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Educators' Perspectives on Strategies to Close the Achievement Gap for African American Elementary Students in Mathematics and English Language Arts

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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Ed.S, ED, Walden University, 2019

M.ED, Liberty University, 2016

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

There is a persistent academic achievement gap between African American and European American elementary students in mathematics and English language arts. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts from a school located in the southeastern region of the United States; consequently, the research question was developed to focus on these perspectives. The conceptual framework for this study was Ladson-Billings's culturally relevant pedagogy. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were used to select study participants. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with 11 educators who had narrowed the gap in achievement for their African American students. Braun and Clarke's six-step framework was used to thematically analyze the data, resulting in four emergent themes: relationship building, meeting the learning needs/styles of students, cultural awareness, and setting high expectations. Findings from this study may be used to bring about a positive social change by providing educators with strategies that they can use to close the achievement gap and increase the achievement of their African American students.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to every African American elementary student. You are important, you are special, you will be successful, and you will make a difference in this world. This work is dedicated to you! Reach for the stars and never quit!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The African American achievement gap has been a pervasive, ongoing problem in the United States and has contributed to many inequities in African American students' success (Banales et al., 2020). According to Hanushek et al. (2019), the gap between African American and European American students is present in mathematics and English language arts. Quinn (2020) expressed that many advocates, including U.S. presidents, have proclaimed the achievement gap as the preeminent civil rights issue of modern times. Henry et al. (2020) emphasized that lower academic achievement among African American children contributes to an ongoing pattern of inequity in adult success, including inequity in educational attainment and wages. The achievement gap has been continual in U.S. schools for some time and has had a damaging impact on the future of African American children (Bonales et al., 2020; Henry et al., 2020).

In this study, I focused on elementary educators' perspectives on strategies that have helped narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. Bjorkulund et al. (2020) suggested that further research is needed to examine schools that have made improvements in reducing the achievement gap. This study may contribute to the field of education and positive social change by adding to the literature on educators' perspectives on strategies that have narrowed the gap in achievement for African American students. This study may also provide information on successful strategies that administrators and professional development coordinators can use to help educators who struggle with closing the gap.

In this chapter, I present the background, problem statement, and research question. The chapter also includes an overview of the conceptual framework, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2. Additionally, I discuss the nature of the study, assumptions, scope, delimitations, and the significance of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Background

Many previous researchers have defined the achievement gap (Hanson et al., 2020; Kotok, 2017; Mestry, 2019). Hanson et al. (2020) described the achievement gap as the statistical difference in standardized test scores between races or social-economic groups. The achievement gap can be interpreted as the disparity in academic performance between specific groups of learners, such as those classified by race or ethnicity (Mestry, 2019). Kotok (2017) expressed that the achievement gap refers to the difference in academic performance between two subgroups when one group outperforms another group.

The achievement gap has been an ongoing issue in education. Hill and Roberts (2019) stated that the academic achievement gap remains an issue for U.S. students, and African American students continue to score the lowest on assessments compared to their European American counterparts. Despite decades of federal and state interventions, changes in policies, and increasing resources for failing school districts, the achievement gap persist (Hanson et al., 2020). Xudong et al. (2016) declared that results from national assessments, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), revealed that there was a significant racial gap between European American and African

American students during the 1970s that has continued into the 2000s, with the gap still being sizeable and robust. This evidence is significant because it shows that the achievement gap has been an issue in the past and remains an issue today.

Data has shown that the achievement gap in education is apparent and undoubtable (Camasson & Jagannathan, 2018; Lenard & Pena, 2018; Mcintosh & Curry, 2020). Mcintosh and Curry (2020) disclosed that in the 2017 NAEP report, only 18% of African American fourth graders were proficient in reading, and only 19% were proficient in math. Camasson and Jagannathan (2018) asserted that for European American and African American students, the average difference on the 2013 NAEP was 23 points in reading and 26 points in math. African American students had average scores between 0.5 and 1.0 standard deviations lower than European American students on national assessments (Lenard & Pena, 2018). These data are evidence that the achievement gap between African American and European American students is an ongoing issue in education.

The achievement gap can negatively impact African American students' future outcomes both educationally and economically. Soland (2018) argued that the achievement gap could impact African American students' access to postsecondary education in the future. Duncan et al. (2019) stated that if the achievement gap continues, it will jeopardize the upward socioeconomic mobility of African American children. Scammacca et al. (2020) proclaimed that African American students with poorer reading or math skills benefit less from reading and math instruction, and as a result, fall further behind while European American students advance.

A gap in educators' practices is evident in the disparity of achievement for African American elementary students in mathematics and English language arts. In this study, I addressed this gap and provided educational stakeholders with elementary educators' strategies that have been used in narrowing the gap for their African American students. This study was needed because it may provide educational stakeholders with information based on elementary educators' perspectives on strategies that have helped narrow the gap.

Problem Statement

The problem is that there is a continued achievement gap between African American and European American students in mathematics and English language arts. The African American achievement gap is present as early as the elementary years (Kevelson, 2019). According to Nation's Report Card (2019), data for public schools in 2019 showed that only 20% of African American students in fourth grade scored proficient or advanced in mathematics, while 52% of European American students scored proficient or advanced. In reading, 18% of fourth-grade African American students scored proficient or advanced, while 44% of European American students scored proficient or advanced (Nation's Report Card, 2019). These data show a gap in practice related to the strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American elementary students in mathematics and English language arts.

Some educators have made progress in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students (Braun et al., 2017). Rust (2016) asserted that although the gap still exists between African American students and their European American

counterparts, there has been some progress in narrowing the achievement gap. Many

educators have implemented teaching strategies and have made significant strides in

closing the gap (McKenzie, 2019; Plessis, 2019; Ratcliff et al., 2016).

One elementary school located in a southeastern state of the United States has made

progress towards closing the achievement gap for their African American students. This

school was even named a National Blue-Ribbon School for its progress in closing the

achievement gap. Figure 1 shows the school's end-of-grade assessment data for

mathematics and English language arts from 2016–2019. These data are evidence that

this elementary school has had success in narrowing the achievement gap of its African

American elementary students.

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Figure 1

End of Grade Assessment Reports

Mathematics End of Grade Assessment Report
Percent of Students who Scored in Proficient or Distinguished

ELA End of Grade Assessment Report
Percent of Students who Scored in Proficient or Distinguished
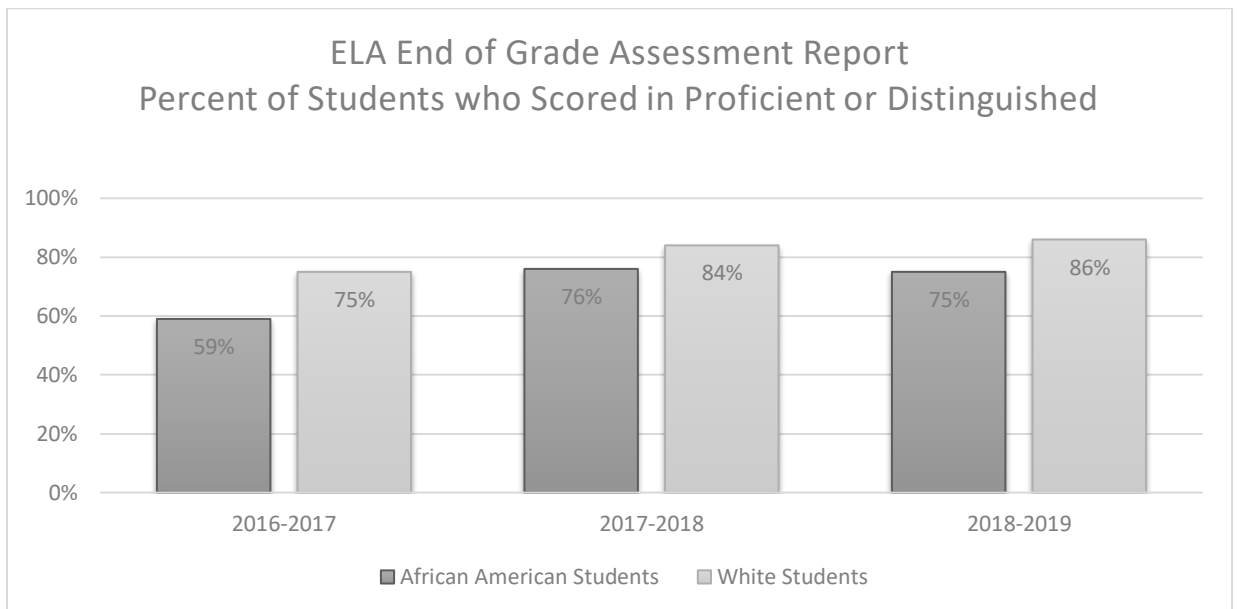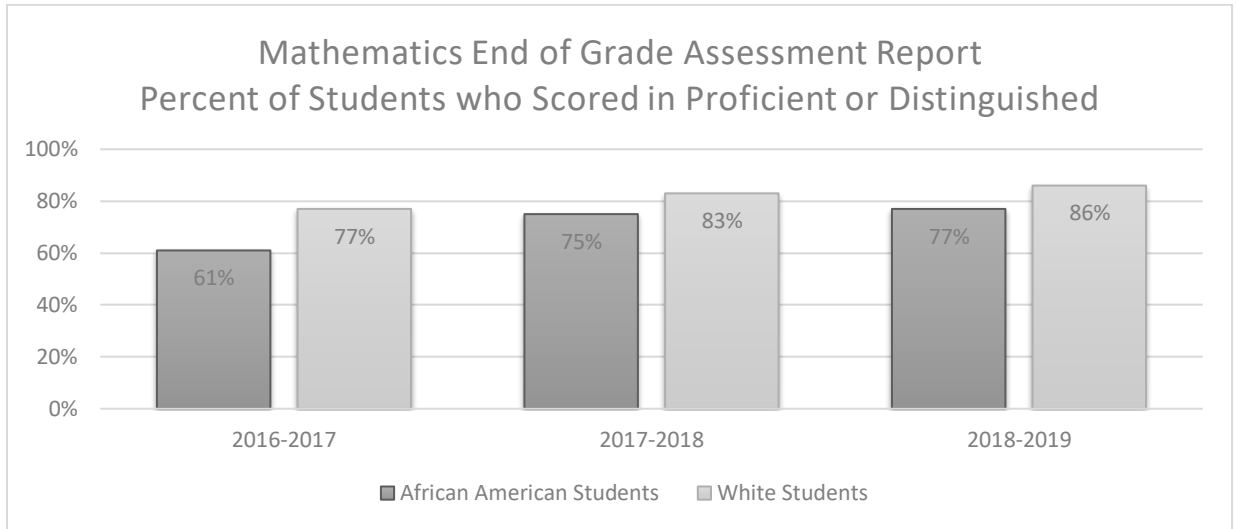
Note. Adapted from "2019 College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)," Georgia Department of Education, (http://ccrpi.gadoe.org/Reports/Views/Shared/_Layout.html).

Clark et al. (2016) stated that schools are filled with diverse students, and educators must look at race and culture to understand how different students process, engage, think, and learn. Some educators have found success in narrowing the gap, but there is a gap in practice concerning the strategies that educators have used to narrow the achievement gap for African American elementary students in mathematics and English language arts (Diemer et al., 2016; Essien, 2017). Discovering these strategies may have the potential to help other educators narrow the gap to ensure that their African American students are not falling behind and that all students are successful.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts in a school located in the southeastern region of the United States. In previous studies, Diemer et al. (2016) and Essien (2017) suggested that future research should identify ways to narrow the achievement gaps among underrepresented groups. Essien advised that future studies should focus on states with higher concentrations of African American communities, such as the southeastern region of the United States. Essien further proposed that studies could focus on schools whose African American students achieve high levels of success. Bjorklund-Young and Plasman (2020) expressed that further research should closely examine schools that have made admirable improvements in reducing the achievement gap. Similarly, Keith (2018) recommended that more studies discover best practices that are currently being utilized to make a difference in closing the

achievement gap. This study focused on the gap in practice related to strategies educators have used to narrow the achievement gap. The results of this study may help current and future educators narrow the achievement gap for their African American elementary students.

Research Question

1. What are third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts?

Conceptual Framework

This basic qualitative study was guided by Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy. I used this framework to expound on how cultural awareness in the classroom can be used to help with the achievement of African American students. In culturally relevant pedagogy, it was proposed that African American students should experience academic success, develop or maintain cultural competence, and develop critical consciousness through which they challenge the status of current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Austin et al. (2019) declared that culturally relevant teaching must develop students academically first and then nurture and support cultural competence so that students can see their own cultures reflected in the curriculum.

Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy was devised from the perspectives of successful educators of African American students. Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that educators must have high expectations and demand academic excellence when teaching African American students. Ladson-Billings further stated that

educators must teach African American students to accept academic excellence for themselves to be successful. The culturally relevant pedagogy encourages educators to teach African American students to develop awareness to examine the cultural norms that produce and maintain social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Allen et al. (2017) expressed that culturally relevant educators must understand themselves and others, social relations, and knowledge while internalizing that their students' experiences exist with past, present, and future struggles. Culturally relevant pedagogy also encourages educators to engage their students in the world and each other. It proposes that implementing these strategies in the classroom could help educators find success in educating African American students so that they can achieve (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally relevant pedagogy was appropriate to use as the conceptual framework in the current study because it provided an organizing framework for exploring educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. I used the basic principles of the culturally relevant pedagogy to explore educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. The research question helped me to gather new understandings from the perspectives of educators. I used the interview protocol guide to provide opportunities for me to speak with educators who possessed strategies to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. As I collected data, I then used the culturally relevant pedagogy principles to gain a more thorough view of the educators' perspectives. The same principles were also applied to

the initial codes, axial codes, and themes during data analysis. The conceptual framework

relates to this study because it was derived from the perspectives of successful teachers of

African American students. A more detailed analysis of the conceptual framework is

included in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

To explore elementary educators' perspectives on strategies that have helped

narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English

language arts, I used a basic qualitative design, conducting telephone or Zoom participant

interviews. Merriam (2009) asserted that researchers conducting a basic qualitative study

should be interested in how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and

what meanings they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose of this design is to

understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Using the basic qualitative approach was appropriate because it was consistent with

understanding educators' perspectives.

Data were collected from semistructured interviews with 11 educators from an

elementary school located in the southeastern region of the United States. I selected

educators who had been at the school for more than two years and had taught in third

through fifth grade. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and coded.

I transcribed the interview data using an online transcription service. Thematic

analysis was then used to identify, analyze, and report the emergent themes. To guide the

thematic analysis of data, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. I

began by using open coding to study concepts from the data. Codes were then assigned to

each concept after they had been identified. I then clustered open codes into preliminary categories, which was done by examining how the data and codes could have been related. I also paid close attention to codes that may have been repeated. Axial coding was carried out by naming categories using a word or phrase that reflected its contents. Emergent themes were identified by grouping together similar categories and subthemes. Lastly, I explored the data that supported the themes, considered how the themes fit the broader understanding of the data and determined the relationship between the themes and the research question.

Definitions

In this section, I provide definitions of key concepts used in the study that will help the reader to understand their context.

Achievement gap: The difference between the percentage of European American students and the percentage of a different ethnic group of students, such as African Americans, who achieve proficiency on a state exam (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020).

Culturally relevant teaching: A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, impart skills, and change attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Mainstream American English: The language commonly used in school texts and by teachers that helps make an easier transition in learning to read (Dexter et al., 2018).

Assumptions

I made several assumptions in this study. I assumed that all educators who participated in this study would provide strategies that they have honestly used to narrow the gap. Another assumption was that the participants would provide responses that reflect their own experiences. It was also assumed that the participants would be open and honest even if the topic of race may have been uncomfortable to them. These assumptions were essential because this study was aimed at understanding and learning about strategies that have helped educators to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts, but there is no way to know whether responses provided would be honest or from the participants' own experience. I also assumed that culturally relevant teaching had played some role in the success of these educators. This assumption was relevant because this study was grounded in the culturally relevant pedagogy.

