POVERTY AND EDUCATION: AN EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

by

Elizabeth Leigh Rogers Ghent

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

This study was developed to increase awareness on educators' perspectives at a Title I middle school in Lancaster, SC. The purpose was to determine which educational barriers, according to the teachers' perspectives, have the highest impact on students. Using the survey results, it was determined which school initiatives play the largest role in mitigating the educational barriers. Data was collected through an anonymous online survey distributed in February of 2020. The results indicated which poverty related educational barriers were noteworthy. Having an effective meal program was determined to be the most effective way to combat poverty. Clubs, sports, and parental involvement were also ranked high was ways to combat poverty. Students in high poverty (Title I) schools need to have extra supports and initiatives in place to help students succeed.

Keywords: poverty, education, educators' perspective

Dedication

For all the teachers who work tirelessly to educate the whole child. We do not teach just academics. We are the mamas, the daddies, the aunts and uncles that ensure each child has someone positive in their life, and someone they can trust.

For my family who stood by me through the tasks of being a wife, a mom, a daughter, a teacher, and a full-time graduate student. Thank you!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Students living in poverty is a reality for many schools across the nation. In Lancaster, SC, South Middle School is the only Title I middle school in the district. Teachers are troubled about how the lives of these students will develop. It has been demonstrated through research that poverty affects a child's performance in school (Payne, 2005). Education can be key to offer a way out of poverty for these children (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Even though education can offer a way out of poverty, there are also barriers in education caused by poverty. Poverty has a negative influence on behavior and achievement in school (Jensen, 2013). The impact that poverty has on education can be reduced with interventions used in schools.

Background

Historical

Numerous research studies have examined links between child poverty and academic achievement. One such study examined the effects of poverty and the quality of the home environment on changes in the academic and behavioral adjustment of school age children (Alsbury, Blanchard, Gutierrez, Allred & Tolin, 2018). This study examined ways to reform poverty-stricken schools. Students of these areas were dealing with the effects of poverty as well as a variety of additional risk factors which can have negative impacts on the children who experience them. Risk factors included the absence of a father figure, the number of children in the home, and maternal education. Although it is clear that these additional risk factors can have a negative impact on the children who experience them, it was chronic poverty that emerged as the strongest single indicator of later failure to achieve in school and anti-social behavior.

Chronic poverty is associated with developmental delays, the lack of educational achievement, and it also it shown to be associated with deficits in social development.

Social

Many schools have students that live with the daily reality of poverty. Teachers are concerned for these students, and how it effects their education. Research has shown that a child's performance in school is strongly related to socioeconomic status and that education often offers a means of breaking the cycle of poverty for children in low income families (Gallagher, 1991). While it is shown that education can allow individuals to rise out of poverty it has also been shown that the educational barriers related to poverty affect academic achievement. Research confirms poverty's negative influence on student behavior, achievement and retention in school (Greever, 2014). International research also proves that using sustainable interventions can reduce the effects of poverty (Chamberlain, Hanson, Klass, Schickedanz, Nakhasi, Barnes & Klein, 2016).

Theoretical

The current research study explored the impacts of poverty on education specifically through the lens of a teacher. Although considerable research exists on the extent of, and factors contributing to poverty less is known about how teachers perceive the effects of poverty on students, how they respond to poverty in their school, and what teachers view as necessary to overcome educational barriers related to poverty (White, Hill, Kemp, MacRae & Young, 2012). The current study considered on school in South Carolina with a high percentage of families living in generational poverty.

Situation to Self

Teaching in a high poverty school comes with many challenges. Students come to school unprepared, hungry, and lacking support from home. I am challenged with delivering my content, while taking care of out of the ordinary circumstances for my students. Over 85% of my school's student population lives in poverty. Poverty causes many educational barriers, and it is my hope through this study that I will be able to provide our school and schools like us a variety of ways to combat poverty and break the cycle of generational poverty.

Problem Statement

Poverty is a problem in many schools. While teachers cannot solve the problem of poverty, it is important that they be educated as to how to help their students overcome educational barriers related to poverty. South Middle School is a Title I school with over 85% of the students coming from poverty. Many teachers are not from poverty-stricken homes and do not know how to relate to the students or are not trained in ways to combat poverty. South Middle School has programs in place to help these students. These programs need to be evaluated to determine which programs work best, which do not work, which programs could be enhanced and which programs to delete.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this descriptive survey study is to describe educators' perceptions about how poverty influences students and the educational process, the challenges teachers face as they work with students living in poverty, and the support teachers need to effective work with this student population. This investigation of teacher and administrator's perceptions will provide insight into change that may need to occur at South Middle School provide students living in poverty better educational opportunity to better their futures.

A. From the perspective of teachers and administrators, how does poverty influence education?

B. What challenges do teachers face in helping students overcome educational barriers related to poverty?

C. What do teachers need to best support students of poverty, so they may succeed in school?

Significance of the Study

Poverty affects health and child development. Payne's (2005) A Framework for Understanding Poverty, explains the obstacles encountered by people living in poverty. Payne's work documents the facts of poverty and provides practical and compassionate strategies for addressing poverty's impact on people. She recommends was to improve instruction and achievement for students living in poverty. Children raised in low-income families score lower than children from more affluent families on assessments of health, cognitive development, school achievement and emotional well-being (Payne, 2005).

Payne (2005) identifies four areas as being effective in promoting learning for at-risk students: developmental preschool programs, supplemental reading programs, reducing class size, and school wide projects in prevention and support. This study will focus on the fourth area: school wide projects in prevention and support. The first three areas cannot be dictated by teachers, but the fourth can be implemented, and if done with fidelity there are programs that combat educational barriers. These programs not only help students of poverty, but all of the students in a school.

Research Questions

1. From the perspective of teachers and administrators, how does poverty influence education?

2. What challenges do teachers face in helping students overcome educational barriers related to poverty?

3. What do teachers need to best support students of poverty, so they may succeed in school?

Summary

Teachers are a disadvantage when they are not familiar with student backgrounds. If teachers are unaware of the daily struggles of poverty and how to overcome the struggles, it is difficult to be able to reach students. Students struggling because of poverty creates another set of problems than that of your "normal" student. Students coming from poverty are already disadvantaged when they walk through the school doors from day one. This study will help to enlighten teachers and help administrators decide on which programs to keep, delete, or create to give poverty stricken the best advantage to overcome poverty.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Poverty and Education

It is important for teachers to understand the impact poverty plays on education (White, 2009). Poverty affects education in many ways. Poverty is not just lacking in material goods. Children who come from poverty are often lacking in healthcare, adequate nutrition, and support at home. Children growing up in poverty experience "double jeopardy." Not only are they directly exposed to risks in their homes and communities, including illnesses, crowding and family stress, lack of psychosocial stimulation, and limited resources, but they often experience more serious consequences to risks than children from higher income families (Engle & Black, 2008, 3).

With these factors, children from poverty usually do not perform as well in school as children from more affluent backgrounds. It has been found that most American students who start school significantly behind their peers can never close the readiness gap. Rather, the gap tends to widen as they move through school (Engle & Black, 2008).

Ruby Payne suggests that "poverty" applies to anyone who carries the "mindset" of the "poverty culture" (Bomer, Dworin, May & Semingson, 2008). Many have been able to overcome poverty, but the values or beliefs of those people have not changed. Payne states that while the income of an individual may increase, "patterns of thought, social interaction, cognitive strategies, etc., remain" (Payne, 2005). Students from households with incomes above the poverty line still may exhibit behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs associated with those from poverty (Bomer, Dworin & Semingson, 2008).

Poverty equates to lower test scores. Krahsen (2011) claims poverty may be the only serious problem in American education. To contend with poverty, schools need to provide

nutrition, health care, a clean environment, and books. Children of poverty typically have less books at home so they need to be readily available at school for students to use and take home (Krashen, 2011).

School is a place where children should feel safe. They should feel that they are cared for and know they will be given opportunities to improve and succeed. With the high numbers of students in poverty, which is continually growing, schools must be aware of the needs of these children and families and must be comfortable working with them (Wille, McFarland, & Archwamety, 2009). Most students want to succeed. There are factors that influence their motivation to do well (Mangels, et al. 2006).

Poverty

According to the United States Census Bureau, a family of four (2 adults and 2 children) at the poverty threshold is $24,858. The United States has the second highest rate of any Western industrialized nations of children in poverty at 23%, second only to Romania (Wexler, 2014). The Census Bureau reports, between 2015 and 2016, the poverty rate for children under age 18 declined from 19.7 to 18.0 percent. Because children are dependent on others, they enter or avoid poverty by virtue of their family's economic circumstances.

Poverty presents many challenges for teachers. All teachers are college graduates and have been prepared to teach content, this does not mean they are prepared to teach. Many teachers are faced with situations they have never encountered. Teachers face children who seem unmotivated when in fact they may just be hungry or worried. Teachers face children who go home alone and may care for their own siblings. Teachers face children who come to school with a completely different mindset than their affluent peers.

Children in poor families tend to develop weaker academic skills and achieve less academic success. Many arrive at kindergarten without the language or social skills they need for learning. They miss school frequently because of health or family concerns. They slip behind in the summer with little access to stimulating educational programs or even regular meals (Hernandez, 2011). Children cannot alter family conditions by themselves, at least until they approach adulthood (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Situational poverty and generational poverty are two types of poverty that many students experience.

Situational Poverty

Individuals from low income households make decisions differently than others from affluent backgrounds. Choices have to be made to get the car repaired or pay utility bills, or go to a school function or attend work (Cedeño, Martínez-Arias, & Bueno, 2016). Situational poverty is defined as a lack of resources due to a particular event (Payne, 2005, 45). A person/family can experience situational poverty when their income and support is decreased due to a specific change - job loss, divorce, death, etc. While there can be a domino effect caused by this one significant change, families experiencing situational poverty tend to remain hopeful, knowing that this is a temporary setback. This typically is not so with generational poverty. Generally, the attitude of people victims of situational poverty are pride and refusing to accept charity

Generational Poverty

Generational poverty is defined as having been in poverty for at least two generations; however, the patterns begin to surface much sooner than two generations if the family lives with others who are from generational poverty (Payne, 2005, 45). This type of poverty usually affects education more than situational poverty. Families never owning land/housing and seeing no

benefit in education (Ullucci, & Howard, 2015). Thousands of students from generational poverty fail early grades because they do not turn in their homework. Perhaps the students have parents who are illiterate or have low education levels and cannot help them with their homework (Beegle, 2003). Generational poverty values will focus more on survival and short-term outcomes. In comparison, generally, middle class values encompass education, work and being perceived as a productive member of society. In generational poverty, it is also possible that counterproductive traditions are passed down such as low emphasis on education.

Generational poverty affects the attitudes of all the people involved. Their outlook and views are very different from middle class values. Typically the mother is the head of the household, and she makes all decisions – not an outside authority. Future ramifications are not considered and being happy in the present in the utmost goal (Payne, 2005). Since present tense survival is the utmost importance in poverty, concrete problems are solved and the look to the future to solve abstract problems is never thought of, or it is forgotten.

Family patterns also present an issue in generational poverty. It is difficult to trace family histories as many marriages are common-law. Lineage is more difficult to trace, and it centers around the mother (Payne, 2005).

Roles that women and men play differ from the middle class to those in poverty. Men in middle class are typically looked at to be the provider, but in generations provider men are looked at to be fighters, lovers, and hard workers (Payne, 2005). Men are absent for many reasons – they may be looking for work, they may be in jail, or they may have to disappear for a time because someone is looking for them. Being a fighter/lover can mean that others have a reason to come after you. Men also may be absent because of government policies that will deny resources (SNAP, housing assistance Medicaid, etc.) to families if the man is present.

Death is also more common in generational poverty. This is because there is more violence in impoverished areas. Death is a prominent part of the family history. It is also a large part in the present. It can be difficult to discern in conversation who is alive and who is alive because in discussion they are still living (Payne, 2005).

Generational poverty is affecting education more and more each year as it grows in schools, and there is less middle class culture. To be able to serve these students, we must rethink ideas about which the students can and should be served (Payne, 2005). Education is a way to help these students escape generational poverty. It is up to the education system to help them learn the hidden rules of society and provide them with resources (Payne, 2005).

