

A MULTI-CASE STUDY OF LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS' PERCEIVED IMPACT ON
REDUCING INEQUITY IN MAJORITY-MINORITY URBAN SCHOOLS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this multi-case study was to explore the local churches' perceived impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools in the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States. In this research, education inequity is generally defined as the lack of academic resources such as school funding, experienced teachers, and technology in a community that has been historically excluded. This study was guided by social capital theory as it relates to education and how they influence community and parental involvement levels and investments that impact educational success. The research questions are as follows: (1) How do local church leaders perceive the impact of their partnership on improving educational equity and lowering the achievement gap in local schools? (2) Why do local churches provide services and resources to support educational equity? What are the experiences, barriers, and successes? (3) Why do factors such as faith and family significantly impact school outcomes? This study will be bound to local churches and school districts in the Northeast regions of the United States. The sample was composed of 8 participants from three churches and faith-based nonprofits. Data collection included individual interviews, a focus group, and surveys. Data analysis was conducted using pattern-matching logic, coding, and transcripts interpretation.

Keywords: social capital, faith-based organizations, educational inequity, secularism.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to local pastors, church and school leaders, and teachers who have devoted their lives to working together to improve their communities by making education equitable for all of God's children.

Acknowledgments

I must first acknowledge the LORD from whom all blessings flow. I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to my wife for her unconditional support and patience in this journey again. To my children, I am grateful you inherited the love of education. I am forever thankful to my parents and grandparents, who instilled in me the love of education. I would also like to thank my committee chair Dr. Sharon Michael-Chadwell and committee member Dr. George Johnson for their unparalleled guidance and support.

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List of Abbreviations

City Education Initiative (CEI)

Demographic Analysis Estimates (DA)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Improving America's Schools Act (IASA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Keller's Theory of Motivation, Volition, and Performance (MVP)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Post-Enumeration Survey (PES)

Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)

Social equity theory (SET)

St Matthew's Church (SMC)

The Bilingual Education Act (BEA)

The City Church (TCC)

The Learning Partnership (TLP)

U.S. Department of Education (USDE)

United States dollar (USD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

I explored the perceived impact of local church leaders on reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools. Despite the solid personal belief in fairness and justice for all, structural factors still contribute to social inequity. Throughout American history, policymakers have actively promoted policies that negatively affect communities of color (Bailey et al., 2021; Rothstein, 2017; Schreckhise, 2018). Due to societal structural inequities, many marginalized groups are at elevated risk for multiple adverse outcomes. Chapter 1 presents the context for the proposed research study. The background encompasses historical, social, and theoretical frameworks. In Chapter 1, I also present the problem and purpose statements, the significance of the study, the research questions, and the definition of pertinent terms.

Background

In this study, I extend the discussion on church leaders' impact beyond perceived faith-based organizations and controversial public school debates surrounding constitutionality. Instead, I focused on the experiences of local church leaders as they seek to help urban districts overcome obstacles that hinder them from fulfilling their academic missions. Local churches can act as valuable sources of social capital that urban school districts require to exert a lasting impact on the schools and students they serve (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2017). Researchers have allotted great attention to poor academic achievement among students in urban schools. For example, students in urban schools have lower achievement scores than their peers in suburban districts (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2018). To write off districts' dismal performance as inevitable is to relegate students to a lifetime of failure and create a generational cycle of city youth deprived of the opportunity to succeed (Behrman et al., 2017; Kuhfeld et al., 2018).

I grounded this research on the association between education and social capital, which can be understood using the social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Social networks leverage social capital to benefit individuals (Bourdieu, 1986). To a lesser degree, social equity theory is relevant in evaluating church leaders' perceived impact on local schools because it can demonstrate how different social processes can contribute to achievement gaps between racial groups (McKown, 2013). Many factors drive young people to achieve academic success, such as motivation and external rewards (Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2020). Therefore, policies and training services should consider internal and external motivators when designing their programs. I also referenced Keller's (2010) motivational design model that encourages individuals to adopt and sustain self-regulation and operational learning behavior.

Historical Context

Inequity has always been a problem in the education system (D. Meyers & Miller, 2009). In many urban districts, students lack access to resources necessary for fulfilling their highest potential (Torraco, 2018). Black and suitable environments that enable Hispanic students to thrive are scant (Valant & Newark, 2016). Inequities in schools are historically tied to race and ethnicity in the United States (Williams, 2002). Education inequity faced by Black individuals in the United States originated from slavery (Beckert & Rockman, 2016), the U.S. Constitution (Black, 2018), and the persistence of disparities through the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras (Williams, 2002). In the Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the ruling declared that segregated public facilities were permissible under the law if considered equal. The Court's decision upheld the Jim Crow laws, which barred Blacks from accessing the same facilities as Whites, thus establishing the *separate but equal* doctrine for the following 60 years. Implementing separate but equal public policies affected virtually every aspect of society,

including schools. Six decades later, in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Court ruled that “in the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place” because segregated schools are “inherently unequal.” The Court concluded that Black students were “deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the 14th Amendment.”

Notably, some progress has occurred in addressing segregation in schools; however, findings have revealed that the shadows of *Plessy v. Ferguson* remain (Ashford-Hanser et al., 2020). While governmental efforts may help improve educational outcomes for specific students, enforcement of current laws must occur to ensure that current inequities are not inadvertently widened or exacerbated (Egalite et al., 2017). Coleman et al. (1966) discovered that race, parental education, and income are strongly associated with a child’s academic success. Other researchers have contended that the rise in income inequality has contributed significantly to the increase in educational inequality in the United States (Bloome et al., 2018), which, in turn, has contributed to the academic achievement gap in the nation. According to a report released by the Education Department, this gap has increased since the previous generation. Consequently, policymakers should target low-income youth through higher education programs (Zhou, 2019).

The alarming achievement gaps experienced by disadvantaged and non-privileged students brought about by social circumstances raise concerns about the direction of education policy. Programs meant to improve the education of low-income students have yet to bridge the achievement gap between disadvantaged and non-privileged students and their privileged peers (Hanushek, 2019). Perhaps it is time to re-evaluate education policies and change course in search of a new direction. Achievement gap statistics have been widely tracked and reported. Critics of documenting and reporting on achievement gaps to end educational inequality must understand the potential negative consequences of framing racial disparities in a manner that

could lead to the inaccurate depiction of minorities as unintelligent and unskilled (Quinn, 2020). A closer analysis of the historical impact on the outcomes of students of color can provide a greater understanding of the depth of the issue. Historically, Black churches have been at the forefront of resistance against social injustices (Baldwin, 2003). Today, local churches continue serving their communities by positively influencing them and contributing to civic improvement.

Social Context

Several studies on urban education have highlighted the various issues affecting students' education quality. Among these are teacher shortages, stress, and inequity in the distribution of highly qualified teachers (Brewer et al., 2016; Robinson, 2018). In addition, urban students face other structural barriers that prevent them from succeeding, such as inadequate housing and poor healthcare provisions (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Such outcomes raise concerns about how school practices and policies can influence the development of these children. Studies on the life outcomes of Black male students have revealed that they are more likely to be incarcerated than their White counterparts (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Goldstein et al., 2019; VanderPyl et al., 2018). The scholarship on young men of color repeatedly addresses their academic underachievement, including the disproportionate rate at which they are suspended and expelled from schools (Chu & Ready, 2018; M. A. F. Wilson et al., 2020). These factors inevitably create a climate where students of color are less likely to succeed (Yeh, 2015)—this trend is unsustainable in today's diverse society. Therefore, positive interactions with teachers with the same life experiences as students can help them see themselves as future successors (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Nonetheless, recruiting and retaining Black male teachers has been challenging for school personnel and a subject of ongoing discourse for years. Nevertheless, many researchers agree that increasing the number of Black male teachers is essential for improving

the academic success of Black students (Scott & Alexander, 2019). However, evidence demonstrating how school administrators can support Black male preservice teachers is scant (Walker et al., 2019). Without identifying the educational outcomes of racial minorities, the chances of resolving the issues faced are slim (Harper, 2015). In this research, I asserted that local churches can provide urban districts with the required social capital to overcome many obstacles.

