read has the tools to unlock every other area of study. If children are unable to read, then they will experience many difficulties moving forward in life both in their education and future career. In fact, literacy is foundational to our society and how we function. Many children are introduced to reading from a very young age, whether by having a parent read a bedtime story at night or singing their ABCs with Elmo. Sean Reardon, who is a prominent researcher in the field of literacy and achievement, wrote an article along with a few other researchers arguing that these early literacy experiences are key to future success in the classroom (Reardon et al., 2012). However, some children have limited literacy experiences prior to beginning school. One subgroup of children that has been found to be statistically at a disadvantage when it comes to literacy are students who come from backgrounds of low socioeconomic status (Foster & Miller, 2007).

This disadvantage does not have to do with an inability to read or even an unwillingness to read. Instead, this gap often occurs due to discrepancies and deficits in early literacy such as an inadequate number of resources, parents who are unable to be fully present, or childcare that is less academic or enriching than those of their peers (Gottfried et al., 2015). This review will not be studying the "why" of this gap because it is very difficult to measure due to a multitude of factors being at play, in addition to the fact that the reasons for the gap may be more based on opinion than on research. However, research suggests that due to the factors above, students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds consistently underperform compared to students from middle to high SES backgrounds (Reardon et al., 2012). This discrepancy is called

the achievement gap, but a more specific term would be the literacy achievement gap or just the

literacy gap. Sean Reardon, a leading researcher in this field of research, wrote extensively on

the different types of achievement gaps and their correlation. After compiling and reviewing

nearly seventy years of research and data on the achievement gap as it relates race versus

socioeconomic status, he concluded that, over the decades, the correlation to race was declining

and the correlation to SES was increasing (Reardon, 2011). What this means is that the data

shows definitively that it is more accurate to study the gap from the perspective of SES. With

this in mind, the duration of this review will primarily discuss the achievement gap as it is related

to SES. This plays a significant role in policy and government decisions, which will be discussed

later. Some researchers are still looking at the gap from the racial perspective, which has

certainly had validity due to the tragic history in America of race and opportunity. Yet this is not

the most accurate view. Consequently, the discussion of the intersection of race and SES is also

extremely significant in our culture, as seen in the discussion of critical race theory. However,

that is not the subject here. As mentioned earlier, Reardon is a significant voice in this

discussion, and a look into his discussion on this topic can be found in both the book *Whither

Opportunity?: Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances* (2011) and the Equal

Opportunity Project sponsored by Stanford University.

　　　　Further, other important achievement gaps are typically related to a specific risk factor

and include gaps such as the gender achievement gap and the disability achievement gap. In

addition, it is important to mention that the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES),

which is a part of the Department of Education, will be treated as the primary source of data on

the topic of education research for the duration of the paper.

Review of the Literature on the Literacy Achievement Gap

For the purpose of accurate language, the terms literacy gap and literacy achievement gap will both be used throughout this paper to describe the discrepancy in reading scores between students in literacy that is typically correlated to the gap between students of low socioeconomic status and those of a higher socioeconomic status (Reardon et al., 2012). It is important to note, however, that this discrepancy, while it occurs often, is not a determining factor in any way for any individual. There are many students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged who have no delays or issues in reading because being poor does not lead to deficiencies in cognitive ability. Nonetheless, due to a multitude of factors, there is a gap in the test scores that needs to be addressed that can be seen in many decades of data (Martin, 1979; Chall et al., 1991).

While there are many classified factors for different achievement gaps, the lower achievement of students from low SES backgrounds has been a problem for decades in the United States, and researchers, school boards, and governments have been actively working to implement strategies and programs of many different types to close this literacy gap. While there is a significant amount of data that demonstrates achievement gaps for the past few decades, a couple references specifically reflect this consistent existence of the gap over time (Martin, 1979; Chall et al., 1991, Foster & Miller, 2007). Martin (1979) succinctly stated it in the following words: "There is considerable evidence that the mean level of scholastic attainment of children from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds falls below that of children from more advantaged backgrounds" (p. 62). Chall et al. (1991), an author and researcher on the reading crisis, wrote a book that addressed the literacy gap, citing poverty and lower socioeconomic status as a clear correlating factor. This specific book reviewed factors such as early literacy in the home as things to be encouraged to perhaps prevent these types of discrepancies. Further

sources on this topic have been mentioned already and will continue to be reviewed throughout this entire paper. Any review of the literature on the issue of literacy can and often will demonstrate a literacy gap.