Education

Schools alone clearly cannot solve problems of poverty. Nonetheless, because education is so directly and strongly affected by poverty's deleterious consequences, poverty should be an important educational concern. It does not presently have that status. Despite our knowledge of poverty's important influence on education, responses to poverty have tended to play a marginal role in education policy and practice. (Levin, 1995, p. 215). Thirty years of careful social science has provided overwhelming evidence that socioeconomic status (SES) has been and continues to be the best single predictor of how much schooling students will obtain, how well they will do at their studies, and what their life prospects beyond school are. (Levin, 1995, p. 212)

Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs was introduced in 1940's. In it, states that all people possess within them drives to fulfill unmet needs. The different levels of needs form a hierarchy. A person who did not have a need met at one level was not able to meet the needs that

were at higher levels. This hierarchy of needs is depicted as a pyramid, the lowest level is

concerned with the satisfaction of physiological needs, such as hunger, thirst, and fatigue. The

next levels, in order, are: safety, belongingness and love, esteem and achievement, then cognitive

needs, such as knowing, understanding, and exploring. Next are aesthetic needs such as beauty

and order. The pyramid ends at the highest level, what Maslow termed self-actualization, or the

drive to find fulfillment and realize potential (Rich Jr, 2011). This pyramid has changed over

time, cognitive then aesthetic needs are between esteem and self-actualization and at the top is

now transcendence. According to Maslow a person's whose basic needs are not met will not be

able to reach their full potential.   Life experiences, including divorce and loss of a job, may

cause an individual to fluctuate between levels of the hierarchy.

Applications of Maslow's hierarchy theory to the work of the classroom teacher are

obvious. Before a student's cognitive needs can be met, they must first fulfill their basic

physiological needs. If a student is tired and hungry, they are not going to be able to focus on the

assignment. This is also why having a safe, inviting classroom is important as well. If students

do not feel emotionally and physically safe, they will not perform in class. Maslow suggests

students must be shown that they are valued and respected in the classroom, and the teacher

should create a supportive environment. Students with a low self-esteem will not progress

academically at an optimum rate until their self-esteem is strengthened (Rich, 2011).

Academic Performance

Poverty is associated significantly with marked inequalities in early childhood

development. Children whose families live in poverty often lack resources for decent housing,

food, clothing, and books, and they often do not have access to high quality child care and early

education or to health care (Hernandez, 2011). Without access to these things, these students

start behind others, making them disadvantaged before they even enter school. Many times, their thoughts are on their next meal instead of the next assessment. Financial factors are only one part of poverty. Social and environmental factors also have an effect on academic performance. Teachers must be prepared to teach all children and be aware of the different backgrounds of children and the challenges that come with each.

Reading is a foundational skill for learning, personal growth, and enjoyment. The degree to which students can read and understand text in all formats and all contexts is a key indicator of success in school and in life (Lance & Hofschire, 2012). There were major discrepancies in the success of children with no books in their home versus just three books in their home (Tran, Luchters, & Fisher, 2017). With less books or no books in the home, children are exposed to less vocabulary words. Children from poverty are usually not exposed to complex language or large vocabularies (Rothstein, 2008).

Advantaged children will generally outperform children from poverty. Children who start school with limited exposure to vocabulary are at risk for deficits in reading achievement. Children learn vocabulary from parents and caregivers, when their vocabulary is limited the child's will be as well (Goldstein, et al., 2017). Children from low income families hear, on average, 13 million words by age 4, middle class hears about 26 million by the same age, and upper-class children hear about 46 million. Vocabulary is a major part of the brain's tool kit for learning, memory, and cognition (Jensen, 2013). Words help children characterize, manipulate, and reframe information. Students from low-income families are less likely to know the words a teacher uses in class or the words that appear in reading material. When children aren't familiar with words, they become frustrated and no longer want to read. To combat these feeling they

often tune out, or feel like school is not for them. To keep from looking ignorant or being made fun of many students will choose not participate in class if they struggle with reading.

Literacy is a struggle for many families in poverty. It is not just that the present student struggles, but they may be struggling because there is a lack of literacy in the home. A family literacy program in Colorado was created to break the cycle of poverty and low literacy for low-income families. The goals of the program are to a) help parents improve their literacy skills and become full partners in educating their children, and b) to assist children in reaching their full potential as learners. The program involves adult basic skills, general education development, examination preparation, English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes, parenting sessions and job-skills training. While this is going on, children are usually being educated either in a pre-school setting, or homework clubs if they attend school. During the session, parents and children come together for literacy activities. The families also receive home visits (Nelson, Martin, & Featherstone, 2013).

Behavior

Teaching economically disadvantaged students demands more of teachers because some students are not just financially deprived. They also sometimes lack social skills or knowledge of the "hidden rules" — a term Ruby Payne, author of "A Framework for Understanding Poverty," uses for the unspoken cues and habits of a group. Hidden rules are the unspoken habits and cues of a group. They arise from cause-and-effect situations and reflect the mindsets that are needed to survive in that economic reality (Payne, 2005). There are hidden rules for race, nationality, region, age, sex, religion, and economic class. A person need only be alive to learn them; they come to us by living. All hidden rules impact behavior: One of the strongest influences is economic class (Payne, 2005).

Students of poverty often do not have positive role models at home. Many do not have anyone encouraging them to do well and succeed. Some students assume their lives will be the same as their parents, and there is nothing that can evoke change from this pattern. Poverty stricken children need adult mentor relationships. Adult mentor relationships are beneficial for students, but more so for students who are exposed to drugs, alcohol, unprotected sex and other at-risk behaviors (Evans & Anderson, 2013). Unstable work among lower income parents is associated with higher levels of behavior problems in children through higher parent psychological distress, parenting stress, and reduced ability to provide effective caregiving (Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012). Children from unstable homes are in need of strong, positive, caring adults.

Flouri and Midouhas (2016) conducted a study to determine the effects of family poverty on child behavior. From this study, it was concluded that students from high SES and low SES backgrounds need to be placed together. If they are placed together the more positive behaviors influence others (Flouri & Midouhas, 2016).

Children from poverty are sometimes seen as lazy or uncaring of their success or lack thereof. Children from poverty usually have a lack of hope or optimism. Also known as "learned helplessness." To combat this, positive relationships need to be established. More important than how schools look is how educators look at the children who enter the schools each day and how educators see their roles in those children's lives (Pianta, 2014). Most behavior issues with students can be improved by building meaningful relationships.

Rita Pierson's "Every Kid Needs a Champion" focuses on the importance of teachers forming relationships with students. Unless there is a connection between teacher, student and lesson, learning becomes tiresome to all involved (Pierson, 2013). Mrs. Pierson made it a point

to know everything she could about her students. She stated, "I made it my business to know everything I could about my students. Where they lived and with whom, how often they changed schools, how many siblings they had, whether or not they lived in a house or an apartment, whether there was trauma or drama in the household. I went on home visits and shopped in the neighborhood stores so I could be certain to run into my students and the folk they lived with. Some of my best parent conferences were held on the produce aisle at the grocery store. Many may consider my actions extreme. I called it 'preparation for what might lie ahead.' Teaching and learning is often hindered by the details not found in school records." Building relationships with students can also create alliances within the classroom. Soon students that could be or had been the most problematic will become an advocate for the teacher if a healthy relationship has been built.

Students who show little or no effort are giving feedback. When students like a teacher, they work harder. When students get excited, curious, and intrigued, they put out more effort. Students will often work much harder in one class than in another. The feedback is about themselves—and about the class. Teachers should invest in students who are not putting out effort. In a study of more than 1,800 children from poverty, school engagement was a key factor in whether the student stayed in school (Finn & Rock, 1997).

Mental and Physical Effects of Poverty

Poverty is a critical risk factor for many of the mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders of children and youth (Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012). Poverty, health and nutrition affect children's cognitive development. Socioeconomic status has an impact on cognitive development and health. At age 5, cognitive function was negatively impacted by poor socioeconomic conditions, poor maternal education, paternal absence, inadequate health care and

inadequate sanitary conditions at home and in the neighborhood, and low birth weight (Santos, et al., 2008). Socioeconomic status forms a huge part of this equation. Children raised in poverty rarely choose to behave differently, but they are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance (Jensen, 2016).

Mental Health Issues

Home environments effect cognitive ability. Children in impoverished environments are more likely to be neglected, hungry, and anemic. Low academic performance can be caused by these health issues (Wexler, 2014).

Being poor means coping not just with a shortfall of money, but also with a concurrent shortfall of cognitive resources. The poor, in this view, are less capable not because of inherent traits, but because the very context of poverty imposes load and impedes cognitive capacity (Mani, Shafir, & Zhao, 2013).

Studies suggest that specific brain structures tied to processes critical for learning and educational functioning (sustained attention, planning, and cognitive flexibility) are vulnerable to the environmental circumstances of poverty, such as stress, limited stimulation, and nutrition. It appears that children's potential for academic success is being reduced at young ages by these circumstances (Hair, Hanson, Wolfe, & Pollak, 2015). These issues can make school harder for children from impoverished backgrounds. Chronic stress, which can be caused by poverty, compromises executive functions linked to complex cognitive tasks (Cedeño, Martínez-Arias, & Bueno, 2016).

Children from families with limited financial resources displayed systematic structural differences in the frontal lobe, temporal lobe, and hippocampus. The regional gray matter

volumes of children below 1.5 times the federal poverty level (FPL) were, on average, three to four percentage points below developmental norms for their sex and age; the estimated gap increased to seven to ten percentage points in children living below the FPL. (Hair, Hanson, Wolfe, & Pollak, 2015). The developmental differences in the brain development of high poverty students could account for 15-20% of the academic deficits (Hair, Hanson, Wolfe, & Pollak, 2015).

Children of poverty experience more stress which has a negative impact on success. Children of poverty need less stress. Many times, these children take on adult roles at home. It is important that teachers do not try to exert control over students' lives, because it can cause confrontation. Instead, teachers should encourage responsibility and ownership, as well as teach coping skills to help students deal with their stressors (Jensen, 2013). Like effort, cognitive capacity is teachable. Working memory and processing skills need to be taught to these children in order for the achievement gap to be lessened.

Studies suggest that specific brain structures associated with the processes that are critical for learning and educational functioning (sustained attention, planning, and cognitive flexibility) are vulnerable to the conditions of poverty, such as stress, limited stimulation, and nutrition. If so, it would appear that children's potential for academic success is being reduced at young ages by poverty (Hair, Hanson, Wolfe & Pollak, 2015).

A growing body of evidence indicates that poverty is highly comorbid with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) exposure and that children living in poverty are more likely than their peers to experience frequent and intense adversities (Hughes & Tucker, 2018). Poverty disproportionately burdens low-income families with stressors that intensify adverse conditions, which in turn add additional stress and cognitive dysfunction. The devastating effect of this

negative feedback loop on the development of children is well documented, and childhood poverty has been strongly linked to a variety of negative outcomes across the life course, including low educational attainment, increased exposure to violence, hunger, parental incarceration, and increased likelihood of being subject to abuse and neglect (Hughes & Tucker, 2018).

Quality relationships form the bedrock and foundation of emotional stability. Seventy-five of students in poverty do not have cohabitating parents at home (Jensen, 2016). Students from poor families have more stress and less coping skills. The more stress a student experiences the more negative effects it has on their brain development. Students are also more likely to be exposed to verbal abuse. Verbal abuse affects the integrity of the left hemisphere pathways involved with processing language, as well as fiber tracts involved in emotional regulation (Jensen, 2016, 46). Positive experiences can change this. Brains respond to positivity by reducing stress hormones and increasing serotonin (Jensen, 2016, 47). The hippocampus will grow as emotional support increases, and this in turn will enhance learning and memory (Jensen, 2016).

Physical Health Issues

Poverty effects children even before they are born. Satisfactory prenatal care is less common with mothers in poverty. With less than satisfactory prenatal care, children are susceptible to low birth rates, being preterm, and having neurological and developmental disabilities. African American children of poverty are ten times more likely to be born with fetal alcohol syndrome than their white middle class peers (Wexler, 2014). Teachers blamed for circumstances out of their control is one of the results of denying the impact of poor health (Rothstein, 2008).