Theoretical Context

The connection between education and social capital is the subject of various theoretical frameworks (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Bourdieu (1986) believed social capital could promote social reproduction when connected with education. Bourdieu proposed the idea of social capital and the concepts of human and cultural capital—his social capital concept centers on the idea that social networks hold immense value for individuals. Regarding education, Coleman (1988) conceptualized social capital as the idea that social patterns and processes contribute to ethnic differences in student achievement. For example, Coleman argued that the expectations of parents and communities are essential factors that can influence academic success. Coleman (1991) also proposed that parental involvement, specifically in conjunction with school and family connectedness, significantly promotes student achievement. Thus, social capital elements can influence parents' commitment to and involvement in their children's education.

The concept of social capital focuses on multiple elements of social relationships, such as social networks, civic engagement, and norms of reciprocity (Lin, 2001). The values associated with social networks can help people solve their common problems. Specific congregations can address the needs of impoverished people by employing the social capital framework (Pieterse,

2011). Likewise, Putnam (2000) viewed churches as a vital part of American society and regarded them as the most critical source of social capital. Religious involvement is crucial to the well-being of American communities as it involves providing social support to those in need, cultivating ethical values, and encouraging altruistic behavior (De Soto et al., 2018; Kraal et al., 2019). Theorists believe social capital should be a vital resource that can lead to various positive social and academic outcomes.

Problem Statement

The problem is that researchers know little about church leaders' perceptions of the impact of local churches on reducing education inequity in urban schools. Education inequity in urban schools, particularly the achievement gap between Black and White students, has continued to increase despite the government's efforts (Levin, 2010). Local organizations encounter numerous obstacles when cultivating relationships to gain support for programs inconsistent with their stated goals and objectives and when there is a lack of flexibility (Badgett, 2016; Polesel et al., 2017). In addition, urban schools are less likely to partner with organizations due to the lack of connections within the community (Luaces et al., 2019). A few researchers have highlighted the lack of fathers' involvement in their children's education as a significant marker (Jeynes, 2016; S. W. Kim & Hill, 2015). Other researchers have focused on the home life of individual students as a critical indicator of the continued increase in the achievement gap (Castro et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2020). Many scholars have ignored the church's role as a source of social capital with desirable effects (Greeley, 1997). For the first time in U.S. history, a Gallup report demonstrated that Americans who are members of religious groups are not in the majority (Jones, 2021). Understanding the value of social capital is essential for comprehending the interactions between schools and other stakeholders in the community (Hernandez-Gantes et al.,

2018; Lanford & Maruco, 2018). Students can develop the necessary skills to compete in the 21st century global economy by using innovative and challenging learning environments established through partnerships between community stakeholders (Murillo et al., 2017).

Purpose Statement

In this multi-case study, I explored church leaders' perceptions of the local churches' impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools in the Northeast region of the United States. I also analyzed the unique collaborative partnership between local churches and public schools in urban cities. For this research, I defined education inequity as the lack of academic resources such as school funding, experienced teachers, and technology in a community that has been historically excluded (Bloome et al., 2018; Torracco, 2018). My study was guided by social capital theory in the context of education (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and how it influences parental involvement levels and investments, which, in turn, affect educational success (S. Park et al., 2017). Students of color require mentoring beyond what they typically receive in classrooms to improve the learning experience and overcome academic challenges (Liou et al., 2016; Salisbury, 2020). Case studies assist researchers in investigations concerning real-world phenomena, identifying issues that can affect an individual or a group (Yin, 2009). Studying the behavioral phenomenon of successful churches influencing local districts furnished results that generate new ideas and theories that can help highlight different aspects of how local churches can serve schools.

Significance of the Study

Qualitative research can yield new knowledge through the researcher's interpretation of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Theory constitutes a critical component of the process because utilizing diverse theoretical frameworks allows the development of distinct ways of knowing

(Heng, 2020). Theory development can provide opportunities to explore new ideas and hone analytical skills. Therefore, social capital theory helped guide my research efforts in addressing the issues of educational inequity in local school districts and assisted me in developing and evaluating ideas and relationships for exploration (Garvey & Jones, 2021).

Theoretical Significance

From a theoretical standpoint, this study was necessary. Various theoretical frameworks often discuss education and social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Parental involvement and other social capital elements within a community or family help influence academic norms and expectations, positively impacting educational success (S. Park et al., 2017). Social capital is the idea that various social processes and patterns influence student achievement (Coleman, 1988). These factors may be parental expectations and the role played by communities. Social capital can also affect parents' involvement and commitment to their children's education.

Empirical Significance

My study findings offer researchers valuable information on the various factors affecting students' success. Furthermore, the findings provide data to future researchers and validate past researchers who have suggested the importance of correctly implementing multiple factors that affect student learning success. Further, results emphasize some critical factors when establishing a comprehensive plan that promotes academic excellence and stimulates community involvement and its partners. A survey by the Pew Research Center demonstrated that the proportion of Americans unaffiliated with a religious group has increased significantly (G. A. Smith, 2021). Differences in religious commitment grew because of various factors, suggesting that we live in a more polarized nation (Twenge et al., 2016). Even among the religious, there is

a growing number of unaffiliated people who are skeptical of organized religion. The rise in the number of people who do not adhere to a particular religion or church will likely impact communities. Considering the differences in religious engagement in other areas and the increase in secularism amongst the population (G. A. Smith et al., 2019), compared with other studies, I extended this qualitative study to the more secular parts of the country. Because the setting of this study was the Northeast region of the United States, the results provide points of comparison with other areas.

Practical Significance

This qualitative research has practical significance. Understanding the synergistic relationship between local churches and urban school districts in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States is vital. Stakeholders, local churches, and public schools can cooperate to produce an outcome more significant than the sum of the efforts put into individual actions. Churches play a vital role in ensuring the success of schools, as they can support the unique needs of students and their families (Mishra, 2020; Salinas et al., 2018). An inclusive school can create optimal community partnerships if it is committed to developing an inclusive school culture and has a clear vision of inclusivity (Haines et al., 2015).

Research Questions

I examined how local churches help address educational inequalities within urban school districts, focusing on how they facilitate the reduction of the achievement gap. I conducted a case study to achieve this objective, and the following research questions guided the process:

Central Research Question

What have been the perceptions of local church leaders' impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority schools?

Little research is available on the influence of local churches in urban districts. I explored how local churches describe their influence on urban schools toward enhancing their educational equity and academic performance. More research is required to identify their perceived successes, challenges, and other factors contributing to reducing the achievement gap. Jordan and Wilson (2017) discussed the significance of increasing the support and involvement of African American churches in public schools. However, to effectively address the issue of racial inequity, churches and schools must regularly discuss their perceptions of how racial inequity affects urban youths—such a dialogue could serve as a framework for developing strategies for increasing the involvement of churches and schools in improving the academic performance of minority students.

Sub-Question 1

How do local church leaders perceive the impact of their partnership with local schools on improving educational equity and lowering the achievement gap in these schools?

Many researchers and practitioners have identified various contributing factors and proposed interventions for improving instructional quality and school leadership practices. Likewise, many intervention frameworks conceptualize the redress of instructional imbalance in schools. For example, some researchers discovered that extended school days increased student achievement and were linked to higher reading scores in the first year of a program (Figlio et al., 2018).

Sub-Question 2

What were the barriers local churches faced and their successes in providing services and resources to support educational equity?

Jordan and Wilson (2017) conducted a comparative case study of two churches based on the naturalistic principles of qualitative research to determine African American students' academic improvement due to the unique partnerships between Black churches and public schools. According to historical documents, one of the two churches has been concerned for the well-being of African Americans since its inception.

Sub-Question 3

What are church leaders' perceptions concerning the impact of faith and family on school outcomes?

The findings of a meta-analysis study indicated that factors such as faith and family could significantly influence the achievement gap and school outcomes (Jeynes, 2015). My research may improve understanding of the synergistic relationship between local churches and urban districts. Stakeholders operate in harmony to produce an outcome more significant than the sum of the efforts put into individual actions.

Definitions

Educational inequity: Educational inequity is the lack of fairness and justice regarding school funding, provision of experienced teachers, and technology in a community, and often experienced by communities that have been historically excluded (Torraco, 2018). Bloome et al. (2018) reported that parents' income influences their children's education.