Research done by the NCES in the last decade reveals citations of studies that span across the last few decades and around the world in any country that has a wealth difference and an education system (Bohrnstedt et al., 2015). Even though the bulk of the research on this topic is from the last two decades, achievement gaps are not a new concept. People attempt to explain them by looking at upbringing of students from various backgrounds and correlating factors such as parent involvement and early literacy. The role that a parent plays in a child's life is crucial, and it is difficult for a teacher to overcome the effects of nurture or lack of and the environment the child was raised. In addition, schools try to engage the parents and community as much as possible, but they are not necessarily equipped for that role. What they can do is encourage teachers to adapt how they teach to the different circumstances of each individual, using their training on different interventions and methods of teaching. Included in the decades of research about the achievement gap is also a significant amount of research involving different interventions to close the gap. A summary of this research will be included in this review as a part of the effort to find the solutions to the achievement gap.

The achievement gap is a systemic issue that those in education have been working to change. A study published by NCES in 2015 reflects that this literacy gap is not closing (Bohrnstedt, et al., 2015). The strategies and plans that have been implemented in schools such as before and after school programs, early interventions, additional instructional aides, and many others have been unsuccessful, at least on a large scale. If this is the case, it is then the responsibility of researchers to dig deeper into this issue to find what the problem truly is and

what can actually be done to fix it. Successful strategies should then be based on what teachers and school districts are doing that is successful, not what a government or school board official believes might be the best strategy or whatever their opinion on the issue is that is not based on research (Ladd, 2012).

The goal of this review and analysis is to discover the strategies that teachers and school districts are using and implementing to close the achievement gap, because they are the individuals and organizations who are making the most change and being the greatest influence in the lives of the students who are struggling with literacy. Current practices on national, state, and local levels will be reviewed and discussed with the literacy gap in mind, examining what has been successful and what has been largely unsuccessful.

Significance of Literacy

Much of the research on the achievement gap primarily is focusing on achievement in general rather than a specific area (Bohrnstedt, et al., 2015; Ladd, 2012), but this review attempts to narrow in on literacy achievement specifically. As mentioned before, literacy is the foundation for nearly every other subject in school because most other areas of study can be self-taught to a degree if the individual is able to read. Research suggests that many of the problems and delays in literacy are actually preventable if there are interventions early on, but without these interventions, students are being set up for many future issues (Schmitt & Gregory, 2005). The absolute importance of early interventions is most succinctly said in the following way: "Success in the early grades does not guarantee success throughout the school years and beyond, but failure in the early grades does virtually guarantee failure in later schooling" (Slavin et al., 1992, pp. 3–4). Essentially, the research shows that programs should mostly all be targeted early on. One commonly accepted phrase is that in grades Pre-K through second, the students are learning

to read, but once they reach third grade, they are reading to learn. This places a burden on those in education and those that write policy that affects education to work to create programs and curriculum that supports children regardless of their own at home literacy education. This is why the research summarized and analyzed below is so crucial in the field of education.

Social Cognitive Theory

Any conversation about education has a basis in theory at some level. In a discussion about an achievement gap, the most fitting theory appears to be the social cognitive theory, studied and articulated by Bandura. This theory argues that "much human learning occurs in a social environment" (Bandura, 1986, as cited in Schunk, 2012, p. 118). Achievement gaps can be examined through this lens. Researchers in this area look back at the child's environment that could have caused these gaps, while teachers look at how they can change the environment to adapt to these gaps. All of it is rooted in social cognitive theory.

Special Education and Literacy

Students in special education historically are very likely to struggle with literacy, and it is actually one of the two main characteristics of students in special education (Treptow et al., 2007). Interestingly enough, there is very little research on students in special education and literacy gaps, specifically students with emotional and behavioral disorders, because the normal target for these students is the behavioral issues that often come with the disorders. Students with disabilities who are also students coming from low socioeconomic status are even more at risk because they have two different risk factors at play. In fact, students coming from backgrounds of low SES are already more at risk to be diagnosed with disabilities (Shifrer et al., 2016). Therefore, it is irresponsible to not have research on this overlap and how to specifically assist students who have multiple risk factors.