Relative to their more advantaged peers, low-income children have more sympathetic nervous activity (elevated blood pressure), more elevated hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis (HPA) activity (dysregulated cortisol), more dysregulated metabolic activity (elevated adiposity), and greater inflammation indicative of compromised immune function. These income-related alterations in markers of chronic stress with well-documented physical morbidity outcomes can begin early. Family poverty elevates basal cortisol measures beginning at 7 months through 4 years (Evans & Kim, 2013).

Children who struggle with hunger are more likely to experience headaches, stomachaches, colds, ear infections and fatigue. They are also likely to get sick more often and then recover more slowly (Abraham-Cook, 2012).

Health and Nutrition

Overall, poor people are less likely to exercise, get proper diagnoses, receive appropriate and prompt medical attention, or be prescribed appropriate medications or interventions (Jensen, 2013). A study by two prominent neuroscientists suggested that intelligence is linked to health. The poor have more untreated ear infections and hearing loss issues; greater exposure to lead; and a higher incidence of asthma than middle-class children. Each of these health-related factors can affect attention, reasoning, learning, and memory (Jensen, 2013).

Nutrition plays a critical role in child development. Children who grow up in poor families are exposed to foods with lower nutritional values. Poor nutrition at breakfast affects gray matter mass in children's brains. Skipping breakfast is highly prevalent among urban minority youth, and it negatively affects students' academic achievement by adversely affecting cognition and raising absenteeism (Jensen, 2013). Many times the only breakfast children of

poverty are able to receive is the breakfast at school. Many times this is loaded with sugar and rushed which leads to other health issues.

When students experience poor nutrition and diminished health practices, it's harder for them to pay attention, focus, and learn. Exposure to lead is correlated with poor working memory and weaker ability to link cause and effect (Jensen, 2013). Kids with ear infections may have trouble with sound discrimination, making it tough to follow directions, do highly demanding auditory processing, and understand the teacher. This can hurt reading ability and other skills. Poor diets also affect behavior. Students can often appear listless or hyperactive.

Students of poverty often come to school hungry and tired. However, telling the student to eat breakfast and go to bed to earlier is not going to solve the problem if there is no food to eat or they are sleeping on a sofa or a floor with no heat, air or a leaky roof. The two primary needs for the brain are oxygen and glucose; oxygen reacts with glucose to produce energy for cell function. Lack of enough healthy food can impair a child's ability to concentrate and perform well in school. Those who do not get enough nutritious food to eat tend to have significantly higher levels of behavioral, emotional and academic problems and tend to be more aggressive and anxious. And teens are more likely to have difficulty getting along with other kids and to be suspended from school (Abraham-Cook, 2012).

It is well-established that there are socioeconomic differences in what people eat and drink and that these choices are a leading contributor to obesity (Allcott, Diamond, & Dubé, 2017). Economists propose four categories of potential explanations for why income could be associated with more healthful eating: availability, prices, preferences, and information. The average store in low-income neighborhoods offers less healthful groceries than in high-income

neighborhoods. Low-income neighborhoods tend to have fewer large grocery stores and more

drug and convenience stores per capita (Allcott, Diamond, & Dubé, 2017).

<center>**Teaching Strategies to Overcome Effects of Poverty**</center>

Teacher Preparation Programs

In 2007, the National Academies Study of Teacher Preparation amplified the importance

of teacher preparation as the factor for student achievement. A similar conclusion was put forth

by Akiba, LeTendre, and Scribner (2007), who said that teacher quality is seen as "the crucial

driving force for improving student achievement and thus promoting a nation's economic

competitiveness in the global society" (p. 369). These perspectives bolster the need for a strong

emphasis on the concept of poverty, its impact on student achievement, and how to address its

effect in teacher preparation (Hughes, 2010).

Many teacher preparation programs do not prepare future teachers for what they

encounter if they work in a high poverty school. Even with some secondary education content

fields attracting a higher numbers of male students than other programs, the majority of

preservice teachers are white, female, and are from the middle class. Many of these students are

preparing for public school careers in communities with poverty rates that are often more than

one and a half times higher than the national average. Middle-class preservice teachers' lives

have rarely intersected with low income students until they enter the classroom (Bennett, 2008).

To combat this problem some preparation programs have started including not just

multicultural education classes, but also are now including literature from Ruby Payne to help

preservice teachers understand and discuss a topic that is completely outside their frame of

reference - poverty. In addition, sociocultural driving tours of the local community have been

implemented to some programs, requiring students to travel to multiple neighborhoods to focus

on community diversity. The culminating activity of the driving tour is a reflective paper in which preservice teachers are required to reflect on four main areas: (a) their own backgrounds and childhoods, (b) a demographic description of their current school placement, (c) the effect of the tour on their individual teaching philosophies, and (d) the implications of the tour for their classrooms. After the driving tour assignment has been completed, a full-class debriefing allows students to discuss their experiences in small groups and as a large group (Bennett, 2008).

The reflective papers demonstrated the lack of knowledge the majority of preservice teachers have about poverty. The ideas about needs and basic necessities varied greatly from what the preservice teachers deemed as necessary as to what they witnessed on the tour (Bennett, 2008). Teachers had many comments on what they witnessed along the journey and the role it would play in their future classrooms. Many stated they were not from wealthy backgrounds, but the tour made them realize just how fortunate they were in their lives (Bennett, 2008).

Programs should include coursework with a focus on poverty. The concept of poverty can be integrated into programs without too much disruption to the current curriculum. Courses such as Introduction to Education and the History and Foundations of Education, which aim to provide students an overview of education, can include content on the definition of poverty and its characteristics, social inequality, and the role that schools play in reproducing inequality. Multicultural education courses can include content on "understanding the culture of poverty. Making sure that preservice teachers experience a broad range of field experiences is also a way to expose preservice teachers with as many different backgrounds of students as possible (Hughes, 2010).

To provide the best education for all students, the study of poverty, combined with other activities, provides a broader perspective for many preservice teachers and can be extended to

current teachers. It is critical that current and future teachers have a deep understanding of the role that poverty plays in their students' lives. Rather than avoiding a major social issue confronting teachers in public schools today, studying poverty and its implications for the school and community can change thinking and prompt teachers to action (Bennett, 2008).

Teacher Behavior/Perceptions

Unconditional commitment and love are needed by youth from their adult mentors (Hughes, Newkirk, & Stenhjem, 2010). Students need to receive the stability at school that they may not receive at home. Students needs to know that mistakes are a learning opportunity. Students need to know that that if they are reprimanded by a teacher, that it is not a personal attack. Students should not be degraded at all, but especially in front of their peers. If a conference is needed with a student, it needs to be addressed privately. Many students from poverty do not see successes in school, so small successes need to be celebrated. Teachers must build relationships with their students for them to be successful and they must also believe that all students are able to learn.

Children with unstable home lives are particularly in need of strong, positive, caring adults (Jensen, 2013). The more you care, the better the foundation for interventions. Teachers should learn every student's name as quickly as possible and pronounce it correctly. By taking the time to learn their names, it shows that you care enough to make an effort. Ask about their family, their hobbies, and what's important to them. Teachers needs to lead by example and show students how to do things.

Never use embarrassment to reprimand a student in front of his or her peers (Jensen, 2013). The teacher should demonstrate the behavior he or she wants and expects and explain its importance as the student moves through school. Embarrassing a student will only cause more

issues in the future because they will that the teacher does not care about them. They will also be less likely to ask for help when needed.

Students need to be known as individuals and the environments in which they live and not statistics (Hughes, Newkirk, & Stenhjem, 2010). Building relationships with students allows children to be known and not seen as statistics. It is not acceptable expect and allow children of poverty to act differently or not to be challenged because statistics say they do not perform as well. Children will perform when they are believed in and motivated.

Teachers' perceptions shape school climate. Teachers are the single most important factor in school success. Some teachers may withdraw support from students they feel are difficult. This can be detrimental to the success of the students (Kenyatta, 2012). Without teacher support, these students will not be able to narrow the achievement gap. Many times teachers are the only professionals that children of poverty come in contact with. Teachers need to share examples of successful people who were once impoverished and overcame poverty through education, not stardom. Every student was blessed with a beautiful voice or amazing athletic ability. They also need to be aware that those things can be destroyed and if they are you need a foundation, an education, to continue a story of success.

Due to many students from poverty not having academic resources at home, some school districts have discontinued library fines for late books in a hope it will encourage more students to check out books without the fear of owing money if they are late returning the book. Many districts require all teachers to have classroom libraries for students so that books are available in all classrooms and not just in their English classroom. There are also community programs where community members read to students. Some elementary teachers have reached out to the

community members to help supply students in their classes with books for different occasions throughout the year, such as the first day of school, Christmas, and the child's birthday.

Teachers need to realize the importance of glucose and oxygen to keep students engaged and active in their learning. Stretching and deep breaths can provide glucose and oxygen at no cost (Jensen, 2013). Brain breaks are also a way to take a couple of minutes to get students reenergized and able to complete the next task. Brain breaks can be as simple as give a neighbor a high five or take a lap around the room.

Teachers need to have a growth mindset and instill that in their students. If students believe they are not able to learn at a certain level it will influence engagement and learning. Students should be taught that their brains can change and grow, that they can even raise their IQs. Focus on affirming and reinforcing effort. Guide students in making smarter strategy choices and cultivating a positive attitude. In teaching, you have to believe that every single student (100 percent of your students with no exceptions) can improve a great deal and that you're willing and able to make it happen (Jensen, 2016, 17).

Focusing on the core academic skills that students need the most will help students succeed academically. Students need to be shown how to organize, study, take notes, prioritize, and remember key ideas. They cannot move on to problem-solving, processing, and working-memory skills until the basics are met. Begin with immediate recall of words, then phrases, then whole sentences. This will help them remember the directions you give in class and will support them as they learn how to do mental computations (Jensen, 2013).

Teachers may struggle with providing students with someone who cares about them and their school progress. This is more common as students move up in secondary grades, and teacher are more focused on their content. Students from poverty may have the cognitive skills,

emotional support, or coping skills necessary to deal with adversity. The key isn't to provide

sympathy but to show empathy and provide tools (Jensen, 2016, 45). For teachers, who are not

empathetic as others empathy can be taught.

In recent years, technology being available at schools has helped to narrow the gap

between affluent and underprivileged children. Teachers must be trained to be able to use this

technology as an effective tool (Taylor, 2005). Students who do not have the advantages of

having technology at home must become trained on these tools at school to narrow the

achievement gap. Teachers also have to find a line between using too much technology. While

it is important, students also need to become problem solvers and able to work in social

situations.

Positive Behavior Interventions

Poverty levels are increasing at a faster rate in rural areas than in metropolitan areas.

There is a need for more research in these rural areas because of this growing need. Schoolwide

Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) is a method to support schools. Schools were chosen to

participate, and staff was trained. SWPBS was determined to be effective (McCrary,

Lechtenberger, & Wang, 2012). One example was a school that had students who were

unprepared for class. To combat this, supplies were readily available with no punishment for not

being prepared. According to the teachers at this school, student morale and behavior improved

when the worry of supplies was alleviated (McCrary, Lechtenberger, & Wang, 2012). With

teacher pay being at the center of so many media reports lately, the question will arise of who is

expected to pay for the supplies and is there any consequence if the materials are not returned for

others to be able to use.

Good behavior tickets were used at one school, and they saw discipline referrals dramatically decrease (McCrary, Lechtenberger, & Wang, 2012). This brings about the thought of what about the students who always do what is expected. There are strengths and weaknesses with this program. A strength is that the referrals have decreased, but with that strength a weakness could be that teachers target "troubled students" and "good students" may feel ostracized for doing what is expected all the time. There could also be issues with determining what a good behavior ticket allows.

North Carolina implemented the programs, Smart Start and More at Four. Both programs are aimed at enhancing learning opportunities in early childhood for children of poverty.

The vision of Smart Start is that every child in North Carolina will enter school healthy and ready for success. It is a public/private approach that requires a prescriptive board at the state and local levels that has the responsibility for making management and funding decisions (Ponder, 2010). Funded services in local communities include early child care and education, preventive health and family support services.

More at Four requires certain eligibility requirements related to at-risk factors and high standards for 4-year old classes that serve More at Four children. At-risk is primarily defined as low income and may also include limited English proficiency, children with developmental disabilities, chronic health programs or having a developmental or educational need (Ponder, 2010).

