

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE READING ACHIEVEMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITY
STUDENTS: ELEMENTARY EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Immaculata University

by

Zacheya J. Champagne-Lee

In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

TITLE OF DISSERTATION:

Factors Influencing the Reading Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students: Elementary Educators' Perceptions

AUTHOR: Zacheya Champagne-Lee

Mary D. Calderone, Ed.D.
Chairperson

Melissa L. Pavetti, Ed.D.
Committee

Maryann O. O'Connell, Ed.D.
Committee

Himi Caputo, Ed.D.
Reader

ON BEHALF OF IMMACULATA UNIVERSITY

Jane F. Kane
Jane F. Kane, Ed. D.
Dean, College of Graduate Studies

Thomas J. Compitello
Thomas Compitello, Ed D.
Chairperson, Education Division

DATE: March 19, 2015

©

By

Zacheya J. Champagne-Lee

2015

All Rights Reserved

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to analyze the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. The study was guided by 3 research questions: (a) What are the perceptions of educators (K-5) regarding the positive and negative factors that influence the reading achievement of ethnic minority students? (b) What are the perceptions of educators (K-5) regarding the most effective instructional strategies that positively impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students? and (c) What are the perceptions of educators (K-5) regarding the most valuable resources that can be used to raise the reading achievement of ethnic minority students? The study was conducted in 3 suburban Pennsylvania school districts as well as one suburban Pennsylvania charter school. Fifty-three elementary educators who taught students in grades kindergarten through 5th participated in the online survey. Seven elementary educators participated in follow-up interviews. The findings from this research revealed that the participants believe that factors related to teacher quality and parental support strongly impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. The elementary educators in this study recognized the existence of an achievement gap between White students and ethnic minority students. Strategies such as small-group instruction, reading aloud to students, conferencing, and differentiating instruction were identified as effective approaches to support the reading needs of ethnic minority students. Participants most commonly cited the Reading Workshop framework as an approach that positively impacts the achievement of ethnic minority students.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because of His grace, I have been blessed with the ability to remain dedicated to this work. I give glory and honor to God for showing me the way. Thank you, Lord, for your grace and mercy.

Acknowledgements

Proverbs 3:5-6— Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Thank you Jesus—I have come a mighty long way! I have so many reasons to rejoice!

To my dissertation chair, Dr. Mary Calderone, thank you for your wisdom, expertise, guidance, and encouragement. It has been a true blessing to learn from you.

To my committee member, Dr. MaryAnn Cox, thank you for everything. You are a wonderful educational leader and a great mentor. Thank you for all of your support and encouragement.

To my committee member, Dr. Melissa Pacitti, thank you for sharing your expertise in the area of literacy. I truly appreciate the insight that you provided.

I would like to thank my fourth reader, Dr. Heidi Capetola. You are truly an inspirational leader. I have always admired your poise, tranquility, and upbeat personality. I will always remember to surround myself with positive people.

Thank you to Rita Garwood, a very dear long-time friend, who provided editorial support and served as my research assistant. I could not have completed this process without your insight. Thank you for joining me on this journey and for being a friend.

I would like to thank all of the teachers, staff, and families within the PASD community. You have provided me with the support and encouragement that I needed to keep moving forward. I feel blessed to be a part of such a warm and dedicated community.

I would like to thank my husband, Andrae Lee. You have been there for me since that start of my educational career. Thank you for supporting this incredible journey.

My two children are my absolute greatest blessing. Thank you, Julien and Jayla, for being so very patient with me as I worked many long hours to complete this dissertation. I love you both very much. Julien, thank you for your encouraging words of wisdom and for checking in with me along the way. You are truly my biggest fan. Jayla, your smile and laugh warm my heart; you are my sunshine.

Thank you to both of my parents, Dorsey and Cecilia Champagne, who encouraged me in so many ways throughout my life. Dad, your determination and work ethic have been my inspiration. Mom, you always put the needs of your children before your own. I love you both so very much. Thank you for having faith in me and for instilling the importance of education.

To my grandmother, Juanita Champagne, a two time breast cancer survivor. Grandmom, you are a true fighter and a model of hope. I love you.

To my sisters, Doreen and Monique Champagne, I love you both. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

To Jonathan, my incredible nephew— I hope this work may inspire you to use your many gifts and talents in positive ways. I know you will do great things in life.

To my niece, Kylee, the newest member of our family, I can't wait to see what you will become. You have added a spark to my life over the past year. Auntie loves you.

Thank you to my cousin, Maurice. Your humility, loving heart, and gentle spirit always make me smile. I love you so much.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	viii
List of Tables	xi
Chapter One-Introduction	1
Overview	1
Need for the Study	5
Statement of the Problem	8
Definition of Terms	9
Limitations	11
Research Questions	12
Summary	12
Chapter Two-Literature Review	14
Introduction	14
The Achievement Gap	16
Factors that Influence the Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students	20
Teacher Quality	20
Tracking and Detracking	26
Socioeconomic Factors	27
Choice, Motivation, and Engagement	32
Early Childhood Education	35

Effective Instructional Strategies for Ethnic Minority Students	37
Culturally Responsive Practices	37
Differentiated Instruction.....	42
Response to Intervention.....	45
Summary	47
Chapter Three-Methodology.....	49
Introduction	49
Subjects	49
Setting	50
Instruments.....	53
Survey	53
Interview	53
Reliability and Validity.....	54
Design of the Study.....	55
Procedures.....	56
Data Analysis	58
Summary	58
Chapter Four-Results	59
Introduction	59
Survey Participants’ Demographic Data.....	59
Data Results	60
Results for Research Question One	60
Likert Scale Survey Results.....	61

Open-Ended Results.....	64
Interview Results	67
Results for Research Question Two.....	70
Likert Scale Survey Results.....	71
Open-Ended Results.....	75
Interview Results	77
Results for Research Question Three.....	79
Likert Scale Survey Results.....	79
Open-Ended Results.....	80
Interview Results	84
Results for Interview Question One.....	85
Summary	86
Chapter Five-Discussion.....	90
Summary of the Study	90
Limitations of the Study.....	96
Relationship to Other Research	97
Recommendations for Further Research.....	101
Conclusion	102
References.....	106
Appendices.....	121
A. Online Survey	121
B. Interview Questions	126
C. RERB Approval.....	127

List of Tables

Table

Table 4.1 Factors Related to Teacher Quality.....	62
Table 4.2 Factors Influencing the Reading Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students	65
Table 4.3 Instructional Strategies Impacting the Reading Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students	73
Table 4.4 Additional Strategies Impacting the Reading Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students.....	76
Table 4.5 Resources Positively Impacting the Reading Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students.....	80

Chapter One—Introduction

Overview

Millions of children across the United States reach fourth grade without learning to read proficiently (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). According to 2013 data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 45% of White students read at the proficient level in fourth grade. This percentage plummets to only 17% for African American students and 19% for Hispanics (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). Fryer and Levitt (2004) indicated that Black students generally score one standard deviation below White students on standardized tests. Fryer and Levitt equated the one standard deviation achievement gap to the difference in performance between the average fourth grader and the average eighth grader. Over the past decade, schools have become more accountable for student performance as a result of the passage of laws and policies (Hsieh, 2013; Noguera, 2009). As an example, the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB) holds schools accountable for the achievement of all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). As mandated by NCLB, every state now has distinctive standards that specify the knowledge and skills that children need to attain at specific grade levels (Haskins, Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012).

One overarching objective of NCLB is to close the achievement gap in grades kindergarten through third. A fundamental component of NCLB is to ensure equitable achievement outcomes for all students, especially in the area of reading (Adelson & Carpenter, 2011). Specifically, a central goal of NCLB is to ensure that poor and minority students are not taught by inexperienced and unqualified educators at higher rates than other children. Closing the achievement gap and ensuring that schools focus on the needs of every single child are core tenets of this educational act (Hsieh, 2013; Konstantopoulos

& Chung, 2011). As a result of increased demands imposed by NCLB, many state accountability plans now evaluate schools based on test scores, and some states are considering determining salaries for teachers based upon achievement test results (Caillier, 2010; Jacob & Lefgren, 2007).

Under the requirements of NCLB, schools must disaggregate data by student characteristics (i.e., race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) in order to make performance comparisons among these various subgroups (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). NCLB necessitates that schools show annual evidence of improvement, or Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP was Pennsylvania's growth measurement used to determine whether a school or district was making sufficient annual progress towards the goal of 100% proficiency by 2014. However, as a result of a waiver filed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), AYP was eliminated in 2013 and replaced with an alternative accountability plan referred to as the School Performance Profile (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2013). Under this new system, schools are required to demonstrate evidence of student academic achievement, evidence of student growth, as well as indicators of closing the achievement gap.

In a comprehensive data analysis and examination of schools that were unsuccessful at making AYP across the United States, Hsieh (2013) found that many schools with high percentages of ethnic minority students failed to make AYP. Konstantopoulos and Chung (2011) stated that the United States' education system has a two part objective: to provide opportunities for all children to grow academically and to lessen inequality in achievement. Given the increased demand to ensure that all students are able to demonstrate proficiency, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, educators are in search of instructional

approaches that will increase the achievement of students of color (Erickson, 2008; Williams, 2011).

Ensuring that every child is a reader has been a critical instructional priority for schools during the last several decades (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). In spite of the varied and intensive efforts employed to help all children succeed, NAEP data have revealed a clear achievement gap between students of color and White students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011), an achievement gap occurs when one group of students outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant. More than a decade's worth of fourth grade reading data from NAEP have clearly revealed that Black and Hispanic students have consistently performed at least 25 percentage points behind their Caucasian peers. Although this substantial gap in reading achievement currently exists, the NAEP scores have shown some progress in narrowing the White-Black and the White-Hispanic gaps in reading since the 1970s (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). While this improvement may be a sign of hope for the future, Hanselman and Borman (2013) professed, "Elementary literacy education in the United States still faces great challenges" (p. 237). In making this statement, Hanselman and Borman cited the large number (more than 50%) of Black, Hispanic, and poor children across the United States who are not reading at a proficient level by fourth grade.

The disparity between the achievement of students of color and White students continues to be a complex problem in the United States (Allen, 2008). Research conducted by Fryer and Levitt (2004) revealed that the Black-White achievement gap expands as children move through school. While researchers have proposed an array of possible

causes, no one has been able to definitively identify the precise factors that have led to this gap between students of color and White students (Williams, 2011). Regardless of the reasons for this persistent disparity in achievement, concerns have existed for many decades, and therefore, continued attention must be given until a solution is found (Williams, 2011).

The potential reasons for the achievement gap are varied (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Wenglinsky, 2004; Williams, 2011). As an example of one possible theory regarding the achievement gap, Allen (2008) expressed the need for stakeholders to examine the history of public education in the United States. “The task of successfully eradicating the achievement gap calls for stakeholders to examine the history of public education in the United States and to use the obvious historical evidence as an impetus to champion school reform” (Allen, 2008, p. 14). Some researchers have expressed concern that the United States has failed to implement the steps necessary to create a high-quality 21st century educational system (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Haskins et al., 2012). While other nations are taking comprehensive measures to support the changing demands of society, the United States is lagging behind in its efforts to increase the performance expectations for students (Darling-Hammond, 2011). “Although international competition is growing, U.S. students graduating from high school or college and entering the work force are increasingly less literate” (Carbo, 2008, p. 98). According to recent statistics, fewer than 20% of African American and Hispanic youth receive a college education (Darling-Hammond, 2011). However, this statistic was not always the reality. For a short period of time in the 1970s, African American and Hispanic students were attending college at rates similar to their Caucasian peers (Darling-Hammond, 2011).

Other potential causes of the achievement gap are related to issues associated with equity, poverty, and race. Darling-Hammond (2011) expressed concern regarding a lack of equity in schools and the long-term potential impact for ethnic minority students. Boyd-Zaharias and Pate-Bain (2008) stated that the low achievement and high dropout rates among poor and ethnic minority students continue to plague our society. The researchers indicated that the United States has failed to deliver a high-quality education to every child. Rothstein (2014) said, “Black children are more racially and socioeconomically isolated today than at any time since 1970. The academic achievement of African Americans has improved dramatically in recent decades, but so has that of whites, so huge achievement gaps remain” (p. 1). The current levels of reading achievement for today’s students will have serious implications for the future success of our nation (Cole, 2008). Closing the achievement gap will require significant attention to the issues of race and poverty (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008).

Need for the Study

Research from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010) cited the importance of all students being able to read proficiently by the end of third grade since this grade level is considered a fundamental milestone in a child’s educational development that paves the way for future educational success. In third grade there is an important shift from learning to read to reading to learn (Hernandez, 2011). Hernandez (2011) expressed, “Black and Hispanic children who are not reading proficiently in third grade are about twice as likely as similar White children not to graduate from high school” (p. 9). Shealey and Callins (2007) asserted, “Failing to address why so many students are underachieving in reading in the U.S. public schools will have profound implications” (p. 195). For these reasons,

professionals must have a greater sense of urgency to help children from diverse backgrounds reach their full achievement potential in reading. Utley, Obiakor, and Jeffrey (2011) asserted, “There is greater diversity within our nation and within the United States public school system than ever before” (p. 5). As diversity in our nation continues to grow, educators must be prepared to support all children.

In a research study that examined the achievement test score gap between urban and suburban students, Sandy and Duncan (2010) indicated, “The achievement gap between urban and suburban students can be explained by differences in family background and race” (p. 311). Specifically, Sandy and Duncan determined that 75% of the gap can be explained by the high number of ethnic minority and economically disadvantaged students in urban schools. Likewise, Teale, Paciga, and Hoffman (2007) revealed that there are a disproportionately high percentage of poor, Black and Hispanic students in urban environments. Teale et al. (2007) found that many urban schools lacked essential curriculum elements that are critical for student success in reading and writing. Specifically, the urban schools involved in the study fell short in the areas of comprehension instruction, writing instruction, and instruction focused on developing children’s knowledge of the world (Teale et al., 2007).

Some educational researchers have cited the need for high-quality early intervention programs (Allington, 2012; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Rothstein, 2014). Allington (2012) suggested that high-quality early intervention programs could prevent many reading challenges that students experience. According to Teale et al. (2007), “The first years of school are critical to children’s development as capable and lifelong readers and writers. This period is the time for learning foundational literacy skills and dispositions” (p. 347).

Similarly, research conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014) supported the need to aggressively take early action in order to ensure the reading proficiency of students.

Rothstein (2014) described high-quality early intervention programs as an expensive but fundamental resource for children from birth to school entry.

To date, very few schools have been able to successfully narrow the achievement gap (Williams, 2011). Although researchers, policymakers, and educational theorists have provided insight on this pressing matter, the achievement disparity is a persistent problem and the focus of ongoing debate in the educational community (Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2007; Williams, 2011).

In 2004, Congress provided educators with an instructional framework that could serve as an effective response to help close the reading achievement gap (Allington, 2012). This three-tiered initiative, known as Response to Intervention (RtI), has been adopted by many schools across the United States in an attempt to help narrow the achievement gap. RtI has been classified as a prevention-focused model that would allow school professionals to provide research-based interventions to students as soon as problem areas are identified (Brown-Chidsey, 2007).

Although the RtI instructional model may hold some promise in increasing student achievement, Marshall (2009) described the importance of teacher effectiveness in all schools. Marshall asserted, "Good teaching is a powerful gap-closer" (p. 652). There is a substantial body of research that has validated the importance of teacher effectiveness in order to increase the achievement potential of all students (Barnes, 2006; Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006; Hernandez, 2011; Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2011; Marshall, 2013).

Carbo (2008) argued that some of the approaches taken by many schools may actually be detrimental to improving the reading achievement of diverse students. Carbo stated, “Much of what is being done today in literacy disregards important research in reading, learning styles and how the brain learns, and is likely to worsen the reading problem and increase the number of bored, stressed students who dislike reading” (p. 100). If this problem is not continually examined, there will be devastating long-term consequences for many children (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Carbo, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

President Barack Obama used the phrase “morally unacceptable” to describe the large race and class-based achievement gap in our country (Darling-Hammond, 2011). The low reading achievement of ethnic minority students is a serious problem in the United States. Haskins et al. (2012) contended, “Good jobs in the nation's twenty-first-century economy require advanced literacy skills such as categorizing, evaluating, and drawing conclusions from written texts” (p. 1). Many states have recently adopted the new Common Core Standards. These rigorous standards require students to demonstrate advanced literacy skills (Haskins et al., 2012).

Results from the 2012 Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) have also proven that there is a clear achievement gap in reading (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). In 2012, 51% of African American students and 45% of Hispanic students scored basic or below basic on the PSSA. This is in comparison to only 18% of their Caucasian peers who scored basic or below basic. The reading achievement disparity between White students and students of color on the 2012 PSSA revealed an even larger disparity in fifth grade where 62% of African American students and 57% of Hispanic

students scored basic or below basic on the reading PSSA in comparison to 27% of their Caucasian peers who scored basic or below basic (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). A lack of proficient performance among ethnic minority students has prompted many different stakeholders to examine the measures needed to help close the gap.

In order to gain a better understanding of the influences that have led to this disparity in achievement between White students and students of color, this study sought to understand the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the specific factors that impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. In addition, this study was designed to learn the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the instructional strategies and resources that positively impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply:

Academic Achievement — Measures of achievement that focus on teaching and learning rather than discipline (Frye & Vogt, 2010).

Achievement Gap — The disparity in academic performance among groups of students (Education Week, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) — Pennsylvania's growth measurement used to determine whether a school or district is making sufficient annual progress towards the goal of 100% proficiency (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011).

Cultural Competence — Understanding, appreciation, and respect of students' cultures and use of student cultures as the basis upon which teaching and learning occur (Frye & Vogt, 2010).

Culturally Responsive Teaching — A culturally-supported, learner-centered approach whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007).

Detracking — The process of dismantling institutional and organizational structures or instructional barriers that sort students according to ability (LaPrade, 2011).

Differentiated Instruction — An approach used in the classroom in which students have various ways for acquiring content, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn (Tomlinson, 2001).

Early Childhood Education — The formal teaching and care of young children (spanning from birth to the age of eight) by individuals or professionals (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

Educational Technology — A variety of electronic tools and applications that help deliver learning content and support the learning process (Cheung & Slavin, 2013).

Electronic Reader (E-reader) — A handheld electronic device used for reading electronic books and similar materials (Electronic reader, 1993).

Elementary Educators — Professionals who teach students in grades kindergarten through fifth.

Ethnic Minority Students — African American and Hispanic/Latino students.

Global Learner — Students who learn best by visualizing, touching, and moving (Young, Wright, & Laster, 2005).

Highly Qualified Teachers — Teachers who hold at least a bachelor's degree, hold a valid Pennsylvania teaching certificate, and demonstrate subject matter competency for the core content area they teach (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) — Federal legislation that ensures accountability as well as increased federal support for education (United States Department of Education, 2004).

Reader's Theater — A staged reading of a play or dramatic piece of work designed to entertain, inform or influence (Kerry-Moran, 2006).

Strategy Groups — A reading approach in which students are grouped together according to a specific strategy in which they require structured support from the teacher.

Students of Color — African American and Hispanic/Latino students (Kezar & Eckel, 2007).

Total Participation Techniques (TPTs) — Teaching techniques that allow for all students to demonstrate, at the same time, active participation and cognitive engagement in the topic being studied (Himmele & Himmele, 2011).

Limitations

This study had several limiting factors. First, the study was conducted in three suburban public school districts and one public charter school in southeastern Pennsylvania. However, the problem of low reading proficiency levels among ethnic minority students is prevalent all across the nation. Therefore, the small demographic area was a limitation. The educator perceptions in the location of the study may differ from those in other areas of the United States, and therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other areas of the state or country.

The study was limited to the perceptions of elementary educators (K-5) who directly facilitated reading instruction. The viewpoints of elementary teachers who did not

directly instruct reading, secondary teachers, or administrators were not considered in this study. Given these parameters, the total number of voluntary participants was a limitation.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of educators (K-5) regarding the positive and negative factors that influence the reading achievement of ethnic minority students?
2. What are the perceptions of educators (K-5) regarding the most effective instructional strategies that positively impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students?
3. What are the perceptions of educators (K-5) regarding the most valuable resources that can be used to raise the reading achievement of ethnic minority students?