Faith-based organizations (FBOs): FBOs are groups of individuals united by religious or spiritual beliefs whose activities are rooted in a specific faith. FBOs usually seek to fulfill spiritual, social, or cultural needs. According to Vidal (2001), FBOs are of the following three types: (a) congregations with a physical building and geographical grouping of its members; (b) national networks of churches and denominations, which include social services and other

religious organizations; and (c) non-affiliated religious organizations that are not bound by national networks or incorporated separately.

Keller's theory of motivation, volition, and performance (MVP): The MVP theory describes how external factors influence people's behavior and are influenced by the internal psychological processes involved in achieving goals (Keller, 2010).

Majority-minority urban schools: Majority-minority urban schools have populations in which over half of the students are racial, ethnic, or social minorities. In contrast, fewer dominant political or social group members are represented in the population (Brown et al., 2022; Gest, 2021; Weis, 2020).

Secularism: Secularism is the belief that society should become more independent from religion (Queen et al., 2001).

Social capital: Social capital is the synergy of relationships among people living and working in a particular society that helps achieve goals that otherwise would not have been met (Coleman, 1988).

Social equity theory: Social equity theory explains how various social processes contribute to achievement gaps between racial groups. Although the theory does not address the causes behind the achievement gaps, it describes how different social factors can create differences between racial groups (McKown, 2013).

Summary

I explored local church leaders' perceptions of their churches' impact on reducing education inequity in urban schools. Ethnically and culturally diverse youth perform lower on various academic performance measures compared with their White peers (Henry et al., 2020). Examining how race and socioeconomic status affect achievement gaps may help identify

patterns of educational inequity in urban districts. Furthermore, changes in education policy designed to close achievement gaps and reduce educational inequity can sometimes produce the opposite effect (C. V. Meyers & Smylie, 2017). However, social capital can be vital to students' academic success in majority-minority urban districts and help communities develop strategies and plans to improve student success (Almeida et al., 2021). Developing social interaction and networks is critical for instilling social trust among under-represented students. Mishra (2020) analyzed the social structure leading to academic success through social capital and networks and reported that family and religious and ethnic communities were more likely to have the necessary resources to help under-represented students succeed. Churches play an essential role in ensuring the success of schools by providing the support needed to meet the unique needs of students and families (Kornas-Biela et al., 2020; Mishra, 2020; Salinas et al., 2018). In addition, inclusive schools can forge optimal community–school partnerships if they are committed to creating an inclusive school culture, have a clear vision of inclusion, and exhibit the attributes of trust and collaboration (Haines et al., 2015). Chapter 2 continues the dissertation with an in-depth review of the pertinent literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

I systematically reviewed relevant literature to examine inequity in majority-minority urban school districts. This review helped me explore how social capital can foster educational equity and eliminate achievement gaps in urban schools. In Chapter 2, I review the current literature addressing the situation. The first section explores the theories relevant to eliminating educational inequity, namely social capital theory, social equity theory, and the theory of motivation. The subsequent section reviews literature from different scholars regarding educational inequity and the role played by local churches in closing the achievement gap between low-income and medium-income students. The results of this study may demonstrate how leveraging social capital can influence education and bridge some of the gaps resulting from social inequity.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks provide a map to guide the qualitative exploration of a phenomenon and facilitate understanding complex systems built according to existing theories or literature (Miles et al., 2020). In addition, researchers can draw new categories and concepts by reflecting on how the theoretical framework contributes to answering the overall research questions of their study (Garvey & Jones, 2021). While theoretical frameworks are valid, one must be cautious against overreliance on them to prevent the loss of the ability to glean emergent results from the data (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Nonetheless, a theoretical framework is a conceptual approach that draws on existing knowledge and previous theories to analyze complex phenomena. A theoretical framework comprises three components: the knowledge base, the researcher's worldview, and the methodological choices (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

Researchers have revealed that the academic achievement of urban students is significantly lower than those in suburban districts (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2018). Factors that drive academic success easily categorize into the following three primary components: (a) motivation, (b) external rewards, and (c) policies. Therefore, educators and policymakers must consider the factors that motivate young people to succeed academically. The following three theories will guide this study: (a) social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and how it influences community and parental involvement levels and investments that affect educational success (S. Park et al., 2017), (b) social equity theory (McKown, 2013) that explains how social factors can be employed to reduce achievement gaps, and (c) Keller's theory of motivation, volition, and performance (Keller, 2010).

Bourdieu (1986) identified contemporary concepts about social capital in studying how dominant classes maintained their societal positions by leveraging their social connections, thereby accumulating cultural, social, and economic capital. Scholars have employed Bourdieu's concepts to frame social and cultural capital theories. Coleman (1988) expanded the scope of Bourdieu's research by considering the value of social capital for communities denied economic and social power. Putnam (2000) highlighted the significance of social capital in bridging the gap engendered by differences in privilege, opportunities, and social class, suggesting that people can use social capital to benefit themselves and their communities. Mishra (2020) highlighted that social capital and social support are essential factors enabling under-represented students to succeed in their studies through a framework of networks designed to complement each other.

According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized

relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). Thus, for Bourdieu, social capital refers to the culmination of various resources in social networks. Building a reliable and trustworthy social network is vital for people’s social capital, allowing them various advantages and opportunities. Bourdieu asserted that the structures people associate with influence all human actions and that people’s ability to leverage social capital influences the same. Social capital offers an essential group benefit. In other words, social capital is a resource people use to benefit themselves and their connections, accessible by the original possessors of the capital and the people around them.

However, the same qualities of social capital that engender productive and beneficial gains can also cause negative externalities. For example, drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1986), Friend (2021) maintained that despite the various efforts to widen inclusivity, social class boundaries in the political, economic, and social realms still exist in higher education. Several researchers have issued warnings about the potential adverse effects of social capital. Pillai et al. (2017) stressed that social capital could adversely affect the development of cooperative projects, leading to the formation of closed groups and a groupthink mentality. Likewise, Strindlund et al. (2021) explored the theoretical presuppositions concerning the harmful effects of social capital on the development of cooperative projects; they revealed that poor collaboration between public organizations could result from negative social capital.

People’s unequal access to social capital is one of the primary factors that has historically contributed to social inequity—access to the necessary resources and access is essential for reducing social inequity. For Coleman (1988), social capital is functionally unique; he contended, “Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or in physical

implements of production” (p. S98). Coleman defined social capital as a set of resources people can use within social structures that allow actors to act. Like Bourdieu (1986), Coleman believed people could achieve social capital through multiple relationships—that capability enables them to employ their resources in one social network to benefit themselves in another. The significance of relationships is vital to achieving essential goals such as education, employment, and housing. Han et al. (2020) analyzed the various types of relationships that influence the development of knowledge-sharing networks and discovered that building social capital is a critical component of these networks. Furthermore, a friendship network and robust trust levels significantly affect the development of knowledge-sharing networks.

The stability of social relations and the social structure to which people belong are the two factors determining the type of social capital people possess (Coleman, 1988). An organization’s operational design can also regulate the stability of its social relations. For instance, an organization with a strong structure that allows multiple people to work in various positions can maintain its stability. The extent to which people trust their social environment and the magnitude of their obligations toward it also determine the type of social capital people have (Coleman, 1988). Furthermore, elevated trust among group members is vital to ensure the organization can operate successfully—without this level of trust, the institution will fail to function correctly (Coleman, 1988).

Following Coleman’s (1988) footsteps, Putnam (2000) conceptualized social capital as a resource people can employ to benefit themselves and their communities. Similar to human capital, social networks can also influence the productivity of groups and individuals. Various characteristics of social networks, including norms of trust, mutual respect, and social networks, influence social life dynamics, allowing individuals to act more effectively together (Putnam,

2000). Putnam's (2000) positive depiction of a conflict-free society promoted by social capital has not escaped scrutiny. Gelderblom (2018) claimed that Putnam's idea of bridging the gaps in social capital by eradicating common social ills is over-simplified. Primarily, bridging the gaps in social capital is not optimally effective in addressing the issue of communal mistrust. Despite the criticisms attracted by his concept of collaboration, Putnam's research provides a framework for understanding the social mobility of marginalized youth. He claimed that the various forms of social capital elaborated on in his work can help people develop effective networks.