Program Reviews

Over the last few decades, the government in the United States of America has implemented programs and policies in order to close the gap. Presidents of both political parties have agreed on the issue and attempted to find solutions. After a survey of recent literature, we see that the majority tends to be scattered and disorganized because it is not comprehensive and holistic. Therefore, this review is attempting to fill in these gaps by analyzing decades of research and interventions. Over the next few pages, some of the main programs that have been implemented will be summarized, and research that describes how each has been either successful or unsuccessful will be discussed. The final section of this review will examine future plans for research and an application on policy and the changes that should happen on both a state and federal level.

Headstart

One of the most common interventions is early intervention such as an early preschool. Early preschools are common around the US, and some are even government funded. Headstart programs specifically, as well as the Virginia Preschool initiative, are implemented in communities to get ahead of the disparities in test scores. Students who attend Headstart programs are actually more likely to attend schools in their elementary years that are lower performing, leading to the effects of the early intervention dissipating over the first few years of elementary school (Zhai et al., 2012).

Another research study concurs with this research that Headstart programs might not be effective enough to close the gap, stating that while the programs might be effective for some students, most students do not see improvement (Greenwood et al., 2012). Therefore, while these are common programs, they cannot be viewed as a complete fix to the problem. The limitation to

this statement is that every preschool program is different, and some might actually be successful

programs that are closing the gap in their area. Due to this contradiction and the lack of accurate

data, more data should be collected on both the national and state level to come to a more

complete conclusion.

After-School Tutoring

There is limited research on the efficacy of after-school tutoring. There is much being

implemented on federal and state levels in education that is not researched down the line, either

long term or short term on whether or not the intervention is working. However, there was one

study done that did look specifically to over four hundred at-risk students and how the after-

school tutoring programs that they were enrolled in affected or improved their reading (Roberts

et al., 2018). They concluded that there was no real improvement, though this might have been

due to absenteeism and high attrition. The authors also mentioned that this study concurred with

previous studies that were done on this same intervention. This intervention is very common, and

additional qualitative studies should be completed before any definite assumptions are drawn.

Government Acts

In the last two decades, there have been two major government acts on a federal level that

have directly addressed the gaps among student achievement. No Child Left Behind Act was

signed by President George Bush in 2002, instituting more federal oversight and making schools

more accountable for student outcomes. In addition, the act focused in on groups of students

who were not achieving as well, specifically students from racial minorities, students who were

of low SES, and students who had disabilities (Taylor, 2006). If states did not comply with the

act, they faced losing Title I funding (Klein, 2015). However, there was very little research done

on either a large or small scale as to the effectiveness of the changes. Taylor (2006) looked into

NCLB and Critical Race Theory which will be analyzed below; however, it is not the focus of this review.

The next president, President Barack Obama, set into motion another act, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that was signed in December of 2015. This was an act that was a revision for NCLB, which was supposed to have been revised back in 2007 under Bush, but it was delayed almost 10 more years. It focused on statewide assessments and standards and actually reduced federal government oversight by pushing more things down to the state governments (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.) In addition, this act required that all states hold high school students accountable to certain high academic standards for the purpose of preparing them for college. These standards built on the accountability that NCLB called for and were set up for the purpose of closing achievement gaps (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.) Again, no clear studies have been conducted as to the effectiveness of this act that were freely accessible for research and study, but as mentioned before, the most current NCES data still reflects a significant achievement gap.

One of the important things to consider when referring to the achievement gap is that it is an intersection of research that involves a multitude of different factors. The stakeholders in this issue include students, parents, teachers, and the government, and subsequently, society as a whole. This tangle of people and organizations complicates the issue and is best described in the following way by researchers who were studying NCLB and the achievement gap and critical race theory. Taylor (2006) describes it in the following way.

> Closing the achievement gap is a goal that has united a wide range of stakeholders. But the formulation of effective strategies requires some shared knowledge of what caused, perpetuated, and sustained it in the first place. Without some unifying theoretical

framework, it is difficult to formulate a cohesive set of policies and expectations. Indeed,

what may happen when there is failure to meet performance expectations is a splintering

of stakeholders into blame-shifting entities—teachers blaming parents, parents blaming

administrators, administrators blaming legislators, etc.—resulting in a fragmenting of

effort, energy, and effectiveness. (p. 72)

This quote sheds a light on the complications that are associated with this topic, but this

paper will seek to accurately separate all of the factors in a clear and succinct manner. Formal

education is a part of nearly every American's upbringing and therefore the foundation for the

rest of their life. This burden leads to the necessity of comprehensive and clear research.