Summary

The reading proficiency level of today's students is a serious educational concern (Burchinal et al., 2011). Allington (2012) pointed out that two of every three students in the United States are reading below a proficient level. Data have clearly shown a lack of proficiency in reading for ethnic minority students in particular. According to several decades worth of NAEP data, many Black and Hispanic students are performing significantly behind their peers in the area of reading (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). This lack of reading proficiency can have severe long term educational and career consequences for ethnic minority students (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Carbo, 2008). Schools are responsible for the academic success of all students and have a responsibility to ensure that all students experience growth in their reading skills (Adelson & Carpenter, 2011). Therefore, a commitment to meeting the literacy needs of students of

color must remain a top educational priority. This study examined teacher perceptions regarding the factors impacting the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Chapter Two will provide an extensive review of the research surrounding this topic.

Chapter Two—Literature Review

Introduction

The United States of America is the most racially and culturally diverse nation in the world (Ford, Henfield & Scott, 2013). Ethnic minority populations are growing faster than the population as a whole (Cyr, McDiarmid, Halpin, Stratton, & Davis-Delano, 2012). As diversity in the United States' classrooms continues to increase, educators must be prepared to respond to the learning needs of each individual student (Saravia-Shore, 2008). Given the growing diversity in our nation, educators are continually challenged to expand their repertoire of teaching strategies (Cole, 2008). While meeting the needs of diverse student groups may present a complex task for many educational professionals, schools have the ultimate responsibility to ensure the success of all students. "The face of our nation is changing and our public schools bear a major responsibility for addressing disparities through the design and delivery of effective instruction" (Cyr et al., 2012, p. 158). Schools have the power to change the educational trajectory of their students (Chenoweth, 2009). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014) stated, "Today's children are our nation's hope for building a strong future economy and thriving society" (p. 1). To this end, professionals must remain valiant in their efforts to support the diverse and changing needs of 21st century learners.

In our current educational system, the reading needs of many ethnic minority students are not being met. Several decades worth of NAEP data have revealed a statistically significant disparity in the achievement between White students and students of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The significant gap in student achievement between Black and White children has been described as one of the most

pernicious problems facing our society (Burchinal et al., 2011). A longitudinal study conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation examined how third-grade reading skills and poverty impacted the high school graduation of nearly 4,000 students (Hernandez, 2011). The study revealed that students who are not reading at a proficient level by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of school than proficient readers. Likewise, Chenoweth (2009) acknowledged that there is a substantial body of data that revealed the correlation of achievement with poverty and race. These data indicated that many poor, Black and Hispanic students achieved at lower levels than middle-class White and Asian students. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, the graduation rate among students of color has been reported to be as many as 25 percentage points below their White peers (Cyr et al., 2012). Ensuring that all students graduate from high school with advanced literacy skills is crucial to their future educational and career success (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2013).

In order to provide a wealth of information surrounding the topic of the achievement of minority students, this literature review is divided into three major sections. The review focuses on the achievement gap, factors that have influenced the achievement of ethnic minority students, and effective instructional strategies that have impacted the achievement of minority students. The academic achievement of ethnic minority students is the overarching focus of this literature review. However, given the critical importance of reading proficiency among ethnic minority students, coupled with the distinct focus of the research questions, special attention is given to the specific factors, strategies, and resources that impact reading achievement for students of color.

The Achievement Gap

Historically, Black individuals have struggled to gain access to fair educational opportunities (Chambers, 2009). Chambers (2009) acknowledged that prior to the 20th century many Black students were forced to attend segregated schools. In the 1950s, schools for Black students had enormous shortages of resources, and students of color were denied meaningful educational opportunities (Rothstein, 2014). Similarly, Chambers (2009) expressed, “The problem of racial disparities in education is complicated and multifaceted” (p. 418). The researcher noted that many segregated schools lacked the appropriate resources that were needed in order to provide a high-quality education to Black students. Given this culture of segregation and inequality, Black Americans were compelled to fight for fair educational opportunities. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. forced our nation to confront the disparities of race and poverty in the 1960s (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008). Cole (2008) acknowledged, “Racism and prejudice are still ugly realities in all sectors of life in the United States, including education. Today, racism may be less overt and virulent than in the past, but its effects can still greatly harm minority students” (p. 2).

Data collected from a sampling of 20 children per school from 1,000 different schools across the United States revealed that the average Black student attended a school that was 59% Black and 8% Hispanic. In comparison, the typical White student attended a school where 6% of the population were Black and 5% of the population were Hispanic (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). Progress has been made over the past several decades in terms of minimizing segregation and providing equal educational access for students of color.

However, substantial racial segregation still exists in United States' schools today (Gándara, 2010; Fryer & Levitt, 2004).

According to Gándara (2010), Hispanics are the most segregated student group in the United States. Segregated schools tend to have fewer resources and support for students (Gándara, 2010). Gándara provided several factors that have led to this segregation. First, there is a high concentration of Hispanics in the inner cities where housing is more affordable. Next, many Hispanic children speak English as a second language, and therefore language differences serve as a barrier.

Gándara (2010) pointed out that segregation is closely connected to achievement outcomes. In comparison to schools in affluent areas, schools serving low income and minority students in segregated areas often provide fewer college preparatory and honors courses. The author noted that Hispanic students are the group of students who are most likely to drop out of school, which can have negative implications for their future employment and career status. "The intense segregation that Hispanic students experience in U.S. schools nearly guarantees that many will not have the opportunity to meet expected academic standards" (Gándara, 2010, p. 60).

There have been substantial efforts made over the last several decades to understand the primary issues that have hindered the reading achievement of ethnic minority students (Shapiro, 2008). While recognizable efforts have been made to support the needs of students of color, the racial gap in student academic achievement continues to be an area of concern and a topic of much controversy in the educational community (Chambers, 2009; Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2007). Although the existence of the achievement gap is indisputable, the factors that have led to this disparity remain a focus of much debate

(Burchinal et al., 2011). Some researchers have argued that trying to determine the causes of the achievement gap is a waste of time and energy (Williams, 2011). Instead, some educators and policy makers have expressed the importance of continued concerted efforts on intervention and true reform (Haycock, 2006; Williams, 2011). Williams (2011) declared, “It is imperative that the educational community stop trying to determine who is culpable for this crisis and instead come together and focus its efforts on true reform” (p. 65).

The enactment of NCLB has driven the issue of the achievement gap into the spotlight by exposing profound disparities in the U.S. educational system (Noguera, 2009; Webley, 2012). Schools across the country are now required to critically examine an issue that has been ignored throughout much of U.S. history. According to Haycock (2006), this law shined a direct spotlight on the achievement of poor and ethnic minority students. Haycock expressed, “There are no more invisible kids. NCLB has shone a spotlight on the academic performance of poor and minority students, English language learners, and students with disabilities — students whose lagging achievement had previously been hidden” (p. 38). Webley (2012) described this direct attention on the achievement of ethnic minority students as a great victory of the NCLB legislation.

NCLB created increased accountability for schools. Many schools have intensified their focus on results, and accountability has become a common standard in today’s society (Wilson, Martens, & Arya, 2005). As a result of the NCLB legislation, the administration of high-stakes assessments has become the norm throughout the country. The intention of NCLB was to close the achievement gap by holding schools responsible for the achievement of all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status (Noguera, 2009).

Although this may sound like a noble goal, there are conflicting opinions among researchers regarding the intentions and the impact of NCLB. As an example, Smyth (2008) argued that ethnic minority and economically disadvantaged students have not benefitted from NCLB; if anything they have been left further behind than ever before. Frye and Vogt (2010) suggested that the focus on closing the achievement gap has caused Black children to be underserved and neglected in schools. Specifically, the researchers argued that negative stereotypes and teacher attitudes are factors causing inequity within the educational system. Webley (2012) stated, “Despite its [NCLB’s] admirable intentions and the measurable gains it has produced in the past 10 years, the good no longer outweighs the bad” (p. 41). Researchers have argued that NCLB is flawed and that the implications of this legislation could actually have a damaging impact on poor and ethnic minority students (Smyth, 2008).

In response to increased accountability and testing demands, some schools have made changes to their curriculum and instructional practices (Cole, 2008; Noguera, 2009; Webley, 2012). As an example, Webley (2012) noted that many schools are narrowing their curricula and teaching to the test. Webley stated that this type of approach can have a negative impact on the overall quality of instruction and may contribute to the achievement gap. According to Smyth (2008), “Teaching to the test reduces teacher creativity, innovative instruction, the use of varied teaching strategies for diverse students, and teacher and student motivation” (p. 134). Noguera (2009) classified teaching to the test as a harmful and pervasive phenomenon. Cole (2008) explained the importance of using a variety of assessment measures to determine student learning.

In addition to the issues with high stakes assessment practices, increased accountability, and the impact of legislation, factors related to teacher quality, tracking, socioeconomic concerns, choice, motivation, engagement, and early childhood education experiences have been identified as variables impacting the achievement of ethnic minority students.

Factors that Influence the Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students

Teacher quality. Teacher quality has been heavily cited as a significant influential factor related to the achievement of students (Christenbury, 2011; Cole, 2008; Gordon et al., 2006; Haycock, 2006; Haycock & Crawford, 2008; Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2008; Marshall, 2009; Smith & Gorard, 2007). Gordon et al. (2006) expressed that the success of public education depends upon the effectiveness of the 3.1 million teachers managing the classrooms across the United States. Smith and Gorrard (2007) proclaimed, “The quality and supply of the teacher workforce is an area that has attracted widespread international attention and concern” (p. 191). Teaching is a complex act that requires specialized skills and knowledge (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008). Research has confirmed that effective teachers can substantially increase achievement for minority students (Marshall, 2009). Marshall (2009) asserted, “Good teaching helps all students, but it gives the biggest boost to students who enter classrooms with low achievement” (p. 652). According to the American School Board Journal (2006), “Achievement gains from having a high quality teacher could be almost three times as large for African-American students than for White students, even when comparing students with the same prior school achievement” (p. 58). Gordon et al. (2006) found that students taught by educators in the top quartile of effectiveness advance, on average, approximately five percentile points each year relative

to their peers. Conversely, students instructed by teachers in the bottom quartile of effectiveness lose an average of five percentile points relative to their peers.

In school districts with high poverty rates and/or high levels of an ethnic minority population, the recruitment and retention of effective teachers has been identified as a very challenging task (Bumgardner, 2010). Haycock and Crawford (2008) also noted that high-quality teachers are not evenly distributed across all kinds of schools. According to Bumgardner (2010), lack of teacher autonomy, student discipline problems, and lack of administrative support were factors that impeded the retention of teachers. Haskins et al. (2012) reported that many teachers leave high-poverty schools because of factors such as an absence of strong leadership and limited resources. Jacob and Lefgren (2007) found that teachers in high-poverty schools are less likely to have credits beyond their bachelor's degree and have fewer years of experience in comparison to their counterparts in lower-poverty schools. Haskins et al. stated, "The typical pattern in a high-poverty school is that as teachers accumulate experience and seniority, they tend to exercise their option to move to schools in low-poverty areas, thus creating a continuous flow of new, inexperienced teachers into high-poverty schools" (p. 4). Many states across the country have initiated efforts to recruit and retain high-quality teachers in high-poverty, high-minority schools. Haskins et al. noted that better pay does have an impact in attracting and retaining teachers in high-poverty schools.

Placing the lowest achieving students with the weakest teachers is no way to close the achievement gap (Haycock & Crawford, 2008). According to the American School Board Journal (2006), "African American students are about twice as likely to be taught by the least effective teachers" (p. 58). The results of ineffective teachers and poor instruction

can have long-lasting effects on students. “Schools that have had success in teaching poor and minority students do not keep ineffective teachers on the faculty; in these schools, teachers are held responsible if their students do not learn” (Cole, 2008, p. 5). School leaders must work hard to ensure that all teachers within their buildings are able to appropriately meet the diverse needs of the student body. Teachers must employ a broad repertoire of instructional strategies and they must be competent facilitators (Cole, 2008).

Haycock and Crawford (2008) asserted, “Gaps in teacher quality are a big contributor to gaps in student achievement” (p. 18). Cole (2008) pointed to poor and inappropriate instruction from ineffective teachers as an influential factor that can hinder the growth of ethnic minority students. “Instead of being presented in a variety of modes, instruction in too many U.S. schools tends to be abstract, devoid of application, overly sequential, and redundant. Bits of knowledge are emphasized, not the big picture, thus handicapping global thinkers” (Cole, 2008, p. 5). Ethnic minority students may receive inferior instruction because they are often placed in low-level reading groups and/or sent out of the classroom for remedial instruction (Saravia-Shore, 2008). It is very important for educators to hold high expectations for the performance of all students; under the right circumstances, all children have the potential to achieve at high levels (Cole, 2008).

NCLB has attempted to address the issue of teacher quality by mandating that all teachers must be Highly Qualified in the area(s) that they teach (Smith & Gorard, 2007). However, there are not uniform licensing requirements across our nation, which means that the criteria used to determine what constitutes a Highly Qualified teacher varies from state to state. The content of this legislation as it relates to the area of teacher quality is focused on the required credentials of educators, but it does not address the specific characteristics

that define an effective educator (Smith & Gorard, 2007). Additionally, some research has shown that teacher certification may be a poor predictor of teacher effectiveness (Gordon et al., 2006).

In order to prepare educators to work effectively with all students, there must be a focus on teacher preparation programs (Frye & Vogt, 2010; Matias, 2013; Stevens & Charles, 2005; Turner, 2007). Turner (2007) described the importance of preparing teacher candidates to work with culturally diverse students. Similarly, Frye and Vogt (2010) stated that colleges of education have a direct responsibility to prepare all teacher candidates with the cultural competencies needed to effectively guide, develop, and mentor culturally diverse students. Frye and Vogt (2010) went on to say, “Teacher preparation programs must carefully select teacher candidates who have the dispositional qualities that will allow them to see the potential in every child regardless of race, ethnicity, language, gender, etc.” (p. 12). Pre-service educators must understand the disparities that exist in our educational system and must be equipped with the essential skills and strategies to meet the needs of students of color. Matias (2013) stated, “White teacher candidates need to re-experience the pain of racism” (p. 78). This can be done by exposing pre-service teacher candidates to historical articles from ethnic minority scholars that depict the emotional trauma of racism (Matias, 2013). In response to the need to better prepare pre-service candidates, some undergraduate institutions in the United States have started to modify and adapt their programs in order to support the changing needs of today’s students (Frye & Vogt, 2010; Matias, 2013; Turner, 2007).

Cyr et al. (2012) recognized the importance of altering the teacher preparation program at Springfield College in order to appropriately equip prospective teachers with

the skills to work with diverse student populations. The faculty at Springfield College embarked upon a comprehensive program reform process. This process began with an analysis and reflection of the current program. The program transformation process entailed the integration of a teacher leadership component, a dual licensure program in elementary and special education, revamping course goals and outcomes, and an increase in field work experiences in diverse settings.

Similarly, at the University of Maryland, Turner (2007) incorporated distinct activities into a reading methods course in order to promote cultural awareness and sensitivity. Specifically, pre-service teachers were required to read and respond to multicultural literature, review model videos of literacy instruction in diverse classroom settings, and read and write cultural autobiographies. By engaging in this research study, Turner (2007) helped the prospective educators identify “blind spots” that may have limited their ability to effectively work with diverse populations of students.

The School of Education at the University of South Carolina (USCS) implemented an aggressive diversity plan in 1995 (Stevens & Charles, 2005). The institution recognized the fact that South Carolina had a high population of Black and Hispanic students, yet a low enrollment of ethnic minority students in the Education Division. The institution implemented a variety of techniques in order to improve their program. Some of those techniques included the integration of multicultural teaching materials, the addition of a diversity bulletin board that featured teaching tolerance materials, and the integration of videos and projects that focused on teaching tolerance. Student feedback surveys were also used to help guide the program efforts. The most significant outcome of their efforts was an increase in diversity of their student body (13% to 31%) as well as an increase in

diversity in their faculty (8% to 13%). The university articulated a belief that prospective educators must learn multicultural content and must be able to effectively apply their knowledge as they worked with diverse ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic student populations (Stevens & Charles, 2005).

According to Christenbury (2011), effective teaching is central to the academic success of all students. High quality teachers utilize a plethora of strategies and a range of methods, which they modify and enhance over time (Christenbury, 2011). Many effective instructional approaches build on students' backgrounds and reaffirm their cultural, linguistic, and ethnic heritages (Saravia-Shore, 2008). Cole (2008) illustrated good instruction as teaching that is engaging, relevant, multicultural, and appealing to an array of learning styles. Likewise, Saravia-Shore (2008) expressed, "The growing diversity in U.S. classrooms necessitates and encourages the development and use of diverse teaching strategies designed to respond to each student as an individual" (p. 44).

Effective teachers understand the importance of developing relationships with students (Kafele, 2009). Kafele (2009) stated, "You must be able to demonstrate to them that you are genuinely interested in them and their overall growth and well-being beyond their academic progress" (p. 9). According to Knoell and Crow (2013), student-teacher relationships are cultivated through intentional and ongoing effort, and relationships between teachers and students affect learning outcomes and behavior in the classroom. Murray-Harvey (2010) found that there was a correlation between positive and supportive teacher-student relationships and students' academic achievement, psychological health, and overall well-being in school.

Tracking and detracking. By tracking students, or grouping them according to their perceived ability, students may be deprived of important and valuable academic opportunities (Cole, 2008). Schools across the United States continue the practice of tracking despite evidence that has supported the ineffectiveness of this grouping approach (Burriss & Welner, 2005; Chambers, 2009). According to Burriss and Welner (2005), tracking denies achievement opportunities for students. Burriss and Welner (2005) affirmed that Black and Hispanic students are consistently overrepresented in low track classes. As a result of tracking, Cole (2008) indicated that ethnic minority students are often denied access to rigorous coursework. “Students in low tracks are stigmatized and lose self-esteem and motivation, while expectations for their performance plummet” (p. 4). Some researchers identified a correlation between tracking and the achievement gap. Burriss and Welner (2005) and Chambers (2009) found that school tracking policies negatively influenced student achievement.

In the late 1990s, the Rockville Centre School District in Long Island, New York, began a multi-year detracking effort that resulted in increased learning expectations for all students (Burriss & Welner, 2005). In this diverse suburban school district, low track classes were gradually eliminated at the high school level and replaced with heterogeneously grouped classes and a rigorous curriculum that was previously reserved exclusively for students in the highest track courses. The district employed a universal acceleration plan and raised the bar for all students. The results of having high expectations proved to have a powerful impact on many students, especially Black and Hispanic students. The achievement gap narrowed and overall graduation rates increased. The percentage of ethnic minority students who earned a Regents diploma (high school

graduation diploma in New York State) went from 32% in 2000 to 82% in 2003 (Burriss & Welner, 2005). In order to effectively execute a plan such as the one utilized at Rockville, a school district must remain focused and committed. LaPrade (2011) stated, “Removing instructional barriers to promote equity and excellence in classrooms for all students requires concerted efforts on several fronts” (p. 749). In order for detracking to be effective, educators must not make presumptions; they must have an attitude that every single child can and will succeed (LaPrade, 2011). Teachers cannot make excuses and must maintain a belief that neither failure nor mediocrity is a possibility in their classrooms (Kafele, 2009).

Socioeconomic factors. Achievement differences are often associated with socioeconomic factors (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008; Chenoweth, 2009; Education Week, 2011; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Sandy & Duncan, 2010). Chenoweth (2009) indicated, “Poor, Black, and Hispanic students achieve at lower levels, on average, than middle-class White and Asian students in study after study” (p. 38). Children who are Black and from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately low achieving (Williams, 2008). Nisbett (2010) said, “The root causes of the achievement gap are complex, and the class and ethnicity gaps are intertwined” (p. 11). According to Boyd-Zaharias and Pate-Bain (2008), the low achievement and high dropout rates among poor and ethnic minority students have been described as a “plague” to the United States society. “Low achievement and dropping out are problems rooted in social and economic inequality—a force more powerful than curricula, teaching practices, standardized tests, or other social-related policies” (p. 41).