Putnam (2000) believed that a strong network of social relationships can best improve the quality of a society. Furthermore, the evidence of social capital's importance materializes based on the idea that the physical resources required to achieve societal stability and economic development do not outweigh social capital. Like Coleman (1988), Putnam emphasized that trust is one element that makes social capital last, generated through various social networks, such as promoting mutual respect and civic engagement. Mayger and Hochbein (2021) espoused that trust emerges through social networks promoting civic engagement and mutual respect. The researchers maintained that a school's ability to build trusting relationships with various stakeholder groups by aligning their efforts around a shared vision for their academic program aligns with the school district's success. Social networks built on norms of solid reciprocity and civic engagement also support the significance of trust. Strong standards of mutual respect and the presence of many people with similar obligations further evidence the positive externalities of social networks. Although social capital is a product of other social activities, it is typically only invested by actors to reach their individual goals.

Related Literature

Notwithstanding the importance of educational equity, the experiences of minority students in the United States remain substantially different. Leaders must receive support through professional learning and coursework to provide all children with the necessary resources and support to reach their potential to ensure they can steward a vision of inclusivity and support culturally receptive pedagogy (Clayton et al., 2020). Nonetheless, researchers have found comprehending the various factors affecting equity reception in scientific and academic communities challenging (Ziegler et al., 2021). Through studies based on social capital theories, researchers can better understand the various mechanisms that influence social action (Mikiewicz, 2021).

Other Related Theories

Scholars have devised various educational theories to ensure all students can achieve their full potential through a more equitable education system. Establishing a more just and fair management system for all schools is one critical factor in implementing a comprehensive reform program. Nevertheless, researchers have shown that unfair policies and other inequities can harm schools that serve minority students (Burt et al., 2020; McKown, 2013). According to Keller (2010), many factors affect the success of minority learners. Motivation and volition are two crucial aspects of learning. Keller noted that the motivation, volition, and performance (MVP) model, which includes the myriad of strategies and methods that can encourage self-regulatory and operational learning, enhances the performance of minority students.

Social Equity Theory

McKown (2013) comprehensively analyzed the various social processes that impact the test scores of different racial-ethnic groups. The author presented a model to examine and

diminish the racial achievement gap. Social processes encompass interpersonal interactions, including nonverbal communication. Social equity theory (SET) posits that two types of social processes influence the disparities in achievement among races and ethnicities: direct and signal influences. Direct influences contribute to the achievement gap between racial and ethnic groups by disproportionately favoring certain groups. On the other hand, signal influences are indications a child may receive from their racial-ethnic group that impedes their development (McKown, 2013). Rogers et al. (2018) suggested that direct influences on the achievement gap between racial-ethnic groups materialize in the home environment through high parental expectations and in the school setting through the quality of teacher-student relationships and instructional quality. McKown (2013) also averred that White students were more likely to be exposed to challenging material compared to their peers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Herman (2009) observed that low-income minority students tend to exert greater effort in school when provided with increased teacher support.

Establishing strong relationships based on trust, respect, and care can foster student achievement and promote a sense of belonging within the school community (Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2020). A school culture that values trust and respect can also contribute to narrowing the achievement gap between White and Black students (Morgan & Amerikaner, 2018). For African American students, positive relationships with teachers enhance academic performance compared to their White counterparts. Conversely, poor relationships with teachers can adversely affect these students' development (Halberstadt et al., 2018). Creating positive learning environments can also improve the academic performance of high-ability students. According to Cross et al. (2018), high-ability students in a positive environment demonstrate higher levels of

engagement and motivation. Providing support to their peers can facilitate the development of strong academic relationships.

Rather than focusing solely on individual differences in achievement, the application of SET allows for an examination of how various factors can impact the performance of different groups (McKown, 2013). SET assists researchers in analyzing racial and ethnic disparities within educational settings and investigating the disproportionate disciplinary practices experienced by students of color (Gregory et al., 2010). Moreover, SET can be instrumental in developing effective responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic, particularly those affecting the African American community (Wright & Merritt, 2020). Additionally, through partnerships between schools and nonprofit organizations, the implementation of the SET framework has played a transformative role in reshaping perceptions about racial and ethnic disparities in both educational and police-community relationships (Tarlton et al., 2020). According to SET, the various factors that contribute to the achievement gaps between different racial groups are explainable using four propositions (McKown, 2013).

1. First, two classes of social processes influence the achievement gaps between racial groups. Direct influences affect the racial-ethnic achievement gaps when distributed differently among the other groups. Signal influences communicate negative expectations about a child's racial-ethnic group that can negatively affect their academic performance.
2. Second, signal influences refer to the ability of children to detect cues that indicate a stereotyped expectation, and this capacity increases significantly during elementary school.

3. Fourth, the social processes that affect the achievement gap operate in a limited range of developmental settings that can change with age.
4. The combination of the appropriate direction and signal influences across developmental contexts contributes to the achievement gap between different racial groups.

Keller's Theory of Motivation, Volition, and Performance

Among the many challenges teachers in urban districts face is low student motivation (Camacho & Parham, 2019). Keller's (2010) theory of motivation, volition, and performance adds to an integrative approach by including various information-processing concepts, action control, and intentions within a system framework model. Additionally, MVP defines how external (environmental) factors impact behavior with internal psychological processes and constructs in connection with goal-directed outcomes, consequences, performance, and effort. In addition to expanding the initial motivation, volition, and performance model, Keller included action control and intentions. Gatzka (2021) provided an overview of the highly pertinent aspects of motivation to explain the connection between learning and personality traits and the relationship between academic achievement and personality traits. He opined that goals, motivation, and learning approaches are critical factors associated with various personality traits. Gatzka indicated that intrinsic motivation, which relates to a deep desire for learning, is associated with favorable test results and a broad knowledge base linked to openness. Conversely, extrinsic motivation, characterized by focusing on performance goals, is connected to high academic achievement.

According to Liu et al. (2009), participation in religion and attendance at church can enhance social capital among churchgoers. However, while social capital may not directly

improve income equality, other researchers have suggested that church attendance contributes to increased political participation among minorities and the developing of civic skills (Liu et al., 2017). Additionally, churches play a significant role in social transformation (Beukes, 2019). Local churches have the potential to foster positive networks within communities, utilizing social capital to tackle significant challenges effectively.

Non-Theory Related Literature

Inequity has emerged as a prominent concern within the education system, particularly in urban districts, where a lack of fairness often hinders students from realizing their full potential. Unfortunately, many minority students face the challenge of not receiving quality instruction in an environment that is conducive to their academic success.

Educational Inequity and Inequality

Educational inequity and inequality have become recognized by researchers as systemic structures that impede certain groups from receiving adequate education due to factors such as inadequate facilities, understaffed schools, and limited course offerings (Parsons & Turner, 2014). Baker (2016) asserted that choice and competition systems are rooted in inequality and differentiation, highlighting the importance of ensuring equal options to enhance equality. However, since the early 2000s, the U.S. government has often mistaken equity for equality, promoting uniformity using standards, high-stakes testing, and other accountability measures (Cramer et al., 2018). While equality emphasizes providing all students with the same opportunities and resources, equity necessitates offering additional support, resources, and opportunities to students who start from a disadvantaged position. Equity strives to address unequal starting points and ensure fairness for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Jurado de Los Santos et al., 2020). Equity emerges by investing in resources at a

level that yields and sustains the highest quality outcomes for all groups (Parsons & Turner, 2014). Despite a genuine belief in equal opportunity, structural factors contribute to social inequality (Elenbaas et al., 2020). Although equality and equity share the same etymological root, they hold distinct meanings. Equality denotes that everyone receives equal opportunities and resources (Cramer et al., 2018). Conversely, equity requires allocating resources and opportunities to ensure comparable opportunities for all (Parsons & Turner, 2014). The concept of equity acknowledges that different students require varying resources and opportunities to attain the same level of achievement (Leithwood, 2021).

Majority-Minority Schools. The term *majority-minority school* refers to a school where one or more racial and ethnic minorities (relative to the whole country's population) constitute most of the local population (Brown et al., 2022; Gest, 2021; Weis, 2020). Some minority students attending ethnically and racially diverse schools can avail of myriad benefits—for instance, Black and Latino students are likelier to improve their academic performance in majority-White schools (Borman et al., 2004). The presence of desegregated school districts offers social advantages, while segregated schools harm society (Ayscue et al., 2018). Despite the evident benefits of integration, school segregation and district secession persist in some areas of the country. In cases of secession, the separating districts rely on local revenue for their funding, leaving the remaining districts with only federal funding, which is often inadequate to compensate for the loss (Houck & Murray, 2019). The ongoing secession of school districts and the creation of new districts in predominantly White areas have contributed to racial segregation among students (Taylor et al., 2019), thereby exacerbating educational inequities.