Current Implementations and Practices

While the above sections are not a comprehensive list of the government and national

programs that have been put into play in order to close the gap, it certainly covers the majority of

the most popular and well-known interventions and programs. Other interventions that have been

implemented on a smaller scale and been successful to some degree will now be discussed. It is

important to note that these programs are not one size fits all or guaranteed by any means to be

successful. However, they have all been intentionally targeted programs for students who are

struggling in literacy and also at-risk due to their socioeconomic status.

The most common practices that assist with reading achievement are early literacy

programs that work to get ahead of the problem, identifying at-risk youth in the early stages of

kindergarten or pre-kindergarten. One such program as this was implemented in central-east

Canada and used a specific curriculum in a half-day program with youth who had demonstrated a

deficit in both oral language and emergent literacy called the KELT (Kindergarten Early Literacy

Tutoring) program (MacDonald & Figueredo, 2010). The students spent the morning at this

program, completing activities that were authentic and hands-on, rather than rote drilling and

worksheets that are commonly seen in literacy intervention programs. They then spent the

afternoon at their typical kindergarten with the rest of their peers. The results of the program

demonstrated significant success of baseline scores, even after only two months of the

intervention. Macdonald and Figueredo recommend early interventions such as this for

kindergarten students, because they claim that waiting until first grade might be too late because

oral literacy development is so key at this stage. The success of this program is very promising

because of its significant results overall.

The difference between early interventions such as this and the Headstart programs that

are federal programs is mostly authenticity and intentionality. Headstart programs are

government programs that attempt to solve a problem on a national level, whereas KELT worked

on a more local basis with a specifically developed curriculum (Greenwood et al., 2012;

MacDonald & Figueredo, 2010). The curriculum used more evidence-based practices and oral

language development that led to clear improvement in the students' literacy and language

development, which is far above any results of Headstart. Catered literacy programs in individual

districts and states tend to show better results as demonstrated above.

Another intervention program that has shown to be more effective among students is

parent programs that are implemented in pre-K through third grade (Magnuson & Schindler,

2016). Parents are the first influence into the life of the child and often the biggest influence for

at least the first few years of their life. Therefore, it makes sense to, if possible, involve the

parents whenever possible as long as they are willing and able. Parent programs include formal

activities to do with the parents, helping parents by giving them additional information about

school choice, or, the more successful program, add on programs (Magnuson & Schindler,

2016). They consist of activities such as the "Raising a Reader" program and include clear instructions for what the parents should be doing. These types of programs are shown to have the greatest impact on student growth in literacy compared to any other one studied by Magnuson and Schindler (2016).

The final program that will be discussed in this review that has shown success is another early literacy program called "Read-It-Again" and was put into practice in rural Appalachian communities where students from areas of low socioeconomic status were struggling with literacy (Mashburn, et al., 2015). This program was implemented in over 100 different pre-K classrooms across the region and looked at the impact of six different measures of children's language and literacy development. The actual curriculum in the program consists of a free download online and fifteen storybooks that must be purchased, but overall, it is a very accessible program that can be implemented into many different classroom structures. Over the course of the program, the students showed significant growth in one area—print concepts— and neared significance in the area of alphabet knowledge. Mashburn and the other authors do recommend this program, though, saying that "RIA would provide the field of early childhood education with a scalable option for bridging the gap between efficacy research and everyday classroom practices" (pp. 74-75)

Preparation for Pre-service Teachers

An important part of any discussion that has application for teachers must include discussion about how pre-service teachers are being prepared not only so as to prevent the same mistakes, but also for the purpose of knowing how to best serve and understand their students. Pre-service programs in education are conducting studies that look at poverty and simulations and how they affect attitudes in teacher candidates (Keeney et al., 2019). Teacher candidates also

have a burden to do their own research into whatever type of education that they are entering, and programs that are preparing teacher candidates have the burden to prepare their students well. Pre-service teachers are given four years in which they must learn as much as possible about the field that they are entering. Because literacy is so foundational to learning, this area should receive as much attention as possible in those four years. University programs that have students in the field of education should be strengthening their students in this area in order to best prepare them for the field.