In a comprehensive research investigation involving over 300 low income American youth from ages 4 through 10, Burchinal et al. (2011) examined the Black-White achievement gap in both reading and mathematics. The analysis revealed that a significant racial gap was present by the age of three, and family and school characteristics such as racism, segregation of schools, income, parental education, parenting beliefs, and quality of instruction were the primary contributors to this gap (Burchinal et al., 2011). According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014), the gap in proficiency rates between poor children and higher-income children widened by nearly 20% over the past decade. In every single state, children from low-income households were less likely to be reading proficiently in comparison to their higher-income peers (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). Likewise, Fryer and Levitt (2004) stated that socioeconomic status and poverty are significant factors in explaining racial differences in academic achievement. McGlynn (2014) stated, “The gap between poor children and wealthier ones widens each year, and by high school it has become a chasm” (p. 57). Children from wealthier families are increasingly starting kindergarten much better prepared to succeed than children from lower income families, thus the academic gap continues to widen (McGlynn, 2014). Colker (2014) pointed out a “word gap” (vocabulary) between rich and poor children. “Children’s vocabulary skills are linked to their economic backgrounds. By three years of age, there is a 30 million word gap between children from the wealthiest and poorest families” (Colker, 2014, p. 26). In order to close the achievement gap, attention must be given to the issues of poverty and race.

Yet another barrier associated with poverty involves a lack of summer reading experiences. Children who do not read over the summer may experience a loss of reading

skills (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013; King-Dickman, 2013). This loss of achievement, also referred to as the summer slide or the summer setback, is a contributor to the reading achievement gap (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013) described the summer reading setback as a major contributor to the rich/poor reading achievement gap. Furthermore, King-Dickman (2013) stated, “The slide can result in a poor student being as much as four years behind a wealthier one in terms of literacy skills by the time both students graduate from high school” (p. 62). According to Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013), many children from low-income families have limited access to books over the summer. “Without books, poor children rarely read during the summers and their school-year achievement suffers a setback” (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013, p. 10). King-Dickman (2013) stated that students who live in poverty may lose up to three months of reading achievement each summer. In order to prevent this from happening, schools must ensure that children who fall into this category are provided with good fit books to read over the summer (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013).

Insufficient funding is another issue that children in high-poverty schools experience (Cole, 2008). High-poverty schools often receive less funding than schools in affluent areas. As a result, students are taught with subpar materials and fewer resources. This unequal access to resources presents an academic disadvantage for ethnic minority students. Teachers in these environments often have fewer professional development opportunities and larger class sizes (Cole, 2008).

Although socioeconomic factors may have an impact on the achievement of ethnic minority students, there are many schools across the United States that have experienced success in raising the achievement levels of students in high-poverty, high-minority schools

(Chenoweth, 2009; Hawkins, 2007; Reeves, 2004). As an example, Chenoweth (2009) analyzed the practices at several schools where low-income and racially diverse students achieved at high levels. Many students in the high-poverty and high-minority schools lacked background knowledge and vocabulary skills. According to Chenoweth (2009), the educators in the low-income schools were thoughtful in their efforts to develop students' skills in these areas by utilizing documentaries and videos and by incorporating field trips. These educators met regularly to discuss curriculum, instruction, and student achievement. The meeting times were sacred, and the educators recognized the value and importance of teacher collaboration. The professionals had deep discussions regarding instructional strategies that were having a positive impact.

Similarly, the results from a multi-year study conducted in several Rhode Island schools revealed successful efforts in narrowing the achievement gap (Hawkins, 2007). Hawkins (2007) stated, "The driving force of successful schools is the staff's commitment to ensuring the success of each student" (p. 62). Comparable to the successful practices that occurred in other schools that successfully closed the achievement gap, Hawkins (2007) found that the Rhode Island schools had high and common expectations for the achievement of all students and utilized differentiated instructional techniques. In addition, teacher collaboration occurred routinely, there was increased instructional time in literacy, and inclusive strategies were in place to ensure that students with special needs were educated in the general education curriculum. Teacher teams met to analyze student work and data, and professional development in research-based best practices were provided to staff members (Hawkins, 2007).

Reeves (2004) conducted research in “90/90/90” schools. This term, coined by the researcher in 1995, was used to describe schools identified as having the following characteristics: 90% or more students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, 90% of the students were members of ethnic minority groups, and 90% of the students met or exceeded the state level academic benchmark. Through this research, Reeves identified a variety of common characteristics among these schools. Similar to the research conducted by Chenoweth (2009), 90/90/90 schools had a laser-like focus on the achievement of all students. This was evidenced by student achievement data displays (graphs, charts, and tables), a comprehensive accountability system that was designed to ensure the growth of all students, visual exemplars of student work in all content areas, and an intensive focus on reading and literacy instruction (Reeves, 2004).

Clear curriculum choices were a second characteristic of 90/90/90 schools (Reeves, 2004). More instructional time was spent on the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics and less academic time was spent on other subjects. A third common characteristic of 90/90/90 schools was frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement. In many of these schools, this included weekly assessments of student progress. The 90/90/90 schools were committed to providing students with timely and specific feedback regarding their performance.

Another characteristic of 90/90/90 schools was a strong emphasis on requiring written responses in performance assessments and a focus on nonfiction writing (Reeves, 2004). Performance tasks that required written responses assisted teachers in diagnosing obstacles to student learning by providing them with valuable information about student needs. According to Reeves (2004), “By assessing student writing, teachers can discern

whether the challenges faced by a student are the result of vocabulary issues, misunderstood directions, reasoning errors, or a host of other causes that are rarely revealed by typical tests” (p. 5). Most traditional assessments and worksheets do not provide classroom teachers with this type of diagnostic information regarding their students.

The fifth and final characteristic of 90/90/90 schools was collaborative scoring of student work (Reeves, 2004). Teachers would exchange papers with other teachers and principals would exchange papers with other schools. Uniform criteria and common assessment practices were well-established. Although factors such as poverty, race, culture, and language can impact student achievement, studies have proven that variables in teaching, curriculum, and leadership are profoundly important (Chenoweth, 2009; Hawkins, 2007; Reeves, 2004).

Choice, motivation, and engagement. Three additional factors that research has identified as impacting the reading achievement of ethnic minority students are choice, motivation, and engagement. Research has shown that children are more motivated to read and will read for longer periods of time when they are provided with opportunities to choose reading materials that are aligned with their interests and abilities (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Carbo, 2008). Allington and Gabriel (2012) stated, “The research base on student-selected reading is robust and conclusive: Students read more, understand more, and are more likely to continue reading when they have the opportunity to choose what they read” (p. 10). The act of choosing alone often boosts motivation, and motivation is a significant factor in comprehension (McLaughlin, 2012). Teachers need to understand that there is a relationship between book selection and student motivation and engagement (Moley, Bandre, & Georde, 2011). Educators need to discover what kinds of reading

materials their students find the most interesting in order to select books thoughtfully. In addition, educators need to have those books readily available for students, and should intentionally design instruction that incorporates the reading interests of their students (Moley et al., 2011; Williams, 2008). Robb (2008) emphasized the importance of giving students a choice of literacy-related activities that each student can meet at his or her level. Another factor that plays a part in the overall reading engagement and motivation to read is book selection.

According to Gibson (2010), a growing number of African American girls have shown an interest in urban fiction books. Although this type of text may not be highly favored by educators, it is important to continually investigate the types of reading materials that are capturing the interest of ethnic minority readers. A better understanding of the types of books that ethnic minority students choose to engage with will help to support their reading achievement (Gibson, 2010).

In a study that investigated the book selections of 293 economically disadvantaged Black students, Williams (2008) found several interesting themes related to the book selections of the targeted participants. First, the students in this particular study were motivated to select books that represented a piece of their identity but that did not reflect ethnic culture. Many of their book selections represented media and mass marketing interests. For example, the books that many students selected were about well-known pop stars, actors, and actresses. This finding suggests the importance of educators providing access to books that represent everyday societal and cultural interests. Second, gender differences appeared in the selections of books: girls chose nonfiction books more often than boys. A third finding was that 97% of the students who were interviewed indicated

that they selected a book due to the influence of another person (i.e., an adult at school, family, friends). These data reaffirm the influential role that teachers can have in guiding students towards book selections (Williams, 2008).

According to Williams (2008), true reading engagement involves interacting with text in a strategic and motivated manner. In other words, readers who are engaged in the text not only comprehend the text well, but are also motivated to read. Engaged readers have positive attitudes towards reading, read regularly for enjoyment, construct understandings based on prior knowledge, and develop new understandings based upon their literacy experiences (McLaughlin, 2012).

Research by Carbo (2008) and Williams (2008) identified a positive correlation between engaged reading and reading achievement. Carbo stated, “The amount of engaged reading is an excellent predictor of reading achievement” (p. 105). Educators must ensure that underachieving students (especially ethnic minorities) are given ample opportunities in school to be engaged in reading (Cummins, 2011). Cummins (2011) expressed that in order to build the academic vocabulary for diverse students and to increase their reading comprehension, students must be exposed to a wide variety of genres and encouraged to read. In order to increase the reading achievement of students, it is important for educators to understand the types of reading strategies and materials that may spark engaged reading. Not all students have the desire to read and may lack the motivation to read. Therefore, educators have the responsibility to determine students’ interest and to help develop and broaden their interests. Williams (2008) noted that this can be done when educators model enthusiasm for what is being read and expose students to a variety of genres. “The enthusiasm, interest, and delight that the person reading exhibits while reading aloud to

students is contagious and motivating” (Carbo, 2008, p. 103). In order to keep students engaged in reading, King-Dickman (2013) stressed the importance of intentional classroom discussions during literacy instruction. “Intentional talk among diverse learners is important for increasing engagement because it tends to increase people’s thinking and vocabulary” (King-Dickman, 2013, p. 65). According to King-Dickman (2013), classroom discussions have the power to boost word knowledge and to motivate students to read. As an illustration, Cummins (2011) stated, “Animated discussions and debates about the social and moral issues embedded in both fictional and expository texts should be the norm rather than the exception” (p. 145). These types of powerful discussions not only fuel student engagement, but also serve as a great literacy motivator (Cummins, 2011). When students are able to engage in discussions about what has been read, students are better able to attach meaning to the printed content (Ediger, 2013).

One way to foster engagement, while also assisting students in developing good reading habits, is to read aloud to them (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Carbo, 2008). Allington and Gabriel (2012) emphasized the importance of modeling reading behaviors for students by reading aloud to them. Similarly, Carbo (2008) also highlighted the importance of reading aloud to students. This allows the facilitator to model important reading behaviors such as accuracy, fluency, and vocabulary. Allington and Gabriel (2012) classified reading aloud to students as a high-impact, low-input strategy because it does not require any specialized materials or training, just a conscious decision to embed this practice into the instructional routine. “From the day students walk into kindergarten, they should be given daily opportunities to listen to and discuss stories” (Cummins, 2011, p. 145).

Early childhood education. Early childhood education, or providing students with the needed academic support before or during their first formal years of schooling, can help to prevent school failure (Ziolkowska, 2007). Early intervention has been cited as another factor that impacts the achievement of ethnic minority students (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008). According to Ziolkowska (2007), the most successful interventions are those that begin early. High-quality early education programs coupled with high-quality kindergarten through third grade education can produce long-lasting achievement benefits for students (Takanishi & Bogard, 2007). As stated by Takanishi and Bogard (2007), well designed and properly implemented early intervention programs can provide great benefits for students who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

Research conducted by Boyd-Zaharias and Pate-Bain (2008) illustrated that poor and ethnic minority students who participated in pre-kindergarten programs were better prepared for school, especially in the area of literacy. Allington (2012) stated that the 33% of kindergarten students who did not know their letter names were likely to become the 33% of fourth grade students who were not reading on grade level. Allington affirmed that schools must offer high-quality reading instruction to students beginning in kindergarten. Students who begin kindergarten with recognizable reading struggles must be provided with additional instruction in reading by a reading specialist or another professional with extensive expertise in teaching reading (Allington, 2012). In a State of the Union address, President Obama proposed universal preschool to help level the playing field for all students (McGlynn, 2014). However, due to financial concerns, many states do not offer preschool programs and the United States has no national commitment to education for all children from age three through grade one (McGlynn, 2014; Takanishi & Bogard, 2007).

According to Herbers et al (2012), “Students who begin first grade lacking these important learning skills may require intensive and specialized interventions to accelerate learning” (p. 373). Students who struggle early on may experience frustration and become disengaged (Herbers et al., 2012). According to Nisbett (2010), high-quality pre-school programs can help to reduce the achievement gap. Considering the potential positive achievement benefits of high-quality early intervention programs, school policymakers should continually examine the possibilities of offering these types of programs to students, especially to students who come from lower income households (Nisbett, 2010).

Effective Instructional Strategies for Ethnic Minority Students

Culturally responsive practices. Teachers must have an understanding of cultural differences in order to effectively educate ethnic minority students (Cole, 2008). In order for ethnic minority students to flourish, classrooms must be culturally relevant (Kafele, 2009). Kafele (2009) stated, “Curriculum and instruction must be culturally relevant, culturally appropriate, culturally responsive, and culturally sensitive to the learner. We want our students to be able to identify and relate to what they are learning” (p. 67). With the aim of developing a true understanding and an appreciation for the cultural and learning needs of ethnic minority students, teachers must be willing to engage in critical self-reflection about their own attitudes and beliefs (Young, Wright, & Laster, 2005). According to Young et al. (2005), becoming culturally sensitive often requires a change in attitude and a change of heart. This willingness and ability to self-reflect is of critical importance. Compton-Lilly (2009) emphasized the importance of teachers’ recognition and respect for the racial differences of students. The needs and behaviors of ethnic

minority students may be misinterpreted and consequently mishandled if educators fail to understand their cultural and learning differences (Cole, 2008).

Ford and Kea (2009) presented an analogy between medical practices and instruction. When a doctor comes to the realization that a prescribed medication or intervention shows no effect, minimal effect, or makes the problem worse, the doctor is responsible for reevaluating the treatment in order to provide the patient with a more effective and responsive option. Similarly, in the field of education, teachers are responsible for tailoring their instruction in order to meet the diverse needs, values, and interests of their students. Saravia-Shore (2008) indicated, “The implementation of sound, research-based strategies that recognize the benefits of diversity can build a better future for all of us” (p. 44). Culturally responsive instruction encompasses a variety of aspects and can help to improve the learning experiences for racially and ethnically diverse students (Saravia-Shore, 2008).

Cyr et al. (2012) indicated that the application of culturally responsive instruction provides educators the opportunity to honor and respond to the diversity in the classroom. According to Cyr et al., “Culturally responsive teaching recognizes that all students bring rich cultural and linguistic experiences to the classroom that influence personal learning styles” (p. 161). Culturally responsive teachers implement instructional strategies that optimize student achievement by positively reinforcing their cultural identities (Shealey & Callins, 2007). Ford and Kea (2009) asserted, “When teachers are culturally responsive, they are student centered; they break down barriers to learning and, hence, provide keys that open doors to students’ success” (p. 1). Thus, to be culturally responsive means that teachers work proactively and assertively to understand, respect, and meet the needs of

students from cultural backgrounds that are different from their own. Culturally responsive teachers utilize flexible grouping strategies, collaborate routinely with students, and create a family-like classroom community that is personally and physically inviting (Ford & Kea, 2009).

Research has described a variety of specific culturally responsive instructional practices that can be used to increase the achievement of ethnically diverse students. There are many strategies that have proven to be beneficial in meeting the learning needs of racially and ethnically diverse students (Cole, 2008; Ford & Kea, 2009; Shealey & Callins, 2007; Young et al., 2005). Erickson (2008) noted that teaching reading must go beyond drills targeting isolated skills as this method of teaching may actually hinder student growth. Ethnic minority students must be actively engaged in the learning process. The most meaningful and authentic learning experiences occur when students are able to construct their own understanding, create their own solutions, and formulate their own conclusions (Cole, 2008). Rychly and Graves (2012) described the importance of engagement in learning. The researchers stated, “Students learn best when they are engaged in their environments and with the information to be learned. This engagement happens when students feel validated as members of the learning community and when the information presented is accessible to them” (p. 45). Games, simulations, role-playing, experiments, cooperative learning, debate, discussion, creative dramatics, music and dance, pantomime, storytelling, drawing, and other active learning experiences provide students with opportunities to be active in the teaching and learning process (Cole, 2008; Ford & Kea, 2009). By engaging in these types of experiences, students are able to make

discoveries, connect their learning to the real world, and use multiple modalities of learning.

In order to effectively meet the needs of ethnic minority students, there must be an increased focus on instructional practices (Palumbo & Kramer-Vida, 2012). To further accentuate this concept, Palumbo and Kramer-Vida (2012) contended, “For schools to close the achievement gap, curriculum experts need to reconsider our educational practices, especially the way literacy is taught” (p. 119). Shealey and Callins (2007) acknowledged that effective cultural literacy instruction requires explicit skill instruction as well as the ability to engage children in authentic literacy experiences that incorporate multicultural children’s literature. Turner (2007) indicated that elementary classrooms should be vibrant literacy communities that motivate diverse students to read. These literacy communities must be led by literacy orchestrators (teachers) who deliver culturally responsive literacy instruction. According to Turner, culturally responsive literacy teachers design and implement authentic learning experiences that capitalize on the strengths, interests, and experiences of diverse students. In addition, these teachers utilize a constructivist-oriented approach and recognize the importance of adapting instructional practices in order to meet the varying student needs. In a culturally responsive literacy classroom, a variety of grouping practices (i.e., literature circles, guided reading groups, partner reading) and interactive activities, such as Reader’s Theater, writing circles, and think-pair-share, are utilized (Turner, 2007).

Culturally diverse students need to feel comfortable and welcome, and have a sense of belonging in school (Abellan-Pagnani & Hébert, 2013). To help ensure their overall social and emotional well-being, Abellan-Pagnani and Hébert (2013) utilized picture books

to help guide and inspire Hispanic students. The researchers concluded that teachers may be able to meet the affective needs of their students by carefully selecting picture books that encompass multicultural themes. Abellan-Pagnani and Hébert (2013) discovered that the exposure to picture books may enable Hispanic children to draw parallels between their personal experiences and the experiences of the characters. Similarly, Morgan (2009) articulated that educators can help students to develop a cross-cultural understanding as well as an appreciation for multiple viewpoints by exposing students to well-written picture book biographies which represent individuals from diverse backgrounds. Morgan stated, “It is important for young learners to feel appreciated in school, and including members of their group through literature that represents their perspectives accurately will help achieve this goal” (p. 225). Morgan affirmed that teaching children to have multiple perspectives can reduce problems involving prejudice or discrimination. Therefore, culturally authentic picture books should be used as a teaching resource beginning in early childhood education (Morgan, 2009).

In order to effectively engage students in the aforementioned strategies, teachers must first understand how their students learn best. Several researchers have cited the importance of understanding the learning styles and preferences of culturally diverse students (Carbo, 2008; Cole, 2008; Ford & Kea, 2009; Saravia-Shore, 2008; Young et al., 2005). In a culturally responsive classroom, learning styles dominate, and the instruction is student-centered (Ford & Kea, 2009). In order to align instruction to the learning styles of the students, teachers must be able to identify a student’s style through a formal inventory, observation, interview, or questionnaire (Cole, 2008). Many students of color are global learners, or students who learn best by visualizing, touching, and moving (Young et al.,

2005). According to Young et al. (2005), it is of critical importance for teachers of racially and ethnically diverse students to routinely integrate cooperative learning experiences, classroom discussions, and experiential learning, as well as provide students with different options to complete an assignment.

Differentiated instruction. In order to appropriately respond to the growing and changing needs of our diverse 21st century classrooms, teachers must differentiate their instruction (Parsons, Dodman, & Cohen Burrowbridge, 2013). Fountas and Pinnell (2012) acknowledged, “Classrooms are full of a wonderful diversity of children; differentiated instruction is needed to reach all of them” (p. 269). Tomlinson (2001) described differentiated instruction as an instructional approach in which students have various ways of acquiring content, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn. Differentiated instruction has also been described as a proactive approach based on the premise that highly effective teachers recognize that differing learners have different needs (Tomlinson, 2001). Differentiated instruction is a responsive method to instruction that incorporates a myriad of strategies designed to meet diverse student needs (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012).