Equity Gaps. Equity gaps in education encompass the diverse dimensions of teaching and student success metrics that exhibit variations among different demographic groups and

socioeconomic statuses, highlighting the disparity between desired outcomes and the current reality (Ziegler et al., 2021). Frankenberg et al. (2019) observed a significant increase in the proportion of minority students in majority-minority schools, rising from 5.7% in 1988 to 18% in 2018. The authors attributed this escalation in segregation to various factors, including housing policies and widening wealth gaps that emerged in the 1990s and 2000s. Ziegler et al. (2021) recognized several types of equity gaps in education, such as achievement, confidence, funding, and threshold gaps, which play a crucial role in comprehending the multiple issues associated with equity and equality in the educational landscape. Ziegler et al. argued that despite variations in terms such as *opportunity*, *learning*, and *outcome gaps*, these concepts can collectively offer a conceptual framework for comprehending and addressing the diverse equity gaps in education.

Opportunity Gaps. The opportunity gap pertains to the unequal distribution of educational inputs across different processes, encompassing disparities in resources, opportunities, and access to learning, which further divide into various dimensions, such as limited access to resources and reduced capacity to take advantage of learning opportunities. Conversely, the outcome gap focuses on the need for equitable outputs in educational processes, including student participation rates and the attainment of educational goals. By acknowledging and addressing these gaps, practitioners can direct efforts toward promoting equity in education. Separating the various equity gaps into their respective categories allows education stakeholders to communicate more clearly (Ziegler et al., 2021).

Funding Gaps. Increasing the resources allocated to schools with more poor students can reduce the achievement gap between people experiencing poverty and the nonpoor (Jackson et al., 2016; Thorson & Gearhart, 2019). M. D. Johnson et al. (2020) proposed that implementing place-based learning communities can enhance students' sense of belonging, improve academic

performance, and narrow equity gaps across multiple measures. Similarly, Peters (2022) recommended that educational institutions and policymakers address the underlying causes of various issues affecting students, such as systemic racism and limited opportunities, to improve the quality of education for all. In addition to addressing systemic injustices within the classroom, A. C. Barton and Tan (2020) called for collective efforts to move beyond current discourses of equity inclusion in education. The researchers emphasized the need to reauthorize the rights of historically marginalized students hindered by systemic injustices in the educational system. The concept of equity is crucial in promoting the inclusion of all students, as it recognizes and disrupts the prevailing status quo, valuing individuals' diverse perspectives and experiences (A. C. Barton & Tan, 2018). Bragg (2017) believed that a comprehensive approach involving multiple stakeholders, including teachers, parents, employers, and community leaders, facilitates student success. However, while effective teachers can help narrow achievement gaps, they may not necessarily close the gaps between racial and socioeconomic groups (T. Kim & Lee, 2020). Meanwhile, Worrell and Dixson (2021) identified early educational inequalities as significant contributing factors to the gaps in gifted identification.

Educational Inequity Outcomes

Olszewski-Kubilius and Corwith (2018) comprehensively reviewed the literature on poverty, academic performance, and giftedness. The authors' findings revealed various factors that influence students' learning capabilities, including their aptitude for learning, the quality of education provided, and the financial resources available within the district. Moreover, low-income families frequently faced the challenge of limited advanced learning opportunities, jeopardizing students' sense of safety and security. Student achievement gaps often received attention as a significant variable in discussions on the impact of poverty on students. The

detrimental effects of poverty were particularly pronounced among Black and Hispanic students (Quinn, 2020).

Effects of Poverty. There seems to be an unfortunate linkage between race and poverty concerning education. Poverty is one of the most common explanations for the achievement gap. In this regard, Olszewski-Kubilius and Corwith (2018) asserted, “Poverty is a significant problem within our society, affecting educational opportunity, upward mobility, and even basic health and security for many children” (p. 37). Higher academic performance is associated with family income, and the achievement gap largely contributes to poverty’s effects. Impoverished students often have limited access to diverse and inclusive educational opportunities. Wealthier school districts tend to have higher proficiency levels on standardized tests than students in economically disadvantaged communities (Bruce et al., 2019). Family income significantly influences students’ academic and cognitive performance, surpassing other factors in predicting outcomes (G. W. White et al., 2016). Rothstein (2015) emphasized the unmistakable connection between poverty and academic struggles. Researchers must consider the various social and economic disadvantages that disproportionately affect Black families. While achieving integrated educational settings remains a crucial research objective, attaining it is becoming increasingly challenging. Drake (2017) suggested that the segregation of students perpetuates socioeconomic inequality and reinforces its justification and rationalization. Policies that foster competition among schools for resources by prioritizing high-performing students can perpetuate a cycle of academic segregation.

Factors in Lowering the Achievement Gap. Practitioners have proposed many interventions to improve the quality of instruction and leadership practices in schools to redress the instructional imbalance. Figlio et al. (2018) found that extended school days increased

student achievement and linked to higher reading scores in the program's first year. This proposed intervention provides more students with more effective instructional time to learn a task thoroughly. However, much work still needs to be done to close the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites. Yet, many teachers believe that the factors that affect the achievement gap are those they consider out of their control (Ratcliff et al., 2016).

The Role of Policy in Educational Equity and Equality. During the Colonial Period in U.S. history, teaching enslaved or freed Blacks to read and write was considered a threat to White society. Schweiger (2019) discussed how Blacks in bondage or after liberation acquired literacy skills in the decades leading up to the Civil War. However, Bly (2008) noted that there were more literate enslaved individuals during colonial times compared to the period following the colonies' independence. Southern states upheld a racialized hierarchy by criminalizing education, while many African Americans clandestinely sought education (Black, 2022). The proliferation of antiliteracy laws gained traction after Nat Turner's 1831 rebellion, and the harsh punishments inflicted by enslavers exemplify how White supremacy suppressed education for African Americans (Weissman, 2019).

In 1865, 3 years prior to the ratification of the 14th Amendment, the federal government positioned itself as a mediator between states and local education authorities by establishing the Freedmen's Bureau. The Freedmen's Bureau addressed the South's failure to educate African American residents by supporting the establishment schools dedicated to improving their literacy (Veniero, 2021). However, even after the complete prohibition on educating African Americans disappeared following the Civil War, segregation and inequitable policies persisted, resulting in Black students enduring unequal educational opportunities (Norwood & Norwood, 2022). African Americans in former slave-holding states recognized education as vital to attaining

equality. For instance, from 1862–1875 in North Carolina, most teachers for freed people were African American, many of whom had been formerly enslaved individuals who worked diligently to establish a sustainable education system (Brosnan, 2019).

Historical Context of Educational Inequity

Inequity has emerged as a significant issue within the education system, particularly in urban districts, where a lack of resources often hinders students from realizing their full potential. The presence of inequity in schools is closely tied to race and ethnicity in the U.S., with its roots traced back to slavery and the U.S. Constitution and persisting through the eras of Reconstruction and Jim Crow (Williams, 2002). Notably, the achievement gap is most pronounced in schools with lower per capita expenditure. Household unemployment, racial segregation, limited parental education, and inadequate per capita expenditure are primary factors contributing to the achievement gap in urban schools (Hung et al., 2020). Despite efforts, many programs aimed at improving the academic performance of low-income students have not yielded the desired success (Hanushek, 2019).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) to improve the educational opportunities of children in the U.S. President Johnson declared that the new law “represents a major new commitment of the federal government to quality and equality in the schooling that we offer our young people” (L. B. Johnson, 1965). Johnson opined that the ESEA would help bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots. As established during the Civil Rights Era, the ESEA continues to be the anchor for the educational rights of students (Hakuta, 2017). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 represented a significant federal government initiative in

public school policymaking since the ESEA (Heise, 2017). Advocates of NCLB (2001) anticipated that it would enhance the quality of students' education.