Other Pre-service Programs

The implications of poverty are far-reaching and affect multiple fields of study in how they act and work in their professions. A couple of the fields that are impacted by poverty and have research on this effect are the medical field and nursing field. Studies have been done specifically on how pre-service programs should be preparing nursing students to work in fields with individuals with poverty (Jilani et al., 2015 and Tillman et al., 2020). These studies reflect attempts to understand how the students view those in poverty and how to improve negative perceptions. The researchers designed interventions and programs to understand how the students in the programs view those in poverty and begin to change these perceptions. While this does not directly correlate to research in education, it does have significant implications because teaching is also a service profession. If other programs are working to address the problem of poverty and perceptions, it places a burden on educators as they have significant interactions that can affect students in many ways.

Race and Poverty

While race is not the focus of this research synthesis, it is certainly a factor in any conversation that includes poverty, education, and test score gaps. It can be argued that this is the

case due to systemic racism (Taylor, 2006). Even if this is not the case, it is certainly true that the two topics of race and poverty are often intertwined, and this is especially so in the United States of America (Martin, 1979). Because an entire race was enslaved by another, the consequences of this are far-reaching and impossible to ignore. To think otherwise is to ignore the facts of history. Therefore, race is certainly a part of this paper's discussion due to the nature of the topic.

When NCES summarizes the current data on the achievement gaps that exist, they use the racial achievement gap as a focus to demonstrate. This is significant because NCES is the leading organization in the USA that does this type of study and therefore holds an expert role in the field. Race has been a topic of contention in the United States ever since its founding, and a look back into the last century alone reveals a drastic shift in education for minority people groups. For example, Brown v. Board of Education (1954) ruled segregation of schools unconstitutional, and the direct fallout of that can still be felt today in communities that struggled only to desegregate sixty-five years ago. Entire races of people were discriminated against when it came to education of which naturally is something that is still worth studying the effects. Critical race theory has been used for decades in an attempt to trace and understand these effects. The fact that minority people groups, especially black people, had inferior schooling for most of the United States of America's history, deserves deeper study.

As mentioned earlier when discussing SES and achievement gaps, race is never a determining factor in any academic performance. People did wildly believe that black or minority Americans had less ability when it came to cognitive skills, but this is no longer accepted or believed in the majority of society. However, a review of the literature does demonstrate correlation between certain minorities and lower test scores (Mattison & Aber, 2007; Noguera, 2008). Both pre-service teachers and current teachers should be aware of this

complicated topic when entering the profession and do their own research on the issue. They

must also examine their specific district and its demographics to understand the issue more

clearly. Every district is unique and should be treated as such in how it is approached by every

individual teacher.

When students enter kindergarten, there is already a significant achievement gap but

according to research, it will statistically double throughout the time students are in school

(Taylor, 2006). This places a serious burden on educators and researchers in this field to ensure

that all children, not just those of a middle or high SES are getting a quality education during

their time in school. The education that someone receives in elementary school builds until

graduating high school, and if an individual has failed a significant number of classes or has a

low GPA, then that individual has a serious disadvantage moving forward into his or her career.

School is not just a step in our education because it is what we use in our culture to take a place

in society and pursue our dreams. Individuals who do poorly on their SATs and ACTs are less

likely to get into good colleges and get quality jobs. If the American education system is failing

particular classes and races, then it is failing everyone.

Discussion and Significance

A common theme among the successful literacy intervention programs is early

intervention (Mashburn et al., 2015; Magnuson & Schindler, 2016) While Headstart programs

also attempt early interventions, they are less authentic and catered to one district or school,

which could certainly be a contributing factor to the reason why they are unsuccessful. In

addition, most of the studies done show more success with interventions that are holistic. Instead

of having students come early or stay late just to complete basic worksheets or read aloud, the

teachers are looking for an understanding of both the spoken and written language and a true

desire for literacy. This type of authentic learning can be defined in the following way: "an

instructional experience in which students use inquiry-based methods to explore real-world

problems and projects that are relevant to the learners" (Westberg & Leppien, 2018, p. 14).

Authentic learning, then, provides a new and often more effective way of processing new

material and learning.

   All in all, an authentic program that includes extensive hands-on activities that promote a

different type of literacy growth and development that starts early, preferably before

kindergarten, and works closely with families to intervene in the lives of at-risk children is most

recommended by research. Each state and every district, being that every area is unique in both

its demographics and funding, can and should work to create catered programs that seek to close

the literacy gap through interventions that have been shown to work in multiple research

programs.