These programs had positive effects on the children of poverty and other students involved (Dodge, Bai, Ladd, & Muschkin, 2017). These programs offer a way for students of poverty to be better prepared in school. These programs offer North Carolina families a way to

access higher quality child care, more developmental screenings than any other state, improving

literacy schools for the family and ways to combat childhood obesity.

Reward systems will have to be reviewed continuously to see what works best. Schools

will have to adapt to what is best for their clientele. Some give homework passes as rewards, but

then the argument develops, if you can have pass to skip homework, what was the validity of the

homework? Homework has been determined to improve class grades if completed, but there is

no evidence to suggest it improves academic understanding or standardized test scores (Kralovac

& Buell, 2001). Students of poverty are also at a disadvantage with completing homework

successfully because many times parents are less educated or not at home to be able to help with

the homework. Some community have homework centers that offer assistance to those who

need help, but not students are able to attend these centers. Many high performing schools, use

the last period of each as an all-student homework hour. The research on the value of homework

is varied. This time can be also be used as a way to connect with students – not just help with

homework (Jensen, 2016). Some teachers don't understand that when the homework does not

get done, it is poverty of access to technology and materials that is the cause, not personal

laziness.

The Junior Civitans do play a role in the area schools, to try to make sure the students

have food over the weekend with their program "Backpack Buddies." Many students qualify for

this, but some are too embarrassed to take the bags of food given each Friday. Local churches

are a good place to seek support. Often times, if they cannot financially help, they will offer

mentors to come and spend time with struggling students.

Many programs can be implemented with little to no cost. It is not difficult to gain

community support who will often donate many things to schools. Parent Teacher Organizations

can also help with many of these and contact local businesses on behalf of the school and the

students to try to make sure basic needs are met. If these places are not contacted, many of them

are unaware of the needs that the schools and their students have. Contacting local businesses is

a great way to build relationships with the community.

Combat Poverty in the Classroom

Teachers can strengthen relationships with students by revealing more of themselves and

learning more about their students. Use more buy-in strategies, such as curiosity builders;

excitement and risk; and competition. Make the learning more of the students' idea by offering a

choice, and involve them more in decision making.

Forming relationships is so important at the beginning of the year. There are many

strategies teachers can use to form these bonds. You can quickly connect with students by

finding out about their hobbies, or just spending a few minutes each day with a couple of

students between classes to connect with them about something (Jensen, 2016). Showing up

students sporting or academic events means a lot to students, especially to those who do not have

support at home or students whose parents cannot be there for any reason. When a student feels

that someone understands them, they have connectivity and it teaches students that they are

valuable and worth their teachers' time.

Making connections to students' worlds in ways that help them see a viable reason to

play the academic game is key to get students to participate. Tie in activates to the real world, so

they have immediate value to students. Use money, shopping, technology, and their family

members to make the learning more relevant. Without clear links between the academics and the

real world, students often experience a discouraging disconnect between the school world and

their home life. The result can be the student giving up once he or she has been discouraged many times.

Effort should be affirmed daily. Not just correct answers getting praise. Teachers need give more positives than negatives, they optimize both learning and growth (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). In homes of those from poverty, children commonly get twice as many reprimands as positive comments, compared with a 3:1 ratio of positives to negatives in middle-class homes (Jensen, 2013). When affirmed, stimulated, and encouraged students work harder. Set high goals for each student. Show students real-world success stories of adults who came from the same circumstances and achieved their goals despite their troubles. Provide daily feedback so students see that effort matters and that they can adjust it for even greater success. Even students who struggle should want to return to school daily because of the encouragement from their teachers.

Vocabulary building must form a key part of enrichment experiences for students, and teachers must be relentless about introducing and using new words (Jensen, 2013). Include vocabulary building in engagement activities. Some could be creating trading cards, using quizlet, or the game "who has, I have." Teachers can also draw cards from a bowl and ask the class to use the new word in a sentence. Vocabulary practice can be integrated into daily rituals. Teacher could post a word for the day and when either the teacher or a student uses it—and another student is first to point it out—that student gets a simple privilege, which is also a positive reinforcement. Words should be reinforced and not used for one day and forgotten. The goal is to increase vocabulary over the long term.

Students should be taught ongoing coping skills so they can better deal with their stressors. For example, give them a simple, "If this, then that" strategy for solving problems

using new skills. You can do this through telling stories about your own daily stressors, allowing students to brainstorm solutions, and then sharing the coping tools that worked for you and modeling how you addressed various challenges (Jensen, 2013).

Virtual Field Trips

Virtual field trips (VFT) can be a useful tool in high poverty schools. If students and schools cannot afford to take students to experience new places, virtual field trips can be used to give students the access to these places. In a recent study on the educational value of a traditional field trip, it was concluded that students from high-poverty schools and rural areas made more academic gains after they participated in a tour of an art museum than students not going on the tour. These gains included improvement in critical thinking, historical empathy, and interest in art (Morgan, 2015).

Teachers can help impoverished students make similar gains by taking them to new places through a VFT. VFTs are also particularly beneficial for rural students. Rural households at all socioeconomic levels have fewer computers and internet connections than suburban and urban homes; thus, students in rural areas have fewer chances to become adept with technology (Lester, 2012). Exposing students to VFTs and other forms of technology in school will help lessen the academic gap from those who have more resources outside of school.

Many rural students also live in poverty and experience conditions that increase chances for academic failure. Unfortunately, researchers and policymakers often overlook these conditions (Lester, 2012). Rural students living in poverty have fewer opportunities to visit a variety of locations that more fortunate students may and may have never been to a museum, the beach, a subway/train station, or an airport. Deepening their understanding of the world through well-planned VFTs will expose them to some of these places. VFTs will also enhance their

vocabularies and understanding of reading material and content that may be present on standardized tests (Lester, 2012).

VFTs cannot replace traditional field trips, they will allow students to achieve many learning opportunities without the difficulties associated with traditional field trips. Teachers will often avoid field trips if they feel many students will not be able to attend, there are behavior issues and concerns for safety or possible language barriers with ESOL students. Creating a tailored VFT prevents these concerns and helps students learn by exposing them to places in the real world they often do not have the opportunity to experience. Additionally, a well-designed VFT can be a very powerful teaching tool.

In one study, for example, comparing student learning outcomes between one group of 8th-grade science students experiencing a real field trip and another group participating in a VFT found minute differences in the knowledge gained between the two groups (Lester, 2012). There are many different applications that teachers can use to create VFTs along with a vast quantity already available on the internet. Most can be tweaked to make sure they align with each state's standards.

Another alternative consists of organizing a live interactive VFT using videoconferencing software to connect students with an expert or professional in a particular field. This would be beneficial to rural areas where there may not be an abundance of options for career day visits or for students who do not have the transportation to participate in career days. Bring the different careers to the students in any way possible.

All types of VFTs can inspire students, help them learn, and connect them with people, places, and situations in the real world (Lester, 2012). Even though VFTs enhance learning for all students, they are mostly advantageous for rural and disadvantaged student, who usually visit

fewer places than more advantaged students. Creating and utilizing VFTs can make school more intriguing and lead to more learning opportunities for students of all ages.

Teacher Retention

The failure to ensure that the nation's classrooms, especially those in disadvantaged schools, are all staffed with qualified teachers is one of the most important problems in contemporary American education (Ingersoll, 2004). Teachers in poverty stricken schools are the ones most likely to leave. The most qualified teachers leave in search of better working conditions and better pay. America's neediest children lose over half of their teaching staff every five years (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Data shows that the demand for new teachers is not primarily due to student enrollment and/or teacher retirement increases. Most of the hiring of new teachers is to fill spots vacated by teachers who departed several months earlier. Although teacher retirements have increased in recent years, they account for only a small portion of the above total departures or turnover (Ingersoll, 2004). Since retirement is not the main reason there is a teacher shortage, it is no known that teachers are leaving for other professions.

Some teacher turnover, especially of ineffective teachers, is necessary and beneficial. Turnover of teachers is of concern because of its relationship to school cohesion and performance. High rates of teacher turnover are of concern not only because they may be an outcome indicating underlying problems in how well schools function, but also because they can be disruptive, in and of themselves, for the quality of the school community and performance (Ingersoll, 2004).

Turnover rates are 50% higher for teachers in Title I schools, which serve more low-income students. Mathematics and science teacher turnover rates are nearly 70% greater in Title

I schools than in non-Title I schools, and turnover rates for alternatively certified teachers are more than 80% higher. At 16.7% annually, the South has a particularly high turnover rate. The higher-spending Northeast averages the lowest turnover rates, with about 10% turnover overall (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, 9). Knowing that students of poverty need to build relationships this turnover rate can be detrimental to their ability to build trusting, lasting relationships.

Most teachers decide to leave the profession because they are dissatisfied with teaching. The most prominent reasons for dissatisfaction in recent years have been pressures associated with test-based accountability, unhappiness with administrative support, and dissatisfaction with teaching as a career. Teachers also report that they leave for both financial and personal reasons (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, 30).

Research Questions

A. From the perspective of teachers and administrators, how does poverty influence education?

B. What challenges do teachers face in helping students overcome educational barriers related to poverty?

C. What do teachers need to best support students of poverty, so they may succeed in school?

Summary

In 1961 Oscar Lewis coined the term "culture of poverty." He determined there were fifty attributes that communities of poverty shared. Myths of poverty are shared, such as poor people are unmotivated and uninvolved in their children's learning. The reality is explained that poor people lack the resources to be able to be as involved as wealthier families (Gorski, 2008).

Building relationships is by far the most powerful strategy to help children of poverty overcome what seems to be their predetermined fate.

Meeting the needs of racially and ethnically diverse youth from poverty present major challenges for schools (Hughes, Newkirk, & Stenhjem, 2010). Teachers need to be educated in cultural diversity to be able to form meaningful relationships with students of all backgrounds. If possible, it is preferable to try to recruit teachers with similar ethnicities as students to help foster relationships.

The National Rural Education Association (NREA) has created a call to action to bring awareness to education in rural America. There are ten topics that will be on their research agenda from 2016-2021. They are as follows: access to counseling, building capacity, closing the achievement gap, college and career readiness, data-driven decision making, effects of poverty, rural school and community relations, teacher/leader preparedness, teacher/leader recruitment and retention, and technology integration (Hill & Turney, 2016).

Everyone is collectively responsible for kids and their welfare. Parents need to be involved in decision making and this is difficult in high poverty areas. Parents are not typically as involved or educated and do not know how to be an advocate for their children (Hyslop, 2012). If parents are not able to advocate for their child, it is the school's responsibility to help the child and parent as much as possible to try to help the child break the cycle of poverty within his or her family.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Research Design

The current research is aimed to contribute to the research on educational barriers of poverty. Although there is considerable research on the extent and factors contributing to poverty, there is not a vast amount of research on teachers' and administrators' perspectives of poverty and the influence of poverty on their school. Therefore, this descriptive survey design study aims to examine the perspective of teachers and administrators and describe their perception of how poverty influences students and the educational process, the challenges teachers face as they work with students living in poverty, and the support teachers need to effective work with this student population. (White et al., 2012). The current study was developed to gain insight into the teachers' perspectives at a Title I middle school known to have a high poverty level. It is hoped that specific themes will emerge and that the findings will provide information concerning what is working and what is needed to increase educational quality and improve opportunities for students living in poverty. Understanding teacher and administrator's perceptions may provide an understanding about current school strengths and areas that need improvement to inform future initiatives

A descriptive cross-sectional survey design (Jackson, 2009) will be employed in this study. Using this research design enabled me to administer questionnaire, containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions, to teacher and administrator participants and describe their given responses at one point in time. The survey consisting of closed- ended questions and open-ended questions was administered to a volunteer sample teachers and administrators at one middle school that is classified as Title I. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and the sample was chosen based on convenience as I am employed at this location. The survey data

collected was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Both qualitative and quantitative

analysis methods were used to analyze the data.