According to Tomlinson (2001), there are various characteristics of differentiated instruction. One attribute of differentiated instruction is that it provides students with multiple approaches to the content, process, and product. In other words, teachers provide differing methods to what students learn, how they learn it, and how they demonstrate their understanding. Teachers who effectively differentiate instruction consistently assess student progress in multiple ways (Parsons et al., 2013). Ongoing assessment is a vital component of the differentiated learning experience (Tomlinson, 2001). “Effective teaching requires teachers to be able to assess what students are taking from instruction and

adapt their instruction to meet the differing needs of students” (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008, p. 43). Many of the assessments used in a differentiated classroom are qualitative in nature (observation, class discussions, student work, etc.) and help to determine the individual needs of each student. Student-centered instruction is another characteristic of the differentiated classroom. Teachers of a differentiated classroom understand that learning experiences are most effective when they are engaging, relevant, and interesting (Tomlinson, 2001). Parsons et al. (2013) affirmed, “Exemplary teachers thoughtfully adapt their instruction to meet the diverse needs of students” (p. 42). Teachers who differentiate instruction well understand the importance of also making minute-by-minute adjustments during a lesson in response to student needs that arise during instruction (Parsons et al., 2013).

As it relates to reading instruction, Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) described the importance of utilizing differentiated instruction because the literacy needs, interests, and strengths of students vary widely. Cobb (2010) stated, “In an urban school setting, differentiated instruction has proven to be effective in increasing student achievement in reading” (p.38). Students from kindergarten through third grade made greater gains in their word reading and comprehension when teachers employed differentiated learning strategies in comparison to students whose teachers primarily utilized whole class instruction (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). Fountas and Pinnell (2012) and Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) recommended utilizing small, flexible reading groups as a differentiated instructional strategy. By providing guided reading instruction, teachers are able to engage with students in small groups. In a guided reading lesson, teachers provide texts that are at the instructional level of the students and offer them needed support (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Fountas and

Pinnell (2012) recommended that guided reading groups need to be dynamic and flexible; teachers must form and reform groups to allow for learning differences and progress.

In many schools, educational technology is commonly used as a vehicle of differentiated instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of students (Cheung & Slavin, 2013). As an example, electronic readers (e-readers) can now be found in many classrooms and school libraries (Miranda, Johnson, & Rossi-Williams, 2012). Electronic readers have the potential to motivate reluctant readers to read more often. A study conducted with 199 students in an urban Texas middle school revealed that students were more engaged and motivated to read during their independent reading time when they were given the opportunity to use e-readers (Miranda et al., 2012). The devices were loaded with 25 books each. After a two month period, students reported that they had read between one and four books during their independent reading time. Struggling readers may be embarrassed to read text at a lower level; however, e-readers allow teachers to assign students the appropriate text at their level in a more private manner (Miranda et al., 2012).

Computer programs are another form of educational technology that have demonstrated positive benefits. A study conducted in a large urban school district in Cleveland, Ohio, revealed that the Compass Learning software program had a substantial positive impact in raising the reading achievement of ethnic minority students who were living in poverty (Cobb, 2010). According to Cobb (2010), this internet-based program fostered differentiated learning opportunities, prescribed personalized learning paths for students, and provided cooperative learning experiences.

By differentiating instruction, teachers honor the diversity in their classrooms (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). According to Watts-Taffe et al. (2012), learners are constantly

growing and changing as a result of their literacy experiences. Children bring a variety of cultural and linguistic experiences to the class that can help to shape powerful interactions and experiences (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012).

Response to Intervention. In 2004, many educators across the country were presented with RtI as a resource that could potentially assist with closing the reading achievement gap (Allington, 2012; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008). The creation of RtI came as a result of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). RtI was proposed as one solution to the overuse of the discrepancy model which was the primary method used to determine the presence of a specific learning disability (Ofiesh, 2006). The re-authorization described RtI as an optional method that school districts could use to assist in the identification of students with learning disabilities. Prior to this passage of law, there was a recognizable upward trend in the number of students identified as learning disabled (Brown-Chidsey, 2007). Brown-Chidsey (2007) also pointed out that the percentages of Black and other racial minority groups who were being found eligible for special education were higher than the percentages of racial minorities in the United States population as a whole. Harry and Klingner (2007) found that the disproportionate number of ethnic minority students in special education was a result of ambiguous and subjective school practices. After completing a three year study, the researchers concluded that a variety of factors, including a lack of appropriate classroom instruction, inconsistent policies, as well as arbitrary referrals and assessment decisions, tarnished the referral process (Harry & Klingner, 2007). Kashi (2008) affirmed, “RtI provides a more flexible, mainstream approach that adapts well to the different cognitive and cultural learning styles inherent to minority students

whether or not underperforming” (p. 38). A prevention-focused framework such as RtI has the potential to assist schools in providing interventions to students in a targeted and comprehensive manner (Brown-Chidsey, 2007).

RtI typically involves three tiers of support (Allington, 2012; Brown-Chidsey, 2007; Brozo, 2009; Callender, 2012; Jones, Yssel, & Grant, 2012; Martinez & Young, 2011). At Tier I, all students receive high-quality core instruction that is delivered utilizing a combination of whole-class, flexible small groups, and other differentiated learning strategies in order to appropriately respond to diverse populations of students (Jones et al., 2012). At this level, all students receive universal assessments to help determine their precise learning needs (Brown-Chidsey, 2007). At Tier II and Tier III, students receive more intensive interventions (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Brozo, 2009; Martinez & Young, 2011). Bean and Lillenstein (2012) described some of the fundamental characteristics of Tier II and Tier III interventions. Students who received targeted interventions at the Tier II and Tier III levels may receive their instruction in a small group setting. In addition, instruction for students in Tier II or Tier III may be facilitated by an instructional specialist (i.e., a reading specialist, special education teacher, etc.). Finally, the students’ receiving supports at this level may receive additional instructional time in reading in order to work on their specific needs (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012).

The careful monitoring of student progress is an essential component of the RtI process at all three levels within the framework (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Brown-Chidsey, 2007; Kashi, 2008; Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008). The professional employees working with the students are responsible for making important instructional decisions regarding the needs of all students, and progress monitoring data serve as a vital component

of the decision making process (Stecker et al., 2008). Stecker et al. (2008) acknowledged that data-based decision making is a key ingredient to help ensure that students receive the most appropriate instruction and timely interventions.

The RtI model has received increased attention from researchers, policymakers, and schools over the past decade (Brown-Chidsey, 2007). RtI is a prevention-focused tiered intervention framework that was primarily designed to improve reading achievement (Jones et al., 2012). Callender (2012) emphasized the importance of schools' having the appropriate resources and support structures in place to differentiate according to student needs. Callender stated, "The most important rule is that one size does not fit all, meaning that students are provided with what they need rather than what is necessarily prescribed at their given grade level" (p. 11). According to Brown-Chidsey (2007), RtI helps to ensure that all students are provided with equal educational opportunities. Kashi (2008) described RtI as a hopeful and beneficial resource for students with ethnic and cultural differences. Kashi stated, "For those individuals with different learning styles, different backgrounds, different languages, different lifestyles, and so on, RtI provides an opportunity to move forward in education without a handicapping classification" (p. 42). Although RtI has been recognized as a resource that holds significant promise for supporting the achievement of students, Hernandez Finch (2012) indicated that more research regarding RtI needs to be conducted to ensure that the specific needs of students with diverse backgrounds are met. In summary, RtI has the potential to support the reading needs of all students.

Summary

The reading achievement of ethnic minority students is a serious concern in the United States (Burchinal et al., 2011). Recent statistics have indicated that less than 20%

of Black and Hispanic students are reading at a proficient level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). In order to be successful in the workforce today, individuals must have strong reading skills (Haskins et al., 2012). There must be a sustained and relentless effort toward eliminating the achievement gap between White students and students of color.

As identified in the research presented in this chapter, there are a variety of factors that impact the achievement of ethnic minority students. Some of those identified factors include teacher quality, tracking, socioeconomic concerns, choice, motivation and engagement, and early childhood education. The research presented in this chapter also identified effective strategies and resources to aid in the positive academic achievement of ethnic minority students. Cole (2008) affirmed, “No single strategy, approach, or technique works with all students” (p. 2). Some of the promising strategies and resources presented in this chapter include utilization of culturally responsive teaching practices, differentiated instructional techniques, and a preventive school-wide framework such as RtI. Culturally responsive instruction allows educators to acknowledge and appropriately respond to the diversity within the classroom (Cyr et al., 2012). By providing differentiated learning experiences, teachers are able to ensure that all students are able to access the instruction in a variety of ways (Tomlinson, 2001). The RtI model allows schools to provide timely interventions and equitable learning opportunities for all students (Brown-Chidsey, 2007). While this list is certainly not exhaustive, it does provide educators with a significant amount of strategies, considerations, and best practices that could assist in closing the achievement gap and ensuring that the specific needs of ethnic minority students are met.

Chapter Three—Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. By engaging in this investigation, the researcher sought to develop a deeper understanding of the perceptions of elementary professionals regarding the positive and negative factors impacting the reading achievement of ethnic minority students, specifically Black and Hispanic students. The researcher aimed to understand the beliefs of educators regarding the instructional strategies that have positively affected the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. In addition, this study attempted to identify what teachers believed to be the most effective resources to increase the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Finally, the researcher sought to understand teacher perceptions regarding the achievement gap. In order to gain a stronger knowledge of educator beliefs in these areas, elementary professionals who facilitated reading instruction to diverse student populations in grades kindergarten through fifth were surveyed and interviewed. An online survey, open-ended questions, and in-person interviews were the qualitative data collection techniques. The questions utilized in this study were designed to gather educators' perceptions regarding the three research questions.

Subjects

One hundred and fifty elementary educators were invited to participate in this study. Fifty-three participants completed the online survey and seven subjects completed the interview. The participants in this study were kindergarten through fifth grade elementary educators from three suburban public school districts, as well as elementary professionals from one suburban Pennsylvania charter school. All sites were located in the southeastern

region of Pennsylvania. The researcher specifically requested the participation of kindergarten through fifth grade elementary classroom teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, and intervention teachers. These specific professionals were asked to participate in this research investigation based upon their experience in facilitating reading instruction to elementary students. In order to gain the most valuable and accurate perceptions regarding this topic, all study participants had direct experience teaching reading to diverse populations of elementary-aged students. Finally, all subjects met the *Highly Qualified* designation to teach reading to elementary-aged students as defined by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Setting

Given the nature of this research topic, the researcher collected data from schools and districts that service ethnically diverse student populations.

The charter school involved in this study was a kindergarten through 12th grade public charter school comprised of 975 students. According to demographic information from the 2013-2014 school year, there were 500 students in the lower school (K-5) and there were 22 teachers who facilitated reading instruction at this level. This diverse charter school accepts children from more than 20 different school districts from various counties within southeastern Pennsylvania. The demographics of the student body in this school were as follows: 62% White, 21% Black, 7% Multiracial (not Hispanic), 6% Asian, 4% Hispanic, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (not Hispanic). Twenty-one percent of the student population were considered economically disadvantaged.

Achievement data from 2012-2013 revealed that 80% of students were proficient or

advanced on the reading PSSA or Keystone exam. At the third grade level, 91% of the students were proficient or advanced on the reading PSSA.

School District A was located in a suburban area of southeastern Pennsylvania. The district had a total population of approximately 2,500 students. The following data from the 2012-2013 school year represented the ethnic make-up of the students in this school district: 82% White, 10% Hispanic, and 7% Black. Additional ethnic groups represented in this school district made up less than 1% of the total student population. Thirty-four percent of the student population in this district were considered economically disadvantaged. In this school district, the researcher conducted the study with both the early learning center and the elementary school due to the student diversity in both settings. The early learning center serviced students in grades kindergarten through second. There were 29 total professionals who taught reading in the early learning center. Demographic information from this school revealed that 13% of the students were Hispanic and 7% of the students were Black. The elementary school serviced students in grades three and four. Demographic information from this school revealed that 10% of the students were Hispanic and 7% of the students were Black. There were 25 total professionals who taught reading in this elementary school. Achievement data from 2012-2013 revealed that 72% of the students scored proficient or advanced on the reading PSSA.

School District B was located in a suburban area of southeastern Pennsylvania. The district had a total population of approximately 3,800 students. The 2012-2013 demographics for the student body were classified as follows: 72% White, 21% Hispanic, and 5% Black. Additional ethnic groups represented in this school district make up less than 2% of the total student population. Forty percent of the student population in this

district were considered economically disadvantaged. The researcher conducted the study with one of the elementary buildings that serviced a diverse population of third and fourth grade students. In this elementary building, demographic information revealed that 24% of the 600 student population were Hispanic and 4% of the population were Black. There were 34 teachers who facilitated reading instruction at this school. Achievement data from 2012-2013 revealed that 72% of the students scored proficient or advanced on the reading PSSA.

School District C was also located in a suburban area of southeastern Pennsylvania. The district had a total population of approximately 5,600 students. According to 2012-2013 data, the demographics for the student body were classified as follows: 85% White, 10% Black, and 2% Hispanic. Additional ethnic groups represented in this school district made up less than 3% of the total student population. Thirty-three percent of the student population in this district were considered economically disadvantaged. In this school district, the researcher conducted the study with two diverse elementary buildings. In one of the elementary buildings, demographic information revealed that 32% of the population were Black and 4% of the population were Hispanic. There were 24 teachers who facilitated reading instruction at this school. Achievement data from 2012-2013 revealed that 58% of the students scored proficient or advanced on the reading PSSA. In the second elementary building, demographic information revealed that 26% of the population were Black and 3% of the population were Hispanic. There were 16 teachers who facilitated reading instruction at this school. Achievement data from 2012-2013 revealed that 61% of the students scored proficient or advanced on the reading PSSA.

Instruments

An online survey, open-ended questions, and in-person interviews were the qualitative data techniques utilized to address the research questions. These instruments were developed by the researcher and field tested by a group of elementary professionals who were not part of the study. The survey was designed based on relevant literature and previous research in the area of study. The survey items, open-ended questions, and the interview questions focused on the factors, instructional strategies, and resources that impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Survey. Elementary professional staff members who facilitated reading instruction were invited to participate in the researcher-created online survey. The survey (Appendix A) was conducted electronically using Survey Monkey, an online survey service. Part One of the survey asked the participants to provide demographic information including (a) the number of years in teaching, (b) the grade level(s) that they teach, (c) the number of years that they have worked with diverse populations of students, and (d) their current job title.

Part Two of the survey was comprised of 30 fixed-choice questions. The survey contained a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* in order for the participating educators to communicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each survey question. In addition to these fixed-choice items, Part Three of the survey contained six open-ended questions. A review of the start and end times in Survey Monkey revealed that the average survey completion time was approximately 25 minutes.

Interview. The final component of the research process entailed face-to-face interviews (Appendix B) conducted by a research assistant. Six open-ended interview questions were used as an additional instrument to gather teacher perceptions regarding the

factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. The researcher utilized a research assistant (who did not know the potential participants) for the in-person interview component of the data collection process. The use of a research assistant helped to minimize bias. Given the race and professional role of the researcher, the subjects may have felt compelled to respond in a way that might not have accurately depicted their true beliefs about each question. However, the use of the research assistant helped to ensure that the data collected were reliable and accurate since the research assistant had no direct connection to the field of education or to the topic of the research study. Seven elementary professionals agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. The targeted participants in the study were asked to contact the researcher through email or phone to communicate their willingness to engage in the interview component of the research study. The duration of the follow-up interview was approximately 30 minutes per subject. The interviews occurred at the worksite of the participant or at Immaculata University. To help ensure reliability and validity of the interview responses, the interviews were digitally recorded (with the permission of the subject) and transcribed by the research assistant.

Reliability and validity. Jupp (2006) described validity as the extent to which conclusions drawn from research provide an exact portrayal of what happened or an accurate explanation of what happens and why. Reliability has been defined as the extent to which a measuring instrument gives consistent results (Jupp, 2006). In order to ensure the validity of the qualitative instruments, the researcher field tested the 30 fixed-choice survey items, the six open-ended questions, and the six interview questions with five professional staff members from various school districts in southeastern Pennsylvania. All five participants in the pilot panel had experience teaching reading to diverse groups of

students but were not participants in the research study. The researcher elicited the input from a pilot panel of elementary educators in order to determine the clarity and relevance of the survey and interview questions. The pilot group was asked to provide feedback in regard to any potential bias or redundancy of the survey questions. In addition, the pilot panel was asked to provide insight in regard to the relevance between the survey questions and the research questions. Lastly, the pilot members were asked to provide their insight regarding how the question(s) could be improved. Adjustments to the instruments were made based upon feedback from the pilot panel.

In order to ensure the triangulation of the data, the researcher used multiple qualitative instruments. The triangulation of the information helped to ensure that the data were both valid and reliable. Triangulation is achieved when the research issue is looked at from at least two different points (Jupp, 2006). Likert scale survey responses, open-ended questions, and interview responses were carefully analyzed to determine emerging themes and trends within the data. Open-ended questions provided the participants with the opportunity to expound upon their responses.

Design of the Study

This qualitative study was designed to enable the researcher to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. The researcher collected data in multiple ways. First, the targeted elementary educators were asked to complete an online survey through Survey Monkey. The survey contained both fixed-choice, Likert scale questions, as well as open-ended responses. The use of Survey Monkey helped to ensure that responses were compiled anonymously and confidentially

since the participants could not be identified by their responses. For increased security, the survey was password protected to increase the likelihood that only the intended participants were able to access the survey.

The final component of the data collection process entailed follow-up interviews with willing participants. Six open-ended questions were presented to the seven volunteer interview subjects. The individual interviews provided an opportunity for participants to further elaborate on the themes that emerged from the survey responses.

Procedures

The researcher sent letters of request to the superintendents in three school districts and to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the charter school. After written consent from the participating districts' superintendents and the CEO was received, the researcher sought formal approval from the Research Ethics Review Board (RERB) of Immaculata University (Appendix C). Upon approval from RERB to conduct research, the researcher emailed the building principals in the participating schools to request permission to contact their elementary staff. At two of the sites, the principals permitted a face-to-face meeting during their building professional development time. During the meetings with the elementary staff, the researcher provided the elementary educators with a verbal explanation of the study to accompany the survey invitation letter which contained details about the research study, the survey, and the interview. At the remaining sites, the principals forwarded an email with the invitation letter, survey link, and password.

The elementary professionals involved in the study were provided with a detailed written explanation of the study before deciding if they would like to participate. A participant consent form was embedded in the online survey and the subjects were required

to complete the consent process prior to answering any survey questions. Teachers were informed, in the invitation letter and at the close of the electronic survey, that they were invited to participate in an interview with the researcher. All targeted participants were provided with the contact information of the researcher. Any individual who desired to engage in the interview component of the process was asked to contact the researcher to formally express his/her interest and to establish a convenient interview date and time. Participants who completed the voluntary interview were required to complete a multiple consent form prior to participating in the voluntary interview component of the study. The participants who were interviewed were reassured that their information would be kept confidential. The names of the participants and the names of their school districts were not used. The responses of the subjects appeared in data summaries only. Responses to the interview questions were scripted in order to ensure accuracy and validity. In addition, the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the research assistant. The researcher reviewed all transcripts prior to examining the data obtained through the interview process.

A research assistant was utilized to aid the researcher with various aspects of the data collection and data analysis processes. The research assistant completed the required National Institutes of Health (NIH) certification and ensured that all steps of the data collection process were organized and occurred in a systematic fashion. The research assistant was responsible for the development of the electronic survey in Survey Monkey after all questions were field tested and determined to be valid and accurate. The research assistant was instructed by the researcher to manage the online distribution of the survey as well as the collection and compilation of survey responses. The use of Survey Monkey helped to ensure that the data were compiled anonymously and confidentially so no

participant was identifiable by his/her survey responses. The research assistant was made aware of the fact that strict anonymity and confidentiality were critical elements of the data collection process.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the online survey, open-ended questions, and the interviews were organized, analyzed, and categorized. The researcher organized the data thematically and presented them in both written and table format. Through this data analysis process, the researcher identified commonalities and trends that helped to determine educator perceptions in regard to the three guiding research questions. All of the data gathered is presented and discussed in the results section of this study.

Summary

This research study investigated the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Elementary educators who facilitated reading instruction to students in kindergarten through fifth grade in three suburban school districts and a suburban charter school were invited to participate in this study. Triangulation occurred through the use of multiple methods of data collection including Likert scale survey questions, open-ended questions, and interviews. The survey and interview responses were categorized into the three research questions in order to triangulate the data and strengthen the validity of the research study. The data collected were analyzed in relation to the guiding research questions and thoughtfully organized in order to reveal common themes, trends, and/or patterns. In Chapter Four, the researcher will present the data and report on the results of the study.