Scope and Delimitations

I used a semistructured interview protocol to gather 11 elementary educators' perspectives on strategies that they believe have helped narrow the achievement gap for African American students. The participants were educators who had taught or were currently teaching in a third, fourth, or fifth-grade classroom. I excluded educators who had been at the school less than two years. I chose to exclude these educators because they were new to the profession and may not have yet developed strategies to narrow the achievement gap. The purpose of selecting educators who had been teaching for more than two years was to recruit more educators with experience and gain more information

on strategies that have been used over time. Since third through fifth-grade students are assessed using a state standardized assessment, I excluded K–2 educators in this study.

I considered using Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) critical race theory (CRT) as the conceptual framework because it focused on race in education. CRT in education provides educational stakeholders with race awareness to understand educational inequality and structural racism. CRT also seeks to find solutions that lead to greater change. Landson-Billings (2010) mentioned that CRT acknowledges that racism is embedded in U.S. society and suggested that race affects education in many ways, such as curriculum design, instruction, assessment, and school funding (Ladson-Billings, 2010). I decided not to explore this theory because I wanted to focus more on cultural relevancy in the classroom and how educators use this to successfully educate African American students. Landson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy was more suitable for this study.

Transferability was strengthened by providing broad descriptions of the data and contexts. I provided specific information on how the study was carried out as well as the sample population, setting, sample size, inclusion criteria, sampling strategy, demographic characteristics, interview protocol, and excerpts from the interview. This information provides the reader with circumstantial factors to examine when assessing the study's design and findings for transferability to their own locale.

Limitations

I identified multiple limitations to this basic qualitative study. The first limitation was the small sample size of participants. This study included 11 educators at an

elementary school located in the southeastern region of the United States. This small number of participants only gave a small-scale view of educators' perspectives on strategies that have been used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students. Due to this, the findings of this study may not be universal to other settings. This limitation was addressed by ensuring strong transferability through a broad description of the research design, data, and contexts.

The second limitation was that I am a part of the same cultural background as the students of interest in this study. I am also an educator myself. These factors could have caused me to have indifferent feelings about educators' perspectives on strategies that have aided in African American students' success. I worked to make sure that my opinions did not get in the way of the actual responses from the participants of this study to have valid information from each participant. I kept a reflective journal to record any potential biases.

Another limitation was that the world was experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic throughout this study (see Arquilla & Guzdial, 2020; Bâcă, 2020). This limitation prevented me from being able to visit the school site where I was conducting the study. This limitation was addressed by conducting interviews over the phone or via Zoom.

Significance

There is a gap in practice concerning the strategies educators use to narrow the achievement gap for African American elementary students in mathematics and English language arts. This study focused on this gap in practice and may provide educators' perspectives on the strategies used to help African American elementary students

achieve. Educators may benefit from this study because they may apply these strategies in their classrooms to help narrow the achievement gap for their African American students. Educational stakeholders may also benefit from this study because they may use this information to support African American student achievement by developing training or professional development opportunities for teachers to learn about these strategies. This study may lead to a positive social change by assisting educators with strategies to help African American students succeed in mathematics and English language arts at the same level as their peers.

Summary

This basic qualitative study focused on exploring educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts at an elementary school located in the southeastern region of the United States. The achievement gap is a problem in education and has been for some time; however, some schools have found ways to narrow this gap so that all students are successful. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Landson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy. In Chapter 1, I explain the key concepts and terms that may have various meanings. The assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance were provided. In Chapter 2, I will explain the literature review strategy, describe the conceptual framework, and analyze the literature connected to the key concepts in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the United States, one problem in education is the continued academic achievement gap between African American and European American students in mathematics and English language arts (Hanushek et al., 2019). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts in a school located in the southeastern region of the United States. The achievement gap of African American students has been present for many years (Hanushek et al., 2019). There has been some progress in narrowing the achievement gap, but the gap for African American students still remains (Rust, 2016).

In Chapter 2, I review the current literature on the achievement gap of African American students. The following key concepts are explored: culturally relevant pedagogy, the historical roots of the achievement gap, current reasons for the African American achievement gap, educators' role in the achievement gap, educators' perspectives on African American achievement, the African American achievement gap in mathematics, the African American achievement gap in English language arts, the negative impacts of the achievement gap, the importance of mathematics achievement, and the importance of English language arts achievement.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted this literature review to explore factors of the African American achievement gap. Peer-reviewed articles were reviewed from two major educational

databases: EBSCOhost and ERIC. The key search terms used were: *culturally relevant*

pedagogy, African American achievement gap, causes of the achievement gap, educators'

perspectives on African American achievement, history of the African American

achievement gap, African American achievement gap in mathematics, African American

achievement gap in English language arts, negative impacts of the achievement gap,

importance of mathematics achievement, and *importance of English language arts*

achievement. The articles reviewed were published between 2016 and 2020 with a few

older sources that provided details related to the history of the achievement gap.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally

relevant pedagogy. The culturally relevant pedagogy is used to explain ways that cultural

awareness in the classroom can help with the achievement of African American students.

This theory was designed from the perspective of successful educators of African

American students and proposed that African American students must experience

academic success, develop or maintain cultural competence, and develop critical

consciousness to challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings,

1995). Ladson-Billings suggested that educators of African American students must

demand academic excellence and get students to choose academic excellence so that

African American students can thrive. It is also essential for educators of African

American students to utilize culture as a tool for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

According to the culturally relevant pedagogy, educators must teach their students to

develop a consciousness to critique the cultural norms that produce and maintain social

inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Educators are encouraged to help students critically

engage in the world and others through the culturally relevant pedagogy. By using this

pedagogy, educators should succeed in helping their African American students achieve

(Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (1995) recommended that

teachers focus on the whole child rather than just academics. Milner (2011) opined that

teachers should be prepared to do more than teach subject matter and focus on building

meaningful relationships with their students. Bryan et al. (2018) further suggested that as

teachers plan lessons, they must understand how the concepts that are taught apply to the

lives of their students. Borrero et al. (2018) explained that with culturally relevant

pedagogy, teachers must have classroom environments that provide a space for all

student voices to be valued and move away from traditional teaching methods. In the

culturally relevant pedagogy, students must feel safe and that their own backgrounds and

cultural experiences are valued and allowed to thrive (McCarther & Davis 2017). Hodge

and Collins (2019) recommended that teachers strive to effectively use the culturally

relevant pedagogy to help foster students' educational attainment in urban environments.

The assertions of these researchers are significant because they provide teachers with

strategies to help implement the culturally relevant pedagogy.

The culturally relevant pedagogy motivates teachers to take a deeper look at their

classroom practices to help better teach African American students. Seriki and Brown

(2017) suggested that culturally relevant pedagogy allows teachers to examine and

modify their classroom practices to effectively teach all children, particularly students of

color. Seriki and Brown stated that culturally relevant pedagogy relies on teachers having conceptions of self and others, connectedness with all their students, and a critical view of the conception of knowledge. The culturally relevant pedagogy is distinguishable based on the principles of teaching the whole child, equity and excellence, identity and achievement, developmental appropriateness, and student-teacher relationships (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Durden (2008) affirmed that to truly improve educational outcomes and reverse the historically low performance of diverse students, schools must view learning through the child's eyes. Durden asserted that as learners, children attempt to make sense of their world by constructing and understanding events by using prior knowledge, past experiences, and cultural references. The claims of Brown-Jeffy and Cooper, Durden, and Seriki and Brown are significant because they explain that culturally relevant teaching involves viewing learning through the eyes of students. The culturally relevant pedagogy is used to help teachers create classrooms and instruction suitable and culturally relevant for learners.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Historical Roots of the African American Achievement Gap

The African American academic achievement gap derives from years of bondage, oppression, and inequality for African Americans (Childs, 2017; Davis, 2008; Levine & Levine, 2014). Davis (2008) suggested that corruptive historical influences are the central cause of the persistent academic achievement gap between African American children and their counterparts. During slavery, African Americans were considered inferior. They were not allowed to be educated, and since there was no formal schooling for slaves,

slaves had to learn during their playtime with their slave masters' children (Levine & Levine, 2014). Childs (2017) explained that slave masters would spell words that they did not want slaves to know, and African Americans would then memorize the words and meet up with literate slaves to recite them and learn what the words meant. Davis described that African American culture was also established where European Americans ingrained within African Americans the belief that they were lesser humans intellectually than European Americans. African Americans were also brutally punished for learning how to read or write (Davis, 2008). These researchers' assertions show that African Americans were at a disadvantage with education long before receiving the right to be educated formally. The achievement gap for African American students has roots dating back to a time before formal education for African Americans.

Some African Americans had the ability to read and write during the time of slavery, but European Americans despised this. Levine and Levine (2014) discussed that free African Americans wrote about their slavery experiences, which demonstrated that African Americans could learn; however, it also created a backlash against the education of slaves, including basic literacy. Levine and Levine's claim shows that when free African American people tried to educate themselves or their children, they received backlash that left some African Americans fearful of being educated due to the retaliation they would receive and contributing to the gap in achievement for African Americans early on.

When formal schooling began for African American students, inequities were present. After slavery, separate schools for African American and European American

students were usually unequal in quality in the North and the South (Levine & Levine, 2014). African American schools were overcrowded, poorly built, and minimally equipped (Butchart, 2010). Students were given second-hand textbooks discarded by European American schools (Levine & Levine, 2014). Bauman (1998) explained that the most critical barrier that faced African American students was the poor conditions of African American schools. European American schools received more resources, while African American schools were underfunded (Butchart, 2010). Walker and Archung (2003) reported that among European American southerners and European American northern philanthropists, the belief was that African Americans needed a second-class education to prepare them for the second-class jobs they would have in society. The assertions of Bauman, Butchart, Levine and Levine, and Walker and Archung work together to show that when African American students were allowed the opportunity to receive a formal education, it was not equal compared to the education of European American students. African American students were at a disadvantage in their education due to poor school buildings and resources. For these reasons, African American students were obstructed early in their journey to receiving a quality education.

In the 19th century, the achievement gap label for African American students was not yet present. Woodson and Love (2019) stated that near the close of the 19th century, the achievement gap did not exist. In the 1860s and 1870s, African American education flourished even during tough times, such as the Jim Crow era (Butchart, 2010). African American children who secured access to schooling performed as well as or better than European American students on the same tests; however, their success was heavily

penalized (Woodson & Love, 2019). In the 1890s, violence against African American

communities further slowed the growth of the African American education infrastructure

(Woodson & Love, 2019). White supremacy also shaped African American education,

and White supremacists used systematic, organized, and relentless terrorism to tear down

the dream of African American education (Butchart, 2010). By the late 1960s, the

difference in test scores among African American and European American students was

labeled the achievement gap, according to the NAEP (Woodson & Love, 2019). The fact

that the achievement gap label was not yet present and African Americans were

intimidated or killed for trying to learn demonstrates that hostility and many other factors

contributed to the gap in African American achievement early on (Butchart, 2010;

Woodson & Love, 2019). It is evident that the African American achievement gap has

deep and historical roots.

Current Reasons for the African American Achievement Gap

Poverty is one current reason for the African American achievement gap. African

American students start off far behind their European American peers because many lack

access or opportunity to resources that would enrich their learning (Hung et al., 2020).

Hung et al. (2020) disclosed that African American family earnings are also lower on

average than European American households' earnings. Yeh (2019) concurred that

differences in income and wealth are linked with differences in educational opportunities,

and these differences in opportunities are associated with differences in achievement. The

achievement gap is rising between low- and high-income students and along racial lines

(Hung et al., 2020). Blandin (2017) found that parents from lower socioeconomic

backgrounds were less inclined to participate in school-based parental involvement, which is vital for student achievement. These assertions are significant because they show that many African American students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and are at a disadvantage due to the lack of opportunities and resources available, which places African American students behind in their education compared to their peers.

Low-income, African American students often experience a lack of access to high-quality schools and educational resources. Yeh (2019) declared that low-income, African American children live in homes with fewer books, have fewer books available in the school and classroom library, and live farther from public libraries than children raised by middle- and upper-income families. Hung et al. (2020) affirmed that segregation, which is defined as areas where African American students attend higher poverty schools than European American students, results in more significant achievement gaps. Yeh explained that low-income African American students tend to experience lower-quality schools and lower-quality teachers than their European American peers due to low wealth limiting the price of the homes that African American families can afford. Valant and Neward (2016) explained that most African American students attend schools where most of the students are African American. These schools typically have fewer resources than schools where most students are European American, including teachers with less experience. Based on the assertions of these researchers, African American students who live in lower-income families are at a disadvantage due to where they live, which affects their achievement. They may live in neighborhoods where schools are not high quality, and their homes may lack the necessary resources to

aid in their education. Low income and wealth are present causes of the achievement gap of African American students.

Negative classroom behavior and discipline are also current contributors to the achievement gap for African American students. African American students are disproportionately economically disadvantaged, and economic-disadvantaged students are overrepresented in adverse discipline outcomes (Goplan, 2019). Pearman II et al. (2019) asserted that exclusionary discipline negatively impacts achievement, which includes missing out on instructional time, developing negative academic self-concepts, placement in lower-tracked courses and dropping out of school. School suspension hinders academic growth and contributes to racial disparities in achievement (Goplan & Nelson 2019; Mizel et al. 2016). Goplan and Nelson (2019) asserted that students of color disproportionately experience adverse disciplinary actions in school, such as in and out of school suspensions and expulsions. African American students might use more emotive communicational styles with louder voices, which may be misinterpreted as noncompliance, and this difference may result in the disproportionality (Goplan & Nelson, 2019). These researchers' claims show that African American students are disproportionately subject to adverse disciplinary action that causes African American students to miss school and suffer a loss of learning. These researchers also showed that there might be a disconnect between teachers and the cultural behaviors of African American students.

Educators' Role in the Achievement Gap

Educators' expectations play a role in the achievement gap of African American students. Scott et al. (2019) suggested that some teachers have lower expectations for students in low-income schools where African American students are generally overrepresented. Higher qualified teachers tend to teach in more advantaged schools. Some teachers have been shown to have differential expectations for students of different racial-ethnic groups even when the previous achievement of these students was equivalent (Scheneka et al., 2017). Scott et al. suggested that teachers view students differently based on race, with Asian students typically viewed more positively and African American students less positively by European American teachers. Scheneka et al. (2017) called attention to the point that teachers who have higher expectations for students may give their students more opportunities to answer questions during class or further press the student to explain their thinking, while a teacher who has low expectations for a student may not give that student enough time to respond to a question or may not even call on that student in the first place, making the student miss a key learning opportunity. The researchers' claims are significant because they show that teacher expectations for African American students can aid or impair their educational journey. When teachers have low expectations for their African American students, they may not challenge them or give them the same learning opportunities. Low teacher expectations for African American students contribute to the academic achievement gap.

The lack of African American educators has contributed to the achievement gap of African American students. Moore et al. (2017) suggested that another contributing

factor to the achievement gap is that fewer people of color seek jobs in education which remains a predominantly European American field. Banerjee (2018) suggested that African American teachers are more likely to understand their African American students' social and cultural words and are more likely to be accurate in interpreting their behavior in the classroom. Yarnell and Bohrnsted (2018) explained that teachers who do not share the demographic traits of their students on average hold lower expectations for student performance which has been shown for African American students specifically. Moore et al. stated that some European American teachers perceive African American students differently from European American students. Banerjee (2018) expressed that more excellent teacher representation was associated with improved reading and math scores for students of color and higher percentages of African American students continuing to rigorous math courses. When students are assigned to one demographically mismatched and one same-race teacher, the demographically mismatched teacher is more likely to perceive the student as disruptive, inattentive, and less likely to complete their work than a teacher of the same race as the student (Greshenson, 2016). Childs (2019) explained that African American teachers provide culturally based instruction, higher expectations and positively impact the achievement and retention of African American students. The researchers' claims show that when African American educators teach African American students, many of these students flourish due to their teacher's relatability. African American teachers can relate to African American students and understand their cultural communication styles. The lack of African American teachers in the field of education has contributed to the achievement gap.