Participants and Setting

As research has shown that teachers working in areas of high poverty generally have a

greater awareness and better understanding of poverty and related issues (White et al., 2012), the

perceptions of educators working within high poverty areas were the target population for this

study. The participants were educators employed at one middle school in the Southeast that is

classified as Title I with a 81.9% poverty rate. Most students of the 533 within the school

participate in the free or reduced breakfast and/or lunch programs offered at the school. The

sampling frame consisted of 40 educators, and the sample is a convenience sample as I work at

the school where the study took place. All educators at South Middle School received an email

invitation requesting their participation in the study survey, and teachers and administrators

volunteered. An ideal sample was 38 based on a sampling frame of 40, a confidence level of

95%, and a margin of error level of 5%. The sample consisted of 34 volunteers, an 85% response

rate

Instrumentation

Educators completed a survey that was researcher created to examine their perceptions of

how poverty influences students and the educational process, the challenges teachers face as they

work with students living in poverty, and the support teachers need to effective work with this

student population. The survey consisted of eight open ended questions and eight close ended

(e.g., multiple choice, multiple answer questions, and 5-point Likert type scale). The survey and

questions were developed using the Guidelines for Devising Questionnaires (Mills, 2014) and

literature related to childhood poverty and educational barriers in high poverty schools. For

example, research demonstrated that children and families living in poverty have many stressors, including barriers to success. Educational barriers related to poverty include physical and mental health and nutrition concerns, cognitive delays, and chronic stress. Some questions were adapted from a Scholastic survey (Teacher and Principal School Report: Equity in Education, 2017) and a BCTF survey (White, Field, and & Kuehn, 2013). The questions related to specific school initiatives where based on information gathered at the school and the researcher's own teaching experience at this school for six years. The survey questions were limited so that participants could complete the survey within 10-15 minutes to avoid participant fatigue.

The survey covered the areas addressed by each research question: teacher perspectives regarding how poverty influences students and the educational process, the challenges teachers face as they work with students living in poverty, and the support teachers need to effective work with this student population. The Likert-type scale, multiple choice, and multiple closed-ended questions provided participants the opportunity to identify and rate influences, barriers and challenges, school initiatives, and supports needed related to poverty. The first section of the survey was intended to provide a context for the open-ended questions to follow. The open-ended questions allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and perceptions related to the influence of poverty on education and support and initiatives needed to address poverty within middle schools. There were also two demographic questions also. Table 3.1shows how each survey question corresponds with each research question.

Table 3.1

Research and survey questions

Research Question	Survey question	Literature
From the perspective of teachers and administrators, how does poverty influence education?	Closed-ended SQ1: What percentage of your students do you believe are living in poverty? None ___Less than 25% ___Between 25% to 50% ___Between 51-75% ___More than 75% ___Don't know SQ2: Which of the following educational barriers or challenges impact the students you work with? Check all that apply. ___Low attendance ___Transportation ___Nutrition and health ___Achievement gaps ___Language and cognitive development ___Lack of adult mentorship ___Emotional concerns (including anxiety and stress related concerns) ___Social knowledge and competence (social skills, ability to self-regulate) ___Lack of parental involvement___None Open-ended	Payne, 2012
What challenges do teachers face in helping students overcome educational barriers related to poverty?	SQ3: What challenges do you experience while teaching children affected by poverty? SQ 4: [Likert-type scale question] The school breakfast program is adequate to meet the nutritional needs of students who come to school hungry. 1 2 3 4 5. SQ5: The school snack and lunch program are adequate to meet the nutritional needs of students throughout the day. 1 2 3 4 5. SQ 6: I feel that there are adequate staffing resources at my school to meet the learning needs of students who require extra support to address learning gaps. 1 2 3 4 5	
What are educators' perceptions about the support the school provides to them and students of poverty?	SQ 7: I feel that there are adequate resources at my school to meet the social emotional needs of students living in poverty. 1 2 3 4 5 SQ 8: I feel well prepared to teach in a school where poverty related issues are present on a regular basis. 1 2 3 4 5	

SQ9:I feel my teacher training was adequate in preparing me for teaching students who live in poverty. 1 2 3 4 5

SQ 10:My professional development and school in service opportunities have increased my awareness of poverty related issues. 1 2 3 4 5

SQ 11: Which of the following school initiatives do you believe are helpful at mitigating educational barriers related to poverty? Check all that apply. ___Breakfast Program ___Lunch Program BackPack Program ___Mustang Mentors ___Clubs ___Mustang Rodeo ___Steeplechase ___Mustang Café ___Family Night ___School celebrations (sports day, assemblies, performances) ___P/T Conferences ___Extra-curricular activities available to students (volleyball, basketball, football, cheer) ___Other (Please describe):

SQ 12: In your opinion, which school initiatives have been most helpful in decreasing the learning gaps and improving learning outcomes for students affected by poverty? (e.g., school wide literacy support program, etc.) Please comment or explain your response.

SQ 13: In your opinion, which school initiatives have been most helpful at increasing parent involvement? (e.g., PT conferences, SIC, Family Fun Night, etc.) Please comment or explain your response.

SQ 14: In your opinion, which school initiatives have been most helpful in fostering social-emotional growth and/or instilling hope? (e.g. sports, clubs) Please comment or explain your response.

SQ 15: In your opinion, which school initiatives have helped to increase identity and engagement for students, and have helped to foster a sense of belonging? (ESOL breakfast) Please comment or explain your response.

SQ 16: Please include any additional comments which you believe would aid my research, including your thoughts on current school strengths/successes and recommendations for school initiatives you would like to see in place in the future.

Research Questions

A. From the perspective of teachers and administrators, how does poverty impact education?

B. What challenges do teachers face in helping students overcome educational barriers related to poverty?

C. What do teachers need to best support students of poverty, so they may succeed in school?

Procedures

I obtained permission from the Superintendent of the school district to conduct research amongst teachers, counselors and administrators at the school site and the Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). One week prior to receiving an email invitation to complete a survey, educators were informed at a staff meeting regarding the purpose and the importance of the survey. Teachers and administrators sent an email asking for their voluntarily participation to complete an online surveys. Survey Monkey was used to gather the data. Surveys were anonymous. When participants clicked on survey link, they were e provided with an informed consent to read and electronically agree to before completing the survey. The informed consent letter outlined the goals and intended use of the research results. The letter also served the purpose of reassuring the participants that the survey is voluntary and completely anonymous. Participants were withdraw from the study at any time before they submitted the survey online.

Validity

To ensure content validity the survey will be test piloted on five former teachers of the same school and will be adjusted as necessary.

To minimize threats of internal validity the survey included items that elicited quantitative as well and qualitative data. Data collector bias was avoided as because participants responded directly to the survey. Participants were more likely to respond genuinely through an anonymous survey rather than an interview with a colleague known to all the participants. The relationship could have been influential with face to face interviews. Location could have been a threat to validity if it was conducted at a staff meeting where others were able to see results. Being distributed online allowed the participants to complete the survey at home or in their own classrooms at a time convenient for them.

External validity was low because the sample was not random, and therefore, results are not generalizable. The sample was relatively small and confined to one middle school with a high degree of poverty. However, because the chosen school does a have high degree of poverty, it is thought that there will be some availability to transfer the results to other schools experiencing the same poverty related concerns. It is believed other middle schools in the area will be able to identify with the aspects of the concerns in this study. This study also allowed for South Middle School to develop new interventions or expand on interventions in place that are being successful.

Data Analysis

The data to be collected in the current research was intended to measure teachers' and administrators' perspectives regarding educational barriers related to poverty at their middle school and to investigate teacher beliefs regarding school initiatives that are helpful in alleviating educational barriers related to poverty. Major themes were identified regarding teachers' beliefs about poverty related barriers and school initiatives that can and do make a difference for students living in poverty.

Once the surveys are collected, quantitative data was analyzed. Multiple choice questions and multiple selection questions, percentages and frequencies of responses are reported. Bar graphs were used to display the data.

Qualitative data was also carefully analyzed, summarized and categorized for emergent themes. Open-ended responses of the survey were analyzed using a qualitative analysis based on the emerging design approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and coding will occur in three stages (i.e. induction, deduction, and verification). First, the researcher coded data, highlighting significant word and phrases, allowing categories to emerge. The researcher assigned each word or phrase a category and compile an initial list of categories, which was then synthesized into sub-categories and then a final list of themes. The data was then read again and each response will be assigned a theme. Then, all data and themes were reviewed a final time for verification. Descriptive statistics were used to report the frequency of identified themes, and selected quotations reported to describe each theme.

The themes were then be examined to identify areas of strength and/or weakness in school initiatives, and to provide meaningful recommendations. Analyzing the data to identify the areas of strengths and weaknesses enabled me to provide the school with recommendations to develop new, continue, or revise initiatives. Results also informed the inadequacy of some and discontinue their use.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS
Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine an educator's perspective regarding educational barriers related to poverty. The study also aimed to explore educators' perspectives regarding school initiatives that are helpful in mitigating these barriers.

Participants

The current research gathered information from educator participants at a Title I middle school in South Carolina. The school site was chosen for its known high poverty rate, and because the author of this research has taught at the school for the past eight years. Data was collected using a survey (Appendix A) distributed to all educators. Thirty-four surveys were completed and returned by February 2020, a response rate of 85%. The survey was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Closed-ended questions were placed at the beginning of the survey to give educators the opportunity to identify educational barriers related to poverty. The first section was intended to provide a context for the open-ended questions that followed. The open-ended questions were asked at the end of the survey to allow educators to reflect on their responses and express their own beliefs about the school initiatives that can ease educational barriers related to poverty. Educators were also given space to voice any additional comments or to clarify or justify their closed-ended question responses.

Results

I collated the data. Thirty-four educators responded to the survey. The respondents vary in their experience. The majority of participants ($n =16$, 47.06%) have been in education for 5 or less years, 11.76% (n=4) of the participants have been working in education 6-10 years, 17.65% ($n=6$) 11-15 years and 23.53 (n=8) 16 or more years. Most of the educators that participated in the survey are fairly new to South Middle, with 64.72%($n= 22$) having been at the school for 1-5

years, 11.76% (*n*=4) 6-10 years, 11.76% (*n*=4) 11-15 years, and 11.76% (*n*=4) 16 or more years.

Survey questions 1 and 2 were used to answer the first research question, from the perspective of educators, how does poverty impact education? The first survey question asked educators respond indicate what percentage of their students were living in poverty, and 41.18% (*n*=14) believe that 51-75% of their students live in poverty and 58.82% (*n*=20) of educators believe that over 75% of their students live in poverty. Responses indicate that most educators at South Middle School are aware of the high poverty rate in their student population. According to the 2019 South Carolina School Report Card Poverty Index, South Middle School's poverty rate is 86.82% and South Middle School in ranked within the top 20% of schools with high poverty rates in South Carolina . It has the highest poverty rate of all middle schools in the county where it is located.

The second survey question asked educators to identify educational barriers or challenges that impact the students they work with (see Figure 4.1 for results). Lack of parental support and nutrition and health were identified most frequently as barriers to education for students living in poverty as all participants identified these two items as barriers (*N*=34, 100%). Lack of adult mentorship was also identified as a barrier by the majority of participants (*n*=32, 94%), and educators also frequently identified language and cognitive development as a barrier (*n*=31, 91%).
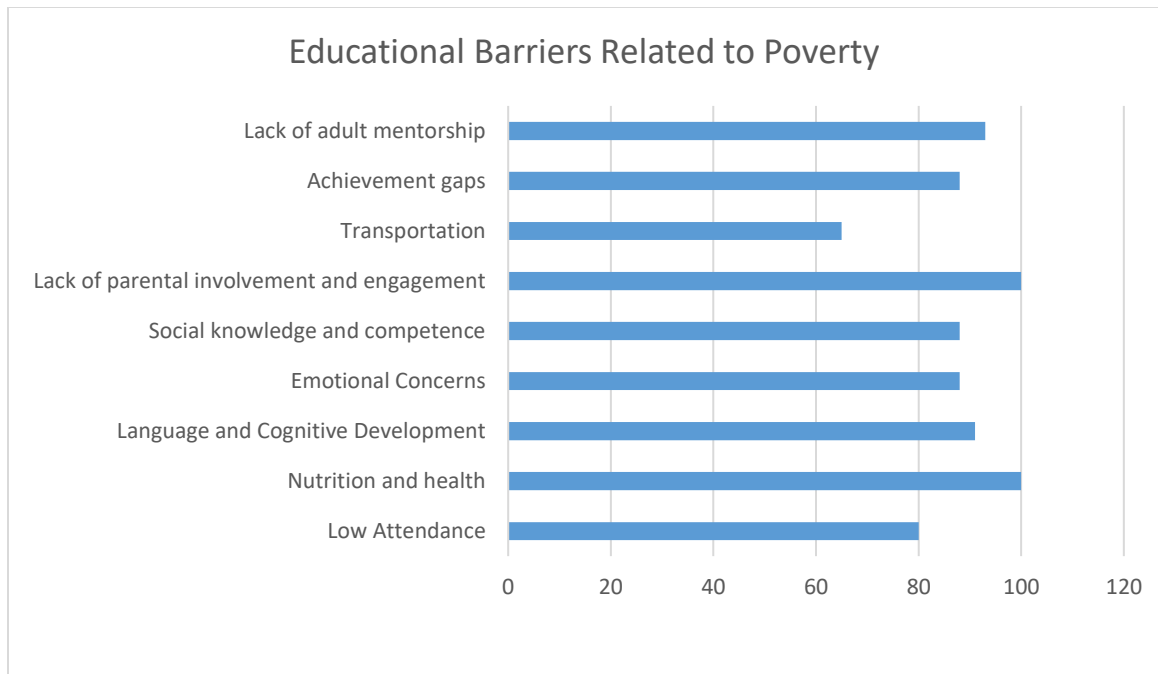
Figure 4.1 Percentages of the believed amount of impact from the listed educational barriers related to poverty.