Chapter Four—Results

Introduction

This qualitative research study investigated elementary educators' perceptions regarding the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Further, the study was designed to understand elementary educators' beliefs regarding the instructional strategies and resources that positively impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

This chapter reports the findings of the online survey and interview data. Data from the Likert scale survey questions, open-ended responses, and follow-up interviews were collected and thoroughly analyzed to identify emerging themes and patterns. Fifty-three elementary educators who worked with ethnic minority students in kindergarten through fifth grades in three different Pennsylvania school districts and one Pennsylvania charter school participated in the research study. Seven of the elementary educators—three from the charter school, one from School District A, and three from School District B—participated in face-to-face interviews with the research assistant. No teachers from School District C volunteered to be interviewed. Eleven of the 53 survey participants skipped the open-ended questions, so there is a variance in the total number of participant responses reported in the data.

Demographic Information

The first four questions of the online survey requested demographic information from all participants. In response to the demographic question regarding the number of years spent working with Black and Hispanic students, 10 participants (19%) indicated they had been working with Black and Hispanic students between 1-5 years, 18 respondents

(34%) reported 6-10 years, 17 respondents (32%) indicated 11-15 years, five respondents (9%) indicated 16-20 years, and three participants (6%) reported more than 20 years' experience working with ethnic minority students.

Data regarding the specific teaching role of the survey participants revealed that 37 participants (70%) were elementary teachers, seven respondents (13%) were special education teachers, five participants (9%) were reading specialists, and four respondents (8%) held other roles such as English as a second language (ESL) teacher, speech and language teacher, or English language arts (ELA) teacher.

Seven elementary educators (13%) participated in the face-to-face interviews. The specific roles of those seven elementary educators were a third grade teacher, two fourth grade teachers, a learning support teacher, a third and fourth grade teacher, a fifth grade English language arts teacher, and a first and fourth grade English language arts teacher.

Data Results

Research question one. What are the perceptions of educators (K-5) regarding the positive and negative factors that influence the reading achievement of ethnic minority students?

The first research question addressed educator perceptions regarding the positive and negative factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Answers to this question included data from the Likert scale questions, open-ended responses, as well as responses from the follow-up interviews. The online survey included 13 Likert scale items and two open-ended questions designed to elicit the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Three interview questions allowed respondents to further elaborate on

their beliefs regarding the factors that are hindering the closing of the achievement gap, socioeconomic factors, as well as factors related to teacher quality.

Likert scale survey responses. Survey questions 5 through 18 of the Likert scale survey and questions 35 and 36 of the open-ended questions were related to various factors influencing the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students. Survey questions five through nine were specific to factors related to teacher quality. All survey participants either strongly agreed or agreed that the quality of a teacher's instruction, the interpersonal skills of the teacher, and the teacher's ability to develop positive relationships with students directly impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Question number six asked participants to respond to whether or not they believed the intellectual qualities of the teacher directly impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Fourteen of the respondents (26%) indicated they strongly agreed, 34 (64%) agreed, and five of the participants (9%) indicated they disagreed. Question number nine asked participants to share their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of pre-service teacher preparation programs in preparing teacher candidates to work with ethnic minority students. Three of the participants (6%) strongly agreed that teacher preparation programs appropriately prepare pre-service educator candidates to work with ethnic minority students, 19 (36%) agreed, 27 (51%) disagreed, and four of the participants (8%) reported they strongly disagreed. Table 4.1 outlines the participants' responses to the Likert scale questions regarding factors related to teacher quality.

Table 4.1

Factors Related to Teacher Quality

#	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
5	The quality of a teacher's instruction directly impacts the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.	37 (69.8%)	16 (30.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
6	The intellectual qualities of the teacher directly impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.	14 (26.4%)	34 (64.1%)	5 (9.4%)	0 (0.0%)
7	The interpersonal skills of the teacher directly impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.	36 (67.9%)	17 (32.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
8	The teacher's ability to develop positive relationships with students directly impacts the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.	41 (77.3%)	12 (22.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
9	Pre-service teacher preparation programs appropriately prepare teacher candidates to work with ethnic minority students.	3 (5.6%)	19 (35.8%)	27 (50.9%)	4 (7.5%)

Note. N=53. SA=strongly agree; A=agree; D=disagree; SD=strongly disagree.

Question number 10 asked participants to report if they believed tracking students by ability level relative to each tested subject had a negative impact on student achievement. Nine of the respondents (17%) agreed, 40 (75%) disagreed, and four (8%) strongly disagreed that tracking has a negative impact on student achievement.

Questions 11 through 18 addressed various additional factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. In response to question number 11

regarding socioeconomic factors, 98% of the participants expressed agreement that socioeconomic factors impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students — 30 participants (57%) strongly agreed, 22 (41%) agreed, and one (2%) disagreed.

Question number 12 asked respondents to report their beliefs regarding preschool preparation programs. Thirty-one respondents (58%) strongly agreed, 20 (38%) agreed, and two (4%) disagreed that ethnic minority students who attend preschool programs have a higher likelihood of reading success in comparison to ethnic minority students who do not attend preschool programs.

The responses to question 13 provided evidence of teachers' perceptions regarding the existence of an achievement gap between ethnic minority students and Caucasian students in their school district. Forty-two of the participants (79%) reported a recognizable achievement gap in their school district and 11 of the respondents (21%) indicated disagreement regarding the existence of the achievement gap in their school district.

Question number 14 was related to the availability of a diverse selection of books in classroom libraries. Forty-nine of the survey participants (93%) agreed that their classroom library contained a diverse selection of books in order to ensure that students were able to choose from a variety of genres and levels. Four of the survey participants (7%) reported disagreement with this survey statement.

The responses to question number 15 provided evidence that teachers believe motivation impacts the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. For this question, the participants were asked to report their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "Motivation impacts the reading achievement of ethnic minority

students.” Thirty-two of the participants (60%) reported that they strongly agreed, 20 (38%) agreed, and one (2%) disagreed with this statement.

Question number 16 elicited teacher perceptions regarding the importance of understanding the learning styles, reading interests, and preferences of their students. All participants expressed agreement with the importance of taking the time to understand these factors related to the needs and interests of their students.

Collaboration with colleagues was the focus of question number 17. Fifty of the survey participants (94%) indicated that collaboration with colleagues is an important component of their day. Three of the survey participants (6%) expressed disagreement with this specific statement.

The responses to question 18 provided evidence that teachers believe it is important to provide students with specific and timely feedback. All survey participants expressed that they strongly agreed or agreed with this survey statement. Table 4.2 outlines the participants’ responses to the fixed-choice questions regarding these additional factors.

Open-ended questions. Two open-ended response questions were designed to elicit the perceptions of teachers regarding the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. The first open-ended question asked participants to describe the positive factors influencing the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students. Forty-two participants responded to this question. Eight of those participants reported that parental support was a positive factor influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. The participants specifically expressed the importance of parental support, parental involvement, and/or parent-teacher communication. Further, two of the eight participants described the importance of parental support beginning at a young age.

Table 4.2

Additional Factors Influencing the Reading Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students

#	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
10	Tracking students by ability level relative to each tested subject area has a negative impact on student achievement.	0 (0.0%)	9 (17.0%)	40 (75.5%)	4 (7.5%)
11	Socioeconomic factors impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.	30 (56.6%)	22 (41.5%)	1 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)
12	Ethnic minority students who attend preschool programs have a higher likelihood of reading success in comparison to ethnic minority students who do not attend preschool programs.	31 (58.5%)	20 (37.7%)	2 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)
13	There is a recognizable achievement gap between ethnic minority students and White students in my school district.	9 (17.0%)	33 (62.3%)	10 (18.9%)	1 (1.9%)
14	My classroom library contains a diverse selection of books in order to ensure that students are able to choose from a variety of genres and levels.	21 (39.6%)	28 (52.8%)	4 (7.5%)	0 (0.0%)
15	Motivation impacts the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.	32 (60.4%)	20 (37.7%)	1 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)
16	It is important to take the time to understand the learning styles, reading interests, and preferences of my students.	43 (81.1%)	10 (18.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
17	Collaboration with colleagues is an important component of my day.	33 (62.3%)	17 (32.1%)	3 (5.7%)	0 (0.0%)
18	Providing students with specific and timely feedback is an important component of my instructional practice.	30 (56.6%)	23 (43.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Note. N= 53. SA=strongly agree; A=agree; D=disagree; SD=strongly disagree.

One respondent stated, “A very important factor, that could be negative or positive, is if children are being read to at home when they are little. Once they get to kindergarten...if it is only beginning, it is too late.” Likewise, another participant responded, “Parents who share an interest and appreciation for reading.”

Eight of the 42 respondents identified building rapport and relationships with students as another positive factor. One participant stated, “A strong connection to the teacher will strongly impact any subject.” Another respondent indicated, “I believe these students are influenced by caring teachers.” Additional participants reported the importance of mutual respect, connections with students, and ensuring that students know that the teacher is there for them. Seven respondents noted the importance of choice or self-selection of books. Six respondents expressed the importance of students’ having “just right books” or books at the appropriate reading level.

The second open-ended question asked participants to describe the negative factors influencing the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students. Forty-two participants responded to this question. Sixteen respondents indicated a lack of home support and/or parental involvement can be a negative factor influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. One respondent cited “no demonstration of literacy at home” as a negative influencing factor.

Seven respondents addressed specific attitudes and beliefs held by teachers as negative influencing factors. For example, one participant stated, “Some negative factors are when teachers have preconceived opinions of students. At times teachers feel that they can’t do anymore because the rest is something that needs to be fixed at home.” Another participant expressed, “I believe some teachers have different expectations for these

students that can be detrimental to their learning.” A third respondent stated, “Having a predisposed manner of teaching lowers your expectations of minority students.” Two of these seven respondents mentioned negative stereotypes held by teachers as a factor. Other negative contributing factors that were reported by at least three participants included socioeconomic issues; educational level of parents; student work ethic, attitude, and motivation; lack of access to reading materials; lack of vocabulary and background knowledge; language barriers; and a lack of financial resources in schools to purchase the appropriate materials.

Interview. During the in-person interviews, seven participants were asked, “What factors do you believe are hindering the closing of the achievement gap for ethnic minority students?” Four of the seven participants cited home/parental support as a contributing factor. Their responses demonstrated a belief that students who have active support, involvement, and encouragement at home have a higher likelihood of academic success. Teacher A articulated that it is important for parents to continually emphasize the message that education is a top priority in life. Further, Teacher A went on to say that some cultures have different priorities and not all cultures may perceive education as the highest priority.

Two of the seven participants referenced cultural norms and expectations as a contributing factor. Teacher D expressed that it is disrespectful in some cultures to question an adult and that parents may be afraid to ask questions. According to the responses of four interviewees, students who do not have support and encouragement at home will have a more difficult time in school. Teacher A said, “If their parents are there and they're engaging and caring and they're reaching out to me and there's that open communication, chances are the kids are on top of their game.” Teacher C reported

noticing a positive difference when parents check their child's work and reinforce what is taught in the classroom.

Two educators mentioned that poverty and socioeconomic issues at home negatively impact the availability of resources at home such as a computer and the Internet. Two of the seven interviewees indicated that language barriers were a contributing factor hindering the closing of the achievement gap. Teacher F cited the importance of high expectations, avoiding preconceived/stereotypical ideas, and building trusting and supportive relationships with students as factors. This educator said, "You can't have those preconceived notions. You've got to look at each person as an individual and really be willing to do that. And sometimes it involves just going through a lot of pain with them too." Teacher F emphasized the importance of relationships, advocating for students, and having an understanding of where people are coming from. This participant stressed the importance of having "love in your heart" and truly listening to what students have to say.

A second interview question involving the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students asked participants, "Do you believe that there is a relationship between the quality of a teacher's instruction and student achievement? If so, describe that relationship. If not, explain why you believe that." All seven interviewees expressed a belief that there is a correlation between the quality of the teacher's instruction and student achievement. When asked to describe the relationship, six of the seven teachers were able to provide specific qualities or approaches used by educators. The seventh interviewee acknowledged the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement. However, this educator reported a desire for further professional development in order to build skills geared toward teaching ethnic minority students.

In response to this question, several of the interviewees referenced specific techniques used by educators. Four of the six elementary educators stated the importance of differentiating the instruction and/or using a variety of instructional techniques. Teacher D indicated that a lot of effort goes into effectively planning and differentiating lessons. This educator emphasized the importance of identifying and planning for students who might need more scaffolding, a graphic organizer, a sentence starter, or planning for students who need to be challenged. Teacher F, highlighting the importance of keeping students interested and engaged, emphasized the importance of using a variety of instructional techniques in order to ensure that students are not bored. This educator expressed that the instruction needs to be lively and exciting.

Three of the interviewees cited the importance of relationships and rapport with students. Teacher B stated, “Good teachers can make the connection with the kids, and have that relationship where the kids just really have trust in you and faith in you and they want to do well because they have that relationship.”

The third interview question specifically related to factors asked the interviewees, “In your opinion, is there a correlation between socioeconomic factors and the reading achievement of ethnic minority students? If so, please describe that relationship.” In response to this question, all seven of the interviewees expressed a belief that there is a correlation between socioeconomic factors and reading achievement. Four of the seven participants who expressed a belief regarding this relationship referenced how a lack of resources at home and a lack of exposure could negatively impact a child’s achievement. Teacher A indicated that if children have access to a variety of resources (i.e., books, clubs, board games, private lessons, community events), they have greater access to the world.

Similarly, indicating that resources are very important to a child's success, Teacher D stated, "If a student's family is low socioeconomic status, things in the home will be lacking: books for them, materials, and background opportunities." Teacher A referenced the hierarchy of needs specifically stating that for some families, fulfilling basic needs such as food and clothing is the main priority. Teacher B remarked, "Kids are coming into our elementary school just not having any exposure to books." This educator expressed that parents may not be able to take them to the library due to having more than one job.

Two of the interviewees specifically referenced situations in which socioeconomic issues may impede a student's ability to participate in extracurricular activities. Teacher C stated, "We have Reading Olympics, but it costs money to join, so we have those extracurricular opportunities that students may not be able to participate in." Teacher D indicated that a lack of transportation may prohibit students from participating in extracurricular opportunities. According to this elementary educator, extracurricular activities may help to build background as well as self-confidence.

Teacher E described the importance of early literacy immersion. This elementary educator expressed that students who grow up watching their parents read will be more apt to read once they enter school.

Research question two. What are the perceptions of educators (K-5) regarding the most effective instructional strategies that positively impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students?

The second research question sought to understand the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the most effective instructional strategies that can be used to positively impact the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students. Questions from the online

survey responses and from the in-person interviews addressed research question two. The electronic survey included 14 Likert scale items, one open-ended question, and one interview question designed to gain participants' beliefs regarding this research question.

Likert scale survey responses. Questions 19 through 32 of the Likert scale survey and question 37 of the open-ended questions were designed to understand teacher beliefs regarding effective instructional strategies. In question 19, the survey participants were asked to report their level of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:

“Allowing students to self-select a ‘good fit’ book helps to ensure that they are motivated to read.” In response to this question, 52 participants (98%) either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. One participant disagreed with this specific statement.

Question 20 was designed to understand the extent to which elementary educators are routinely using culturally responsive teaching practices. In response to this survey item, 11 respondents (21%) strongly agreed, 31 (58%) agreed, 10 (19%) disagreed, and one (2%) strongly disagreed that culturally responsive teaching techniques are an integral component of their classroom experience.

The use of differentiated instructional techniques in reading was the focus of survey item 21. Fifty-two respondents (98%) expressed agreement in the importance of using differentiated instructional techniques in order to meet the reading needs of ethnic minority students. One participant (2%) expressed disagreement with this survey statement.

For survey item 22, respondents were asked if they believed that interactive activities such as Reader's Theater, literature circles, and partner reading were effective instructional techniques for minority students. Fifty-one participants (98%) either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. One participant disagreed with this survey statement.

Respondents were asked to share their beliefs regarding the use of and the importance of the guided reading approach in question 23. Twenty-four participants (45%) strongly agreed, 23 (43%) agreed, five (9%) disagreed, and one (2%) strongly disagreed that the guided reading approach is an important technique that is used in their classroom.

Question number 24 elicited teacher perceptions regarding the use and importance of strategy groups in their classrooms. Ten respondents (19%) strongly agreed, 26 (49%) agreed, 15 (28%) disagreed, and two (4%) strongly disagreed that strategy groups are an important technique used in their classroom.

The responses to question number 25 provided evidence that teachers believe that additional instructional time in reading positively impacts the achievement of ethnic minority students. For this specific question, 16 participants (30%) strongly agreed, 36 (68%) agreed, and one (2%) disagreed with the statement regarding the positive impact of additional reading instruction.

Survey item 26 was designed to elicit teacher beliefs regarding the effectiveness of providing students with uninterrupted time each day to read books at their level. Twenty-three respondents (43%) strongly agreed, 27 (51%) agreed, three (6%) disagreed with this statement. Table 4.3 outlines the participants' responses to the Likert scale items 19 through 26 regarding the instructional strategies positively impacting the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

In response to survey statement 27, the respondents were asked to report their level of agreement in regard to providing students with a designated period of time to select and read books of their choosing. Twenty participants (38%) strongly agreed, 25 (47%) agreed, seven (13%) disagreed, and one (2%) strongly disagreed that students are provided with a designated period of time each day for reading self-selected books.

Table 4.3

Instructional Strategies Impacting the Reading Achievement of Minority Ethnic Students

#	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
19	Allowing students to self-select a "good fit" book helps to ensure that they are motivated to read.	34 (64.2%)	18 (34.0%)	1 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)
20	Culturally responsive teaching techniques (strategies that encompass the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students) are an integral component of my classroom experience.	11 (20.8%)	31 (58.5%)	10 (18.9%)	1 (1.9%)
21	It is important to use a variety of differentiated instructional techniques in order to meet the reading needs of ethnic minority students.	45 (84.9%)	7 (13.2%)	1 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)
22	Interactive activities such as Reader's Theater, literature circles, and partner reading are effective instructional techniques for minority students.	19 (35.8%)	32 (60.4%)	2 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)
23	The guided reading approach is an important technique that is used in my classroom.	24 (45.3%)	23 (43.4%)	5 (9.4%)	1 (1.9%)
24	Strategy groups are an important technique used in my classroom.	10 (18.9%)	26 (49.1%)	15 (28.3%)	2 (3.8%)
25	Providing ethnic minority students with additional instructional time in reading, positively impacts their achievement.	16 (30.2%)	36 (67.9%)	1 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)
26	Providing students with uninterrupted time each day to read books at their instructional level is an effective instructional strategy.	23 (43.4%)	27 (50.9%)	3 (5.7%)	0 (0.0%)

Note. N= 53. SA=strongly agree; A=agree; D=disagree; SD=strongly disagree.

For survey statement 28, the participants were asked if they assisted students in choosing “good fit” books that incorporated their interests. In response to this question, 15 respondents (28%) strongly agreed, 32 (60%) agreed, five (9%) disagreed, and one (2%) strongly disagreed.

In order to understand the perceptions of elementary educators regarding reading aloud to students, survey statement 29 asked participants to describe their level of agreement with the following statement: “Reading aloud to my students is an important way to model various reading behaviors used by fluent readers.” In response to this statement, 46 participants (87%) strongly agreed, six (11%) agreed, and one (2%) disagreed.

Survey statement 30 asked participants if students are provided with routine opportunities to engage in discussion about what they are reading. In response to this survey item, 26 participants (49%) strongly agreed, 23 (43%) agreed, and four (8%) disagreed that students are provided with regular opportunities to engage in discussion about what they are reading.

Question number 31 elicited teacher perceptions regarding their instructional practices. Specifically, the participating elementary educators were asked if their daily instructional practices encompassed the learning styles, reading interests, and preferences of their students. In response to this item, 16 participants (30%) strongly agreed, 35 (66%) agreed, and two (4%) disagreed with the statement.

The final Likert scale question in regard to instructional strategies asked participants if various assessments were used to drive their daily instruction. In response to this statement, 21 respondents (40%) strongly agreed, 30 (57%) agreed, one (2%) disagreed, and one (2%) strongly disagreed with this statement regarding the use of assessments.