Educators' Perspectives on African American Achievement

Educators' perspectives and attitudes are critical and play a massive role in the achievement gap of African American students. Flint et al. (2019) explained that negative assumptions about students' skills, abilities, competencies, and motivation directly affect the way teachers teach urban and African American students. Ramsay (2020) affirmed that deficit perspectives could cause educators to have lower expectations for historically marginalized culturally diverse students. Redding (2019) explained that teachers' perspectives of their students are an essential precursor to a range of educational opportunities and assignments to school services such as special education and gifted programs. Zimmerman (2018) declared that research consistently finds that European American teachers often rate African American students' behaviors and academic abilities more negatively than European American students. Based on the claims of these researchers, teachers who have negative assumptions about African American students will teach African American students differently due to their opposing beliefs. These teachers may also hold lower expectations for African American students. The attitudes and perspectives of teachers are essential because negative perspectives can affect the achievement of African American students.

A lack of cultural awareness of African American students can contribute to teachers having negative perspectives. Ramsay (2020) explained that teachers' views and practices stemming from cultural incongruity could cause teachers to treat African American students as invisible and lead to eventually missed opportunities that would otherwise highlight student contributions. Flint et al. (2019) found in their study that

European American teachers from middle-class backgrounds initially believed that low-income, urban, African American students in their classrooms were generally incapable of high academic achievement and success. Bazemore-Bertrand and Handsfield (2019) asserted that even teachers who enter the profession often report feeling unprepared in their ability to teach in low-income and poor schools due to lack of cultural awareness. Based on the researchers' assertions, cultural differences between teachers and students may cause teachers to have negative perspectives of their students, particularly if their students' cultural background does not mimic their own. Teachers' unknowingness about the culture of African American students has aided in the achievement gap.

Teachers who hold a positive perspective about teaching African American students obtain more success with their students. Youn (2016) suggested that children with teachers who hold a high sense of responsibility and positive perspectives are more likely to perform better than their expected achievement. Ramsay (2020) declared that a positive perspective is critical because teachers' racial and cultural preconceptions about students not only impact their approach to teaching and learning but may create anxiety in students, affect teacher curricular planning choices, influence the extent to which students receive punitive consequences for school infractions, and their ability to teach. Youn cautioned that higher expectations and beliefs about academically disadvantaged children could be an essential educational resource in reducing the disparity of learning growth and increasing the chance for initially disadvantaged children to overcome their deficits. The claims of these researchers explain that positive perspectives of African American students aid in success in the classroom. Teachers' perspectives on educating

African American children are essential because they can help students succeed or contribute to the achievement gap.

African American Achievement Gap in Mathematics

Poverty is a contributing factor to the achievement gap in mathematics for African American students. Davenport and Slate (2019) suggested that poverty is negatively related to student mathematics performance, and low-income students who are often African American are not given the same opportunities to learn mathematics as other students. Davis and Farran (2018) affirmed that young children of color attending urban schools in low-income areas have fewer opportunities to master math knowledge. Davis and Farran further explained that urban schools in low-income areas also lack the rigorous math curricula or high-quality math instruction necessary to engage children in deep math learning. African American students are also assigned to remedial math courses at a higher rate than their European American peers (Davis & Farran, 2018). Davenport and Slate declared that as African American poverty levels increase, student mathematics performance decreases, and students who qualify for the free lunch programs have the poorest mathematics performance. The researchers' claims are significant because it shows that many African American students in poverty or in low-income schools may not receive high-quality math instruction like others. Poverty plays a role in the achievement gap in mathematics for African American students.

The expectations and attitudes of students, parents, and teachers affect achievement in mathematics for African American students. Yansiko (2016) explained that low expectations cause many teachers to engage their students in educational

experiences that require little higher-order thinking, discussion, or sense-making through problem-solving. Parks and Bridges-Rhodes (2018) mentioned that middle-class teachers might also have deficit understandings of the kind of math supports that working-class families need to support their children. Davis and Farran (2018) explained that lowered expectations from teachers can lead to children being denied access to rigorous math curricula and can cause students to develop a negative attitude toward their abilities to do the math. Davis and Farran further stated that young children's attitudes toward math are also a powerful predictor of their achievement. Guglielmi and Brekke (2017) affirmed that parental expectations are also crucial for African American students. Research has shown a tendency for teachers to hold low expectations for economically disadvantaged students, so parents' expectations are essential. The researchers' claims are important because expectations of teachers, parents, and even students can positively or negatively impact math achievement for African American students. Expectations and attitudes of students, parents, and teachers have contributed to the achievement gap in mathematics.

The family structure of some African American students may also affect achievement in mathematics. Lin et al. (2019) suggested that African American youth develop in a wide range of family structures, with only about 35% being raised in two-parent households. Lin et al. explained that family cohesion positively predicted math outcomes and logic and reasoning skills, while family flexibility was negatively associated with logic and reasoning. Lin et al. assertions are vital because it explains how the family structure for African American students may play a role in mathematics

achievement. Students who come from two-parent households may have better math

outcomes than students who come from a more flexible family dynamic.

The gap in mathematics achievement is present in all levels of mathematics for

African American students. Minor (2016) asserted that gaps continued to exist with

African American students even in advanced mathematics. Minor also found that the gap

in advanced mathematics for African American students was more extensive than

students taking lower-level courses. African American advanced students were

significantly less likely to be proficient in math skills such as low-level mathematics

concepts and the use of multiple steps to solve problems compared to European

American advanced mathematics students (Minor, 2016). Based on the claims of Minor,

African American students are typically at a disadvantage in mathematics, whether they

are in lower-level math courses or advanced or gifted level math courses. The

achievement gap for African American students exists in all levels of mathematics.

African American Achievement Gap in English Language Arts

African American students, on average, have a lower rate of reading proficiency

than other races. Dexter et al. (2018) stated that although there have been improvements

in reading proficiency of African American children over the past decade, African

American children still have the lowest rates of early reading proficiency of any ethnic

group in the United States. Washington et al. (2019) affirmed that the language and

reading gaps between African American and European American boys are reportedly

evident as young as the toddler age for language and preschool age for reading.

Washington et al. reported a reading gap between African American and European

American boys, with African American boys performing more poorly on reading assessments. The researchers' claims show that African American students have the lowest reading proficiency, and this starts as early as the toddler age. African American students are at a disadvantage early in reading and literacy.

Poverty plays a significant role in reading achievement for African American students. Short (2016) declared that children's literacy and language difficulties in the classroom can be attributed to the discrepancy between home literacy experiences and school literacy experiences. Compton-Lilly and Delbridge (2019) affirmed that poverty is a real problem that significantly affects children's literacy learning. Poor children face challenges that affect school performance and literacy learning, including nutritional needs, access to health care, living in dangerous neighborhoods, and a lack of resources to support literacy learning (Compton-Lilly & Delbridge, 2019). Sawyer et al. (2016) discussed that low socioeconomic families read less frequently, own fewer books, ask fewer questions of their children and talk less with their children than higher socioeconomic families. Beach et al. (2018) expressed that although there may be differences in instruction and family support for literacy during the school year, the significant difference is the access to resources and support for students in poverty during the summer months when they are not in school. Based on the researchers' claims, poverty affects the home and school literacy experience because it affects access to resources necessary to support literacy. Poverty among African American students is a contributing factor to low achievement in reading.

Teachers can contribute to the success of African American students' literacy development. Compton and Delbridge (2019) expressed that teachers can play a significant role in students' lives and literacy experiences, especially if teachers become better informed and increasingly responsive to the challenges faced by families. Learning about the experiences of African American students and having outreach sessions that take place in community spaces rather than schools can contribute to literacy development (Compton & Delbridge, 2019). Short (2016) suggested incorporating social and cultural contexts that highlight diversity in the classroom can enhance literacy learning. Robinson (2020) claimed that African American students could become active participants when they are provided the opportunity to read realistic and authentic books or graphic novels that mirror their lived experiences. The researchers' assertions are significant because they explain how teachers can contribute to literacy development in African American students. Teachers can aid in promoting African American students' success in literacy.

Negative Impacts of the Achievement Gap

The academic achievement gap can have many negative impacts on African American students' future outcomes. Keith (2018) asserted that due to the achievement gap, students might have a much more difficult time securing a job and risk living in poverty, spending time in jail, or have a shorter life span. According to Michelmore and Dynarski (2017), test scores can be an early predictor of educational attainment and income in adulthood. Michelmore and Dynarski further stated that a one standard deviation difference in test scores in grade school corresponds to a 5%-point difference in

college attendance and a 9% difference in earnings by age 28. Kevelson (2019) declared

that the achievement gap is linked to income gaps between races and has been associated

with differences in employment opportunities, earnings, and educational opportunities.

The African American and European American achievement gap is one strand of social

stratification that has been robust despite the amount of political rhetoric surrounding it

(Sperling & Kuhn, 2016). Based on the researchers' assertions, the achievement gap

contributes to African American students' future outcomes such as life expectancy,

possible jail time, earnings, educational attainment, and poverty. The achievement gap

can have negative impacts on African American students.

  The achievement gap is a problem not only for African American students and

their families and communities, but it affects the well-being of the entire country

(Bowman et al., 2018). Mocombe (2018) affirmed that the African American and

European American achievement gap has contributed to young African American

students desiring to seek economic gain from sports or the entertainment industry over

careers such as scientists, engineers, mathematicians, doctors, lawyers, and teachers.

Monroe (2016) reviewed a study that found a connection between the achievement gap

and the juvenile justice system. Bowman et al. (2018) disclosed that due to the academic

achievement gap, some African American students progress through school, but they do

not excel and are less often enrolled in honors courses in high school or accepted into

competitive four-year colleges. The achievement gap often results in African Americans

earning lower incomes and being overrepresented among individuals living below the

federal poverty line (Kevelson, 2019). According to the researchers' assertions, the

achievement gap is a problem and has contributed to African American students seeking success through sports and entertainment. It has also contributed to pathways to the juvenile justice system and progressing through school but not succeeding. Lastly, it has contributed to lower incomes and poverty. The achievement gap is a problem for the United States and has negatively impacted African American students.

Importance of Mathematics Achievement

Mathematics achievement predicts students' future outcomes throughout school and life. Demir-Lira (2020) declared that success in mathematics predicts later well-being, satisfaction with life, health, wages, employment, and longevity. Hollingsworth and Knight-Mckenna (2018) asserted that students' math comprehension trajectories tend to endure and predict later academic achievement. Students who struggle with basic math concepts early in school are much less likely than their high-achieving peers to meet grade-level expectations later (Nelson et al., 2016). Silver et al. (2021) disclosed that mathematics achievement is associated with later math achievement and outcomes, including educational attainment, career choice, the likelihood of full-time employment, income, and health and financial decision making. Based upon the assertions of the researchers, mathematics achievement is vital for students because it predicts their future outcomes in education and life. Mathematics achievement can indicate a students' future success throughout their educational journey and their income and wealth.

Mathematics achievement is significant because math skills are necessary for many careers and are needed to further education. Douglas and Salzman (2020) revealed that mathematics is increasingly required in the workplace to design, develop, and

manufacture products. Griffiths et al. (2020) declared that achievement in mathematics is essential because math-related fields comprise the top 30 occupations anticipated to grow the fastest by 2026 in the United States. Achievement in mathematics is crucial because the demand for mathematics in the workforce in the United States often goes unmet, and racial or ethnic minorities are largely underrepresented in these fields (Seo et al., 2019). Dang and Nylund-Gibson (2017) affirmed that the United States faces an exponentially high demand for mathematics-related professionals. Douglas and Salzman further expressed that mathematics is often a key metric for assessing education performance and is used across many colleges to select students for acceptance. Mathematics is central to other academic disciplines such as engineering, computer science, and social science (Douglas & Salzman, 2020). The assertions of the researchers show that achievement in mathematics is essential because many careers utilize math skills. Mathematics achievement also affects further education in the future for students. Mathematics is vital in society and necessary for educational attainment.

Early math proficiency is important. Moffett and Eaton (2019) asserted that children behind in mathematics often struggle to catch up. A lack of early math knowledge can portend future difficulties (Hollingsworth & Knight-McKenna, 2018). Vogt et al. (2018) expressed that children with low mathematical competencies in Kindergarten are likely to experience difficulties with math throughout their school years. Vogt et al. further expressed that mathematical competencies in Kindergarten are highly relevant for learning outcomes in school. Mathematical proficiency in the early years lays an important foundation upon which later learning is built (Moffett & Eaton, 2019).

Moffett and Eaton stated that children who learn to think mathematically and learn to express their thoughts in mathematical terms during the preschool years are better prepared to learn formal math concepts upon school entry. The researchers' assertions show that proficiency in mathematics early on is important to students' future success in math. Math proficiency in the early years is important and is the foundation for a students' mathematical success throughout their educational journey.

Importance of English Language Arts Achievement

Early achievement in English language arts is important to a student's success in school and life. Huang and Chan (2018) asserted that reading comprehension is one of the most important educational objectives for students in elementary school because it builds a solid foundation for learning and meaningful participation in society. Gentilini and Greer (2020) affirmed that early reading abilities strongly predict later reading achievement and overall academic performance. Proficiency in reading is essential for students' success in every academic subject and a critical skill for lifelong learning (Brown et al., 2018). Toste et al. (2020) argued that literacy is related to education and economic growth and public health. Muhid et al. (2020) declared that reading is a receptive skill that plays a very significant role in students' learning process. The researchers' assertions are significant because they explain how achievement in English language arts is important for students' success throughout school and beyond school. It is important that students achieve in English language arts to be successful in their educational journey and be prepared for their future lives.

Students may face many issues when they are not achieving in the area of English language arts. Vaknin-Nusbaum et al. (2018) suggested that less proficient young readers usually continue to struggle with reading in future graders. Brown et al. (2018) affirmed that children who struggle with reading are more likely to drop out of school and be less prepared for higher education and career opportunities. Toste et al. (2020) asserted that there is strong evidence that students who struggle with reading are at risk for continuing to experience difficulties throughout their school years and beyond. Huang and Chen (2018) expressed that students who struggle with comprehension struggle with what they have read or have difficulty identifying information, making inferences, and examining arguments from texts they read. Gentilini and Green (2020) declared that poor readers in third grade are also classified as poor readers in high school and demonstrate higher retention and more behavioral and social problems in successive grades. These assertions are significant because they explain how underachieving in English language arts can lead to students struggling in future grades or dropping out of school. Achieving in English language arts is important because underachieving can lead to many problems throughout their educational journey.

Writing achievement, a component of English language arts, is very important for students' future success. Children's writing skills are critical to their overall literacy development (Zhang & Quinn, 2018). Zumbrunn (2016) asserted that writing is not only essential to learning and communication but also to future success. Attiyat (2019) asserted that writing is one of the most crucial skills that learners should aim to develop. Early writing skills can contribute to later achievement in literacy (Zhang & Quinn,

2018). Bingham et al. (2018) declared that children in preschool develop writing skills related to later reading and writing achievement. These assertions are critical because they show that writing is critical for students' literacy development and future success. Writing achievement is an important component of English language arts.