However, the ESEA inadvertently created a situation where schools received incentives to lower the academic standards for specific students, as resources were directed primarily toward those at risk of not meeting the annual progress targets (Krieg, 2011). Recognizing the limitations of NCLB, President Barack Obama introduced the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on 10 December 2015, promising that the objectives of ESSA would be more appropriate, remarking:

The goals of No Child Left Behind, the predecessor of this law, were the right ones: High standards. Accountability. Closing the achievement gap. Making sure that every child was learning, not just some. But in practice, it often fell short. It did not always consider the specific needs of each community. The ESSA requires states to invest in helping students and schools improve, focusing on the lowest-performing schools and closing those big achievement gaps.... With this bill, we reaffirm that fundamental American ideal that every child, regardless of race, income, background, or the zip code where they live, deserves the chance to make out of their lives what they will. (White House Press Archives, 2015)

Congress' intention in passing the NLCB law was to ensure that students from the lowest socioeconomic status receive the necessary support and resources to improve their academic achievement while allowing states to develop and test their academic standards and metrics (Heise, 2017). While the ESSA provisions may contribute to improving educational outcomes for some students, it is crucial to enforce the law's protections rigorously to prevent further inequities (Egalite et al., 2017). However, students from majority-minority districts continue to

lag behind their peers from majority-white districts across various academic categories (McFarland et al., 2017). Furthermore, children from low-income families still attend schools that lack the necessary leadership and essential skills to provide them with a quality education (Murnane, 2007).

Since the enactment of ESEA, it has undergone multiple reauthorizations to improve educational equity for low-income students. Initiatives such as the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA, 1994), the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001), and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA, 2015) have allocated funding towards assisting low-income and special needs students. However, despite the efforts of ESSA to promote equal opportunities, significant racial disparities persist within the education system (LaForett & De Marco, 2020; M. Wilson et al., 2021). Black (2017) stated that ESSA lacks a mechanism to implement equitable practices consistently. Practitioners' endeavors to improve the quality of education for low-income students have not yielded significant success, as the gaps between high-income and low-income students remain wide (Zhao, 2016). Although ESSA aims to address inadequate funding, it does not prevent states from implementing funding practices that may perpetuate inequities (Black, 2017).

Bishop and Noguera (2019) argued that the failure to address the root causes of the achievement gap attributes to inadequate policies that fail to address racial and socioeconomic disparities in education. They advocated for sustained attention to education policies and ecological issues that impact schools and children to address structural inequities. J. C. Fitzgerald et al. (2021) called for more research on the multiple aspects of civic education in K–12 schools to tackle social inequities. Parsons and Turner (2014) emphasized that the concept of presentism, which views racial inequity as solely contemporary, is inaccurate. The researchers asserted that

historical connections between racial inequity and education in the U.S. trace back to the emergence of racial ideology in the 1600s. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of the various dimensions of the issue is crucial for developing effective solutions (Parsons & Turner, 2014). The achievement gap between children of color and their White peers is evident across various indicators such as grade point averages, standardized test scores, advanced placement courses, and graduation rates (Zhao, 2016). Table 1 provides an overview of the history of educational reform in the United States.

Table 1

Educational Reform Legislation and Court Decisions

Decision, law, or report	Year	Content
Plessy v. Ferguson	1896	The Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation laws in the U.S. did not violate the Constitution if the facilities were equal for each race. This decision led to the development of a new legal concept known as “separate but equal.” The decision legitimized the segregation laws passed in the South following the end of the Reconstruction Era (1865–1877).
Brown v. Board of Education	1954	The Supreme Court ruled that segregation in schools was unlawful. Plessy v. Ferguson violated the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees equal protection of the laws.
The Voting Rights Act	1964	The act prohibits unequal application of voter registration requirements, racial segregation in schools and public accommodations, and employment discrimination.
The Elementary and Secondary Education Act	1965	The act aims to improve the achievement gap between students from low-income families and those from more affluent backgrounds by providing federal funding to schools.
The Bilingual Education Act	1967	The act provides federal funding to school districts to establish programs that help students with limited English proficiency.

Decision, law, or report	Year	Content
A Nation at Risk	1983	A commission convened by then-President Ronald Reagan warned about the dire state of the nation's education system. The commission presented a long list of recommendations to improve the country's education quality, such as adopting rigorous standards, establishing more robust graduation standards, and revising the curriculum.
The Education for Economic Security Act	1984	The act gives the Secretary of Education the authority to make matching grants to States for the costs of improving the instruction in science, mathematics, foreign languages, vocational education, and computer education.
Improving America's Schools Act	1994	The act reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. It contains reforms and provisions to improve the quality of education for disadvantaged students. These include the Title 1 program, charter schools, Safe and Drug-Free Schools, and other programs.
No Child Left Behind Act	2001	The No Child Left Behind Act reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. NLCB supported the implementation of standards-based education reform on the premise that setting high expectations and establishing goals can improve the quality of education for all students. States had to develop assessments that measured basic skills to receive federal funding.
Every Student Succeeds Act	2015	To correct the perceived failures of the No Child Left Behind Act, it aims to ensure that states have the resources to improve the quality of education in their schools. Instead of relying on the federal government for solutions, it empowers state and local decision-makers to develop their systems for improving schools based on evidence. NCLB reduces the number of standardized tests given to students and teachers. They should also ensure that these tests do not interfere with the teaching and learning of children.

Note. Legislation and court decisions that have shaped U.S. education: Bilingual Education Act, 1968; Education for Economic Security Act [EEA], 1984; ESEA, 2015; Hunt et al., 2010; IASA, 1994; Kessinger, 2011; NCLB, 2001.

Social Capital and Education

Education and social capital theory are frequently discussed in various theoretical frameworks, as highlighted by Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988). Within a community or family, academic norms, expectations, and responsibilities are crucial forms of social capital that influence parental involvement and investments, ultimately impacting educational success (S. Park et al., 2017). Coleman (1988) conceptualized social capital in the context of education, emphasizing how social patterns and processes contribute to disparities in student achievement

based on race and ethnicity. Coleman argued that parental and community expectations are vital in shaping academic success. Moreover, Coleman supported the idea that the social capital of rural youth is connected to factors that shape their educational aspirations, extending beyond their socioeconomic background. The concept of social capital has had far-reaching implications in educational research, leading to numerous studies highlighting its significance in student academic success. However, Mikiewicz (2021) noted that research must provide a cohesive understanding and capture the full range of factors contributing to student success. Thus, social capital elements can influence parental commitment and involvement in their children's education.

Social networks based on shared values can enable individuals to collaborate in addressing everyday challenges. Putnam (2000) highlighted the importance of churches as a significant source of social capital within American society. Churches provide social support, cultivate ethical values, and address the needs of the less fortunate (Pieterse, 2011). These findings align with Hall et al.'s (2018) proposition that collaboration is fundamental to achieving shared goals. This conclusion is significant because collaboration can overcome barriers and encourage private and public actors to innovate through effective leadership and management (Torfing, 2019).

Social capital is the collective resources accumulated through various social relationships (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Carpiano (2008) coined the phrase *network-based social capital* to elucidate the collective efforts of community members in fostering relationships through their participation in neighborhood institutions and organizations. Social capital networks connect individuals who may be geographically distant, enabling them to establish connections, collaborate, and access new opportunities. An and Western (2019) emphasized the

importance of social capital in facilitating youth participation in extracurricular activities, highlighting the reciprocal support and strength individuals derive from relevant shared experiences. Such positive relationships play a critical role in the success of young individuals, underscoring the need to understand how these relationships impact academic achievement and overall well-being (Sethi & Scales, 2020).

The relationship between students and teachers represents a form of social capital that can enhance educational equity among low-income students (Scales et al., 2021). Positive teacher-student relationships foster cooperation and academic success while crucial in positive youth development. However, these relationships are not equally distributed among disconnected youth, particularly young people of color living in challenging urban environments who face barriers to accessing social capital that supports their positive development (Boat et al., 2021). Organizational leaders can provide essential support and guidance to help these individuals navigate complex barriers and leverage social capital to improve their educational and professional opportunities (Dill & Ozer, 2019).

Salloum et al. (2017) explored the evolving concept of social capital; they emphasized the importance of social capital measures in understanding the distribution of school social capital and its link to academic achievement. Salloum et al. found that social capital is critical to a school's academic success, as it reflects students' level of social support. Consequently, the researchers recommended implementing strategies to enhance social capital within schools. Similarly, Hope et al. (2019) highlighted the significance of church-based support networks in facilitating the success of minority youth by providing psychosocial and practical resources to navigate life's challenges. Likewise, Roksa and Kinsley (2019) reported that low-income family

members play a vital role in supporting children's educational success by providing emotional support, thus fostering a positive psychological outlook.