Table 4.4 outlines the participants' responses to the Likert scale items 27 through 32 regarding the instructional strategies positively impacting the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Open-ended question. In addition to the 14 fixed-choice survey questions, the researcher gathered additional data for question two through the use of one open-ended response question. The open-ended question asked the participants to elaborate on the specific instructional strategies that they believed have positively impacted the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. The participants were asked to list up to three strategies. Forty-two of the 53 participants responded to this open-ended question.

The most common response to this open-ended question regarding specific instructional strategies was reading aloud to students. Twelve of the 42 respondents specifically reported a belief that reading aloud to students was an effective instructional strategy that positively impacts the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students. One participant articulated how reading aloud to students will help to “hook children to the wonders of the written word.”

Nine of the 42 respondents listed small group or one-on-one instruction as an effective instructional strategy. Another frequent response to this open-ended question was conferencing with students. Seven of the 42 respondents listed conferencing with students as an instructional strategy used to positively impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. “Conferencing with students one-to-one to discuss stories and give the student a voice about their reading” was articulated as an important instructional strategy by one of the respondents.

Table 4.4

Additional Strategies Impacting the Reading Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students

#	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
27	A designated period of time is provided daily for children to select and read books of their choosing.	20 (37.7%)	25 (47.2%)	7 (13.2%)	1 (1.9%)
28	I assist students in choosing “good fit” books that incorporate their interests.	15 (28.3%)	32 (60.4%)	5 (9.4%)	1 (1.9%)
29	Reading aloud to my students is an important way to model various reading behaviors used by fluent readers.	46 (86.8%)	6 (11.3%)	1 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)
30	My students are provided with daily opportunities to engage in discussion about what they are reading.	26 (49.1%)	23 (43.4%)	4 (7.5%)	0 (0.0%)
31	My daily instructional practices encompass the learning styles, reading interests, and preferences of my students.	16 (30.2%)	35 (66.0%)	2 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)
32	Various assessment techniques are used to drive daily instruction.	21 (39.6%)	30 (56.6%)	1 (1.9%)	1 (1.9%)

Note. N= 53. SA=strongly agree; A=agree; D=disagree; SD=strongly disagree.

Six respondents mentioned the positive impact of partner strategies such as partner reading, think-pair-shares, and turn and talk opportunities. Five respondents listed guided reading, independent reading time, positive reinforcement and encouragement, and allowing students to have choice/self-selection of texts as effective instructional strategies.

Four respondents specifically mentioned the term differentiated instruction as an effective instructional strategy and five additional respondents listed techniques and/or approaches that are oftentimes associated with differentiated instructional practices. Total Participation Techniques, music integration, kinesthetic and visual learning opportunities,

cooperative learning, and technology integration were all listed as effective instructional strategies.

Additional strategies that were reported by at least one educator included: providing students with access to a wide range of books, not making assumptions, pre-reading text, repeated reading of text, explicit instruction in phonics, assessment, assistance from support teachers, mini-lessons, home and school connections, Reader's Theater, strategy groups, developing rapport with students, visits to the library, prompting to check for comprehension, conversations and/or discussions about stories, building background knowledge, helping students make personal connections with the text, modeling a love of reading, re-teaching basic skills, and incorporating writing. One participant listed specific reading frameworks: System 44 and Reader's Workshop.

Interview. There was one specific interview question related to the second research question. This interview item asked the respondents, "Describe the specific instructional approaches that you have used in order to meet the needs of ethnic minority students." In response to this question, two of the seven interviewees made it clear that they don't see students as minorities. Teacher E expressed, "I feel like I don't really specifically in my head think I have to meet the needs of ethnic minority students. Good teaching is good teaching for every child." Teacher F stated, "Well, it's interesting because I do not look at them as ethnic minority students. I look at students as students. And I really, I guess, wear my blinders in many ways." Further, Teacher F went on to say, "I don't look at the color."

Two of the seven teachers indicated that student choice is an important strategy that they use. Teacher A referenced Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory. This educator

pointed out that we all learn differently and that we all have different strengths and weaknesses. This teacher discussed the importance of using various types of projects and methods to demonstrate learning. Teacher A articulated:

Some people have this intelligence with words, so that's verbal. Some people have intelligence with people, so that would be an interpersonal skill. Some people just really know themselves and are really in tune with who they are, and that would be intrapersonal. Some students, or people, have a very musical inclination, or math and logical.

Teacher A expressed that students should be able to manipulate the content to show understanding in whatever way is most suitable to them. As an example of how to manipulate the content in order to demonstrate understanding in a plethora of ways, Teacher A stated, "So it may be if you're a music person, it may be putting a poem, song, even a rhythm to that and you perform that for the class." In regard to student choice, Teacher A went on to say, "Give choice. It is a big thing...power. It comes down to power really. Giving them power of choice ... it doesn't matter how. You perform or do this. Pick what speaks to you."

Two of the seven interview respondents mentioned the importance of small group instruction as an instructional strategy. According to Teacher G, small group instruction allows an opportunity to support students who have questions or who may not understand. In reference to small group instruction, Teacher G stated, "With small groups I always find books that I know that they can read and understand on their own. They're a little bit harder than their independent reading level." This teacher also mentioned the importance of reading aloud to students, re-teaching, checking vocabulary, and using a lot of visuals.

Along these same lines, Teacher D mentioned the importance of conferencing with students and working with them in small groups. This teacher indicated, “I try to conference or meet with the students, to work with small groups, so if they have common needs, to work with small groups in a way that will meet what they need.” Teacher D also mentioned the use of visuals as an instructional strategy.

In response to this question, Teacher B mentioned the importance of repetition, paraphrasing, and giving extra think time. This teacher also discussed the importance of ensuring that ethnic minority students have the appropriate resources. Teacher C spoke of the importance of building rapport with students and using data to drive instruction.

Research question three. What are the perceptions of educators (K-5) regarding the most valuable resources that can be used to raise the reading achievement of ethnic minority students?

The third research question sought to understand the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the most valuable resources that can be used to increase the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Research question three was addressed using data from the online survey responses and from the in-person interviews. The electronic survey included two Likert scale items and three open-ended questions related to this research question. In addition, there was one interview question designed to gain participants’ beliefs regarding this final research question. Table 4.5 outlines the educators’ responses to the two Likert scale items regarding the resources positively impacting the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Likert scale questions. Question number 33 was designed to elicit educator beliefs regarding the use of multicultural literature. The statement was, “Multicultural literature is

incorporated into my classroom instruction in order to expose readers to multiple points of view and information.” In response to this specific item, 19 participants (36%) strongly agreed, 28 (53%) agreed, and six (11%) disagreed. For question number 34, participants were asked to report their beliefs regarding whether or not their school provided a variety of interventions in order to ensure that the needs of ethnic minority students were met. Fifteen respondents (28%) strongly agreed, 26 (49%) agreed, and 12 (23%) disagreed. Table 4.5 outlines the participants’ responses to the survey response items 33 and 34.

Table 4.5

Resources Positively Impacting the Reading Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students

#	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
33	Multicultural literature is incorporated into my classroom instruction in order to expose readers to multiple points of view and information.	19 (35.8%)	28 (52.8%)	6 (11.3%)	0 (0.0%)
34	My school provides a variety of interventions to ensure that the needs of ethnic minority students are met.	15 (28.3%)	26 (49.1%)	12 (22.6%)	0 (0.0%)

Note. N= 53. SA=strongly agree; A=agree; D=disagree; SD=strongly disagree.

Open-ended questions. Three of the six open-ended questions were connected to the third and final research question regarding the resources positively impacting the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Forty-two elementary educators responded to these specific questions. Question 38 asked educators about the curriculum frameworks or reading programs that have had the greatest positive impact on the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. In response to this open-ended question, the use of the Reading Workshop framework was the most frequently reported response. Nine of the 42 respondents listed the Reading Workshop framework as a resource that positively

impacts the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. One respondent stated, “Reading Workshop, when done properly ... must include high quality mini-lessons, independent strategic reading, conferencing, small group skills instruction, etc...”

Six of the 42 respondents mentioned the One Hundred Book challenge as an effective resource for Black and Hispanic students. Three of the six respondents mentioned that this program “puts books into kids’ hands.” Five of the 42 respondents referenced the Success for All program as an effective resource for ethnic minority students. One respondent noted, “Success for All provides rich literature experiences, extensive oral language development and thematically focused writing experiences in an engaging manner.” Other reading programs and resources that were reported in this question by two or three participants were: Reading Wonders, System 44, Project Read, Guided Reading, Writers Workshop, and Foundations. Two teachers stated the importance of a balanced literacy approach. Two educators noted the importance of a program with a strong phonetic base.

Open-ended item number 39 asked respondents, “What interventions do you believe would help to boost the reading achievement of ethnic minority students?” The most commonly reported answer to this question was small group and/or one-on-one instruction. Fourteen of the 42 respondents listed this as a perceived effective intervention. One participant stated, “Direct instruction in a small group setting, focusing on areas of student need.” The second most common response to this question was parent involvement and/or parent training opportunities. Seven of the 42 respondents listed parent involvement and/or parent training opportunities as an effective intervention. One respondent articulated:

More training and intervention for the families. Teach the parents how they can use positive motivation, use daily conversations at their home to help their child build more vocabulary, how they can check their child's backpack each day, how they can attend conferences. As a teacher, I can work a lot of magic in improving ethnic minority students' overall understanding and reading. However, it will only go so far.

In regard to parent involvement, four of the seven participants noted the importance of engaging family nights and workshops. One respondent mentioned having family events such as bingo and dances. Another respondent mentioned having "practical workshops for families."

In response to this open-ended item, four of the 42 respondents listed the importance of providing students with high interest books. Three participants listed direct strategy instruction, phonics, the use of peer mentors, and providing students with feedback as effective interventions.

One participant emphasized the importance of understanding the learning needs of each child and utilizing a wide range of techniques. This respondent stated:

As a teacher, you need to continue to grow and have a wide variety of teaching tools that will best suit the needs of a diverse and evolving group of students. We need to avoid tunnel vision and truly see each child's learning needs in order to lead them to the appropriate strategies and supports that will eventually lead to their learning success.

The final open-ended question related to research question number three was survey item number 40. This question asked the educators, "Does your school district utilize the

RtI framework? If so, how has this model impacted the reading achievement of ethnic minority students within your classroom?” In response to this question, 38 of the 42 survey respondents reported that the RtI framework is utilized in their school district. Two survey respondents indicated that RtI is not used in their district and two respondents indicated that they have an intervention time, but they do not consider it as RtI.

In regard to the impact that RtI has had on the reading achievement of ethnic minority students, 38 of the respondents provided insight. The other four respondents only answered the first part of this question by stating either yes or no. Of the 38 responses, seven participants stated that they have seen either no impact or a minimal positive impact on the reading achievement of ethnic minority students through the RtI approach. One participant stated that the RtI model has not been as effective as hoped. Another respondent stated, “I find the process to be slow moving. The gap widens with every day that passes.” Further, this elementary educator noted the use of “professional judgment” to determine the most immediate needs of students. Two participants noted that they have not used the framework long enough to assess its effectiveness. One participant expressed that although the RtI model is in place, it has not been implemented well. Another participant noted, “Our ethnic minority students are making gains under the current RtI program, but I believe that we could be doing a better job to close the gap.”

Twenty of the 38 survey respondents who utilized RtI in their district reported noticeable positive outcomes associated with the RtI model. Seven of the survey respondents reported that RtI has been effective because specific needs of students are being met. Five of the participants believed that RtI is beneficial because students are receiving additional reading help. Three participants noted that the use of RtI has

stimulated conversations among teachers regarding the needs of students. Three of the elementary educators indicated that RTI has encouraged teachers to share best practices.

Interview. There was one specific interview question related to the final research question. For this question, the interviewees were asked, “Based on your instructional experiences, which specific resources would be beneficial for most school districts, if not all school districts, to use in order to ensure that the reading needs of minority students are met?” In response to this open-ended question, four of the seven interviewees mentioned technology. Teacher A mentioned the use of the reading website RAZ-Kids as well as listening to books on tapes. Teacher C mentioned the use of Smart Board activities and PowerPoint. Teacher F indicated that financial limitations in the school district created a shortage of technological resources, but mentioned a desire to integrate iPads into instruction. Teacher G mentioned that computers assist by providing students with visual and interactive learning opportunities.

Three of the seven interviewees mentioned the importance of students having access to an abundance of books. Two of the three interviewees specifically mentioned that books in the classroom should be leveled. Two interviewees noted the importance of integrating activities that will engage students. Teacher A mentioned, “Once you engage more of those five senses—going back to the synapses—there’s going to be more connections made. You are going to get a lot more out of it.” One interviewee noted each of the following resources: RTI, having basic materials such as pencils and paper, real life experiences (i.e., summer camps and field trips), information for parents in different languages, and parent education/training.

Data from interview question one. The seven interviewees were asked to respond to an open-ended question that may have prompted a response related to any of the three research questions. The question was, “Based on your educational background and instructional experiences, what do you believe all teachers need to do in order to ensure the maximum reading growth of ethnic minority students? What specifically do you do in your classroom to ensure that the reading needs of minority students are met?” For this question, some of the interviewees listed specific instructional strategies that they used, other interviewees listed factors related to the reading achievement of ethnic minority students, while other participants listed resources that they believe to be positively impacting the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Three of the seven interviewees articulated the importance of relationships, rapport, and/or building trust with students. In regard to building trust and rapport with students, Teacher A expressed that students must “know that you have their best interest at heart. That’s the first hurdle you have to walk with them.” Similarly, Teacher F spoke about the importance of having a positive, supportive, and encouraging relationship with students. “Help them build their confidence with a lot of support and praise for things that they do well.”

Three of the seven elementary educators mentioned the importance of building background knowledge and vocabulary. Teacher D indicated that building background can occur through short stories, discussions, and through pictures/visual aids.

Teacher D and Teacher F both acknowledged the importance of utilizing a variety of different strategies. Teacher D spoke about spending extra time with students in order to focus on their specific needs, getting leveled materials in their hands, using organizational

tools such as graphic organizers, conferencing with students, chunking information, and having books readily available for students. Teacher F stated, “There’s not just one thing you can do. I think there are a lot. You have to have your eyes open. Be willing to make changes and react to the situation, not just what you’ve always done in the past.”

Additionally, this teacher mentioned partnering students together and being a good listener.

Two of the seven interview participants referenced cultural awareness and cultural integration. Teacher F articulated the importance of showing respect and interest for different cultures. “I speak some Spanish. So I will welcome them in the classroom, and every now and then say some Spanish words for them, and ask them to help me with it. That’s modeling a level of respect for their culture.” Teacher B mentioned the importance of using a multicultural reading program. According to Teacher B, this helps students make connections to different cultures and countries around the world.

Summary

This chapter reported the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Data were collected regarding the perceived positive and negative factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students, and elementary educators’ beliefs regarding the most effective instructional strategies and resources that can be used to increase the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Fifty-three elementary educators from three different southeastern Pennsylvania school districts and one charter school engaged in an online survey consisting of four demographic questions, 30 Likert scale questions, and five open-ended questions. Seven elementary educators participated in face-to-face follow-up interviews with a research

assistant. The interviews consisted of six additional open-ended questions regarding the factors, instructional strategies, and resources influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. One interview question focused on the achievement gap.

The first research question focused on the positive and negative factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Forty-two (79%) of the 53 survey participants indicated that there is a recognizable achievement gap in their school district. Data revealed that the participating elementary educators believe that teacher quality related factors impact the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students, including the quality of a teacher's instruction, the interpersonal skills of a teacher, and the teacher's ability to develop positive relationships with students. Additionally, at least 90% of respondents expressed agreement that the following factors impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students: socioeconomic factors; participation in preschool preparation programs; the availability of a diverse selection of books in classroom libraries; motivation; understanding the learning styles, reading interests, and preferences of students; collaboration with colleagues; and providing students with specific and timely feedback. An additional theme that emerged through the open-ended responses and the interviews was a belief that active parental support and home-school communication can be a positive factor influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Conversely, elementary educators also expressed that a lack of parental support and home-school communication can be a negative factor influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Research question two was designed to elicit the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the most effective instructional strategies influencing the reading

achievement of ethnic minority students. The fixed-choice responses provided evidence that they believe the following instructional strategies are effective: using a variety of differentiated instructional techniques; delivering instruction that incorporates the learning styles, reading interests, and preferences of students; keeping students motivated by allowing them to self-select “good-fit” books; providing additional instructional time in reading; providing students with uninterrupted time to read books at their level; reading aloud to students; engaging in discussions with students about what they are reading; and using various assessments to drive daily instruction. The perceived importance of reading aloud to students was also revealed in the open-ended response questions. In addition, both the open-ended and interview responses provided evidence that the participants believe that small group instruction, one-on-one instruction, and conferencing with students are effective instructional strategies. Lastly, partner strategies were frequently noted as effective instructional approaches.

The third and final research question addressed elementary educators’ perceptions regarding the most valuable resources that can be used to increase the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. The majority of educators reported that they incorporate multicultural literature into their classroom instruction. In addition, the majority of participants believed that their school provides a variety of interventions in order to ensure that the needs of ethnic minority students are met. The Readers Workshop Model and the One Hundred Book challenge were the most commonly reported reading frameworks and/or programs that have been most effective in meeting the needs of ethnic minority students. Four of the seven interviewees expressed the importance of integrating technology such as reading websites, books on tape, PowerPoint, and the use of the iPad.

While almost all of the schools involved in this study utilize an RtI model, only about half of the participating elementary educators reported positive outcomes associated with this intervention model. A summary of the study, the results, the relationship to future research, and the study limitations are presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five—Discussion

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze elementary educators' perceptions of the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. The researcher designed the study to understand elementary educators' beliefs regarding both the positive and negative factors impacting the reading achievement of ethnic minority students, and to understand the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the most effective instructional strategies and resources that positively influence the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Finally, the study was designed to understand elementary educators' perceptions regarding the achievement gap.

This qualitative study posed three research questions seeking to discover the perceptions of educators (K-5) regarding the following areas: (a) the positive and negative factors that influence the reading achievement of ethnic minority students, (b) the most effective instructional strategies that positively impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students, and (c) the most valuable resources that can be used to raise the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

The researcher examined the perceptions of 53 elementary educators from diverse settings located in southeastern Pennsylvania. In order to ensure that the subjects had experience with Black and Hispanic students, specific schools in three school districts and one charter school were targeted based on student demographics. The majority of the participants (70%) were elementary classroom teachers.

Data collection consisted of an online survey facilitated by Survey Monkey, an online survey collection resource. The electronic survey contained Likert scale items and

open-ended response items. Additionally, seven participants volunteered to engage in a follow-up interview that consisted of six open-ended questions. The researcher collected, analyzed, and categorized the survey and interview responses in relation to the research questions and reported the responses in table and summary form.

Summary of the Results

In response to the first research question, elementary educators revealed their perceptions regarding the positive and negative factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Data revealed that elementary educators believe that factors related to teacher quality impact the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students. Specifically, all survey participants revealed a belief that the quality of a teacher's instruction, the interpersonal skills of the teacher, and the teacher's ability to develop positive relationships with students are directly correlated with reading achievement. Responses from the open-ended questions and the follow-up interviews also confirmed that elementary educators believe that developing rapport and relationships with students is a positive factor.

An analysis of the responses revealed an additional belief of elementary educators related to teacher quality. Teachers who have preconceived notions of their students, lower expectations for students, and/or beliefs in negative stereotypes regarding their students harmfully influence the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students.

Furthermore, 91% of the survey participants believed that the intellectual qualities of the teacher directly impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. In regard to the effectiveness of pre-service teacher preparation programs, more than half of

the respondents (59%) expressed a belief that teacher preparation programs do not appropriately prepare candidates to work with ethnic minority students.

The majority of participants (90% or more) reported that the following factors impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students: socioeconomic circumstances; participation in preschool preparation programs; the availability of a diverse selection of books in classroom libraries; motivation; understanding the learning styles, reading interests, and preferences of students; collaboration with colleagues; and providing students with specific and timely feedback.

While collaboration with colleagues was identified by more than 90% of the survey participants as an important factor influencing the achievement of ethnic minority students, there was very little mention of teacher collaboration in the open-ended questions and the interview responses.