Achieving grammar skills is also an important component of English language arts. Yaccob and Yunus (2019) affirmed that the importance of grammar cannot be ignored as it is essential, and learners need to master it to create meaningful sentences. Daffern et al. (2017) stated that being able to write efficiently with correct spelling, grammar and punctuation remains a critical part of being a literate writer. Yaccob and Yunus described grammar as the study of words operating together to form meaningful sentences. These assertions are significant because they show that achieving in writing is important because it helps students create meaningful sentences and is also important for becoming a literate writer. Grammar achievement is an important component of English language arts.

Summary and Conclusions

After reviewing previous and current literature on Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy, I understood the purpose of the pedagogy. The culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on cultural awareness in the classroom and how this can aid in African American student achievement. This pedagogy suggests that teachers bring meaning to their lessons so that African American students can see how their lives are applied in what they are learning. It encourages teachers to connect children's school experiences with their cultural reality (Durden, 2008). This pedagogy also focuses on

teaching the whole child and not just teaching academics. Teachers should be prepared to do more than teach subject matter such as science, language arts, social studies, and mathematics (Milner, 2011). The culturally relevant pedagogy states that African American students should feel like their culture is valued and that their voices are heard in the classroom. They should feel safe in their classroom environment. African American students must feel safe and that their background and cultural experiences are honored and allowed to flourish (McCarther & Davis, 2017). The culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on the importance of teachers building meaningful relationships with their students to promote academic achievement. This pedagogy also focuses on teachers taking a deeper look at their classroom practices to help African American students achieve.

After reviewing the previous and current literature on the African American achievement gap, much knowledge was acquired. The African American achievement gap is believed to be derived from slavery times. African American slaves were not allowed to be educated, and they were also seen as inferior. African American culture was founded where European Americans instilled in African Americans that they were inferior humans intellectually (Davis, 2008). If they tried to learn to read or acquire knowledge, they were severely punished. When formal education finally became available for African Americans, there was inequity between African American and European American schools. These inequities included the resources such as books and even the school buildings that they received education in. Black schools were usually unequal in quality (Levine & Levine, 2014). There was also hostility and violence

towards African American communities because they desired an education. This hostility interrupted the African American educational dream.

Current literature suggests that some of the current reasons the African American achievement gap still exists are poverty and discipline in the classroom. African American students experience poverty more than European American students. Poverty leads to differences in opportunities and resources for African American students that aid in academic achievement. African American incomes and wealth are lower, on average compared to European American households, which is associated with differences in opportunities and differences in achievement (Yeh, 2019). Poverty also leads to African American students not having access to high-quality schools. African American students are also disproportionately disciplined. This disproportionality has contributed to African American students missing school and vital instructional time that contributes to achievement. Children who experience punitive disciplinary actions in school exhibit lower academic achievement on average (Goplan & Nelson 2019).

Teachers play a role in the achievement gap of African American students. The expectations teachers have of their African American students may affect students' learning (Scheneka et al., 2017). The current literature shows that when teachers have low expectations of their African American students, it contributes to their achievement in the classroom. Also, a lack of African American educators in education contributes to the African American achievement gap. African American teachers oftentimes understand African American students' social and cultural norms and can relate to them.

African American teachers may teach in a style oriented toward African American students' cultural norms (Yarnell & Bohrnsted, 2018).

Teachers' perspectives on African American students' achievement are critical because positive perspectives aid in the achievement of African American students. Negative perspectives contribute to the gap in achievement and affect how teachers teach African American students. Negative assumptions about African American students' skills, abilities, competencies, and motivation directly affect the way teachers teach these students (Flint et al., 2019). Teachers' lack of cultural awareness of African American students can contribute to negative perspectives. Teachers' cultural incongruity can cause teachers to treat African American students as invisible and lead to eventually missed opportunities that would otherwise highlight student contributions (Ramsay, 2020).

There are many reasons for the African American achievement gap in mathematics and English language arts. Recent literature shows that gap in mathematics is due to poverty, teacher expectations, and family structure. As poverty levels increase, student mathematics performance decreases (Davenport & Slate, 2019). Lowered expectations can lead to African American students being denied access to rigorous math curricula (Davis & Farran, 2018). Family cohesion predicts math outcomes, whereas family flexibility is negatively associated with math outcomes (Lin et al., 2019). The leading cause of the gap in English language arts is poverty. Poor children face challenges that affect literacy learning such as lack of resources that support literacy learning (Compton-Lilly & Delbridge, 2019).

The achievement gap has many negative impacts on African American students. These negative impacts include influences on their future outcomes such as careers, income, and educational attainment. Students not succeeding in school may have a much more difficult time securing a job, thereby running the risk of living in poverty, spending time in jail, and having shorter life spans (Keith, 2018). Achievement in mathematics and English language arts is vital. Mathematics achievement predicts future outcomes, is necessary for careers and helps students have a successful educational journey. Succeeding in mathematics predicts later well-being, satisfaction with life, health, wages, employment, and longevity (Demir-Lira, 2020). English language arts achievement is essential because it also helps with students' future outcomes in life. Proficiency in reading is essential for students' success in every academic subject and a critical skill for lifelong learning (Brown et al., 2018).

In Chapter 3, I will provide details of the methodology applied to this study. This encompassed the research design and rationale. I will also include details about the role of the researcher. I will further focus on the elements of the methodology. This includes participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data analysis, data collection plan, and data analysis plan. I will also explain the trustworthiness of this study. This established the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this study. Lastly, I will include details on the ethical procedures and steps to protect the participants.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts in a school located in the southeastern region of the United States. Exploring this topic may help other educators narrow the achievement gap in their schools by using the strategies collected in the current study in their school setting. In Chapter 3, I detail the research method, research design, rationale, and role of the researcher in the study. The methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures for this study are also described.

Research Design and Rationale

This basic qualitative study addressed the following research question:

What are third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts?

Willig and Rogers (2017) affirmed that research questions and data collection might develop as the study proceeds, but most studies begin with a set of research questions, a research design, and a strategy for data collection and analysis. I chose a basic qualitative research design for this study. I chose this approach because it allows researchers to use methods that help them understand social or cultural phenomena. Taylor et al. (2016) expressed that qualitative researchers are concerned with the meaning people attach to things in their lives. Qualitative researchers are interested in knowing

how people understand and experience their world at a particular point in time and in a particular context (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Holloway (2017) affirmed that researchers use qualitative approaches to explore people's behaviors, feelings, and experiences and what lies at the core of their lives. The qualitative approach was the most suitable method for this study because it matches the research question and the goal of the study, which is to understand elementary educators' perspectives on the strategies used to narrow the achievement gap.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that basic qualitative studies are the most common form of qualitative research found in education. In this design, data are gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The data analysis involves recognizing recurring patterns that characterize the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The final analysis of a basic qualitative research design is the researcher's interpretations of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

The qualitative research interview produces information about research participants' beliefs, perspectives, opinions, and experiences (Roulston, 2019). I used semistructured telephone and Zoom interviews because they allowed me to acquire contextual data on educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap. The world was experiencing a global pandemic at the time of the study (Arquilla & Guzdial, 2020; Bâcă, 2020), so I conducted this study by telephone and Zoom interviews to avoid face-to-face interactions.

I contemplated using other research approaches and designs before adopting the basic qualitative research design. I decided not to use the quantitative method because,

according to Urban and Van Eeden-Moorefield (2018), the quantitative approach deals with numbers. The goal of this study was to gather elementary educators' perspectives on strategies that have narrowed the achievement gap for African American students so, the quantitative design was not an appropriate method. I contemplated conducting a multiple case study design for this study as well. Cohen et al. (2018) explained that multiple case studies are groups of studies that are undertaken to gain a more general picture of a phenomenon. A multiple case study allows replication for the researcher and allows the researcher to explore multiple cases so that all the evidence and data does not stem from one case (Cohen et al., 2018). After consideration, I concluded that a multiple case study design would not be the most suitable because I desired to focus on one setting rather than multiple settings in this study. Observations would have also been difficult to conduct due to many classrooms being virtual because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another qualitative research design that I considered using was phenomenology. Usher and Jackson (2017) asserted that phenomenology is the study of lived experiences within a particular group. This design focuses on participants who have first-hand knowledge of an event, experience, or situation. I chose not to use the phenomenological design because I was seeking knowledge of strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement rather than an event that had occurred with educators.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative studies take researchers into the field for varied interactions with participants, and the researchers have to make sense and meaning of what is learned (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). As the researcher, I was responsible for conducting this study.

I collected data from participants via Zoom and telephone calls depending on their preference. An interview protocol was used to guide the interviews and gather the data. During the interviews, I created conditions that helped promote communication by ensuring that the questions were open-ended and allowed participants to provide any additional information they would like towards the end of the interview. I also listened and clarified as the participants engaged in the interview process. After the interviews were completed, the data were coded and analyzed to answer the research question.

As an African American, I identified with the culture of the students being discussed. I also taught in the elementary school setting for five years. Due to my background and experience, there was potential for bias. I also had years of experience working in a school district where an achievement gap was present. These experiences contributed to my interest in studying elementary educators' perspectives on strategies that have helped narrow the gap. I conducted this study at a school where there were no significant gaps in achievement among African American and European American students. I managed potential researcher biases by keeping a reflective journal and field notes to document my thoughts and feelings and the decisions made throughout the study.

Methodology

Participant Selection

I used purposeful and snowball sampling to select 11 educators with more than two years of teaching experience in third through fifth grade. I chose this criterion because I believed that these educators would have more classroom experience and be able to share strategies that they had used over time. Upon receiving authorization from

the school district's coordinator of assessments and research, I reached out to the participating school's principal to ask for potential participants who met the criteria that I was seeking. I then reached out to those educators and extended an offer for them to participate in this study.

The sample size must be considered prior to conducting a qualitative study. Young and Casey (2019) suggested rich qualitative findings can be discovered with relatively small sample sizes in some studies. The purpose of considering the sample size is to select a sample that will provide rich data to understand the phenomenon studied (Hannink et al.,2019). The sample size for this study was 11 participants. If I had been unable to meet the goal of 11 participants, I would have opened the criteria to include non-homeroom educators, such as special education, gifted, or early intervention program educators.

Instrumentation

Qualitative research interviews are a construction site for knowledge (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). In this study, I gathered data by conducting semistructured, telephone and Zoom interviews. Telephone interviews have become more commonplace because this form of interview can be easily recorded and negates the costly need for travel (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). Semistructured interviews are often called guided conversations (Kim, 2016). Roulston and Choi (2018) advised that follow-up questions are formulated relative to what interviewees have already said in semistructured interviews. I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix D) to collect data. I used this interview protocol during the interviews to review informed consent and ask the same

interview questions of each participant. The interview questions were designed based on the research question and conceptual framework. While preparing the questions, I also reviewed the literature on the achievement gap of African American students to help me determine the operational definition of the achievement gap. I designed the first, second, and third interview questions to gather demographic information about each participant. Interview Questions 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10 were correlated with the research question and Interview Question 6 was correlated with the conceptual framework of this study (see Table 1).

I developed content validity for this instrument by consulting with an expert on this topic to evaluate the interview questions. I asked this expert to assess the instrument by considering the extent to which the questions were representative of the questions that a researcher can ask to assess the topic that I was exploring in this study. I then addressed the feedback they provided to ensure the instrument was sufficient to answer the research question. The expert's feedback was used to make changes to the instrument by ensuring that the questions were open-ended and not closed-ended questions.

Table 1

Alignment of Interview Questions With Research Question and Conceptual Framework

Interview Question	Alignment
How many years of teaching experience do you have?	Demographic information
What grade do you currently teach?	Demographic information
How many years have you taught in third, fourth, or fifth grade?	Demographic information
What teaching strategies or school wide implementations do you believe have contributed to narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics?	Research question
What teaching strategies or school wide implementations do you believe have contributed to narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in English language arts?	Research question
What culturally relevant teaching strategies have you applied within your classroom?	Conceptual framework: Culturally relevant pedagogy
What strategies outside of instructional strategies do you believe have contributed to narrowing the gap in achievement for African American students (relationship building, community involvement, etc.)?	Research question
What resources do you believe have aided in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics?	Research question
What resources do you believe have aided in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in English language arts?	Research question
Is there any additional information that you would like to share regarding strategies to narrow the achievement gap for African American students?	Research question

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I emailed the school district's coordinator of assessments and research to obtain

permission to conduct the study (see Appendix A). I described the study in the email and

asked for permission to conduct this study with educators from the selected school. Upon

completing the requirements to conduct research in the school district and receiving

approval to do so, I began the process by emailing the school's principal to request the

email addresses of educators at the school who met the criteria for this study. After the

principal supplied the names of these educators, they were contacted by email with a

detailed description of the study and a request for their participation in a Zoom or

telephone interview. Educators who expressed interest in participating were sent an

informed consent form by email and asked to review it. I also asked that the interested

educators inform me of their desire to participate in the study within a week of receiving

the informed consent form. Upon their review of the consent form, I asked potential

participants to reply to the email, stating "I consent" in the email's subject line if they

chose to continue with participation in the study. The 11 educators who responded were

selected to participate. Upon receiving the participants' consent to participate in the

study, I reached out again with options of days and times for the interviews. Participants

were offered the chance to select their own day and time to participate in the interview, if

the days and times provided did not work or fit their schedules.

The telephone and Zoom interviews lasted about 30 to 45 minutes and were

recorded on an audio recorder. Upon completing the recorded interviews, I used an online

transcription service to transcribe the interviews. The transcripts helped me to review the

interviews and look for details, such as hesitations, content, or intonation. Field notes were taken during the interviews so that I could notate any impressions that were present. Upon completing each interview, I revisited the notes taken to add in any content that was not written legibly and to strengthen the notes with content that was not included. I also used member checking by sending each participant a two-page summary of the findings to check for accuracy.

Data Analysis Plan

I used the data collected from the interviews to answer the research question. An online transcription service was used to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews. After transcription was complete, I checked the transcripts for accuracy by reading them as the audio recording played. The transcripts included the written record of the questions and responses received from each interviewee during the interview. After checking for the accuracy of the transcripts, I employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for the thematic analysis of the data.

I started by familiarizing myself with the transcribed audio (see Braun et al., 2019). I reread the text while taking notes and then began the coding process. I generated codes to immerse myself more deeply in the data and looked for similarities and patterns across the data (Braun et al., 2019). It was essential that I listened to the audio recordings of the interviews and reread the transcripts multiple times while coding the data. I first started with open coding. I highlighted sections of each interviewees' responses and created codes and labels to describe the highlighted sections. Once the codes were created, I used axial coding to construct linkage between the data. I grouped codes with

other codes that shared similar meanings and determined broader categories that made connections between the codes. I did this until the categories became emerging themes that answered the research question. Next, I reviewed the themes to determine if the themes were useful and accurately represented the data. I also checked that the themes were consistent and searched for any overlapping themes or subthemes in the data. I then revised each theme to identify what the themes were about and named them. I also explored how the themes connected and how they answered the research question. I then used this information to discuss the results and findings.

I also looked through the data to determine if there were any gaps or discrepancies. There were no discrepancies in the data, so no added analysis was needed. Throughout the process, I used a journal to reflect and document my ideas about the data. The journal helped me to reflect on what was seen and not seen in the data.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is essential in a qualitative study. Trustworthiness refers to a concept used in qualitative research to convey the procedures researchers use to ensure the quality, rigor, and credibility of a study (Frey, 2018). Urban and Van Eeden-Moorefield (2018) described the types of trustworthiness as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility asks researchers to consider if faithful accounts of people's lived experiences were created, if the research questions were answered thoroughly, and if others can have confidence in the truth shared by the researcher (McGregor, 2018). Tight (2017) referred to credibility as the extent to which qualitative researchers can

demonstrate that their data is accurate and appropriate. Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the study findings (York, 2020). A two-page summary of the findings were given to each participant so that they were able to check for credibility and accuracy of the analysis. Member checking refers to a process in which researchers check in with participants in a qualitative study to allow participants to respond or comment on their comments or the researcher's interpretation of the data (Frey, 2018). Flick (2018) expressed that member checks are the most crucial in establishing credibility. Anderson and Corneli (2018) referred to member checking as the process where researchers meet again with participants to discuss and verify the data collected via interviews or focus group discussions. Peer examination can be one way to keep the researcher honest while encouraging reflexive analysis (Gerber et al., 2017). Upon submitting a two-page summary of the findings, I also requested that the participants review the two-page summary and share any comments that they had on the findings of the study.