Significance

   This review connects years of research studies and surveys to form a more

comprehensive view of the problem of the literacy gap. However, there is very little synthesis

published concerning these studies. This synthesis clarifies the issue in a way that will hopefully

lead to discussions in the community of educators, as well as government officials, as to what

should be done moving forward. It also opens the door to future studies by this researcher. The

issue of the literacy gap is one that should take high priority in any and all districts that have

gaps in literacy.

   A significant amount of the population of the United States is at-risk in academics due to

socioeconomic status, and as discussed earlier, literacy is the foundation of education, and

subsequently, the foundation of the culture that we live in. The research conducted already, and

the research proposed on this topic in the future are absolutely crucial to our education system

and society as a whole.

Government Policy

This research study as well as the multitude of other articles that have been studied have

the opportunity to be used by the government to inform future policies. While ESSA has not

been studied comprehensively in its impact on improving achievement gaps, as of now there is

no significant change in the data. Therefore, instead of creating government programs that react

to the problem, policies should seek to be proactive and based on the research that is currently

everywhere in this field.

Something to consider would be mandating each state to craft their own policy based on

the unique makeup of their state and demographics. This could help with the "one size fits all"

policies that are not currently successful. At the very least, a review and change of ESSA must

be done in the next ten years, because education is now accepted as a federal right for all

children in the USA. The system that is currently in place is failing many different demographics

of students.

As discussed earlier, NCES is the National Center for Education Statistics. They are a

part of the Federal Department of Education and work on hundreds of surveys, studies, and

articles. They play a key role in the proposed future of policy and this issue. NCES should

continue their research of the achievement gap but should focus in on the gap discussed here- the

income achievement gap. The overwhelming majority of their research is solely focused on the

black-white achievement gap. While this gap is certainly worth exploring and researching, it is

not the only one and failing to study the literacy achievement gap that has been summarized here

is just unacceptable. Once NCES completes more comprehensive reviews, then the federal

government can build on that data and create new policy that reflects whatever the research

shows.

       After each state has been able to implement the proposed policies that are mandated by

the federal government, it would be appropriate for every state to also conduct its own research

every year with a focus on every five years. It will take time for a program to have an effect, but

districts should be reporting feedback as well as test scores and improvements back to the state.

The state governments should then be reporting to the federal government and the Department of

Education to ensure that everything is running smoothly. If nothing has changed in ten years

within a state, the program should be changed, and if nothing has changed in the majority of

states in that time, then a complete review of all of the new data should be done. The key is

continued research and work to make sure that every child in the USA is getting the education

that they have the right to get.

<div align="center">**Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**</div>

Limitations

       This study is simply looking to synthesize the current literature and present possible

practices that can be implemented in school districts, but it does not even begin to scratch the

surface of what can be done next. Large scale studies should be completed that look across

multiple districts and states, seeing as a literature review can only discuss the problem in a

deeper way rather than actually find real-life solutions. In addition, a more thorough review of

government programs and laws could be included, especially more specific programs for

individual states or districts that are researched after implementation for efficiency. As

mentioned earlier, while the research currently suggests that many of the programs are

inefficient, there is not enough to come to any clear conclusions.

In addition, this study includes sources from other countries and from outside of the last decade. Therefore, a more precise study would use more current and specific research once there is more in the field that can be analyzed. Appropriate future studies would be conducted on a more focused scale, narrowing in on the USA specifically. Additionally, there would need to be a much larger number of both qualitative and quantitative studies conducted over a shorter amount of time to get more accurate and precise research. The field of education research is always evolving and growing in a response to the changing culture. There will never be enough research in the field, and those who are currently researching are never truly finished. Because education itself is constantly changing, education research must also do the same..

Recommendations for Future Research

The author plans to conduct a comprehensive qualitative case study during her time in graduate school that would focus on a single district or county where there is a clear discrepancy in test scores that can be correlated to income gaps. Data would be collected from the district itself through a thorough document review from government websites that display income levels throughout the county. In addition, school documents and reports of test scores directly related to literacy would be included. Finally, the study would culminate with a qualitative case study with interviews from veteran teachers and administrators with questions about county, state, and national interventions.