Aligned with Salloum et al.'s (2017) emphasis on social capital as a predictor of academic success and an area for improvement within schools, scholars have recognized the potential of social capital to influence educational outcomes positively (Coleman, 1988; Goddard, 2003). Other researchers have argued that social capital is deeply embedded in society and similarly influences youth outcomes as their background and context (Bourdieu, 1986; Ream, 2003). Community-based organizations are also well-positioned to act as social brokers in their communities, building effective relationships with underrepresented students and addressing social capital disparities (Ramirez, 2021). Scales et al. (2021) highlighted the fundamental role of relational social capital in achieving school success, with high levels of social capital predicting academic performance and engagement. The researchers advocated effectively leveraging teacher-student relationships to promote educational equity for low-income students. Furthermore, students' academic success links to their social capital levels, which are explainable by their family social networks (Putnam, 2000).

Reynolds and Parrish (2018) argued that natural mentors can help mitigate the social class differences between college students from different backgrounds, particularly in college attendance for poor and working-class youth. However, Reynolds and Parrish did not find evidence suggesting that the presence of mentors increased the likelihood of degree completion. In contrast, Ashtiani and Feliciano (2018) claimed that young adults from low-income households who developed enduring relationships with mentors and gained new social resources tended to improve their educational outcomes. Similarly, Gowdy et al. (2021) asserted that

middle-class youth have greater economic mobility than their low-income counterparts, resulting in better access to benefits, including natural mentors.

Raposa et al. (2018) discovered that low-income youth have significantly fewer natural sources of adult mentors. Instead, their support networks primarily consist of close family and friends, providing more cultural support than professional guidance. Raposa et al.'s finding suggests that support networks for young people vary depending on their socioeconomic background. Multiple mentoring relationships promote academic success and graduation rates for low-income students. Such relationships help underrepresented students develop self-esteem, trust in non-parental adults, and access to cultural capital necessary for navigating societal norms (Hagler, 2018). Natural mentoring relationships can have long-lasting effects on young people's development trajectories, as they are more likely to achieve higher educational attainment when mentored by teachers, coaches, and employers rather than relying solely on close family members and friends (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018).

Researchers have consistently found that factors beyond teachers' control impact academic achievement. Minority students with higher levels of social capital and dynamic social networks tend to experience greater academic success than their counterparts with lower levels of social capital (Lu et al., 2022; Stadtfeld et al., 2018). Schwartz et al. (2018) revealed that social capital extends beyond high school and plays a critical role in college and career success, particularly for first-generation students. On-campus relationships can contribute to higher academic success and closer student-instructor relationships. High schools also play a crucial role in developing cultural and educational competencies among students. Jack (2016) found that lower-income students who entered college with higher levels of social capital were better equipped to engage with their college professors. In contrast, students who did not acquire the

same level of social capital during high school were less likely to engage in meaningful dialogue with authority figures in academic contexts. Munn (2018) investigated the influence of race on social capital and found that highly involved White individuals did not integrate their close friends of color into their daily activities. Dividing lines were often maintained based on various factors, including racial and structural power differentials. White students tended to form relationships with racially homogeneous organizations, indicating a lack of social trust and participation in civic engagement among racial minorities, stemming from perceived discrimination and stereotyping (Abascal & Baldassarri, 2015).

Moschetti and Hudley (2015) challenged the notion that the benefits of social capital are exclusively limited to youth from low-income racial minorities. The researchers contended that these benefits extend to first-generation, working-class White students, helping them overcome obstacles and achieve their academic goals. Social capital provides adolescents with a supportive environment to realize their potential and can enhance the effects of intrinsic motivation (Guo & Qu, 2021). Social capital in the classroom and on-campus and community social capital positively influence intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Koyanagi et al., 2021). The bonds and relationships established with teachers can contribute to developing students' autonomous intrinsic motivation.

Population Considerations

In March 2022, the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB) released two reports analyzing the accuracy of the 2020 population count, namely the Post-Enumeration Survey (PES) and the Demographic Analysis Estimates (DA; USCB, 2022). The reports revealed that certain populations, including Black, African American, American Indian, and Alaska Native communities, were undercounted in the census. Compared to the 2010 census, the undercount of

Black, Latino, and American Indian/Alaskan Native populations increased by 3.30%, 4.99%, and 5.64%, respectively, and these increases were statistically significant. On the other hand, the census overcounted non-Hispanic White and Asian populations (USCB, 2022). The accuracy of the census is crucial as results determine the allocation of political power and resources for government programs. The undercounting of minority populations poses significant challenges to their representation and political participation. Relying on the inaccurate results of the 2020 Census can potentially worsen social equity issues, particularly in marginalized communities (Berry-James et al., 2020).

According to the U.S. Constitution, political power-sharing must rest on the population. However, race, immigration status, and homeownership can influence participation in the census (Acuna, 2020). With billions of dollars at stake, every community in the United States has a vested interest in ensuring that its residents enjoy accurate census representation. Each uncounted household directly impacts the quality of the census data, leading to inaccurate decisions by government officials and businesses. During his first year in office, through an executive order, President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. announced a federal plan to advance equity and improve the conditions of minorities and people of color who have been historically underrepresented and underserved (Exec. Order No. 13985, 2021). Biden defined equity as:

The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals in underserved communities, typically denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color. (Exec. Order No. 13985, 2021, Sec., 2.)

The USCB and other governmental institutions must prioritize producing accurate data that reflects the diverse communities in America (Berry-James et al., 2020). The results of the

Decennial Census and American Community Surveys play a significant role in ensuring that communities receive their fair share of federal funding, including grants and support for essential infrastructure such as schools, roads, and public works. Adequate funding is vital in addressing education inequity, particularly for children from low-income households (DeLuca, 2018).

Students from low-income backgrounds require additional resources to achieve equal educational opportunities (Heise, 2019). Under ESEA, services provided in Title I schools must be comparable to those offered in non-Title I schools. The Title I program of the U.S. Department of Education (DoE) aims to ensure that all children receive a fair and equitable education, focusing on addressing proficiency gaps that disproportionately affect children from low-income households. Funding allocations to school districts are based on the number of economically disadvantaged children in each district, as recorded in the annual census conducted by the DoE. Jackson et al. (2016) revealed that school finance reforms increased per-pupil spending and improved educational outcomes for low-income children. R. C. Johnson (2015) also highlighted the positive association between increased school funding and factors such as higher educational attainment and graduation rates, demonstrating the unmistakable impact of school finance reforms on the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children. However, per-pupil expenditures in Title I schools tended to be lower than in non-Title I schools (Heuer & Stullich, 2011; Klein, 2011).

Social Equity and Education

Frederickson (2015) identified critical domains of social equity, encompassing employment, shelter, nutrition, clothing, health care, and education. The author emphasized that public administration should consider the communities' needs when designing a distribution process to improve outcomes across these social equity domains. Addressing disparities and

inequities in these areas can reduce social instability. Likewise, Sahlberg and Cobbold (2021) argued that when considering educational equity, it is crucial to focus on the educational outcomes of students, as this provides a comprehensive perspective on equity in education. The researchers also highlighted that social equity is particularly relevant when comparing groups rather than individuals, as it allows for a broader examination of societal disparities and inequities.

Educational Adequacy

The concept of educational adequacy has a longstanding presence in U.S. history, signifying the need to enhance the quality of the public school system to cater effectively to the diverse needs of students (Swensson & Shaffer, 2020). The notion of adequacy revolves around providing students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to become productive members of society and actively contribute to their communities (Rebell, 2016). Kissel (2021) called for a profound transformation of the nation's education system to achieve sufficiency in meeting the needs of all students. Emphasizing equality, Kissel suggested adopting more equitable school practices to ensure that every student receives appropriate attention and support. By prioritizing the needs of all students and implementing just practices, society can move closer to achieving educational equality and ensuring that every student can succeed.

Benefits of Quality Education

The ability to contribute to society and one's family through education can foster a vibrant and enriching community. Education enables individuals to contribute meaningfully to society and their families in diverse ways. Hanushek et al. (2016) demonstrated that improving the quality of education can yield long-term economic benefits, particularly for developing economies. Enhancing educational quality could lead to economic gains exceeding \$27 trillion

(Schleicher, 2018). Moreover, the financial returns resulting from improved educational quality would be sufficient to cover the entire cost of education for all students in high-income countries by 2030 (Schleicher, 2018).