Survey question 3, an open ended question , was used to answer the second research question, What challenges do teachers face in helping students overcome educational barriers related to poverty?   In question three educators were asked what challenges they experienced while teaching children affected by poverty. The themes that emerged were lack of parental involvement, classroom management, student lack of knowledge and basic needs not being met. The responses read:

- "It's hard for them to come into the classroom and take orders from adults. Many are used to being the adult at home (raising younger siblings, parents and family face addiction, housing is unpredictable, etc). Educational gaps are numerous, social and emotional growth is all over the place and these are difficult issues to address because they can often have difficult or even aggressive attitudes. Many are used to having to fight for everything."

- "Keeping them motivated, getting them to care about school work, getting them to see beyond today and think about the future, teaching them when they bring so many other stressors to the classroom."

- "The discipline is not there but that is due primarily because they have other concerns in their lives and very little adult support at home. Children raising themselves is a huge problem."

- "Parents not caring and not getting involved with their child's school life. Parents not being able to come to school due to the fact that they do not have transportation & cannot afford it. Parents not being able to get on PowerSchool and check their child's grades because of no internet service at home. Children coming to school hungry because of lack of food."

- "Children that do not have a lot of parental support in the home because their parents are working outside of the home. Children that don't have support in their home because the parent may not have the ability to handle discipline problems with their children. The child is the one in control. Some parents do not know how to help their child with homework."

- "Lack of experiences to draw from background knowledge"

- "Parents who grew up in poverty themselves for the most part have not been taught the value of education and therefore cannot instill how important school and getting an education are. The students do not see the importance of learning and do not see the connection of getting an education and making a better life for themselves."

- "Most children do not function well in class because of lack of sleep, food and fear. Many students that live in poverty experience things beyond their control. I see students

that come to school with lack of hygiene care and sleep deprivation because of their living conditions. They typically do not do well in school due to this. They have a hard time making relationships with students and teacher as well as achieving to their fullest. It's very challenging to provide the student with academic need when they shut down due to this."

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- "They often do not have the same opportunities as others at home such as no parent to help with homework or studying or they have to take care of a sibling so they do not have time to do anything"

- "Children have a large achievement gap. Many of my students are below the 50th percentile."

Survey questions four to seven asked educators to respond to five-point Likert-type scale aimed at answering Research question 3; the survey questions focused on resources the school provides to students living in poverty The of the response frequencies for each questions are illustrated in Table 4.1. Over half (n=22, 64.7%) of the educators either agreed or strongly agreed, that the breakfast program at school were adequate, while less than half

agreed of strongly agreed or agreed (*n*=14, 40%) that the lunch and snack program was

adequate to meet nutritional needs of students throughout the day.

Survey questions eight to ten asked educators to respond to five-point Likert-type scale

survey questions related to their preparation and training and were used also used answer

Research Question 3, What do teachers need to best support students of poverty, so they may

succeed in school?. The frequency for each responses for each question is illustrated in Table

4.1.

Table 4.1: *Summary of likert-type survey findings*

Likert-type Survey Questions	1= Strongly Disagree	2= Disagree	3= Neutral	4= Agree	5= Strongly Agree
4. The school breakfast program to meet the nutritional needs of students who come to school hungry.	2	7	3	14	8
5. The school snack and lunch program are adequate to meet the nutritional needs of students throughout the day.	1	13	4	10	6
6. I feel that there are adequate staffing resources at my school to meet the learning needs of students who require extra support to address learning gaps.	6	15	5	7	1
7. I feel there are adequate resources at my school to meet the social emotional needs of students living in poverty.	6	14	7	7	0
8. I feel well prepared to teach in a school where poverty related issues are present on a regular basis.	2	6	3	22	1
9. I feel my teacher training was adequate in preparing me for teaching students who live in poverty.	9	12	7	6	0
10. My professional development and school in	1	8	5	17	3

service opportunities have increased my awareness of poverty related issues.					

Questions eight through ten were about educators' level of preparedness and training in regards to teaching students in poverty. Over half of the educators (*n* =, 67.16%) feel they are well prepared to teach in high poverty school where issues of poverty impact education, but only 17.6% (*n* =8) feel that their teacher training prepared them to teach children living in poverty. Moreover. Only about half of educators (*n* = 20, 58.8%) feel their school in-service and professional development have sufficiently increased their awareness of poverty related issues.

Figure 4.2 (below) further demonstrates the how teach in schools of high poverty levels.

I feel well prepared to teach in a school where poverty related issues are present on a regular basis.

I feel my teacher training was adequate in preparing me for teaching students who live in poverty.

My professional development and school in service opportunities have increased my awareness of poverty related issues.
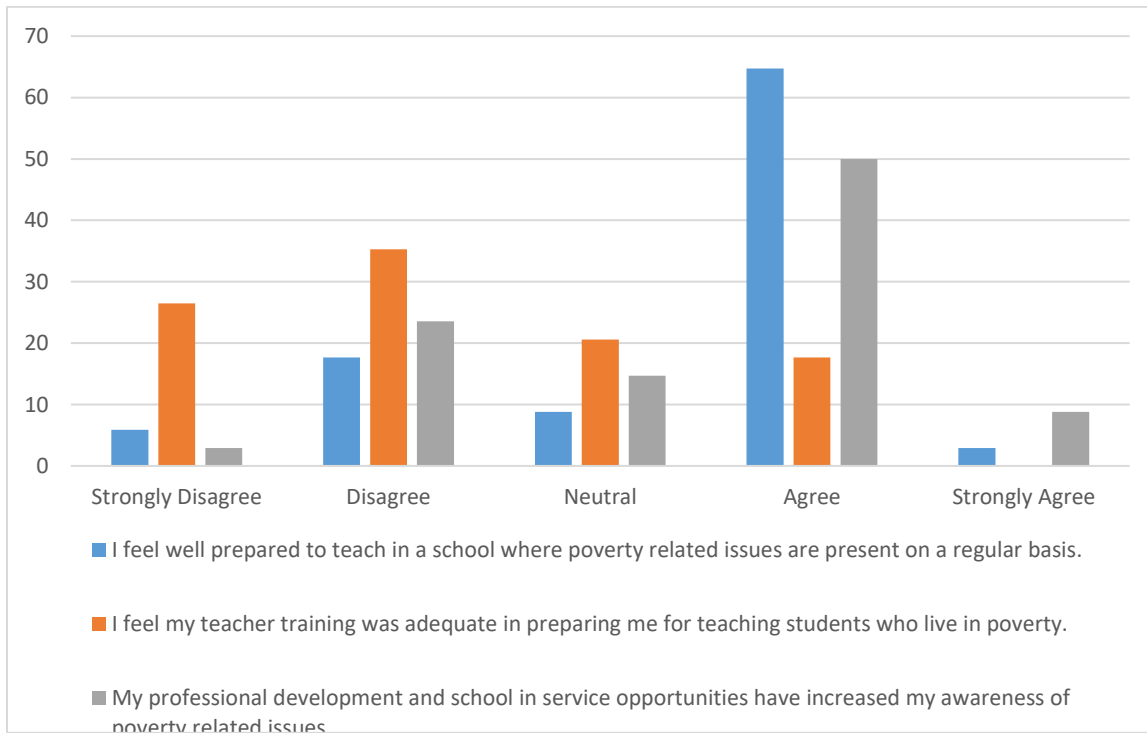
Figure 4.2 Illustrates educators' responses with respect to preparedness to teach in areas of poverty, adequacy of teacher training, and effectiveness of professional development and in-service training.

Questions 11 through 15 further addressed Research Question 3. While the survey questions focused on educators' perceptions of adequacy of services and trainings, questions 11 to 15 asked them to rate and describe the effectiveness of specific school initiatives. The eleventh question asked educators to rank school initiatives as to how effective they believed the initiatives were at mitigating educational barriers related to poverty. The educators ranked the meal programs, breakfast and lunch, as most effective in helping to mitigate the effects of poverty. The Friday Backpack program was identified as the third most effective program. The Friday Backpack program are bags of food for the weekend to some students. The Jr. Civitan from the local high school supplies these bags each week.
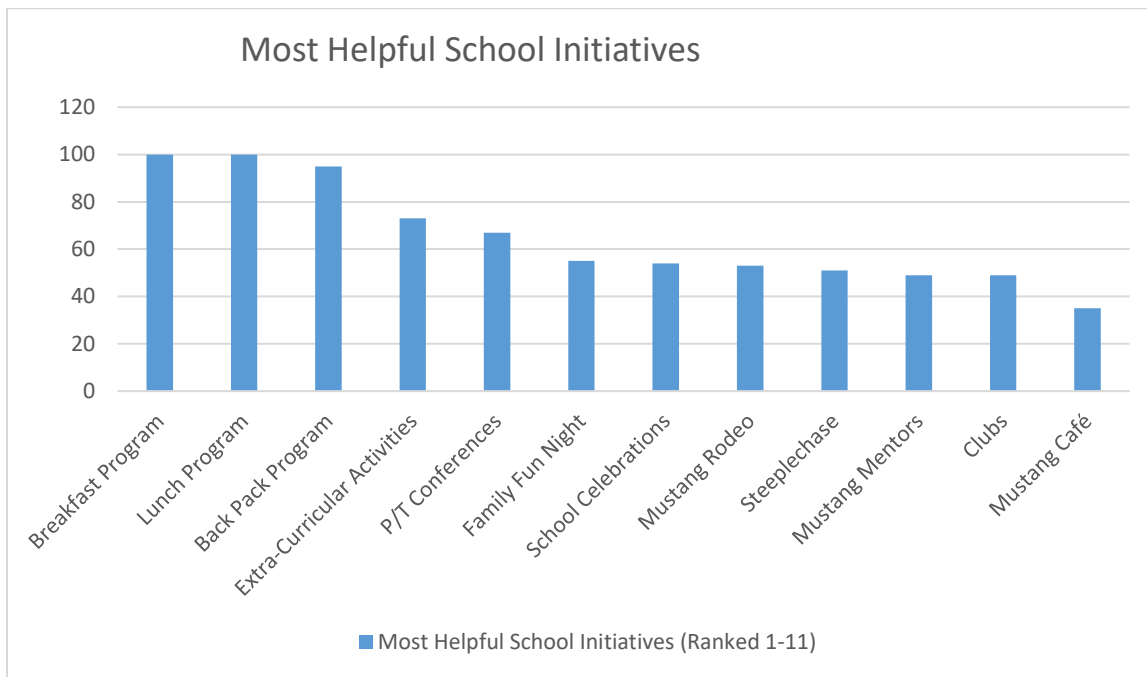

Figure 4.3 Responses of educators at South Middle School as to which school initiatives they believe are the most helpful in mitigating educational barriers related to poverty.

The twelfth question asked educators to identify school initiatives that they believe are the most helpful in decreasing the learning gaps for students affected by poverty. There was a wide

variety of responses, but most of the identified school wide literacy support as something that is needed. Some of the responses read:

- "A mentoring program is desperately needed. I believe that the PALS program will eventually show us that children of poverty find self-worth in helping others."