This part of the study would be the most involved and specific because the goal is to change the fact that most policy is informed by politicians than it is by teachers and administrators. Therefore, the researcher would ask for opinions based in data on what the schools and district should and could be doing differently in response to the literacy crisis, using a set list of questions while also allowing teachers and administrators to add whatever they see

appropriate throughout the conversation. Teachers already spend so much of their time collecting data and administering assessments, giving them expertise in this area. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed, and the professional opinions would then be synthesized with recommendations for change in school districts and a discussion of the proposed impact on policy. Overlap between different teachers, schools, and grade levels will be considered and used to demonstrate expert opinion on the topic.

The profession of teacher is not often viewed as a research position because it only requires a teaching license which typically comes from only an undergraduate degree. However, the perception does a serious disservice to the individuals who are educating the next generation. Teachers work to create assessments and activities that are unique and catered to each class and individual student. Therefore, it should be understood that their opinions are professional, and should be respected while still understood that they can be wrong and disagree on how certain things should be run.

Based on this literature review and the burden on policy makers as seen in the last two decades of policy that has been largely unsuccessful, it is also proposed that the government officials and researchers who work in education research fields, such as NCES, complete their own research, independent studies, and surveys. These studies, which could include organized synthesis of test scores and programs on a national level, would inform the future policies that succeed NCLB and ESSA.

Conclusion

The literacy achievement gap has been a prevalent issue both in the USA and around the world in education for at least the last few decades. In all likelihood, the gap extends even farther back but the research has only been conducted thoroughly in recent years. While there are many

different categories of achievement gaps that can be found in the data, the most consistent and prevalent one is the gap correlated to socioeconomic status. Research on this specific gap all agrees that students from poor backgrounds are statistically at risk, and both the government and the educators have been attempting unsuccessfully to close the gap for years. Presidents have signed acts such as ESSA and NCLB, and before and after school programs have been attempted everywhere. However, the gap remains significant. The data does show that authentic programs that seek to encourage early literacy and work with families tend to be the most effective across the board, a statement that is supported by social cognitive theory because of the changes in environment that are made in these interventions.

Therefore, it has been proposed by this paper that the government, having the burden to provide equal and accessible education for all children in the United States, should mandate the creation of programs by every state to create a unique curriculum for the purpose of closing the gap. While the federal government would be responsible for checking in and overseeing these programs, it is the states who are in the position to be able to solve the problem best because every state has such a specific demographic. Before these programs can be created, however, more research must be done in order to better understand the factors at play. This would be the responsibility of the NCES and the individual state departments of education. The research strongly suggests that if this entire process were to occur, the chances of closing the literacy achievement gap is much higher.

References

Bohrnstedt, G., Kitmitto, S., Ogut, B., Sherman, D., and Chan, D. (2015). School composition

and the black–white achievement gap (NCES 2015-018). U.S. Department of Education,

Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch

Chall, J., Jacobs, V., & Baldwin, L. (1991). The reading crisis: Why poor children fall behind

(1st Harvard University Press pbk. ed.). Harvard University Press.

Every Student Succeeds Act. (n.d.) US Department of Education.

https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn

Foster, W. A., & Miller, M. (2007). Development of the literacy achievement gap: A

longitudinal study of kindergarten through third grade. *Language, Speech & Hearing

Services in Schools*, *38*(3), 173-81. https://doi.org/10.1044/0161-1461

Garwood, J. D. (2018). Literacy interventions for secondary students formally identified with

emotional and behavioral disorders: Trends and gaps in the research. *Journal of

Behavioral Education*, *27*(1), 23-52. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10864-017-9278-3

Gottfried, A. W., Schlackman, J., Gottfried, A. E., & Boutin-Martinez, A. S. (2015). Parental

provision of early literacy environment as related to reading and educational outcomes

across the academic lifespan. *Parenting*, *15*(1), 24-38.

https://doi.org/10.1080/15295192.2015.992736

Greenwood, C. R., Carta, J. J., Atwater, J., Goldstein, H., Kaminski, R., & McConnell, S. (2012).