Transferability shows how studies can be applied or transferred to other environments (Frey, 2018). The researcher must provide a thick description so that readers can begin to understand how findings and insights from one study might apply to other contexts (Rheinhardt et al., 2018). I strengthened the transferability by providing thick descriptions of the context and data. I also provided information on how this study was conducted, including the sample population, sample size, the setting, inclusion criteria, sampling strategy, demographics, interview protocol, and selections from the interview guide. By providing this information, the reader will assess whether the findings and design can be transferred into their setting.

Dependability refers to the stability of the data and the degree to which data is collected in a way that is accurate and reliable (Frey, 2018). Allen (2017) described dependability as the consistency of findings that indicate whether the findings of a study would be consistently repeated if the study were to be replicated. I utilized an audit trail to strengthen dependability. An audit trail is a record of how your analysis developed and the key analytical decisions you made (King & Brooks, 2017). I did this by taking notes on the decisions made during the research process, sampling, data analysis, reflective thoughts, and how the data were managed.

McGregor (2018) described confirmability as the extent to which findings are shaped by the respondents themselves, rather than the researcher's bias. It is the extent to which findings are shaped by the respondents themselves, rather than the researcher's bias (McGregor, 2018). I strengthened the confirmability of the study by keeping a reflective journal. I utilized this journal and inspected my preconceived assumptions, conceptual lens, and how these may impact different aspects of the research process.

Ethical Procedures

It is important to consider ethics when conducting qualitative research. In qualitative research, researchers must be aware of how they conduct themselves ethically throughout the research (Martens, 2018). Flick (2018) described the four principles of ethics as respecting the individual's, doing good, not doing harm, and distributive justice or equity. Ethics is related to the treatment of participants and is also related to every point throughout the research process (Meltzoff & Cooper, 2018). Emanuel et al. (2016) expressed that one way to protect people participating in research is to consider seven

principles: social value, scientific validity, fair subject selection, favorable risk-benefit ratio, independent review, informed consent, and respect for enrolled subjects.

In order to conduct this study, I submitted the required information about this study to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to receive permission. Once I received permission from the IRB, I submitted a letter (see Appendix A) to the school district's coordinator of assessments and research to request permission to conduct this study at the desired school. Upon completing the requirements to conduct research in the school district, I reached out to the principal of the selected school where I conducted the study. I described the study and requested a written consent to conduct this study at their school. Researchers should ensure that individuals participating in the research study understand it and what it entails and give their informed consent to participate voluntarily without feeling pressured (Anderson & Cornreli, 2018). The consent form (see Appendix C) encompasses information about the optional nature of participation, the interview process, the purpose of the study, risks, and benefits of participation in the study, confidentiality, and how participants can remove themselves from the study if they choose.

I made it a priority to secure the participants' privacy and confidentiality during this study. I also replaced each participant's name by developing an alphabetical and numerical code during the data collection and reporting process. Contact information and any other identifying information were excluded from the records and notes of the study. I also ensured privacy during the interviews by ensuring that zoom and telephone interviews were conducted in a quiet and private space in my home. I also placed the

participants' audio recordings, transcripts, information, data, and reflective journal on my computer in a protected file folder. If there was any physical data, I placed this data in a file folder and locked it in my desk drawer. I always maintained a respectful attitude towards the participants' views during the interviews and used ethical interview practices and procedures.

A possible risk to this study was that participants might have felt uncomfortable with the topic of race. I worked to reduce and address that risk by beginning the interview by establishing rapport and building trust. I wanted the participants to know that their input mattered and that they should not feel uncomfortable about the topic of race. Throughout the interview process, I remained respectful, open, and accepting of their input. One benefit of their participation is that participants may have become more aware of the strategies that they have used and be more willing to share this with others after the study.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I have discussed the methodology for this basic qualitative study. I addressed the role of the researcher, participant selection, recruitment procedures, and instrumentation. I also included details on data collection and analysis. My intentions to improve the trustworthiness of this study were described. The ethical procedures that will be utilized to protect the participants and the data of this study were also outlined. In Chapter 4, I will present the results of this study, including the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts in a school located in the southeastern region of the United States. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants for this study. Each participant was sent a letter of invitation by email. Once participants expressed interest, a consent form was sent for their review before agreeing to participate in this study. Potential participants who desired to continue responded to my email with "I consent" in the email subject line. I then sent available days and times for the interview so that potential participants could what worked best for them. Interviews were conducted by Zoom and phone. I used Zoom's audio record function to record all Zoom interviews with the participants' cameras turned off to maintain confidentiality. Phone interviews were recorded using an audio recorder. Each interview was transcribed using an online transcription service to analyze the interview data for codes, categories, and themes.

In Chapter 4, I describe how participants were selected, the participant demographics, and how data were collected and analyzed. The research question that guided this study was:

What are third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts?

Setting

I conducted one-on-one, semistructured interviews from my home via Zoom and the phone. The participants for this study were selected from an elementary school located in the southeastern region of the United States that successfully closed the achievement gap for their African American students. A total of 11 teachers participated in this study. Each participant had more than two years of teaching experience at the successful school and had taught in third through fifth grade.

There were no unexpected circumstances that affected the analysis of the data collected. Two interviews were conducted by phone, and nine interviews were conducted via Zoom. Each interview was transcribed word for word using a transcription service before the coding and analysis process began.

Demographics

I conducted this study with 11 educators from an elementary school located in the southeastern region of the United States. All 11 participants were general education teachers who taught in third through fifth grade and had more than two years of teaching experience at the successful school. Participants' teaching experience ranged from 3 to 28 years. I assigned each participant a code: T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, and T11. Table 2 summarizes participants' years of teaching experience, current grade being taught, and years of teaching experience in third through fifth grade.

Table 2

Research Participants

Participant	Years of Teaching Experience	Current Grade Being Taught	Years Teaching in 3rd through 5th grade
T1	14	3rd	13
T2	28	3rd	28
T3	18	4th	4
T4	21	3rd	18
T5	27	4th	17
T6	12	4th	3
T7	28	3rd	12
T8	23	5th	13
T9	7	5th	7
T10	18	5th	18
T11	3	5th	3

Data Collection

I began the data collection process after receiving approval from Walden University's IRB. The IRB approval number was: 06-10-21-0725026. I used purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to recruit participants for this study. I began by sending an invitational email to potential participants that contained information on the purpose of the study and the benefits of contributing to the study. Once potential participants expressed interest, a consent form was emailed to explain the background, procedures, risks, benefits, privacy, and voluntary nature of this study. I instructed potential participants to respond to my email with the words "I consent" in the subject line if they chose to move forward with participating in this study.

The data collection process took roughly three weeks. Two participants chose to do phone interviews, and nine participants chose to do Zoom interviews. Each participant

emailed me with a date and time that worked best to participate in the interview. I interviewed each participant once. The length of each interview was between 30 to 45 minutes. I asked each participant the same interview questions to guarantee reliability in the data. At the beginning of the interview, each participant was reminded of the purpose of the study, the interview process, and elements of the consent form. Each interview began with two demographic questions to understand how long the participant had been teaching and how long they had taught in third through fifth grade. During each interview, I kept a reflective journal to document my thoughts and feelings and manage potential bias. Zoom interviews were recorded using the record feature on Zoom. I ensured that participants' cameras were off during the recording of the interviews to maintain confidentiality. I used an audio recorder on my computer to record the two phone interviews.

After completing each interview, I thanked the participant and expressed my appreciation for their willingness to be interviewed. I informed the participants that they would receive a two-page summary of the study's findings once I analyzed all the interview data. I concluded each interview by asking the participants if they had any questions and informing them that if they had any questions later regarding this study, they could reach out to me anytime.

The audio recordings from the Zoom and phone interviews were all transcribed word for word. I stored all digital audio recordings and transcripts in a password-protected folder on my personal computer. There were no unexpected circumstances that

took place during the data collection process. I made sure to follow all the steps of the data collection process described in Chapter 3 explicitly.

Data Analysis

All 11 participants were asked the same open-ended interview questions in the same order. I used an online transcription service to transcribe the 11 interviews. I began the data analysis process by familiarizing myself with the transcripts by reading and then re-reading them. I then coded the interview data and placed those codes into categories. Lastly, the categories were grouped into emerging themes.

I utilized Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis. The six steps comprise: familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for the themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There were no unexpected conditions that influenced the data analysis process.

Phase 1: Familiarizing Myself With the Data

I uploaded each interview audio recording to an online transcription service to have the interviews transcribed. Once the recordings were transcribed, I compared the audio recordings to the written transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the data. Each transcript was then printed out and placed in order from the first interview to the last interview. I assigned each participant a code to maintain their confidentiality. I began by reading each transcript and then re-reading it again to familiarize myself with the interview data. As I re-read each transcript, I took notes.

Phase 2: Generating Codes

Open coding and axial coding were used to analyze the interview data. I began by creating open codes, so as I read through the transcripts line by line, I looked for important information related to the research question and conceptual framework. Key details in the transcript were highlighted using various colors: yellow, blue, green, pink, and orange. I used a black pen to label the codes in the right page margin. The different highlighter colors allowed me to color code and match similar codes. After analyzing the data, a total of 74 open codes emerged. A sample of the open codes, participant identifiers, and examples of quotes from the interview data that fit each code are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Examples of Open Codes

Code	Participant	Excerpt
Culturally relevant literature in the classroom	T1	"I definitely try to bring in a variety of literature, not just pretty little White girl stories, I try to make sure that I'm introducing all kinds of cultures."
	T11	"I use diverse novels and reading passages that the students can relate to."
Accelerate students	T4	"I don't believe in just doing well in class and mastering a concept, if you get it and you're doing well let's accelerate you and give you a different problem to challenge you."
	T6	"I accelerate them through different tasks in class or during our extended learning time."
Conference with students	T4	"I conference with them every two weeks, because we do like a growth monitoring where their score can go up or down."
	T2	"Having regular meetings with them, keeping them accountable for whether they are achieving their goals."
Attend outside of school functions	T5	"I'll go to birthday parties and go see them sing in church and try to build a relationship with them and their family both."
	T10	"But trying to be present and involved in certain things that the kids have going on outside of school, so that they not only see you in the classroom, but maybe they see you at a sporting event."
Getting to know your students	T6	"I think teachers need to know their kids and let them know that you care about them."
	T2	"Well, I really believe that relationship building is important. I was aware of their home life, what they like, what kind of books they enjoyed reading, so all of those things."
Meeting the learning needs of students	T7	"I try to teach to the individual child and where they need help as far as small groups, enrichment, whatever they need."
	T1	"I would really try to get to know my kids and ask: Okay, do you need to hear it in a song? Do you need it drawn out? Do you need to get up and act it out?"
Gaining parent support early	T2	"I also think that it's very important to just kind of be honest with parents and get them on board as soon as you possibly can."
	T5	"I also try to get parents involved right off the bat the first month."
Requiring more from students	T2	"My expectations are high, and they know I'm going to keep working with them to achieve it. I'm not going to just accept whatever they give me."
	T4	"I don't believe in rewarding the child just because they show up. I don't do that."
Individualized instruction through iReady	T6	"We use the iReady diagnostic to assess any learning gaps and then the program addresses those gaps."
	T1	"iReady is used daily to instruct students at their own level."
Community speakers	T3	"Definitely getting community partners involved in coming to the school because students need to see future leaders that look like them."
	T8	"I have had African American speakers, like role models from out in the community that have come."

After completion of open coding, I began axial coding by grouping together similar codes into categories. Microsoft Word was used to list all the codes that were generated from the open coding phase. I then began grouping codes together that were similar. If codes had the same meaning, they were combined or condensed. I did this until all the codes were in groups based upon similarities. Once codes were grouped, these groups became the categories. I named each category based upon the types of codes that the category contained. After the axial coding phase, there were a total of 15 categories. Table 4 shows a sample of the open codes and categories and the participant identifiers and quotes from the data.

Table 4

Examples of Open Codes and Categories

Culturally relevant teaching	Culturally relevant literature in the classroom	T5	"But probably most important is literature that they can relate to, culturally relevant literature."
	Write in their dialect	T10	"I often allow my students to write in their own dialect, the way they choose to write."
Challenge students	Accelerate students	T1	"So definitely feeding positivity to students and truly offering them accelerated or higher-level work opportunities."
	Enrichment	T3	"All students need opportunities to be challenged even if they normally perform lower than others."
Student dialogue	Conference with students	T10	"I conference with students one on one, and we go through the writing and talk about how to make it grammatically correct."
	Talk freely with teacher	T1	"I like to have lunch in the classroom with students where I allow them to just talk freely with me."
Supporting students outside of school	Attend outside of school functions	T1	"If they've got a basketball game, a dance recital, a baptism, I've definitely gone to all of those things."
	attend sporting events	T6	"I show up and so I might be at a football game, or I might be at a whatever, a church event."
Building positive relationships	Getting to know your students	T8	"I just think it's really important that teachers take the time to get to know their students and not prejudge them."
	Building relationships with students	T9	"Definitely building a rapport with the students beforehand."
Differentiating instruction	Meeting the learning needs of students	T6	"If we're talking about fractions, and I know my kids love pizza! Then I'm going to make sure my lesson could be about pizza."
	Differentiation of lessons	T3	"I would break students into different groups to work on different things."
Parent support/relationship	Gaining parent support early	T4	"I think it's just really keeping parents informed."
	Being honest with parents	T7	"I try to stay in close contact with parents and let them know how they can help their child."
High expectations	Requiring more from students	T2	"I'm not just taking oh, my teacher doesn't mind if I don't put periods or capital letters."
		T3	"I focus on getting students to become comfortable with moving to a higher level."
Computer program to address learning needs	Motivate students Individualized instruction through iReady	T7	"The iReady program has a diagnostic test that they do during the year, and it sees exactly where they are weak."
	iReady for placement and growth monitoring	T4	"One program that the school uses is iReady and we use that data to determine our small groups."
Community involvement/support	Community speakers Role models	T2	"I have had African American community members come into the classroom to talk about their careers."
		T1	"Bringing in professionals from the community to do activities with students."

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

After completing axial coding, I began reviewing the 15 categories for emerging themes. I began to group categories that shared similar meanings or similar characteristics. This was done to have concrete groups of categories that made sense to be in conjunction. I then began to discover the theme for each group of categories based upon the grouped categories.

Four temporary themes emerged from the analysis: (a) relationship building, (b) meeting learning needs/styles of students, (c) applying best practices for achievement, and (d) teacher influence. I used thematic analysis to evaluate the generated themes with the categorical data, refine the themes, and verify relationships between the themes and the research question.

Phase 4: Reviewing the Themes

During this phase, I reviewed the themes to improve them. I also eliminated themes that did not have enough data to support them. Categories were also shifted around so that I could ensure that they were under the correct theme. I reviewed the themes several times to ensure that each category truly correlated with the theme under which it was categorized. I was also attentive to if the themes answered the research question. The following new themes emerged: (a) relationship building, (b) meeting learning needs/styles of students, (c) cultural awareness, and (d) setting high expectations.

Phase 5: Defining and Labeling Themes

After a complete analysis of the data, I answered the research question: What are third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts?