- "Literacy programs that have been purchased by the district to improve reading/reading comprehension. (LLI)"

- "Providing all students with Chromebooks; Students going on field trips (visiting the Career Center, college campus, businesses); Allowing speakers to visit/speak to Intro to Careers classes. Our school needs more opportunities that allow students to see what is beyond Lancaster!"

- "I think that horsepower helps to close the gaps by allowing students to complete missing work and ask for more individualized help."

- "Free and reduced lunch, breakfast and the backpack program, the clothes closet and having personal items such as deodorant and toothbrushes when students need them is also very helpful. These are all necessities that some of the students cannot afford and do not receive at home."

- "At this point in time, I feel like breakfast and lunch are the best that we do and that is not enough. Nutritionally, the needs are being met but some of the children are hungry. Sometimes, there is a need to not count calories but feed a tummy that needs filling. The last several year, the students coming from elementary lack much of the basic school culture training that teaching them is difficult. A child that has not been taught how to learn struggles. That is the majority of our incoming students."

- "I feel that PT conferences and sports are the most helpful initiatives in decreasing learning gaps. Many students are concerned about being able to play sports throughout school because they know that if their grades/behavior are not good, they will not be able to play. I feel that literacy support programs school wide are not relevant/entertaining to these students and it results in them not completing any of the work."

- "Increasing literacy in non-ELA classrooms has helped. The process that each team uses to call in students who are struggling once a week and conference with them also makes a huge impact. Students see that the team is a united front on helping them better themselves academically and socially."

- "Steeplechase- when implemented electives that supplement ELA/math resource pull-out, push-in-- when implemented"

- "LLI class Corrective Reading/Math Remedial class"

The thirteenth question asked educators to identify which school initiatives have been most helpful at increasing parent involvement. Responses were mainly Family Fun Night and Parent/Teacher Conferences. Some educator responses read:

- "I think the family fun night is a good idea but there is only so much we can do to get the parents there. Whether they come or not is not in our control."

- "Family Fun Night has been useful in getting parents here for that one night, however, they don't tend to come back."

- "Parent-Teacher Conferences, Family Fun Night, Breakfast-Tour for ESOL parents, Mustang Café, Positive Phone Calls, and Sport Games."

- "PTC-when parents attend that you really need to see; weekly calls home that give parents information about weekly happenings; Open house; Art show showcase."

- "It has always come down to the teacher. How much does the <mark>teacher speak with the parent</mark>? Do they initiate positive interaction with them during the first conversation? There cannot be any negative comments in initial meetings with parents. (Parents eating breakfast or lunch with their child), coming in to observe a classroom presentation where their child is presenting, hosting community events."

- "I think <mark>Family Fun Night</mark> would increase parent involvement because it allows parents, students and teachers to interact in a relaxed manner."

Question fourteen asked educators to identify school initiatives that have been most helpful in fostering social-emotional growth and or instilling hope. Responses included many references to sports (over 60%), mentor programs (Men of Distinction), and clubs. A sample of responses follows:

- "<mark>Sports</mark> are important in fostering social-emotional growth and instilling hope because a lot of these students are most influenced by athletes and it helps give them something to aspire to."

- "Our <mark>sports programs</mark> have been invaluable for providing social and emotional growth. One need only look at the behavior issues faced by sixth grade teachers, who are not involved in school sports, and then how much they have matured and grown in seventh and eighth grade. Certainly, physical, emotional and mental growth are a part of this puzzle, but the attitudes and approaches of athletes tend to be more focused and productive."

- "<mark>Clubs</mark> are helpful social-emotional groups. They help them learn how to work together and how to be kind to each, even when they don't get the outcome they would like."

- "Sports. This school does a really good job of being inclusive with their sports teams. Students have to opportunity to join teams and be a part of something bigger than just themselves."

Educators noted that while some programs are working there is still a need for positive role models to be available for our students. Many teachers noted that the boys have Men of Distinction, but there are not opportunities for females to have the same group.

The fifteenth question asked educators to identify school initiatives that have helped to increase identity and engagement and have helped foster a sense of belonging. Responses were fairly consistent. Most referred to clubs, sports or the ESOL breakfast.

- "Clubs. They give students the opportunity to be involved with students from other grades, levels, and backgrounds."

- "Again, it is hard to argue with sports' ability to foster a sense of belonging and identity among students. Even in the spring, boys who played football are constantly referring to being on the team as a part of their identity and being their token of belonging among the South Middle School family."

- "Men of Distinction, Academic Challenge, ESOL after-school program gives those groups a place to interact with others like them."

- "I think our sports team help students increase their identity because it gives them a purpose here."

- "Clubs. Students get to know other students that are not in their grade level. Students are engaged in a fun activity with their peers. Clubs provide students opportunities to get to know each other on a personal level."

- "The ESOL breakfast has been the single best program we put in place to help our Hispanic community not feel isolated when it comes to transition to the high school."

- "We have a great ESOL teacher along with a great ESOL parent coordinator who stays on top of their jobs with our ESOL kids."

- "Inclusive Education, Celebration of Cultural Events BHM, 5 de Mayo, Raising 6th and 8th grade ESOL Students Breakfast-Tour."

The last survey question asked educators for additional comments and thoughts on current school strengths and successes, and recommendations for school initiatives that they would like to see in place in the future. Suggestions were varied and included references to current success:

- "I do believe we are doing the best we can with the resources we have. This is a complicated issue and we, as a school, have limited financial resources but we are rich in people who care. I have never been around so many teachers that care so deeply about our kids. We seem to make what we have work in so many situations. I would be curious on the short term and long term effects: the value of more financial resources vs caring teachers that are also integrated into the community."

- "Poverty is a huge barrier. The things we do now as far as canteen for kids are great, however, those impoverish students will not be able to be involved with something of that nature because they don't have any money to do so. A school-wide token economy would be something where all students have an opportunity to earn their own rewards and in a positive manner."

- "The "soft-bigotry-of-low-expectations," coupled with the absolute collapse of the family in society are the single biggest obstacles to education today. That is to say that the so-called "progressive" notion that one should excuse one's poor academic performance or

behavior solely on the basis of current or historic discrimination based on race, class or
gender, is enabling an entire generation of children to be completely counter-productive
to school and society at large. We must have high expectations for all children and we
must have consequences for not meeting those."

- "Discipline needs to be improved before any academic gaps are going to be corrected."

Summary

Collectively, the educators' responses provided rich data to describe what the school is doing
well to mitigate the effects of poverty and what the school can do to improve. The responses
identified our most helpful programs and gave insight on how to change, improve or delete other
programs. The implications of the educators' perspectives regarding both educational barriers
related to poverty and school initiatives guide recommendations for future actions. In the
following chapter these findings and implications are discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The current study was developed to gain insight into the educators' perspectives at a middle school known to have a high degree of poverty. The purpose of this study was to investigate educational barriers related to poverty from the educator's point of view. As well, I wanted to find out which school initiatives educators believed to be helpful at mitigating these educational barriers. The research questions were prompted by the high percentage of poverty at South Middle School and the desire to improve academic success for the students that attend the school. I anticipated that findings would emerge with respect to what is working, and what is needed, to increase educational equity for low income students, and that the findings could be used to generate recommendations for future action. I hoped that the study would identify not only current educational barriers, but that it would also identify current school strengths.

Summary of Findings

The setting of the study was South Middle School, Title I middle school in South Carolina. This school was chosen based on the school demographics and the high poverty level of students. All educators were invited to participate in the survey, and 34 out of a possible 40 completed the survey, a return rate of 85%. This high return rate may suggest that educators at this site are concerned about the negative effects of poverty on their students, and also that they value the opportunity to comment on the initiatives currently in place at their school. Frequently, their responses referred not only to the strengths of current initiatives, but also what is still needs to be improved.

The data collection method used for the current study was a survey (Appendix A) with both open and closed ended questions. Questions about educator demographics were kept to a minimum to preserve educator anonymity and to minimize fatigue.

Results indicated that educators believed the poverty related barriers experienced by their students were significant. An exploration of the educators' perspectives identified current school strengths, but also identified what is still needed at the school in order for students living in poverty to fully participate and succeed in school.

Research question 1 asked, From the perspective of teachers and administrators, how does poverty impact educations? Three quantitative survey questions were used to answer this question. In these questions, the majority, (58.82%) of educators indicated more than 75% of their students live in poverty, which is a realistic and accurate assessment of the populations which whom they work given that they South Carolina Report Card Poverty Index shows that South Middle School's poverty rate is 86.82%.

Research question 2 asked What challenges do teachers face in helping students overcome educational barriers related to poverty? One open ended question was used to answer this question. An analysis revealed themes including educational gaps, lack of parental support, and lack of experiences.

Research question 3 asked What are educators' perceptions about the support the school provides to them and students of poverty? A series of 12 open and closed ended survey questions were used to answer this question.

Quantitative data demonstrated that the majority of educators believed that the school provided adequate resources related to breakfast, lunch, and snacks to students living in poverty. 64.81% of educators' rated breakfast, lunch, and snacks, resources as adequate, with 100% of

educators rating the meal programs (breakfast and lunch) as being the most helpful. However, educators did not believe that the school provided adequate resources to address social and emotional needs of students as 58.83% of educators noted that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that the social and emotional resources were adequate.

When educators were asked to describe their own preparedness to serve students living in poverty, over 67% noted they felt prepared. However, they did not feel that their teacher education programs prepared them sufficiently, and only a little over ½ (58.8%) felt that professional development and in service on working with these students was sufficient. This indicated the teacher education preparation programs and school need to offer additional training in this area.

Qualitative findings revealed that many educators feel that are lack of parental involvement, role models, nutrition and literacy programs are barriers to education for those students living in poverty. Family Fun Night was brought up several times as way to get parents involved and interact with their children. It also gives them a positive reason to come to school with their children and meet teachers without the stigma of it being a negative encounter. Sports and clubs were also mentioned as ways to foster social-emotional growth. Sports was the most common initiative mentioned, but it was noted there are many students who are not athletic and clubs are teacher made not student chosen so many are not placed in clubs that interest them.

Discussion

Where does the inequality in educational outcomes (however measured) associated with children affected by poverty originate, and, correspondingly, what can be done about it (Flessa, 2007). A discussion of the findings in the current study illustrates that the educators have an

understanding of how poverty related barriers affect their students, and they can eloquently articulate how the initiatives at their school are making a difference and need improved.

Many of the themes that emerged through the data analysis process mirrored the findings found in related literature. The survey provided quantitative data and qualitative data regarding educator perspectives with respect to both educational barriers related to poverty and school initiatives that can mitigate these barriers.

Educators at this site are aware of the negative effects of poverty and identified many poverty-related barriers that affected their student population. Most, but not all, of these barriers identified have been discussed in other several studies (Flessa, 2007; Nelson et al., 2012; Payne, 2005; White et al., 2012). Similar to other studies, educators in this study most frequently identified lack of parental involvement and nutrition and health concerns are barriers to education that their student population faces. They also identified the barriers of language and cognitive development, low attendance, achievement gaps, lack of adult mentorship, and emotional concerns. Other barriers identified by participants included lack of experiences, family literacy levels, lack of belief in self, and lack of positive role models, domestic violence in the home, and addiction. Homelessness was also considered to be barriers that affected learning which is a finding consistent with an article was just published in The Lancaster News that demonstrated that out of the 62 homeless people in the county where the study took place, 36 are 17 or under (Vaughn, 2020).

These barriers are significant, and educators expressed concerns about how they could be addressed. Flessa (2007) stated that there are two incorrect assumptions made about poverty and education: "first, that schools can do nothing, and secondly, that schools can do everything"

(p.4). An examination of educators' perspectives at this site supports Flessa's assertions that effective schools can address poverty related issues, but also, that they cannot combat it alone.

Educators at South Middle School described many challenges and agreed overwhelmingly that basic needs must be met before learning can take place. The findings indicate that strong initiatives are in place, but could be improved. Educators expressed concerns about health issues such as dental problems, undiagnosed vision and hearing deficits, infections and health issues. The school nurse is thought of as health care for many students. Educator responses support Jensen's (2009) findings regarding chronic stress caused by poverty and hoe this stress affects the brain and behavior. Educators noted that students do not know how to appropriately respond or manage their emotions. One educator stated, "when your students are living in poverty and their basic needs (food, water, clothing) aren't met, teachers cannot expect learning to take place."