One final theme revealed from the data sources provided evidence that teachers believe that parental support/involvement and home-school communication can be a positive or negative factor influencing the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students. According to the beliefs presented in the data, students have a higher likelihood of academic success when parents are actively involved in comparison to students who do not have active parental support and involvement.

The second research question sought to identify elementary educators' perceptions regarding the most effective instructional strategies that can be used to increase the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Almost all elementary educators (98%) agreed that allowing students to choose "good fit" books helps to ensure that they are motivated to read. The open-ended response items and the follow-up interview responses provide

further evidence that elementary educators believe that providing students with choice is an effective instructional strategy.

Ninety-eight percent of the survey respondents expressed agreement in regard to the importance of using differentiated instructional techniques as a strategy to ensure that the needs of ethnic minority students are met. Additionally, interactive activities such as Reader's Theater, literature circles, and partner reading were perceived as effective instructional techniques by 98% of survey respondents. Open-ended and interview responses further confirmed that elementary educators perceive differentiated and interactive learning opportunities as effective instructional strategies for Black and Hispanic students.

Although there was strong agreement in support of the implementation of differentiation and interactive activities, the data revealed that the use of culturally responsive teaching practices was not as prevalent. In response to the Likert scale item regarding the implementation of culturally responsive practices, 79% of the participants indicated agreement that culturally responsive teaching practices were an integral component of their classroom experience and 21% of the participants expressed disagreement regarding the use of these specific techniques.

Elementary educators perceived that the use of the guided reading approach is an important strategy as evidenced by 89% agreement with the Likert scale survey question. Although the specific guided reading approach was not commonly referred to in the open-ended and interview responses, many teachers reinforced the importance of supporting students in a small group or one-on-one manner. Many participants (68%) reported that

strategy groups were an important technique; however, the use of strategy groups was not as common as the use of the guided reading approach (89%).

The majority of elementary educators (98%) agreed that providing students with additional instructional time in reading positively impacts their achievement. Further, the majority of teachers also agreed that providing students with uninterrupted time each day to read books at their level is an effective strategy.

An analysis of the data revealed that elementary educators perceive that reading aloud to students is an effective instructional technique. Ninety-eight percent of participants reported agreement with the Likert scale item regarding reading aloud with 87% of those respondents indicating strong agreement with this statement. Data from the open-ended and interview items further confirmed that elementary educators perceived reading aloud to students as an important and necessary strategy. In fact, reading aloud to students was the most common response to the open-ended question regarding specific instructional approaches used to meet the needs of ethnic minority students.

At least 90% of the survey participants viewed the following as effective instructional strategies: implementing instruction that incorporates the learning styles, interests, and preferences of students; engaging in discussion with students regarding what they read; and using various forms of assessment data to drive instruction.

Data from the open-ended and interview items revealed additional themes. Seven participants listed conferencing with students as a valuable instructional strategy. Six respondents specifically mentioned the importance of partner strategies as an effective instructional technique.

The goal of the third and final research question was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the most valuable resources that can be used to positively influence the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students. Eighty-nine percent of the participating elementary educators reported the use of multicultural literature in their classrooms to expose readers to multiple points of view and information. However, based on an analysis of the open-ended items and the interview responses, there was little mention of this type of resource making it difficult to determine if, in fact, multicultural literature is commonly used in the classrooms.

In regard to interventions, many of the participating elementary educators generally reported that interventions are in place in their schools. However, their responses provided evidence that they believe that interventions could be done better. In response to the Likert scale item regarding interventions, 77% of the elementary educators agreed and 23% disagreed that their school provides a variety of interventions in order to ensure that the needs of ethnic minority students are met. In reference to the specific RtI intervention, 38 respondents indicated that utilized RtI in their school. Seven of these respondents indicated they had seen minimal or no achievement impact as a result of this intervention framework. Only half of the respondents noticed positive achievement outcomes associated with RtI.

Use of the Reading Workshop model was the most commonly reported resource perceived to positively impact the reading achievement of Black and Hispanic students. Elementary educators also believed the use of the One Hundred Book challenge as an effective resource for ethnic minority students.

Small group and/or one-on-one instruction were common responses for both research question two regarding instructional strategies and research question three

regarding resources. Based on the responses, it is evident that teachers perceive small group and one-on-one instruction as needed instructional approaches in order to positively impact achievement of ethnic minority students.

The use of various forms of technology was an additional theme that emerged in response to the final research question. Responses to the open-ended interview item provided evidence that teachers perceive technology as a needed instructional resource. More than half of the interviewees articulated the importance of using technology in the classroom. Specifically, use of iPads, Smart Boards, PowerPoint presentations, books on tape, and the reading website RAZ-Kids were all noted as important technological resources by interviewees.

Limitations of the Study

In addition to the limitations stated in Chapter One, there were a few other limiting factors. Only seven of the 53 participants volunteered to be interviewed. There were no interview volunteers from District C, which was the most diverse setting. This may have been because the data were collected at the start of the school year. During the time period of data collection, one of the elementary principals in District A transitioned to a different role and was replaced by a new principal. The researcher was unable to determine if this change in leadership affected participant responses. Additionally, a small number of participating special education teachers (N=7) and reading specialists (N=5) proved to be a limiting factor since these professionals generally support students with the greatest academic needs. No reading specialists volunteered to be interviewed and only one of the seven interviewees was a special education teacher.

Relationship to Other Research

Data have confirmed the existence of an achievement gap between White students and Black students and between White students and Hispanic students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). The results of this study verified that most elementary educators (79%) recognized the existence of an achievement gap in their school and/or district.

Fryer and Levitt (2004) pointed out that the achievement gap widens as children move through school. Therefore, it is of critical importance to identify and support students as early as possible. The importance of early childhood education and interventions were revealed in previous studies as factors influencing achievement for ethnic minority students (Allington, 2012; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Rothstein 2014). Allington (2012) stated that many reading challenges experienced by students could be avoided if students were exposed to high-quality early intervention resources. The results of this study validated Allington's hypothesis as many elementary educators (96%) indicated agreement regarding the importance of preschool preparation programs in order to ensure the reading success for Black and Hispanic students. Research has indicated that students who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are highly at risk for dropping out of school (Hernandez, 2011). Therefore, it is important to ensure that reading needs are addressed early in a child's educational career.

Studies have shown that teacher quality is an important factor influencing the achievement of students (Christenbury, 2011; Cole, 2008; Gordon et al., 2006; Haycock, 2006; Haycock & Crawford, 2008; Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2008; Marshall, 2009; Smith & Gorrard, 2007). Further, Marshall (2009) stressed the importance of ensuring that

low performing students are placed with the most effective teachers because good teaching has the power to close the gap. Consistent with the research, the educator perceptions revealed in this study confirmed that elementary educators believe that teacher quality impacts student achievement. According to the perceptions revealed in this study, educators must develop trusting relationships with students, use a variety of differentiated teaching techniques, and ensure that students are provided with small group instruction.

Another factor under the umbrella of teacher quality is pre-service teacher preparation programs. Completion of a pre-service teacher preparation program is a requirement prior to entering the classroom. Pre-service teacher preparation programs have been modified at some colleges and universities in order to ensure that teacher candidates are appropriately prepared to work with ethnic minority students (Frye & Vogt, 2010; Matias, 2013; Stevens & Charles, 2005; Turner, 2007). Although program reform efforts have been made at some higher learning institutions, the results of this study indicate that many elementary educators (57%) do not believe that pre-service teacher preparation programs appropriately prepare candidates to work with ethnic minority students.

Socioeconomic circumstances were identified in the previous studies as another factor influencing the achievement of ethnic minority students (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013; Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008; Chenoweth, 2009; Education Week, 2011; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; King-Dickman, 2013; Sandy & Duncan, 2010). Fryer and Levitt (2004) asserted that socioeconomic status and poverty are considerable factors in explaining the racial differences in student achievement. The findings of this study affirmed that the respondents believe that socioeconomic factors influence the achievement of ethnic minority students. Ninety-eight percent of the survey participants expressed

agreement that socioeconomic factors impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. All interviewees articulated a belief that there is a relationship between socioeconomic factors and student achievement. Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013) and King-Dickman (2013) acknowledged that student achievement suffers a setback when students do not have access to books. Four of the seven interview participants indicated that a lack of resources at home could negatively influence achievement. In contrast, previous research has shown that in spite of difficult socioeconomic conditions, some schools have been able to demonstrate high levels of academic achievement (Chenoweth, 2009; Hawkins, 2007; Reeves, 2004). Some of the characteristics found in successful high poverty, high minority schools were teacher collaboration, the use of differentiated instructional techniques, and frequent assessment of student progress. Almost all of the elementary educators who participated in this study recognized that these specific elements contribute to the academic success of ethnic minority students.

Fountas and Pinnell (2012) indicated that differentiated instruction is needed in order to effectively respond to the diversity that is present in classrooms today. Parsons et al. (2013) affirmed that the most effective teachers thoughtfully differentiate their instruction in order to meet the diverse needs of students. The research findings in this study supported the findings of previous research as almost all educators mentioned differentiated instructional techniques as an important approach used to meet the needs of ethnic minority students. Ninety-eight percent of the survey respondents indicated that they use a variety of differentiated instructional techniques in order to meet the reading needs of Black and Hispanic students. In addition, 96% of the survey respondents reported that they use interactive activities such as Reader's Theater, literature circles, and partner

strategies in order to meet the needs of ethnic minority students. The integration of these specific techniques is often used as a vehicle to differentiate instruction. An analysis of the open-ended and interview responses provided additional evidence that elementary educators believe it is important to differentiate instruction.

Allington and Gabriel (2012) and Moley et al. (2011) described a relationship between choice, motivation, and engagement. The results of this study were consistent with previous research regarding the connection between these three variables. The majority of teachers recognized that students are more motivated to read and more engaged in their reading when they are given the power of choice. Open-ended responses revealed that teachers understand the importance of students' being able to self-select "just right books" to read and enjoy.

Allington and Gabriel (2012) stated that various important reading behaviors are modeled when reading aloud to students. The research findings in this study supported previous research indicating that reading aloud to students is an important instructional strategy. Ninety-eight percent of the survey participants expressed agreement with this Likert scale item. In addition, respondents frequently noted reading aloud to students as an effective and necessary strategy in the open-ended response items.

The findings of this study contradicted previous research in regard to tracking students. Burris and Welner (2005) and Chambers (2009) indicated that tracking students has negatively impacted student achievement. However, elementary educators' perceptions from this study indicated that the majority of them (83%) do not believe that tracking negatively impacts student achievement.

Recommendation for Further Research

This study investigated the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Further, the study explored teachers' beliefs regarding the most effective instructional strategies and the most valuable resources that can be used to positively impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. Lastly, the study sought to understand teachers' beliefs regarding the achievement gap. The results of this study have prompted a recommendation for the following further research:

1. Conduct a qualitative study to examine educators' beliefs regarding pre-service preparation to better understand the effectiveness of these programs in preparing teacher candidates to work with diverse populations of students.

2. Conduct a study to examine the perceived effectiveness of the RTI model in meeting the needs of ethnic minority students.

3. Conduct a qualitative study to further examine educators' beliefs regarding the role parental support and home-school communication have on the achievement of ethnic minority students.

4. Conduct a study to further explore teachers' beliefs regarding the impact that tracking has on student achievement.

5. Conduct a mixed study of qualitative and quantitative data to understand the potential achievement impact of the Reader's Workshop model and the Hundred Book challenge.

6. Conduct a similar qualitative study to examine the perceptions of middle school and high school reading/language arts teachers to determine if their perceptions regarding this research topic are similar to or different than the perceptions of elementary educators.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study analyzed elementary educators' perceptions regarding the factors, instructional strategies, and resources impacting the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. The researcher sought to answer the three guiding research questions through survey and interview questions designed by the researcher and reviewed by a pilot panel. The data were gathered and analyzed in order to determine trends and themes. While the data revealed that there are a wide variety of factors, strategies, and resources that influence the reading achievement of ethnic minority students, this conclusion presents the elements that were the most prevalent in the data.

The results of this study indicate that teachers recognize the existence of an achievement gap in many of our schools. The participants articulated that a lack of parental support and a lack of home-school communication are negative factors contributing to the achievement gap. They also believed that if students do not have encouragement, support, and resources at home, as well as access to community-based resources, their academic achievement may suffer. As an example, many of the participating elementary educators cited that socioeconomic circumstances may impact the availability of resources in the home. If students are unable to access important materials such as books and computers, they are at a disadvantage in comparison to students who readily have access to these tools. Based upon the results of this study, parents of ethnic

minority students should be encouraged to reinforce concepts taught in school and to play an active role in the education of their children to ensure their academic success.

The findings of the research study also indicate that teacher quality impacts the achievement of ethnic minority students. Given these results, ensuring that all teachers are appropriately and effectively responding to the diverse needs of all students must remain a top priority for principals and instructional supervisors. The participants in this study recognized the importance of establishing rapport with students, making connections with them, and having high expectations. They also demonstrated a belief that developing trusting and supportive relationships with students is critical to their academic success. Additionally, the findings determined that if teachers have low expectations and fail to exhibit care and concern, their students will not be able to achieve their full potential. Based upon a need to establish strong and supportive relationships with students, it is clear that educators must consistently engage in purposeful and personalized measures to get to know their students. Some examples might be administering interest inventories, spending one-on-one time with students, and continually exhibiting an attitude of care and concern.

With regard to instructional strategies, the participating elementary educators communicated that a teacher must be able to effectively differentiate instruction and utilize a variety of instructional techniques. Based upon this finding, professional learning experiences focused on differentiated and culturally responsive instructional practices must continually be offered in school districts.

Respondents frequently cited small group instruction as a strategy/intervention that can be used to increase the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. It is recommended that elementary educators establish a system within their classrooms that

will allow them to service students in a small group setting as often as possible, especially during reading instruction.

The results of this study suggest that participants believed that a variety of interventions are being offered in their schools. However, some teachers expressed concern that the interventions may not be effectively meeting the needs of ethnic minority students. The data indicated that while the RtI model is used in many schools, teachers have mixed feelings regarding the achievement impact that this model has on ethnic minority students. Considering the results of this study, there must be procedures in place in all schools to evaluate the effectiveness of the targeted interventions. Interventions should be changed if students do not demonstrate the appropriate evidence of growth.

The importance of using educational technology was an additional theme reported by four of the seven interviewees. As technology continues to impact our schools and society, it is important to have dedicated personnel in all school districts who are responsible for the direct oversight and management of technological integration. Classroom teachers will need to rely on the guidance of individuals who specialize in this field in order to appropriately integrate the available technological resources into their classroom instruction.

The data presented in this study can be used to assist educators and school leaders in understanding the various factors influencing the reading achievement of ethnic minority students. In order to close the achievement gap, the results of this study provide evidence for the need to ensure that students are educated by teachers who implement a variety of differentiated strategies and learning techniques, have high expectations for student success, and have the ability to maintain caring relationships centered around trust. As

teacher quality continues to be a topic of ongoing discussion in our society, the data revealed in this study verify that the participating elementary educators recognized the need for students to have caring, connected, and competent teachers.

References

- Abellan-Pagnani, L., & Hébert, T. (2013). Using picture books to guide and inspire young gifted Hispanic students. *Gifted Child Today*, 36(1), 47-56. doi: 10.1177/1076217512459735
- Adelson, J. L., & Carpenter, B. D. (2011). Grouping for achievement gains: For whom does achievement grouping increase kindergarten reading growth? *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 55(4), 265-278. doi:10.1177/0016986211417306
- Allen, S. (2008). Eradicating the achievement gap: History, education, and reformation. *Black History Bulletin*, 71(1), 13-17. Retrieved from <http://www.asalh.org/bhb.html>
- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2013). *Adolescent Literacy* [Fact Sheet]. Retrieved from <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/AdolescentLiteracyFactSheet.pdf>
- Allington, R. L. (2012). What at-risk readers need. *Educational Leadership*, 69(9), 1-5. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Allington, R. L., & Gabriel, R. E. (2012). Every child, every day. *Educational Leadership*, 69(6), 10-15. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Allington, R. L., & McGill-Franzen, A. (2013). Eliminating summer reading setback: How we can close the rich/poor achievement gap. *Reading Today*, 30(5), 10-11. Retrieved from <http://www.reading.org/reading-today>
- American School Board Journal. (2006). *Why teachers matter*. Retrieved from <http://www.asbj.com/default.aspx>

- Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010). *Early warning! Why reading by the end of third grade matters*. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid={8E2B6F93-75C6-4AA6-8C6E-CE88945980A9}>
- Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2014). *Early reading proficiency in the United States*. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/KIDS%20COUNT/E/EarlyReadingProficiency/EarlyReadingProficiency2014.pdf>
- Barnes, C. J. (2006). Preparing pre-service teachers to teach in a culturally responsive way. *Negro Educational Review*, 57(1/2), 85-100. Retrieved from <http://thener.org/>
- Bean, R., & Lillenstein, J. (2012). Response to Intervention and the changing roles of schoolwide personnel. *Reading Teacher*, 65(7), 491-501. doi:10.1002/TRTR.01073
- Boyd-Zaharias, J., & Pate-Bain, H. (2008). Class matters: In and out of school. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(1), 40-44. Retrieved from <http://pdkintl.org/publications/kappan/>
- Bumgardner, S. (2010). The equitable distribution of high-quality teachers. *District Administration*, 46(2), 45-47. Retrieved from <http://www.districtadministration.com/>
- Brown-Chidsey, R. (2007). No more waiting to fail. *Educational Leadership*, 65(2), 40-46. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Brozo, W. G. (2009). Response to Intervention or responsive instruction? Challenges and possibilities of Response to Intervention for adolescent literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(4), 277-281. doi:10.1598/JAAL.53.4.1

- Burchinal, M., McCartney, K., Steinberg, L., Crosnoe, R., Friedman, S. L., McLoyd, V., & Pianta, R. (2011). Examining the Black-White achievement gap among low-income children using the NICHD study of early child care and youth development. *Child Development, 82*(5), 1404-1420. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01620.x
- Burris, C. C., & Welner, K. G. (2005). Closing the achievement gap by detracking. *Phi Delta Kappan, 86*(8), 594-598. Retrieved from <http://pdkintl.org/publications/kappan/>
- Carbo, M. (2008). Strategies for increasing the achievement in reading. In R. Cole (Ed.), *Educating everybody's children: We know what works-and what doesn't* (pp. 98-122). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Caillier, J. (2010). Paying teachers according to student achievement: Questions regarding pay-for-performance models in public education. *Clearing House, 83*(2), 58-61. doi:10.1080/00098650903386451
- Callender, W. A. (2012). Why principals should adopt schoolwide RTI. *Principal, 91*(4), 8-12. Retrieved from <http://www.naesp.org/>
- Chambers, T. (2009). The "receiving gap": School tracking policies and the fallacy of the "achievement gap." *Journal of Negro Education, 78*(4), 417-431.
- Chenoweth, K. (2009). It can be done, it's being done, and here's how. *Phi Delta Kappan, 91*(1), 38-43. Retrieved from <http://pdkintl.org/publications/kappan/>
- Cheung, A. K., & Slavin, R. E. (2013). Effects of educational technology applications on reading outcomes for struggling readers: A best-evidence synthesis. *Reading Research Quarterly, 48*(3), 277-299. doi:10.1002/rrq.50

Christenbury, L. (2010). The flexible teacher. *Educational Leadership*, 68(4), 46-50.

Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>

Cobb, A. (2010). To differentiate or not to differentiate? Using internet-based technology in the classroom. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 11(1), 37-45. Retrieved from <http://www.highbeam.com/publications/quarterly-review-of-distance-education-p62115>

Cole, R. W. (2008). Educating everybody's children: We know what works-and what doesn't. In R. Cole (Ed.), *Educating everybody's children: We know what works-and what doesn't* (pp. 1-40). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Colker, L. J. (2014). The word gap: The early years make the difference. *Teaching Young Children*, 7(3), 26-28. Retrieved from <http://www.naeyc.org/tyc/>

Comeaux, E., & Jayakumar, U. (2007). Education in the United States: Is it a Black problem? *Urban Review*, 39(1), 93-104. doi:10.1007/s11256-007-0054-x

Compton-Lilly, C. F. (2009). What can new literacy studies offer to the teaching of struggling readers? *The Reading Teacher*, 63(1), 88-90. doi:10.1598/RT.63.1.10

Cummins, J. (2011). Literacy engagement. *Reading Teacher*, 65(2), 142-146. doi:10.1002/TRTR.01022

Cyr, E., McDiarmid, P., Halpin, B., Stratton, J., & Davis-Delano, L. (2012). Creating a dual licensure program in elementary and special education that prepares culturally responsive teachers. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching & Learning*, 2(3), 158-168. Retrieved from <http://www3.subr.edu/coeijtl/>

- Darling-Hammond, L. (2011). Restoring our schools: The quest for equity in the United States. *Education Canada*, 51(5), 14-18. Retrieved from <http://www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada>
- Ediger, M. (2013). Philosophies of reading instruction. *Reading Improvement*, 50(3), 132-134. Retrieved from <http://www.highbeam.com/publications/reading-improvement-p4454>
- Education Week. (2011). *Achievement gap*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/achievement-gap/>
- Electronic reader. (1993). In *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary*. Retrieved from <http://i.word.com/dictionary/electronic%20reader>
- Erickson, E. (2008). A reading program to narrow the achievement gap. *Reading Improvement*, 45(4), 170-180. Retrieved from <http://www.highbeam.com/publications/reading-improvement-p4454>
- Ford, D., Henfield, M., & Scott, M. (2013). Culturally responsive education for African American and Hispanic students: Merging theory, research, and practice. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching & Learning*, 3(2), 65-67. Retrieved from <http://www3.subr.edu/coeijtl/>
- Ford, D. Y., & Kea, C. D. (2009). Creating culturally responsive instruction: For students' and teachers' sakes. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 41(9), 1-16. Retrieved from http://www.lovepublishing.com/catalog/focus_on_exceptional_children_31.html
- Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. (2012). Guided reading: The romance and the reality. *Reading Teacher*, 66(4), 268-284. doi:10.1002/TRTR.01123

- Frye, B. J., & Vogt, H. A. (2010). The causes of underrepresentation of African American children in gifted programs and the need to address this problem through more culturally responsive teaching practices in teacher education programs. *Black History Bulletin*, 73(1), 11-17. Retrieved from <http://www.asalh.org/bhb.html>
- Fryer, R. G., & Levitt, S. D. (2004). Falling behind. *Education Next*, 4(4), 64-71. Retrieved from <http://educationnext.org/fallingbehind/>
- Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. (2008). Implementing RTI. *District Administration*, 44(11), 72-76. Retrieved from <http://www.districtadministration.com/>
- Gándara, P. (2010). Overcoming triple segregation. *Educational Leadership*, 68(3), 60-64. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Gibson, S. (2010). Critical readings: African American girls and urban fiction. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(7), 565-574. doi:10.1598/JAAL.53.7.4
- Gordon, R., Kane, T. J., & Staiger, D. O. (2006). Identifying effective teachers using performance on the job. *Hamilton Project Discussion Paper 2006-01*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2006/04education_gordon/200604hamilton_1.pdf
- Hanselman, P., & Borman, G. (2013). The impacts of success for all on reading achievement in Grades 3–5: Does intervening during the later elementary grades produce the same benefits as intervening early? *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis*, 35(2), 237-251. doi:10.3102/0162373712466940

- Harry, B., & Klingner, J. (2007). Discarding the deficit model. *Educational Leadership*, 64(5), 16-21. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Haskins, R., Murnane, R., Sawhill, I., & Snow, C. (2012). Can academic standards boost literacy and close the achievement gap? *Future of Children*, 1-5. Retrieved from <http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/journals/>
- Hawkins, V. J. (2007). Narrowing gaps for special-needs students. *Educational Leadership*, 64(5), 61-63. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Haycock, K. (2006). No more invisible kids. *Educational Leadership*, 64(3), 38-42. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Haycock, K., & Crawford, C. (2008). Closing the teacher quality gap. *Educational Leadership*, 65(7), 14-19. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Herbers, J. E., Cutuli, J. J., Supkoff, L. M., Heistad, D., Chan, C., Hinz, E., & Masten, A. S. (2012). Early reading skills and academic achievement trajectories of students facing poverty, homelessness, and high residential mobility. *Educational Researcher*, 41(9), 366-374. doi:10.3102/0013189X12445320
- Hernandez, D. J. (2011). Double jeopardy: How third grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation. *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*, 1-15. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid={8E2B6F93-75C6-4AA6-8C6E-CE88945980A9}>

- Hernández Finch, M. E. (2012). Special considerations with Response to Intervention and Instruction for students with diverse backgrounds. *Psychology in the Schools, 49*(3), 285-296. doi:10.1002/pits.21597
- Himmele, P., & Himmele, W. (2011). *Total participation techniques: Making every student an active learner*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Hsieh, M. (2013). Data mining from education databases: Examine the factors impacting the school performance in the United States. *International Journal of Intelligent Technologies & Applied Statistics, 6*(2), 135-143. doi:10.6148/IJITAS.2013.0602.
- Jacob, B., & Lefgren, L. (2007, Summer). In low-income schools, parents want teachers who teach. *Education Next, 59-64*. Retrieved from <http://educationnext.org/>
- Jones, R. E., Yssel, N., & Grant, C. (2012). Reading instruction in Tier 1: Bridging the gaps by nesting evidence-based interventions within differentiated instruction. *Psychology in the Schools, 49*(3), 210-218. doi:10.1002/pits.21591
- Jupp, V. (Ed.). (2006). *The SAGE dictionary of social research methods*. London, England: SAGE. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857020116>
- Kafele, B. (2009). *Motivating Black males to achieve in school & in life*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Kashi, T. (2008). Response to Intervention as a suggested generalized approach to improving minority AYP scores. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 27*(4), 37-44. Retrieved from <http://acres-sped.org/journal>
- Kerry Moran, K. J. (2006). Nurturing emergent readers through readers theater. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 33*(5), 317-323. doi:10.1007/s10643-006-0089-8

- Kezar, A., & Eckel, P. (2007). Learning to ensure the success of students of color: A systemic approach to effecting change. *Change*, 39(4), 18-21. Retrieved from <http://www.changemag.org/>
- King-Dickman, K. (2013). How Elena learned to love reading. *Educational Leadership*, 70(8), 62-65. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Knoell, C. M., & Crow, S. R. (2013). Exploring teacher influence on the lives of students from diverse elementary schools in a rural midwestern community. *International Journal of Psychology: A Biopsychosocial Approach / Tarptautinis Psichologijos Zurnalas: Biopsichosocialinis Poziuris*, 13, 31-48. doi:10.7220/1941-7233.13.2
- Konstantopoulos, S., & Chung, V. (2011). Teacher effects on minority and disadvantaged students' grade 4 achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 104(2), 73-86. doi:10.1080/00220670903567349
- LaPrade, K. (2011). Removing instructional barriers: One track at a time. *Education*, 131(4), 740-752.
- Marshall, K. (2009). A how-to plan for widening the gap. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(9), 650-655. Retrieved from <http://pdkintl.org/publications/kappan/>
- Marshall, K. (2013). Rethinking teacher supervision and evaluation: How to work smart, build collaboration and close the achievement gap (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA. John Wiley & Sons.
- Martinez, R., & Young, A. (2011). Response to Intervention: How is it practiced and perceived? *International Journal of Special Education*, 26(1), 44-52. Retrieved from <http://www.internationaljournalofspecialeducation.com/>

- Matias, C. (2013). Check yo'self before you wreck yo'self and our kids: Counterstories from culturally responsive white teachers to culturally responsive white teachers! *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching & Learning*, 3(2), 68-81. Retrieved from <http://www3.subr.edu/coeijtl/>
- McGlynn, A. (2014). The rich-poor gap widens. *Education Digest*, 79(6), 55-58. Retrieved from <http://www.eddigest.com/>
- McLaughlin, M. (2012). Reading comprehension: What every teacher needs to know. *Reading Teacher*, 65(7), 432-440. doi:10.1002/TRTR.01064
- Miranda, T., Johnson, K. A., & Rossi-Williams, D. (2012). E-Readers: Powering up for engagement. *Educational Leadership*, 69(9), 1-3. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Moley, P. F., Bandré, P. E., & George, J. E. (2011). Moving beyond readability: Considering choice, motivation and learner engagement. *Theory into Practice*, 50(3), 247-253. doi:10.1080/00405841.2011.584036
- Morgan, H. (2009). Picture book biographies for young children: A way to teach multiple perspectives. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 37(3), 219-227. doi:10.1007/s10643-009-0339-7
- Murray-Harvey, R. (2010). Relationship influences on students' academic achievement, psychological health and well-being at school. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 27(1), 104-115.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009). *NAEYC standards for early childhood professional preparation programs*. Retrieved from <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/ProfPrepStandards09.pdf>

- National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). *Understanding gaps*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/gaps/understand_gaps.aspx
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *Results for 2013 NAEP Mathematics and Reading Assessments*. Retrieved from http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2013/#/executive-summary
- Nisbett, R. E. (2010). Think big, bigger... and smaller. *Educational Leadership*, 68(3), 10-15. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>
- Noguera, P. A. (2009). The achievement gap: Public education in crisis. *New Labor Forum*, 18(2), 60-69. doi:10.4179/NLF.182.0000008
- Ofiesh, N. (2006). Response to Intervention and the identification of specific learning disabilities: Why we need comprehensive evaluations as part of the process. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43(8), 883-888. doi:10.1002/pits.20195
- Palumbo, A., & Kramer-Vida, L. (2012). An academic curriculum will close the academic achievement gap. *Clearing House*, 85(3), 117-121. doi:10.1080/00098655.2012.655345
- Parsons, S. A., Dodman, S. L., & Cohen Burrowbridge, S. (2013). Broadening the view of differentiated instruction. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 95(1), 38-42. Retrieved from <http://pdkintl.org/publications/kappan/>
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2008). *NCLB's highly qualified teacher requirements*. Retrieved from http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/highly_qualified_teacher_requirements/8631

- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2012). *Technical report for the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment*. Retrieved from http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pssa_technical_reports/7447
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2013). *ESEA flexibility: Pennsylvania's No Child Left Behind waiver request approved by U.S. Department of Education*. Retrieved from http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/federal_programs/7374/p/1433522
- Reeves, D. B. (2004). High performance in high poverty schools: 90/90/90 and beyond. *Center for Performance Assessment*. Retrieved from http://www.gvsu.edu/cms3/assets/8D75A61E-920B-A470-F74EFFF5D49C6AC0/forms/boardmembers/resources/high_performance_in_high_poverty_schools.pdf
- Richards, H. V., Brown, A. F., & Forde, T. B. (2007). Addressing diversity in schools: Culturally responsive pedagogy. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 39(3), 64-68. Retrieved from <http://journals.cec.sped.org/tec/>
- Robb, L. (2008). But they all read at different levels. *Instructor*, 117(4), 47-51. Retrieved from <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/instructor>
- Rothstein, R. (2014). Brown v. Board at 60: Why have we been so disappointed? What have we learned? *Economic Policy Institute*. Retrieved from <http://s3.epi.org/files/2014/EPI-Brown-v-Board-04-17-2014.pdf>
- Rychly, L., & Graves, E. (2012). Teacher characteristics for culturally responsive pedagogy. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 14(1), 44-49. doi:10.1080/15210960.2012.646853

- Shealey, M., & Callins, T. (2007). Creating culturally responsive literacy programs in inclusive classrooms. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 42*(4), 195-197. Retrieved from <http://isc.sagepub.com/>
- Sandy, J., & Duncan, K. (2010). Examining the achievement test score gap between urban and suburban students. *Education Economics, 18*(3), 297-315.
doi:10.1080/09645290903465713
- Saravia-Shore, M. (2008). Diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners. In R. Cole (Ed.), *Educating everybody's children: We know what works-and what doesn't* (pp. 41-97). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Shapiro, E. S. (2008). From research to practice: Promoting academic competence for underserved students. *School Psychology Review, 37*(1), 46-51. Retrieved from <http://www.nasponline.org/publications/spr/index-list.aspx>
- Smith, E., & Gorard, S. (2007). Improving teacher quality: Lessons from America's No Child Left Behind. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 37*(2), 191-206.
doi:10.1080/03057640701372426
- Smyth, T. (2008). Who is No Child Left Behind leaving behind? *Clearing House, 81*(3), 133-137. <http://www.editlib.org/j/ISSN-0009-8655>
- Stecker, P. M., Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. S. (2008). Progress monitoring as essential practice within response to intervention. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 27*(4), 10-17. Retrieved from <http://acres-sped.org/journal>
- Stevens, R., & Charles, J. (2005). Preparing teachers to teach tolerance. *Multicultural Perspectives, 7*(1), 17-25. doi:10.1207/s15327892mcp0701_4

- Takanishi, R., & Bogard, K. L. (2007). Effective educational programs for young children: What we need to know. *Child Development Perspectives, 1*(1), 40-45.
doi:10.1111/j.1750-8606.2007.00008.x
- Teale, W. H., Paciga, K. A., & Hoffman, J. L. (2007). Beginning reading instruction in urban schools: The curriculum gap ensures a continuing achievement gap. *Reading Teacher, 61*(4), 344-348. doi:10.1598/RT.61.4.8
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2001). *How to differentiate instruction in mixed ability classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Turner, J. D. (2007). Beyond cultural awareness: Prospective teachers' visions of culturally responsive literacy teaching. *Action in Teacher Education, 29*(3). Retrieved from www.tandfonline.com
- U.S. Department of Education. (2004). *Executive summary of No Child Left Behind*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/execsumm.html>
- Utley, C. A., Obiakor, F. E., & Jeffrey P., B. (2011). Culturally responsive practices for culturally and linguistically diverse students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal, 9*(1), 5-18. Retrieved from <http://www.ldworldwide.org/research/learning-disabilities-a-contemporary-journal>
- Watts-Taffe, S., Laster, B., Broach, L., Marinak, B., McDonald Connor, C., & Walker-Dalhouse, D. (2012). Differentiated instruction: Making informed teacher decisions. *Reading Teacher, 66*(4), 303-314. doi:10.1002/TRTR.01126
- Webley, K. (2012). Why it's time to replace No Child Left Behind. *Time, 179*(3), 40-44. Retrieved from <http://time.com/>

- Wenglinsky, H. (2004). Closing the racial achievement gap: The role of reforming instructional practices. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(64), 1-24. Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n64/>.
- Williams, A. (2011). A call for change: Narrowing the achievement gap between White and minority students. *The Clearing House*, 84, 65-71. doi:10.1080/00098655.2010.511308
- Williams, L. M. (2008). Book selections of economically disadvantaged Black elementary students. *Journal of Educational Research*, 102(1), 51-64. doi:10.3200/JOER.102.1.51-64
- Wilson, P., Martens, P., & Arya, P. (2005). Accountability for reading and readers: What the numbers don't tell. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(7), 622-631. doi:10.1598/RT.58.7.3
- Young, C. Y., Wright, J. V., & Laster, J. (2005). Instructing African American students. *Education*, 125(3), 516-524.
- Ziolkowska, R. (2007). Early intervention for students with reading and writing difficulties. *Reading Improvement*, 44(2), 76-86. Retrieved from http://www.projectinnovation.com/Reading_Improvement.html

Appendix A

Dissertation Survey and Open-Ended Questions**Part One**

Demographic Information

1. How many years have you been teaching?
 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 20+years
2. What grade level(s) do you teach? Circle all that apply.
 K 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th
3. How many years have you been working with Black and/or Hispanic students?
 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 20+years
4. What is your current job title?
 Elementary Teacher Special Education Teacher Reading Specialist
 Instructional Support Teacher Other (please specify)

Part Two

Likert-Scale Survey Questions:

5. The quality of a teacher's instruction directly impacts the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. The intellectual qualities of the teacher directly impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. The interpersonal skills of the teacher directly impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. The teacher's ability to develop positive relationships with students directly impacts the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. Pre-service teacher preparation programs appropriately prepare teacher candidates to work with ethnic minority students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. Tracking students by ability level relative to each tested subject area has a negative impact on student achievement.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. Socioeconomic factors impact the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. Ethnic minority students who attend preschool programs have a higher likelihood of reading success in comparison to ethnic minority students who do not attend preschool programs.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. There is a recognizable achievement gap between ethnic minority students and White students in my school district.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. My classroom library contains a diverse selection of books in order to ensure that students are able to choose from a variety of genres and levels.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. Motivation impacts the reading achievement of ethnic minority students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. It is important to take the time to understand the learning styles, reading interests, and preferences of my students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. Collaboration with colleagues is an important component of my day.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

18. Providing students with specific and timely feedback is an important component of my instructional practice.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

19. Allowing students to self-select a "good fit" book helps to ensure that they are motivated to read.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

20. Culturally responsive teaching techniques (strategies that encompass the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students) are an integral component of my classroom experience.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

21. It is important to use a variety of differentiated instructional techniques in order to meet the reading needs of ethnic minority students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

22. Interactive activities such as Reader's Theater, literature circles, and partner reading are effective instructional techniques for minority students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

23. The **guided reading** approach is an important technique that is used in my classroom.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

24. **Strategy groups** are an important technique used in my classroom.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

25. Providing ethnic minority students with additional instructional time in reading, positively impacts their achievement.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

26. Providing students with uninterrupted time each day to read books at their instructional level is an effective instructional strategy.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

27. A designated period of time is provided daily for children to select and read books of their choosing.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

28. I assist students in choosing “good fit” books that incorporate their interests.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

29. Reading aloud to my students is an important way to model various reading behaviors used by fluent readers.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

30. My students are provided with daily opportunities to engage in discussion about what they are reading.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

31. My daily instructional practices encompass the learning styles, reading interests, and preferences of my students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

32. Various assessment techniques are used to drive daily instruction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

33. Multicultural literature is incorporated into my classroom instruction in order to expose readers to multiple points of view and information.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

34. My school provides a variety of interventions to ensure that the needs of ethnic minority students are met.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Part Three

Open Ended Questions

35. Which positive factors do you believe influence the reading achievement of ethnic minority students?
36. Which negative factors do you believe influence the reading achievement of ethnic minority students?
37. Which instructional strategies do you believe have positively impacted the reading achievement of ethnic minority students in your classroom or teaching experience? List up to 3 strategies.
38. Based on your instructional experience, which curriculum frameworks or reading programs have had the greatest positive impact on the reading achievement of ethnic minority students?
39. What interventions do you believe would help to boost the reading achievement of minority students?
40. Does your school district utilize the RtI framework? If so, how has this model impacted the reading achievement of ethnic minority students within your classroom?
41. Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview? The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. If you would like to participate in this brief optional interview, please contact me by phone (215) 265-4651 or by email champagneleek@pasd.k12.pa.us

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Questions

- 1) Based on your educational background and instructional experiences, what do you believe all teachers need to do in order to ensure the maximum reading growth of ethnic minority students? What specifically do you do in your classroom to ensure that the reading needs of minority students are met?

- 2) What factors do you believe are hindering the closing of the achievement gap for ethnic minority students?

- 3) Describe the specific instructional approaches that you have used in order to meet the needs of ethnic minority students.

- 4) Do you believe that there is a relationship between the quality of a teacher's instruction and student achievement? If so, describe that relationship. If not, explain why you believe that.

- 5) In your opinion, is there a correlation between socioeconomic factors and the reading achievement of ethnic minority students? If so, please describe that relationship.

- 6) Based on your instructional experiences, which specific resources would be beneficial for most school districts, if not all school districts, to use in order to ensure that the reading needs of minority students are met?

Appendix C

IMMACULATA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW BOARD REQUEST FOR PROTOCOL REVIEW--REVIEWER'S COMMENTS FORM (R1297)

Name of Researcher: Zacheya 'Keya' Champagne-Lee

Project Title: Factors Influencing the Reading Achievement of Ethnic Minority Students: Elementary Educators' Perceptions

Reviewer's Comments

Your proposal is **Approved**. You may begin your research or collect your data.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS APPROVAL IS VALID FOR ONE YEAR (**365 days**) FROM DATE OF SIGNING.

Reviewer's Recommendations:

<input type="checkbox"/> Exempt <input type="checkbox"/> Expedited <input type="checkbox"/> Full Review	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Conditionally Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Approve
---	--

Thomas F. O'Brien

July 21, 2014

Thomas F. O'Brien, Ph.D., Ed.D.

DATE