All participants disclosed that relationship building was a contributing factor for African American achievement. They also mentioned the importance of meeting the learning needs and styles of each student. The participants communicated that cultural awareness was an essential instructional strategy to aid in the achievement of African American students. Lastly, participants discussed the significance of setting high expectations for students in the classroom. Table 5 shows a representation of categories and themes identified during thematic analysis. The research question was that guided this study was, What are third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts?

Table 5

Categories and Themes

Category	Theme
Supporting students outside of school	Theme 1: Relationship building
Parent support/relationship	
Building positive relationships	
Student dialogue	
Differentiating instruction	Theme 2: Meeting learning needs/styles of students
Computer program to address learning needs	
Community involvement/support	Theme 3: Cultural awareness
Culturally relevant teaching	
High expectations	Theme 4: Setting high expectations
Challenging students	

Phase 6: Producing the Report

The last phase within Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework of the thematic analysis is to complete a concluding analysis of the themes and write about the results. After I completed the data analysis, I verified that the four themes answered the research question. I found no evidence of inconsistent findings in the data, so I presumed that no added analysis was needed. The four themes were used to provide information on the research question concerning third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts.

Results of the Study

Theme 1: Relationship Building

Building Positive Relationships

Many participants mentioned that building positive relationships with students was a critical factor in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. T1 stated:

 I've always tried to make sure that I do connect with students on a personal level. When they know that we care about them as a whole person, they care more about what we're trying to teach them in class.

T10 expressed, "I just think it's really important that teachers take the time to get to know their students and not prejudge them or their backgrounds, where they come from, or socioeconomic status."

T11 shared that relationship building was important and that they focus on building relationships early in the school year before starting instruction. T9 asserted, "Definitely building a rapport with the students beforehand, learning what they're interested in, and maybe tying that into the instruction if you can." T2 communicated, "Well, I really believe that relationship building is important. I was aware of their home life, what they liked, what kind of books they enjoyed reading, so all of those things." T6 revealed:

I know I keep saying this, but I think teachers should know their kids and let them know that they care about them because you can have the smartest kid, but they won't necessarily apply themselves if they don't feel like they belong as part of the classroom community, because they'll achieve for you if they know that you care.

Parent Support/Relationship

Participants expressed the importance of having a relationship and support with their students' parents to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. T2 stated, "I also think it's very important to just kinda be honest with parents and get them on board as soon as possible." T5 asserted:

I also try to get parents involved. And right off the bat, the first month, I'll immediately get in touch with the parents and tell them something good. I try to start off with something good to build that relationship so then if there is a problem later, I've already got that relationship built.

T7 expressed, "I try to stay in close contact with the parents and let them know how they can help their child. We work really close with parents and reach out to their needs." T4 explained:

It's really just keeping parents informed, I think. We constantly meet with them and when we meet, we discuss their child's iReady results, we discuss classroom performance, and we look to see what we can do to get them to that proficient range.

T4 also expressed the importance of letting parents know what is going on at school. T4 stated:

I like to use the interactive notebooks and that's something students can also take home and they can share that with their parents, and they can see what they are learning in the class. We also use ClassDojo, we take pictures on there like throughout the day, so that the parents are more likely to check and not just think it's a discipline tool, but it's a way to let you know what's going on throughout

the day in class. What your child is doing, or if your child has done something

great, we can spotlight that immediately and put it out there so that parents see it

and parents comment which lets me know, they have access to ClassDojo, so

when I do have a problem later on, that's when I am going to contact them

because I know they are checking it or they have the ability to check it.

T8 stated:

I sometimes go to the kids' houses and have a good rapport with their parents.

I've become really close to a lot of the parents, and they are still a part of my life

to this day. So, building that relationship and rapport.

T10 stated:

Having a relationship with the students and their parents, just building that whole

relationship with the mentality that we're all in this together and the kids knowing

that you have their best interest at heart as well as the parent.

Supporting Students Outside of School

Six out of the 11 participants expressed that supporting African American

students outside of school was essential for academic achievement. T1 expressed, "I tell

my students many times throughout the year to let me know if they've got a football

game, a basketball game, a dance recital, a baptism, I've definitely gone to all of those

things." T4 mentioned that it is important to attend games and different programs that

students participate in. T5 expressed, "I'll go to birthday parties and go see them sing in

church and try to build a relationship with them and their families both." T6 declared:

Once they get older and even the younger kids, they play sports, they have church

activities, whatever it be and they'll mention it to you and I show up. And I might

be at a football game, or I might be at a whatever, a church event. And so just

seeing that you're interested in them as a person, not just as somebody to get

grades from I think has been phenomenal in my teaching time. T10 stated:

Of course, this was like pre-COVID, but trying to be present and involved in

certain things that the kids have going on outside of school. So that they not only

see you in the classroom, but they see you at a sporting event or at a recital or

some other type of event that's important to them.

T9 also shared that it was important to be present outside of school walls such as going to

their football games or recitals if students invited you.

Student Dialogue

Participants discussed the importance of valuing time for students to talk freely

with their teachers. T1 mentioned that lunch in the classroom was used to allow students

the time to talk freely with her. T4 expressed:

I do like to have conferences with students. I always try to have at least one where

we can just meet one on one or even if it's just one to two, where they can just

kinda talk for a few minutes and share what's going on in their lives, I think that's

helped.

T1 explained, "I'm very open and honest with my kids and we'll just sometimes go off

topic a little bit and be like, okay well how do you feel about this? Just keeping

conversation open I think helps."

Many educators expressed having weekly conferences with students. T2

explained:

> I just believe that if the kids are aware of their strengths and their weakness, and
>
> that the two of us develop a plan to strengthen their strengths and also bring up
>
> those areas where they are the weakest at and having regular meetings with them
>
> keeping them accountable for whether they are achieving their goals I've found to
>
> be most effective. Because we have conversations about how they're doing, and
>
> they know I'm monitoring how they are doing.

T4 stated, "I conference with my students every two weeks because we do growth

monitoring." T10 and T8 both discussed the importance of having one on one

conferences with students to help them academically and allow them time to talk freely

with them.

Teachers' Supportiveness

Participants expressed that showing the students support and being on the same

page with all of the student's teachers was important. T11 explained:

> I think it's important for the students to know that we are all on the same page and
>
> in our grade level we meet as a grade level, so we don't have conferences
>
> individually with parents. If a parent wants a conference, we meet as a team.

T3 expressed:

> We really operate as a team, it's not just my students but it's our students. Each
>
> teacher truly sees all students, whether they are in their class or not as their own
>
> student and we work together to ensure that every student regardless of the class

that they are in are encouraged and working towards success and has the

necessary tools to succeed. When we plan as a team, we make sure our lessons are

very similar if not the same so that every child receives the same quality learning

experiences.

T1 stated:

Our team as a whole will have conferences with individual students if we see that

they may need a bit of encouraging or need to be steered back on the right track, it

helps for the students to see that all teachers are there to support them and that we

care.

Theme 2: Meeting Learning Needs/Styles of Students

Differentiating Instruction

Many participants discussed the importance of utilizing differentiated instruction

to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and

English language arts. T3 mentioned that she allows her students to work on different

activities within a lesson. T7 discussed that she makes sure to differentiate for each

individual child. T1 stated:

I really just try to know my kids and, okay do you need to hear it in a song? Do

you need to see it drawn out? Do you need to get up and act it out? So just getting

to know the kids is the best teaching strategy out there.

T3 and T8 discussed that they differentiate by teaching their students multiple ways to a

solution. T3 stated, "We implement various ways for students to come up to the solution

or problem in math." T4 mentioned the importance of students being able to explain their math strategies.

Participants also discussed the importance of having real-world application in lessons that are taught. T9 mentioned that she uses a lot of real-world applications in her classroom. T6 stated:

Just being able to make the content relevant. So, if we're talking about fractions, and I know my students love pizza! Then I'm going to make sure my lessons could be about pizza to introduce the lesson. So, I think just making it relevant and familiar to their background helps. Even if it's a story a background story that helps draw them in, hook them into the lesson. That's helpful.

T9 asserted that it's important to learn what students are interested in and incorporate that into the instruction if possible. T9 also stated:

And I know that school is meant for learning, but we also want to have a lot of fun, and it can be a lot more impactful if you are enjoying yourself. So, we try to have a lot of fun while we're working.

T10 and T8 discussed how small group instruction was effective in closing the achievement gap for African American students. T3 stated, "We did a lot of collaborative models where we put students into different groups."

Computer Program to Address Learning Needs

Several participants mentioned the iReady program for math and English language arts as a key resource for closing the achievement gap for African American

Five out of the 11 participants discussed engaging resources that they believe aided in closing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. T5 mentioned using dibbles as a tool to measure reading fluency with her students. T5 stated:

> We did dibbles. I know during summer school, we did it every day because some of them were reading at 60 words per minute and so I got them up just doing it every day I got them up. Most of them were up to or close to 100 words per minute. I think that's really important, their speed, for them to be able to comprehend.

T8, T9, T10, and T11 all mentioned utilizing resources in the classroom such as: Khan Academy, Flocabulary, Kahoot, IXL, BrainPOP, Sadlier Connect Vocab Workshop, Scholastic Magazine, and games for math centers. T11 stated, "In addition to all of those resources, scholastic magazines are relevant, and we like to use the scholastic resources because they are friendly and culturally relevant and differentiated." T9 stated, "I use a lot of BrainPOP and Khan Academy and use games for math centers that they can rotate through." T10 asserted, "I use Khan Academy, Flocabulary, Kahoot, IXL and Sadlier Connect Vocab Workshop that has a lot of different games and resources that are available to the kids and their parents."

Hands on Experiences

Several participants mentioned that having hands-on experiences in the classroom aided African American achievement in mathematics and English language arts. T1 stated:

I definitely try to use as much math manipulatives as possible to just make it

concrete because when they can talk about the math and see the math, I think that

helps them more than just the vague terms and things.

T6 stated, "I do hands on maybe once a week or a little bit of the unit." T8 decaled, "I use

lots of hands-on projects correlating with whatever content we're doing." T9 also stated

that lots of hands-on activities were used in her classroom as well.

Student Reference Materials

Interactive notebooks were mentioned as a great reference tool for students to

refer to at home or while working independently. T2, T4, and T9 mentioned that they

believe this has contributed to narrowing the gap in achievement for African American

students in mathematics and English language arts. T2 stated:

Having interactive notebooks for them to keep up with the mini lesson provides

them with examples. We use the notebooks across grade levels. All of the

teachers use interactive notebooks, even in math, for the kids to record work as

well as to have something to refer back to when they're working independently.

T4 mentioned, "I like to use interactive notebooks and that's something they can also

take home and they can share that with their parents so that they can see what they are

learning in class."

Vocabulary Acquisition

T1, T5, and T11 discussed the importance of vocabulary acquisition and how it

aids in the achievement of African American students in mathematics and English

language arts. T1 stated, "I have noticed that sometimes there's not much prior

knowledge with my students or as much vocabulary, so I try to spend more time addressing vocabulary before we get into a topic." T11 mentioned that she has a strong vocabulary focus in her classroom. T5 stated:

> We started a couple of years ago using Sadlier Vocabulary and I love, love, love Sadlier Vocabulary. It has where they read along with the story, it'll read the story aloud to them, so they're exposed to good vocabulary and hearing it read. And then, it gives them lots of practice and I really, really think that's helped a lot. And it has lots of different stories about lots of different cultures and lots of different events in kids' lives and things. I really think that's a good resource. Also, I read aloud every day, so they are hearing good vocabulary.

Theme 3: Cultural Awareness

Community Involvement/Support

Participants expressed that bringing African American community leaders and role models into the classroom had a considerable impact on narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. T1 and T2 shared that their grade level regularly has community leaders come into the classrooms to work with students. T3 expressed:

> Definitely getting community partners involved in coming to the schools, because the students need to see future leaders that look like them so we bring them in from time to time when we could bring people to come speak. Bringing in people from our local power company to do hands on activities with the students to teach

them more about electricity. So that they'll know that these are professions that

they may want to go into one day.

T8 expressed:

I have had African American speakers, like role models from out in the

community that have come. I taught virtually last year so I did a virtual field trip

to our local power company for my students which was led by an African

American leader. So just having role models. Come in or some leader in the

community come in and speak to them. We've also had police officers come in

and they came and had activities with them and taught them about character. Just

mainly having community leaders and role models come in and speak to the kids

and then spend one on one time with them.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Participants described culturally relevant teaching as a contributing factor to

narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and

English language arts. T1 stated:

In ELA, I definitely try to bring in a variety of literature not just the pretty little

White girl stories, but I try to make sure that I'm introducing all kinds of cultures

giving them something that maybe they can relate to a little bit better. As a school

we have special programs such as Back history month program, so just trying to

recognize different cultures as much as possible.

T11 and T10 both expressed that it was important to have literature that students could

relate to and diverse novels. T10 also shared that she oftentimes allowed her students to

write in their own dialect to bring in culture through writing. T9 expressed, "I use a lot of

pop culture references in my class to bring in culture." T9 and T8 also shared that they

bring culture into the classroom by incorporating music, dance, and sports related topics

into the lessons that they teach. T4 shared that she often times will use students' names in

word problems as a way of implementing culturally relevant teaching. T6 explained:

> I use multiplication fact rap, I mean my kids in my class were really into music, I
>
> guess that's what probably drew me into the project, but they spent the entire
>
> semester putting their facts into music, they would take familiar songs on the
>
> radio and put their facts into them and then they would also put it in technology.
>
> So whatever song they made they put it in a PowerPoint, or they put it in a video.
>
> So, it was there if they wanted to get in front of everybody and sing and
>
> something like that, so it was fun. I mean as a teacher I remember that project.

Theme 4: Setting High Expectations

High Expectations

T2, T3, and T4 expressed that having high expectations for their African

American students aided in narrowing the achievement gap for African American

students in mathematics and English language arts. T4 stated:

> I try to do more positive as far as academics. I don't just look for something
>
> because I don't believe in awarding the child just because they show up. I don't
>
> do that, but if you do something academically, I'm going to praise that to the
>
> highest and I want everyone else to see that so then they will do the same and they
>
> will strive to reach that level too.

T2 explained, "My expectations are high, and they know I'm going to keep working with them to achieve. I'm not going to just accept whatever they give me." T2 also expressed, "I think just being organized and consistent and having expectations and then really making sure that they're going towards those expectations. I'm not just taking oh my teacher doesn't mind if I don't put periods or capital letters." T3 discussed that she has high expectations and tries to get her students to be comfortable with moving to a higher level.

Challenging Students

Participants explained that to aid in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts, teachers must challenge students. T4 stated:

In class if students are showing that the lesson material is too easy for them, I'm always prepared to accelerate them. I don't believe in just doing well in class and mastering a concept, if you get it and you're doing well let's accelerate you and give you a different problem to challenge you. That's the only way students can truly grow, so just making sure that I am doing more than just being okay with them understanding at a basic level.

T6 asserted:

One major thing is that I try to not only cater to my struggling students but also, I cater to my students performing at a proficient level. I accelerate them through different tasks in class or during our extended learning time. It's important to not just let students stay at one level but to always try to push them higher.

T1 expressed:

> I think the best strategy is letting your students know that they are capable of
> more. I have found that when I tell a student that they did great and now I'd like
> them to try a challenging problem because the work is too easy for them, they
> instantly light up and feel good about themselves, so definitely feeding positivity
> to students and truly offering them accelerated or higher-level work opportunities.

T3 explained, "All students need opportunities to be challenged even if they normally
perform lower than others, exposure to challenging task and enrichment is very
beneficial, so I make sure to have these learning experiences present in my classroom
daily."