Having taught at South Middle School for eight years, I am familiar with current school initiatives. This school is aware of the financial situations of the majority of the students who attend. With that being known, necessary items are supplied for students (pencils, notebooks, paper, folders, etc.). Being a Title I school also means that if students cannot afford to pay for field trips, the school will cover the cost. This also means costly field trips are not booked because the school cannot afford to send the students on the field trips and supply necessary items. Over 80% of the students who attend South Middle School qualify for free or reduced breakfast and lunch. All students are given the forms at the beginning of the year to fill out, so no one is singled out alone. Most of the educators feel that the breakfast provided is a better choice than the lunch provided. Based on the comments, the program is not the issue but instead the choice of foods. Many students choose not to eat on certain days. The current study did find

that hunger is a significant barrier to learning. Educators repeatedly commented that the basic

needs must be met first. Hungry students cannot learn. Hungry students are tired. The use of

games, movement, and drama will trigger the release of glucose, stored in the body as glycogen.

Proper glucose levels are associated with stronger memory and cognitive function. In short,

physical activity will reduce some of the issues associated with poor nutrition and will build

student health (Jensen, 2013).

Implications

Theoretical

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs students must have basic needs met first to be

able to grow and learn. This study affirms that educators do believe that. Educators have now

been in schools and have witnessed students coming from poverty with little or nothing to eat

and have seen how it affects their behavior and academic success. Lacking nutrition was one of

the main concerns for teachers. This lets educators know that something must be done to combat

the problem with nutrition. In the weeks since the survey, a colleague and I have undertaken a

project to see how we can possibly get free breakfast for all students, so that they may start the

day with one less worry.

Empirical

The empirical implications of this study are based on knowledge derived from examining

poverty and the students affected by it at South Middle. Having access to an education is

critical. Having access to education should not be taken for granted because, in many countries,

children are not allowed or not able to attend school. This study suggests that poverty affects

education, and that education can improve a person's quality of life. The literature indicates a

number of factors that negatively affect education including but not limited to: poverty, attitudes

toward education, health and nutrition, and access to health care. This mixed methods study replicated many of these findings portrayed in the literature, including the many barriers to education. The implication of this study is that barriers to education, many of which are related to poverty, can prevent children from obtaining an adequate education. The first recommendation is that, in order to decrease the impact of poverty on children and contribute to improved health and nutrition, that the school breakfast and lunch program should be reevaluated. Also, basic educational materials such as pencils, pens, notebooks and paper need to be supplied, so that burden is not placed on parents who can afford to meet the basic needs of their children.

Practical

According to this survey lack of parental involvement is directly related to students in poverty. Educators from other areas speak parent volunteers in their schools, parents attending conferences, parents or others recognizing schools and their efforts, or just contacting educators with concerns. In a low-income school this is not the case. Parent teacher conferences have been held, and only three parents attend. There are parents that do not know that their child, as a middle schooler, cannot read or do basic math functions. Parents needs to be more involved, but many parents do not have transportation to come to school events. There has to be a system to be able to get parents more involved. Sometimes offering a meal will get parents more involved especially from low income homes. Busses could possibly be provided to pick up parents and students to transport to events.

Christian

Many of the themes that became evident during the research process are things that Christians should be or already doing. With the separation of church and state, many educators

fear bringing Christianity into the classroom. But Christianity can be brought in to schools constantly through the actions we take as educators. Being an advocate to do what is right for a child, being a role model, creating a caring school culture are all ways to do Christian acts in school without fear of being reprimanded.

Delimitations and Limitations

The study was limited to only educators at South Middle School because the purpose of the study is to understand how poverty affects education. South Middle School is the only Title I middle school in the county. Had other middle schools been asked to participate in the survey, the perspectives would have been skewed because other schools in the county do not have the same population or the same school initiatives.

Recommendations for Future Research

This researcher believes it is important to view poverty and its effect on education through eyes of an educator. The perceptions of educators can be used to form recommendations for future initiatives. Collectively, the school initiatives described in this study contribute to a caring and inclusive school culture that demonstrates a strong sense of community.

Although the relationship between poverty and schooling is extremely complex there are numerous steps that schools can undertake to mitigate the effects of poverty. These include initiatives to address meeting basic needs. It is also important that the school absorb as much of the costs as possible to provide for the costs of education. It is not always possible to implement, as school populations are largely determined by neighborhood demographics. However, grants are available to provide funding for many necessities and wants of a school.

Based on the educators' perspectives in the current study, this researcher recommends that teacher training programs support new teachers to be agents of social change. Teacher

training programs could play a role in emphasizing social justice issues and could teach

educators how to be advocates for their students. Teacher training programs could also be sure

to send their teacher candidates to a variety of schools and not concentrate them in one area to

ensure they are exposed to multiple environments.

Findings in this study indicate the importance of professional developments opportunities

and the role these opportunities play in increasing educator awareness and understanding

poverty. Educators' beliefs and perceptions about poverty matter. Teacher and student beliefs

about having a fixed amount of "smarts" that the student can't increase will influence

engagement and learning. Teach students that their brains can change and grow, that they can

even raise their IQs (Jensen, 2013).

Suggestions for further research include recommendations to investigate how schools,

communities, and social agencies can work together to improve educational outcomes and life

chances for students living in poverty. In an article published in Educational Leadership (April

2008), Richard Rothstein, research associate at the Economic Policy Institute, asked the question,

"Whose problem is poverty?" He suggests that schools can have only a limited influence on

closing the achievement gap between students who live in poverty and their more affluent peers

unless school improvement is combined with broader social and economic reforms. Without

such a combined effort, he claims, the mandate for schools to "fully close achievement gaps not

only will remain unfulfilled, but also will cause us to foolishly and unfairly condemn our schools

and teachers" (p.8). David Berliner (2007, as cited in Rodriguez & Fabionar, 2010) agrees and

argues, "Without careful attention to the social conditions beyond schools, we will continue to

encounter limitations in advancing educational equity and high achievement among diverse

student populations within schools" (pp.58–59).

Suggestions for working with students of poverty are as follows:

- Only assign work requiring a computer and internet access or other costly resources when it can be provided and completed during school time

- Work with schools to make parent involvement affordable and convenient (transportation, child-care, flexible times)

- Provide access to the same high-level curricular and pedagogical opportunities and high expectations

- Teach about classism, consumer culture, the dissolution of labor unions, environmental pollution, and other injustices disproportionately affecting the poor, preparing new generations of students to make a more equitable world.

- Keep stocks of school supplies, snacks, clothes, and other basic necessities handy for students who may need them

- Develop a curriculum that is relevant and meaningful to students' lives and draw on their experiences and surroundings.

- Continue to reach out to parents even when they are not responsive

- Educate colleagues when they stigmatize poor students and their parents

- Fund field trips or use virtual field trips to give students experiences

Summary

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine educators' perspectives on poverty and the effect it has on education. It was found in this study that multiple barriers to education exist at South Middle School. The issues encountered by the students are complex and not easily solved, but can be improved. Goals include improving nutrition health with a better breakfast and school lunch program, equipping students to compete in a 21st Century job market,

continuing to provide professional development for educators, and expanding or improving

programs that have already proven to be successful. The faculty, staff, students and parents of

South Middle School will ultimately decide which recommendations they are willing to commit

to and implement in their school.

Compared to other schools in the district, it can be frustrating that many of the students at

South Middle School are not closing the achievement gap because basic needs are not

met. Many educators are unaware of the many grants that are available to help meet the basic

needs of students. Educators must become advocates for their students. Recognizing the

students need help is only the beginning of the battle. Educators must keep up to date with their

population and research ways to combat the effects of poverty.

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Appendix A

Poverty and Education: Exploring Educators' Perspectives

Directions: Please respond to each question as accurately as possible by checking one or more, if applicable, of the responses.

Basic Demographic Information

Years of teaching experience:

___0-5 years ___6-10 years ___10+ years

Years of teaching experience at this school site:

___0-5 years ___6-10 years ___10+ years

Teacher's Perspective

1. What percentage of your students do you believe are living in poverty?
   ___None ___Less than 25% ___Between 25% to 50% ___Between 51-75% ___More than 75% ___Don't know
2. Which of the following educational barriers or challenges impact the students you work with?
   Check all that apply. ___Low attendance ___Transportation ___Nutrition and health ___Achievement gaps ___Language and cognitive development ___Lack of adult mentorship ___Emotional concerns (including anxiety and stress related concerns) ___Social knowledge and competence (social skills, ability to self-regulate) ___Lack of parental involvement ___None
3. What challenges do you experience while teaching children affected by poverty?

   _____

   __

   Use the following five point scale to determine your response to the following questions. Please circle your response 1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

4. The school breakfast program is adequate to meet the nutritional needs of students who come to school hungry. 1 2 3 4 5.
5. The school snack and lunch programs are adequate to meet the nutritional needs of students throughout the day. 1 2 3 4 5.
6. I feel that there are adequate staffing resources at my school to meet the learning needs of students who require extra support to address learning gaps. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I feel that there are adequate resources at my school to meet the social emotional needs of students living in poverty. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I feel well prepared to teach in a school where poverty related issues are present on a regular basis. 1 2 3 4 5

9. I feel my teacher training was adequate in preparing me for teaching students who live in poverty. 1 2 3 4 5

10. My professional development and school in service opportunities have increased my awareness of poverty related issues. 1 2 3 4 5

11. Which of the following school initiatives do you believe are helpful at mitigating educational barriers related to poverty? Check all that apply. ___Breakfast Program ___Lunch Program BackPack Program ___Mustang Mentors ___Clubs ___Mustang Rodeo ___Steeplechase ___Mustang Café ___Family Night ___School celebrations (sports day, assemblies, performances) ___P/T Conferences ___Extra-curricular activities available to students (volleyball, basketball, football, cheer) ___Other (Please describe):

12. In your opinion, which school initiatives have been most helpful in decreasing the learning gaps and improving learning outcomes for students affected by poverty? (e.g., school wide literacy support program, etc.) Please comment or explain your response.

13. In your opinion, which school initiatives have been most helpful at increasing parent involvement? (e.g., PT conferences, SIC, Family Fun Night, etc.) Please comment or explain your response.

14. In your opinion, which school initiatives have been most helpful in fostering social-emotional growth and/or instilling hope? (e.g. sports, clubs) Please comment or explain your response.

15. In your opinion, which school initiatives have helped to increase identity and engagement for students, and have helped to foster a sense of belonging? (ESOL breakfast) Please comment or explain your response.

16. Please include any additional comments which you believe would aid my research, including your thoughts on current school strengths/successes and recommendations for school initiatives you would like to see in place in the future.

Please feel free to use this area for any more thoughts you would like to share with me about educational barriers and school initiatives. Thank you for taking the time from your busy life to complete the survey! The return of your survey indicates your consent to participate in this research and for the information you provided to be included in the study results.

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

Poverty and Education: An Educator's Perspective
Elizabeth Ghent
Liberty University
Community Care and Counseling/School of Behavioral Sciences

You are invited to be in a research study to gain a teacher's perspective on poverty and the barriers caused by poverty in education. You were selected as a possible participant because you teach in a high poverty school. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Elizabeth Ghent, a student in the Community Care and Counseling Department in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to identify school initiatives that are working to mitigate the barriers between poverty and education.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete an anonymous survey within one week of receiving this email. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or South Middle School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Elizabeth Ghent. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or eghent@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Suzie Johnson, at sajohnson9@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Appendix C

December 16, 2019

██████████
██████████████
████████████

Dear ████████ :

As a graduate student in the Community Care and Counseling department/School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is Poverty and Education: An Educator's Perspective and the purpose of my research is to describe educators' perceptions about how poverty influences students and the educational process, the challenges teachers face as they work with students living in poverty, and the support teachers need to effectively work with this student population.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your staff to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to click on the link provided in their email and complete the survey. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

████████████

Elizabeth Ghent
Doctoral Student

Appendix D

Dear South Middle Faculty Member:

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to learn more about teachers' perspectives about the influence poverty and educational barriers have on education, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, a faculty member at South Middle School, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey. It should take approximately 15 minutes for you to complete the survey. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, click on the link provided:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HLMGYL6

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research, but you do not need to sign and return it.

Sincerely,

Beth Ghent
7th Grade ELA Teacher

Appendix E

Dear Elizabeth Ghent,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

> (2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
>
> > (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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