Is a response to intervention (RTI) approach to preschool language and early literacy

instruction needed? *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, *33*(1), 48–

64. https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121412455438

Jilani, D., Fernandes, A., & Borges, N. (2015). Pre-clinical versus clinical medical students'
attitudes towards the poor in the United States. *Journal of educational evaluation for
health professions*, *12*. http://doi.org/10.3352/jeehp.2015.12.52

Keeney, A. J., Hohman, M., & Bergman, E. (2019). Interprofessional education: A poverty
simulation with elementary teachers and social work students. *Journal of Teaching in
Social Work*, *39*(2), 148-162. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2019.1586808

Klein, A. (2016, March 31). The every student succeeds act: An overview. Education Week.
https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/the-every-student-succeeds-act-an-essa-
overview/2016/03

Klein, M. (2015, April 10). No child left behind: An overview. Education Week.
https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/no-child-left-behind-an-overview/2015/04

Ladd, Helen F. (2012). Education and poverty: Confronting the evidence. *Journal of Policy
Analysis and Management 31(*2), 203-227. https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.21615

MacDonald, C., & Figueredo, L. (2010). Closing the gap early: Implementing a literacy
intervention for at-risk kindergartners in urban schools. *The Reading Teacher, 63*(5), 404-
419. https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.63.5.6

Magnuson, K., & Schindler, H. S. (2016). Parent programs in pre-k through third grade. *The
Future of Children*, 26(2), 207-221.
http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/43940588

Martin, M. (1979). Reading and socio-economic background: A progressive achievement gap?
The Irish Journal of Education, *13*(2), 62-78. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30077275

Mashburn, A., Justice, L. M., McGinty, A., & Slocum, L. (2015). The impacts of a scalable

intervention on the language and literacy development of rural pre-

kindergartners. *Applied Developmental Science*, *20*(1), 61-78.

https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2015.1051622

Mattison, E., & Aber, M. S. (2007). Closing the achievement gap: The association of racial

climate with achievement and behavioral outcomes. *American journal of community

psychology*, *40*(1-2), 1-12. https://doi.org10.1007/s10464-007-9128-x

Noguera, P. A. (2008). Creating schools where race does not predict achievement: The role and

significance of race in the racial achievement gap. *The Journal of Negro Education*,

77(2), 90-103. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25608673

Reardon, Sean F. (2011). The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the

poor: New evidence and possible explanations. In G. J. Duncan & R. J Murnane (Eds.),

Whither opportunity?: Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances (91-115).

Russell Sage Foundation.

Reardon, S. F., Valentino, R. A., & Shores, K. A. (2012). Patterns of literacy among US

students. *The Future of Children*, *22*(2), 17-37. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23317409

Roberts, G. J., Capin, P., Roberts, G., Miciak, J., Quinn, J. M., & Vaughn, S. (2018). Examining

the effects of afterschool reading interventions for upper elementary struggling readers.

Remedial and Special Education, *39*(3), 131-143.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932517750818

Schmitt, M. C., & Gregory, A. E. (2005). The impact of an early literacy intervention: Where are

the children now?. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, *10*(1), 1-20.

https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ966161

Schunk, D. H. (2012). Learning theories: An educational perspective. Pearson.

Shifrer, D., Muller, C., & Callahan, R. (2016). Disproportionality and learning disabilities:

Parsing apart race, socioeconomic status, and language. *Journal of Learning

Disabilities*, *44*(3), 246–257. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219410374236

Slavin, R. E., Karweit, N. L., & Wasik, B. A. (1992) Preventing early school failure. *Educational

Leadership, 50*(4), 10-18. https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/preventing-early-school-

failure-what-works

Taylor, E. (2006). A critical race analysis of the achievement gap in the United States: Politics,

reality, and hope. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *5*(1), 71-87.

https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760500499025

Tillman, P., Thomas, M., & Buelow, J. R. (2020). Impact of service learning on student attitudes

toward the poor and underserved. *Nurse educator*, *45*(6), 316-320.

https://doi.org10.1097/NNE.0000000000000807

Treptow, M. A., Burns, M. K., & McComas, J. J. (2007). Reading at the frustration,

instructional, and independent levels: The effects on students' reading comprehension

and time on task. *School Psychology Review*, *36*, 159–166.

https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2007.12087958

Westberg, K. L., & Leppien, J. H. (2018). Student independent investigations for authentic

learning. *Gifted Child Today*, *41*(1), 13-18. https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217517735354

Zhai, F., Raver, C. C., & Jones, S. M. (2012). Academic performance of subsequent schools and

impacts of early interventions: Evidence from a randomized controlled trial in Head Start

settings. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*(5), 946-954.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.026