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness

Frey (2018) described trustworthiness as a concept in qualitative research that
indicates the procedures researchers utilize to ensure the quality, rigor, and credibility of
a study. A peer debriefer who had a sound understanding of the phenomena assessed the
interview questions for content validity. This was done to establish trustworthiness. The
peer debriefer was an informed and trustworthy collaborator who gave instructive
feedback that aided in deciding details of the interview questions that needed to be
reconsidered. The peer debriefing allowed for reflexivity of any biases that may have
existed within this study. I generated evidence of trustworthiness for this study by using
credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is the way a researcher establishes confidence in the truth of the findings of a particular study (Frey, 2018). Credibility was important in this research study. I kept a reflective journal to document any biases that evolved while collecting data. This guaranteed creditability and provided reflectivity. I was able to elevate the level of self-reflection and uphold trustworthiness during this study by maintaining a reflective journal. I used member checking to further confirm the credibility and validity in this study. The participants in this study were presented with a two-page summary of the analyzed interview data and findings. The participants in this study had no disagreements or remarks regarding the findings of this study. To establish creditability in this study, all participants had two or more years of teaching experience in third through fifth grade at the school focused on in this study. A peer debriefer who was well informed on the research subject also rendered me feedback on the interview questions. The peer debriefer yielded reflexivity of any biases in this study.

Transferability

The extent to which the findings of a study have applicability in other contexts is referred to as transferability (Frey, 2018). I strengthened transferability by presenting details on the study's conditions, setting, sample population, sample size, inclusion criteria, sampling strategy, demographic characteristics, interview procedures, and excerpts from the interview guide. Participants varied in years of teaching experience. All 11 participants had two or more years of teaching experience in third through fifth grade. Readers and scholars will find relativeness among this study's findings and their

individual experiences due to the use of thick descriptions and complete details of participant interactions, perspectives, context, and ideas. Readers will consider the appropriateness of transferring the findings to later or equivalent situations or environments.

Dependability

Consistency, or how the researcher can determine whether the study's findings would be duplicated if the study were replicated with like participants refer to the study's dependability (Frey, 2018). I maintained rich notes and continuous practices throughout the interview and data collection process to establish dependability. One-on-one Zoom and phone interviews were utilized to establish rich, deep, personalized, and contextualized data. To reduce inconsequential conversations, I utilized open-ended questions that were focalized on the topic of this study. I assured that the sequence and reading of the interview questions were the same for every participant. The findings and explanations within the study remained steady and supported the data throughout the data analysis phase. I notated personal beliefs, motives, and theories through rich documentation using a reflective journal and preserved this throughout the research process. An extensive audit trail was utilized throughout the research process and included reflective views, development of the findings, and research resources used for this study.

Confirmability

The degree to which the study's findings are determined by the participants and not the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the researcher is referred to as

confirmability (Frey, 2018). A reflective journal and audit trail were kept to maintain the

ingenuity of the data in this study. The reflective journal comprised detailed

predispositions, self-reflections, and practices carried out during the research process.

This helped me remove personal biases. I was able to initiate precise methods for data

analysis and data collection by utilizing the audit trail. I was also able to consider the

research path and evaluate the transparency within this study through the audit trail. I

utilized a peer debriefer familiar with the phenomena to acquire instructive feedback and

inspiration to explore extensively into the data to gain a better perception of each

participant's perspective. A justification was presented for each decision that was made

during the research process of this study.

Summary

In Chapter 4, the data analysis and findings of this study are reviewed. This study

was formed from one research question and explored elementary educators' perspectives

on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in

mathematics and English language arts in the southeastern region of the United States.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were utilized during the data collection process to

acquire the perspectives of 11 educators with two or more years of teaching experience.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework of thematic analysis were utilized to guide

the analysis of the results. Four themes emerged. These themes indicated elementary

educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African

American students in mathematics and English language arts in the southeastern region of

the United States. The proof of trustworthiness with credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability was established during this study's data collection and data analysis process.

Executing the data analysis allowed me to answer the research question: What are third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts? Once the coding process was concluded, four themes emerged in the data: a) relationship building, b) meeting learning needs/styles of students, c) cultural awareness, d) setting high expectations.

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was relationship building. Participants described relationship building as a critical factor in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. Participants shared that building positive relationships with students had a huge impact on their academic skills. Participants also expressed that building relationships with students should be focused on at the beginning of the school year before instruction begins. Participants also mentioned that parent support was a contributing factor in aiding in African American achievement. Participants discussed how they reached out to parents early to establish the relationship early in the school year. Many participants focused on the importance of supporting students outside of school. They stated that students succeeded more when they saw their teacher out in the community supporting them in their sporting events or other activities. Participants expressed the significance of allowing students to speak freely with their teacher. They discussed that they allowed students to talk freely with them during lunch or during one-on-one conferences in the

classroom with the teacher. Lastly, participants explained the importance of all teachers being on the same page and supporting all students, whether they are their students or not.

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis was meeting the learning needs/styles of students. Participants expressed that differentiation of instruction was significant in aiding in African American achievement. They discussed how they used various teaching strategies to meet the needs of the different types of learners. Participants also mentioned addressing the learning needs of students through a computer program called iReady. Participants explained how iReady was used to find gaps that students had. The program also provided students lessons and helped address those gaps. Participants expressed that the program was used for progress monitoring purposes. Participants also explained that engaging resources and hands-on experiences in the classroom were an essential piece in narrowing the gap in achievement for African American students. Some of the engaging resources included: Kahoot, IXL, Khan Academy, BrainPOP, and Flocabulary. Another significant component was interactive notebooks. Several participants expressed the benefits of students having interactive notebooks to refer back to when they worked independently. Lastly, participants explained that vocabulary acquisition was critical in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students. Several participants expressed the importance of addressing vocabulary in the classroom consistently.

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis was cultural awareness. Participants expressed that inviting African American community leaders into the

classroom was a major contributing factor in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students. Participants also communicated the importance of students seeing role models that looked like them and obtaining exposure to the different types of careers that they could one day have. Cultural relevant teaching was also discussed as an essential component in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students. They explained the importance of having culturally relevant literature in the classroom that reflected their students. They also shared different ways to bring culture into the classroom such as through music, dance, or allowing students to free write in their own dialect.

The fourth theme that emerged from the data analysis was setting high expectations. Many participants expressed that having high expectations for students contributed to African American achievement. Participants also explained that their students knew their expectations and knew that their teacher would not accept poor quality work. Lastly, participants also discussed the importance of offering accelerated or challenging opportunities in class so that students can grow academically.

In Chapter 5, I will review an interpretation of the results, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications. I will provide an in-depth analysis of the results for each theme and explain how they are linked to the research question. I will also give a detailed explanation of the limitations of this study. I will present recommendations for managing the topics and limitations for further research. Lastly, I will review the study's implications and the description of the potentiality for positive social change. I will close Chapter 5 with a reflection of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts in a school located in the southeastern region of the United States. I gathered data from one-on-one, semistructured, phone, and Zoom interviews with 11 educators who taught in third through fifth grade with two or more years of teaching experience at the school. Using a qualitative approach, I acquired a thorough understanding of elementary educators' perspectives on strategies that have contributed to narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. Four themes emerged from the data analysis process: (a) relationship building, (b) meeting the learning needs/styles of students, (c) cultural awareness, and (d) setting high expectations. This study was paramount due to the sparse extant research on elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. This study focused on addressing this gap in practice.

In Chapter 5, I explain of the findings and explore how the results provide a better comprehension of elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students. Chapter 5 also compares the research findings with current literature and the conceptual framework of Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy. The study implications, limitations, and recommendations are also incorporated.

Interpretation of the Findings

I initiated the data collection process after acquiring Walden University IRB approval. The interpretations and findings for this basic qualitative study were derived from 11 one-on-one, semistructured interviews, the literature review, and the conceptual framework of Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy. This study addressed one research question: What are third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts? Four themes emerged based on the research question. Findings in this study helped to expand and substantiate information concerning third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts.

Theme 1: Relationship Building

Relationship building is an essential component in narrowing the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. Milner (2011) suggested that based upon the culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers should be prepared to do more than teach subject matter and focus on building meaningful relationships with their students. Mosley et al. (2021) expressed that high-quality teacher–student-relationships are nurtured when teachers demonstrate care, trust, and respect for students. T6 revealed:

> I know I keep saying this, but I think teachers should know their kids and let them
> know that they care about them because you can have the smartest kid, but they

won't necessarily apply themselves if they don't feel like they belong as part of

the classroom community, because they'll achieve for you if they know that you

care.

Walker and Graham (2021) asserted that the quality of teacher–student relationships

contribute to students' academic skills and achievement throughout school and can

strongly contribute to children's social and behavioral adjustment. T2 stated, "Well, I

really believe that relationship building is important. I was aware of their home life, what

they liked, what kind of books they enjoyed reading, so all of those things." Jeffy and

Cooper (2011) stated that the culturally relevant pedagogy is distinguishable based on the

principles of teaching the whole child, equity and excellence, identity and achievement,

developmental appropriateness, and student-teacher relationships. T1 shared,

I've always tried to make sure that I do connect with students on a personal level.

When they know that we care about them as a whole person, they care more about

what we're trying to teach them in class.

Building relationships with parents is also crucial to narrowing the achievement

gap for African American students. Susnara et al. (2021) expressed that positive parent–

teacher relationships and increased parent involvement can improve student achievement.

T5 asserted:

I also try to get parents involved. And right off the bat, the first month, I'll

immediately get in touch with the parents and tell them something good. I try to

start off with something good to build that relationship so then if there is a

problem later, I've already got that relationship built.

Lang et al. (2020) expressed that parents and teachers benefit from mutually positive

interactions because it allows both to be more informed about the child's current

development and life contexts, ultimately benefiting the child. T8 shared,

> I sometimes go to the kids' houses and have a good rapport with their parents.
>
> I've become really close to a lot of the parents, and they are still a part of my life
>
> to this day. So, building that relationship and rapport.

T7 stated, "I try to stay in close contact with the parents and let them know how they can

help their child. We work really close with parents and reach out to their needs."

Allowing students to have time to talk freely with their teacher is vital for African

American achievement. Borrero et al. (2018) explained that with culturally relevant

pedagogy, teachers must have classroom environments that provide a space for all

student voices to be valued and move away from traditional teaching methods. Sedova et

al. (2019) expressed that active student participation in classroom talk relates to better

student achievement. T1 explained, "I'm very open and honest with my kids and we'll

just sometimes go off topic a little bit and be like, okay well how do you feel about this?

Just keeping conversation open I think helps." T4 expressed:

> I do like to have conferences with students. I always try to have at least one where
>
> we can just meet one on one or even if it's just one to two, where they can just
>
> kinda talk for a few minutes and share what's going on in their lives, I think that's
>
> helped.

Supporting students outside of school also aids in narrowing the achievement gap

for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. Zalaznick

(2018) and McShane (2019) reported that supporting students in their lives outside of school pays off in the classroom. T10 stated:

> Of course, this was like pre-COVID, but trying to be present and involved in certain things that the kids have going on outside of school. So that they not only see you in the classroom, but they see you at a sporting event or at a recital or some other type of event that's important to them.

Lastly, teacher supportiveness aids in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. Reeves et al. (2017) asserted that teacher collaboration had been found to have a positive effect on student achievement. Donohoo et al. (2018) expressed that when educators share a sense of collective efficacy, school cultures tend to be characterized by beliefs that reflect high expectations for student success. T3 expressed:

> We really operate as a team, it's not just my students but it's our students. Each teacher truly sees all students, whether they are in their class or not, as their own student and we work together to ensure that every student regardless of the class that they are in are encouraged and working towards success and has the necessary tools to succeed. When we plan as a team, we make sure our lessons are very similar, if not the same so that every child receives the same quality learning experiences.

Banerjee et al. (2017) stated that in a collaborative environment, teachers build their lessons and curriculum cooperatively, meet to talk about progress in student learning in their schools, and take collective responsibility for all students. T1 stated:

Our team as a whole will have conferences with individual students if we see that

they may need a bit of encouraging or need to be steered back on the right track, it

helps for the students to see that all teachers are there to support them and that we

care.

Goddard et al. (2017) asserted that African American and European American

achievement gaps are minor in schools with higher levels of collective efficacy, and

collective efficacy is believed to be important in reducing achievement gaps.

The findings in this study indicated that relationship building was important in

narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and

English language arts. Participants shared their perspectives on how building positive

relationships with students and parents, supporting students outside of school, promoting

student dialogue, and providing teacher supportiveness aided in narrowing the

achievement gap. The evidence of this theme was also observed in the literature review in

Chapter 2.

Theme 2: Meeting Learning Needs/Styles of Students

Differentiating instruction can narrow the achievement gap for African American

students in mathematics and English language arts. Seriki and Brown (2017) suggested

that the culturally relevant pedagogy allows teachers to examine and modify their

classroom practices to effectively teach all children, particularly students of color.

Malacapay (2019) stated that identifying students' learning styles in school is considered

a teacher's responsibility to aid in student achievement. Cornett et al. (2020) expressed

that for U.S. teachers to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population of students,

it is essential to differentiate instruction. Brigandi et al. (2019) asserted that the ultimate aim of differentiated instruction is to ensure that all students learn and grow. T1 stated:

> I really just try to know my kids and, okay do you need to hear it in a song? Do you need to see it drawn out? Do you need to get up and act it out? So just getting to know the kids is the best teaching strategy out there.

T3 stated, "We implement various ways for students to come up to the solution or problem in math." Malacapay asserted that being knowledgeable about students' learning styles helps solve learning problems among students and allows students to become better learners. Ginja and Chen (2020) stated that educators must consider what motivates students and how lessons can be appropriately structured to meet these diverse interests. Interests can include personal experiences and strengths, cultural background, and areas of need. T6 stated:

> Just being able to make the content relevant. So, if we're talking about fractions, and I know my students love pizza! Then I'm going to make sure my lessons could be about pizza to introduce the lesson. So, I think just making it relevant and familiar to their background helps. Even if it's a story a background story that helps draw them in, hook them into the lesson. That's helpful.

Puzio et al. (2020) expressed that differentiated instruction is the commitment to modifying content, process, and or products in response to individual student differences in readiness, learning profiles, and interests. T9 asserted that it is important to learn what students are interested in and incorporate that into the instruction if possible.

Some schools also used the i-Ready diagnostic and instructional materials to meet the needs of their learners (Schmitt et al., 2019). iReady is helpful in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts because it helps find gaps and assists teachers in closing those gaps. T4 stated:

One program that the school uses is iReady and we use that data to determine our small groups as well as who might need to be in accelerated. It has a diagnostic assessment that they take three times a year, so fall, winter, and then of course spring. And the spring one is the one that we really focus on because that gives us a couple of weeks prior to testing, that if there's an area of weakness, then we work on that. I can help to strengthen it before the end of the year assessment if it's something that they still haven't mastered.

Goddard et al. (2019) described differentiated instruction as most effective when teachers pre-assess students and then use those results to allow students to learn. Through the i-Ready diagnostic, students are evaluated through an online test, with each consecutive question based on responses to the initial question. The teacher receives several reports at the class and student levels, including strengths, areas of need, annual growth expectations, scale scores, grade placement levels, and steps for lessons in each domain for each student and the whole class (Schmitt et al., 2019). T7 asserted,

iReady has lessons and it teaches them also, then it gives them a chance to assess. We can then look at the data and they also have diagnostic tests through this program during the year and that's where it sees exactly where they are weak or

what standards they need working on, and then it makes the lessons to that individual child.

Engaging resources also aid in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. T9 stated, "I use a lot of BrainPOP and Khan Academy and use games for math centers that they can rotate through." Baszuk and Heath (2020) expressed that student engagement in the classroom is essential for student learning, and Kahoot is an online tool that provides real-time feedback on student learning, understanding gaps, and opportunities for student participation. T10 asserted, "I use Khan Academy, Flocabulary, Kahoot, IXL, and Sadlier Connect Vocab Workshop that has a lot of different games and resources that are available to the kids and their parents." Vidergor (2020) expressed that Khan Academy is an online source for personal learning that provides content in different disciplines, practicing self-regulation and lifelong learning. Schuetz et al. (2018) described IXL as a subscription-based learning site that allows students to choose their grade level and specific Common Core State Standards to practice while it tracks students' progress and rewards them with virtual stickers as they master each area. Martin (2017) informed that BrainPOP included editable quizzes, games, activities, lesson plans, webinars, and animated movies aligned with Common Core Standards for multiple subjects.

Offering hands-on experiences in the classroom can aid in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. Bradberry and De Mario (2019) affirmed that active learning methods are often considered more effective in developing problem-solving skills and applying knowledge

to other situations. T8 declared, "I use lots of hands-on projects correlating with whatever content we're doing." T6 stated, "I do hands-on maybe once a week or a little bit of the unit." T1 stated:

> I try to use as many math manipulatives as possible to just make it concrete because when they can talk about the math and see the math, I think that helps them more than just the vague terms and things.

Gartland (2021) stated that students feel an increased sense of community in their classroom and a greater sense of self-efficacy and self-belief through the use of hands-on activities. Nurjanah et al. (2021) expressed that hands-on activities can improve student achievement and attract their learning and interest.

Student reference materials such as interactive notebooks aid in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. T2 stated:

> Having interactive notebooks for them to keep up with the mini lesson provides them with examples. We use the notebooks across grade levels. All of the teachers use interactive notebooks, even in math, for the kids to record work as well as to have something to refer back to when they're working independently.

Robinson (2018) asserted that interactive notebooks help students learn and retain more information, better understand concepts they have learned, address multiple learning styles, and teach organizational skills. Mason and Bohl (2017) stated that interactive notebooks provide opportunities to activate students' prior knowledge through pre-assessments, monitor students learning, and scaffolding ideas during the lesson. T4

mentioned, "I like to use interactive notebooks and that's something they can also take home and they can share that with their parents so that they can see what they are learning in class." Westfall (2018) described interactive notebooks as a tool students use to make connections before new learning, revise their thinking, and deepen their understanding of the world around them.

Lastly, vocabulary acquisition is significant in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students. Gallagher and Anderson (2016) affirmed that vocabulary is essential to reading and achievement, and overall success. McQuillan (2019) suggested that the best way to improve reading comprehension and academic achievement is through some form of direct, systematic vocabulary instruction. T5 stated:

> We started a couple of years ago using Sadlier Vocabulary and I love, love, love Sadlier Vocabulary. It has where they read along with the story, it'll read the story aloud to them, so they're exposed to good vocabulary and hearing it read. And then, it gives them lots of practice and I really, really think that's helped a lot. And it has lots of different stories about lots of different cultures and lots of different events in kids' lives and things. I really think that's a good resource. Also, I read aloud every day, so they are hearing good vocabulary.

Loftus-Rattan et al. (2016) stated that storybook reading provides a natural and practical context for vocabulary instruction with young children, particularly in the school setting. T1 stated, "I have noticed that sometimes there's not much prior knowledge with my students or as much vocabulary, so I try to spend more time addressing vocabulary before

we get into a topic." Manyak and Manyak (2021) expressed that vocabulary knowledge is critical to students' long-term academic achievement regarding reading comprehension.

The findings that meeting students' learning needs and styles aided in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students arose during the interview process of this study. Participants shared their perspectives on how differentiating instruction, using iReady to address learning needs, utilizing engaging resources, using hands-on experiences, implementing student reference materials, and teaching vocabulary acquisition were important in meeting students' learning needs and styles. Participants expressed that these factors also contributed to narrowing the achievement gap. I did not observe this perspective in the literature that I reviewed in Chapter 2.

Theme 3: Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness and teaching are essential in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. In the culturally relevant pedagogy, students must feel safe and that their backgrounds and cultural experiences are valued and allowed to thrive (McCarther & Davis 2017). Bryan et al. (2018) suggested that as teachers plan lessons, they must understand how the concepts that are taught apply to the lives of their students. Robinson (2020) asserted that African American students could become active participants when they are provided the opportunity to read realistic and authentic books or graphic novels that mirror their lived experiences. T1 stated:

> In ELA, I definitely try to bring in a variety of literature not just the pretty little
> White girl stories, but I try to make sure that I'm introducing all kinds of cultures

giving them something that maybe they can relate to a little bit better. As a

school, we have special programs such as Black history month program, so just

trying to recognize different cultures as much as possible.

Bean-Folks et al. (2018) asserted that teachers' engagement with Black students'

linguistic and social culture could significantly affect their academic success. T10 shared,

"I often allow my students to write in their own dialect, the way they choose to write." T9

expressed, "I use a lot of pop culture references in my class to bring in culture." In the

culturally relevant pedagogy, students must feel safe and that their backgrounds and

cultural experiences are valued and allowed to thrive (McCarther & Davis, 2017).

African American community partners can aid in narrowing the achievement gap

for African American students. McIntosh and Curry (2020) asserted that community-

school partnerships may be an essential tool for enhancing student success, especially in

low-income, diverse schools, and may address achievement gaps. T8 expressed:

I have had African American speakers, like role models from out in the

community that have come. I taught virtually last year so I did a virtual field trip

to our local power company for my students which was led by an African

American leader. So just having role models. Come in or some leader in the

community come in and speak to them. We've also had police officers come in

and they came and had activities with them and taught them about character. Just

mainly having community leaders and role models come in and speak to the kids

and then spend one on one time with them.

Morris (2021) stated that one approach to meeting students' needs is the community

school model, in which schools partner with community agencies and allocate resources

to provide an integrated focus on academic, health, social services, youth and community

development, and community engagement. T3 expressed:

> Definitely getting community partners involved in coming to the schools, because
>
> the students need to see future leaders that look like them so we bring them in
>
> from time to time when we could bring people to come speak. Bringing in people
>
> from our local power company to do hands on activities with the students to teach
>
> them more about electricity. So that they'll know that these are professions that
>
> they may want to go into one day.

Nelson et al. (2020) stated that school-community partnerships are an essential

mechanism to foster academic resilience and personal development with at-risk youth.

The findings in this study indicated that cultural awareness was pivotal in

narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and

English language arts. Participants shared their perspectives on how community

involvement and culturally relevant teaching were essential factors in narrowing the

achievement gap for African American students. The evidence of this theme was

observed in Chapter 2, along with new evidence that emerged.

Theme 4: Setting High Expectations

High expectations for African American students can help narrow the gap in

achievement in mathematics and English language arts. Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested

that through the culturally relevant pedagogy, educators of African American students

must demand academic excellence and get students to choose academic excellence so that African American students can thrive. Scheneka et al. (2017) called attention to the point that teachers who have higher expectations for students may give their students more opportunities to answer questions during class or further press the student to explain their thinking. Scheneka et al. expressed that a teacher who has low expectations for a student may not give that student enough time to respond to a question or may not even call on that student in the first place, making the student miss a crucial learning opportunity. Yanisko (2016) expressed that teachers' expectations of students may affect teachers' ability to provide students access to high-quality instruction. T2 explained, "My expectations are high, and they know I'm going to keep working with them to achieve. I'm not going to just accept whatever they give me." Youn (2016) cautioned that higher expectations and beliefs about academically disadvantaged children could be an essential educational resource in reducing the disparity of learning growth and increasing the chance for initially disadvantaged children to overcome their deficits. T4 stated:

> I try to do more positive as far as academics. I don't just look for something because I don't believe in awarding the child just because they show up. I don't do that, but if you do something academically, I'm going to praise that to the highest and I want everyone else to see that so then they will do the same and they will strive to reach that level too.

Liou and Rotheram-Fuller (2019) suggested that the impact of teachers' expectations for students is critical to students' success. T3 discussed that she has high expectations and tries to get her students to be comfortable with moving to a higher level. Louis et al.

(2019) stated that teachers' positive or negative expectations for students influence students' sense of academic self-worth and ability to succeed in school.

Offering students challenging opportunities has also aided in narrowing the achievement gap. T1 expressed:

> I think the best strategy is letting your students know that they are capable of more. I have found that when I tell a student that they did great and now I'd like them to try a challenging problem because the work is too easy for them, they instantly light up and feel good about themselves, so definitely feeding positivity to students and truly offering them accelerated or higher-level work opportunities.

Young et al. (2017) asserted that challenging and high-quality math can help address racial and gender achievement gaps. T3 explained, "All students need opportunities to be challenged even if they normally perform lower than others, exposure to challenging task and enrichment is very beneficial, so I make sure to have these learning experiences present in my classroom daily." Allen et al. (2016) stated that enrichment opportunities can benefit students by increasing student engagement and providing a more diverse manifestation of gifts and talents as students explore high-quality problem-based curricula.

The findings in this study indicated that setting high expectations for students was essential for narrowing the achievement gap for African American students. Participants explained that having high expectations for students and challenging students was important for African American student achievement. The evidence of this theme was observed in Chapter 2, along with new evidence that emerged.

Limitations of the Study

Participant availability, the small sample size of participants, and researcher bias were the limitations of this study. For the past year and a half, the United States and the world have experienced a global pandemic (Arquilla & Guzdial, 2020; Bâcă, 2020). Due to COVID-19, teachers are handling their regular duties and educating in person, virtual, and quarantined students. This has restricted their accessibility. To address this, I presented participants with a wide range of interview times to confront this limitation. I also provided a choice between participating in phone or Zoom interviews.

This study encompassed 11 educators at an elementary school located in the southeastern region of the United States. The small number of participants only gave a small-scale representation of educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students. Due to this, the findings of this study may not be universal to all settings. I addressed this limitation by guaranteeing strong transferability through a broad description of the research design, data, and contexts.

I had personal views regarding elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. I am African American and have teaching experience in a school where the student population was predominately African American. I also have teaching experience with third through fifth grade. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I maintained a reflective journal to confront researcher bias and prevent biases and assumptions. By being reflexive, I was able to withhold biases and focus completely on collecting and interpreting the data. I also kept a reflective journal of participants'

perspectives to establish trustworthiness. I utilized thematic analysis to recognize and ensure the dependability of all themes in this study. I maintained reflective views, development of the findings, and research resources used for this study by keeping a comprehensive audit trail throughout the research process. I was also able to ensure that the interpretation of the findings remained unbiased through an audit trail. In this study, I supported some of the research results and theories from the conceptual framework concerning elementary educators' perspective of strategies used to narrow the achievement gap of African American students in mathematics and English language arts.

Recommendations

This basic qualitative study explored elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts in a school located in the southeastern region of the United States. Participants in this study identified relationship building, meeting students' learning needs/styles, cultural awareness, and setting high expectations as important strategies that aid in narrowing the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. Participants expressed the importance of building relationships with students and parents to promote African American student achievement. Participants communicated that meeting African American students' learning needs and styles was important to help narrow the achievement gap. Participants also stressed the importance of cultural awareness and teaching with cultural relevancy to promote student achievement. Lastly, participants expounded on the importance of having high expectations for African American students to promote achievement and

narrow the achievement gap. The study's findings support the gaps in research regarding elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts in a school located in the southeastern region of the United States. I have included the following recommendations for future research.

I recommend a follow-up study in a different region of the United States. This study focused on educators in a school located in the southeastern region of the United States. Future studies may benefit from focusing on educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts from a school in a different region. The benefit of this will be to discover if strategies differ in different parts of the country. The second recommendation would be to follow-up of this study, but with more participants and more school sites. The third recommendation would be to study strategies used to narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts in middle grades.

Finally, administrators, instructional coaches, and district leaders can have professional development opportunities to assist educators in promoting relationship building within their classrooms. The professional development opportunities can also address ways to differentiate learning and meet the needs of the diverse learners in the classroom. Lastly, these professional development opportunities can focus on culturally relevant teaching strategies and set high expectations for students.

Implications

This study may contribute to a positive social change by providing elementary educators with strategies to help narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. This study may also provide school administrators, instructional coaches, and district leaders professional development opportunities to assist educators in building strategies to help narrow the gap in achievement for their African American students. This study may also prompt leaders and educators to share their successful strategies and practices that aid in African American student achievement with others in the profession.

Participants

Participants in this study shared strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. The most repeated strategies amongst most participants in this study were building positive relationships, culturally relevant teaching, and meeting learners' needs and learning styles. Participants discussed these strategies as helping narrow the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts. Researchers also discussed the importance of building positive relationships, teaching with cultural relevance, and meeting the needs of all learners to aid in African American achievement (Bryan et al. 2018; Malacapay, 2019; Milner, 2011). Suggestions for positive social change include educators leading professional development sessions to share strategies on relationship building, culturally relevant teaching, and meeting the needs of all learners through differentiated instruction.

Administration

Administrators could use the findings from this study to develop professional learning opportunities that focus on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students. The professional development opportunities could focus on relationship building, culturally relevant teaching, and meeting the needs of various learners. Educators could also lead these professional development opportunities. Research supports the importance of teachers leading professional development. Balta and Eryilmaz (2019) expressed that teachers are one of the core elements of education, they are the actors in the class, and they manage the learning process in the classroom. Suggestions for positive social change include discovering more strategies that aid in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics and English language arts and fostering the strategies mentioned in this study through professional development opportunities.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore third through fifth-grade elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts from a school located in the southeastern region of the United States. Limited research exists on elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap. I interviewed 11 participants and explored their perspectives on strategies to narrow the gap in achievement in mathematics and English language arts. Participants also shared

their beliefs on strategies that they believe have contributed to their African American students' success.

Four themes emerged from the data, including (a) relationship building, (b) meeting learning needs/styles of students, (c) cultural awareness, and (d) setting high expectations. The findings of this study focused on the gap in practice by contributing to an increased understanding of elementary educators' perspectives on strategies used to narrow the gap in achievement for African American students in mathematics and English language arts.

Elementary educators' have preserved and utilized strategies that aid in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students. This study provided new knowledge on these strategies. The data and results of this study may provide administrators and district leaders with an understanding of strategies that may aid in narrowing the achievement gap for third through fifth-grade African American students in mathematics and English language arts.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

Date:

Time:

Interviewee Code:

<u>Pre-Interview</u>

1. Thank interviewee for volunteering to participate in the study

2. Describe the purpose of the study

3. Describe the interview process

4. Review elements of consent

   - Researcher's background information

   - Risks and benefits of participating in the study

   - Privacy

   - Maintenance of confidentiality

   - Treatment of data

   - Right to refuse to participate and to withdraw at any time without

     penalty

5. Opportunity for questions

6. Statement of consent

7. Begin recording

8. Begin the interview

<u>Post-Interview</u>

1. Thank interviewee for participating

2. Remind interviewee of treatment of data and confidentiality

3. Inform participant that you will contact them to provide a summary of the findings for them to review for accuracy.

Interview Questions

1. How many years of teaching experience do you have?

2. What grade do you currently teach?

3. How many years have you taught in third, fourth, or fifth grade?

4. What teaching strategies or school wide implementations do you believe have contributed to narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics?

5. What teaching strategies or school wide implementations do you believe have contributed to narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in English Language Arts?

6. What culturally relevant teaching strategies have you applied within your classroom?

7. What strategies outside of instructional strategies do you believe have contributed to narrowing the gap in achievement for African American students (relationship building, community involvement, etc.)?

8. What resources do you believe have aided in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in mathematics?

9. What resources do you believe have aided in narrowing the achievement gap for African American students in English language arts?

10. Is there any additional information that you would like to share regarding

strategies to narrow the achievement gap for African American students?

Possible follow up prompts that I will keep visible as I interview each participant:
What did you mean by…….?
Tell me more about…….
You mentioned……
What do you mean by…...?
Please give me an example of when that…. worked/did not work.