Furthermore, Parker et al. (2018) suggested an inverse relationship between academic achievement and inequality—providing high-quality education and striving for equality of educational opportunities are not mutually exclusive endeavors. Countries that offer high-quality education and actively pursue equal opportunities fare better, as there is no evidence of a trade-off between education quality and equality of educational opportunities (Pfeffer, 2014). An inclusive school culture is critical to improving educational outcomes (Ainscow et al., 2019). Building strong partnerships with parents and communities is vital in promoting educational equity. Communities can create a supportive and inclusive environment that empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to society and their families by prioritizing educational quality and pursuing equality of educational opportunities (Goodall, 2018).

Cost of Inequity

Saraiva (2021) suggested that the growing inequality in employment, education, and earnings in the U.S. has resulted in an economic loss of over \$22.9 trillion over the past 3 decades, a figure expected to continue rising as minority populations expand. While inequity and inequality are distinct concepts, both stem from cultural exclusion and injustice. Historical factors, policies, and social norms have perpetuated both issues. Torraco (2018) established a connection between economic inequality and educational inequity. The author observed that as the income gap between the rich and the poor has widened, educational disparities in the system have also increased, with low-income students facing lower college completion rates. The persistence of intergenerational educational and income inequality links to various social

gradients that impact educational opportunities and outcomes (Andersen, 2019). Changes in educational decisions not only have immediate effects on individuals but they also have long-term implications for the social backgrounds of future generations. For instance, certain advantages associated with social privilege can translate into higher educational attainment, highlighting that children from privileged backgrounds are more likely to attain higher degrees than nonprivileged backgrounds (Heisig et al., 2020).

Minorities' Diminished Return

The diminished return phenomenon refers to the social and psychological inequality experienced by African Americans, where the effects of various socioeconomic resources have a systematically smaller impact than Whites (Assari, 2018b). Children of highly educated parents generally show a reduced risk of problems such as poor health and economic stress among young people (Assari, 2018a). The educational attainment of racial and ethnic minority parents also links to multiple outcomes during adolescence. Increasing the educational levels of racial and ethnic minorities is considered a primary strategy for addressing disparities experienced by children and adolescents from these groups (Bowden et al., 2017). The impact of attaining a high level of education on school performance and educational attainment is more pronounced among non-Hispanic White adolescents compared to Black and Hispanic adolescents (Assari et al., 2020). The interactions between racial and ethnic groups and educational attainment are significant, with Hispanic and Black adolescents experiencing smaller tangible gains from attaining a high level of education. The diminished returns associated with the Black-White mental health phenomenon suggest that the salience of health may diminish for African Americans (Cobb et al., 2020).

Parental Involvement

The literature underscores the shared responsibility of parents and schools in educating children, with the family environment and parental engagement playing crucial roles in fostering academic success (Harris et al., 2020). Parental involvement is consistently associated with positive academic outcomes for African American children across different educational stages, including pre-elementary, elementary, secondary school, and even the first year of college (Jeynes, 2016). Through a meta-analysis, Castro et al. (2015) further supported the link between parental involvement and students' academic achievement in kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools. The researchers found that parents who prioritized general supervision of their children's learning activities and had high expectations for their academic performance tended to have children with higher achievement levels. Tan et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis highlighting several significant forms of parental involvement associated with children's academic achievement. These included parents' educational expectations, support for student learning, discussion of school topics, participation in governance and events, engagement in joint reading with children, and emphasis on the importance of education.

Jeynes (2015) emphasized that combining factors can reduce the achievement gap, particularly between elementary and secondary schools. The author highlighted the significant impact of faith and family on the achievement gap and school outcomes. Similarly, Parnes et al. (2020) noted that underrepresented college students may experience academic achievement gaps due to social support disparities. However, consistent with Jeynes' findings, increasing social capital can help narrow these achievement gaps, particularly among first-generation college students. Ma et al. (2022) stressed the importance of social capital manifested through robust

teacher-student relationships and parental involvement as factors that enhance academic performance.

The Impact of Churches

Local Churches' Perceived Impact

Han et al. (2020) found that the dimensions of social capital, including interdependence, trust, and friendship networks, strongly predicted knowledge sharing, indicating that social capital plays a significant role in facilitating knowledge exchange. Jeynes (2010) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis exploring the relationship between personal belief and the achievement gap, specifically focusing on the influence of faith in reducing such gaps. Jeynes' findings indicated that higher levels of faith were associated with lower achievement gaps. The analysis also revealed that higher levels of personal religious belief and commitment linked to a reduction in the achievement gap. Moreover, supplemental analyses suggested that when African American students came from intact families, the achievement gap between them and their peers disappeared. Jeynes remarked:

The results suggest that personal religious faith among African Americans may play a prominent role in reducing the achievement gap. Of all the variables included as potentially bridging the achievement gap, religious faith was the one that produced the largest effect size. (p. 274)

Families play an essential role in their children's education. Family involvement can help children improve their academic success and make them more likely to stay engaged. Students can reach academic success through their parents' participation in their intellectual development; this pathway predates parents' subjective social mobility (Zhang et al., 2020). Jeynes (2010) observed this vital connection, "The fact that the combination of a high degree of personal

religious faith and the family structure in which a student resides eliminates the achievement gap could potentially produce one of the chief academic breakthroughs of the next generation” (pp. 274–275). Jeynes posited that family factors, such as faith and family, produced a significantly lower achievement gap than school-based solutions.

Churches and Public-School Partnerships

Jordan and Wilson (2017) conducted a comparative case study focusing on two churches to examine the unique partnerships between Black churches and public schools and their impact on the academic improvement of African American students. One of the churches had a longstanding commitment to the well-being of African Americans, while the other mobilized its large membership to provide various community services. The churches recognized the influence of racial issues on the public school system and went beyond traditional academic achievement to uplift Black youth’s cultural worth and potential. In addition to social capital, J. J. Park et al. (2020) highlighted the concept of spiritual capital, accessible through successful partnerships within communities of color. The authors described spiritual capital as a set of skills and resources rooted in a spiritual connection, which can support parents in nurturing their children’s resilience and developing community cultural wealth. Jordan and Wilson (2017) challenged the perception of Black people through a lens of deviance and emphasized the importance of valuing and empowering Black youth. The church programs provided opportunities for students to defy low expectations and challenge prevailing beliefs in public education. These efforts exemplified a post-civil rights model that encouraged collaborations and cross-cultural alliances, illustrating the benefits of local churches’ involvement in their communities.

Expanding on the role of churches, Shapiro (2021) highlighted the fundamental connection between health and religion, with social capital playing a significant role. Multilevel

church-based programs can address racial and cultural health disparities in vulnerable African American and Latino communities, as noted by Flórez et al. (2020). The activities of local organizations, including religious institutions, are intertwined with a community's cultural and social norms. Different religious traditions may exhibit varying ministry styles, some promoting bridging social capital while others may contribute to weakening such capital. Additionally, Deller et al. (2018) found that religious institutions can significantly influence organizational activities.

Church's Historical Impact on Education

Churches have historically played a significant role in education, with their influence extending to social change policies in the 21st century. Tröhler (2020) argued that the theoretical education models of the 20th century connect to the Protestant Reformation. Winther-Jensen (2019) emphasized that the Reformation led to a unified and distinctive development in European education through a series of reforms. Black churches, in particular, have a history of being at the forefront of resistance against social injustices. Today, Black churches continue to serve their local communities by contributing to improving neighborhoods and civic development (Jordan & Wilson, 2017). Despite its importance, social capital is not yet widely recognized as crucial in understanding the interactions between schools and community members. However, through partnerships involving various stakeholders in the community, schools can help students develop the necessary skills to thrive in the global economy (Murillo et al., 2017). The collaborative efforts between churches, schools, and other community members have the potential to enhance educational outcomes and create positive societal impacts.

Regional Differences

Most of the existing research on the partnership between churches and public schools has primarily focused on religiously oriented areas of the country. I addressed this gap in this study by examining this phenomenon in more secular regions. There are notable differences in the level of spiritual engagement among different communities in the United States. In 2017, the Southeast and Southwest regions, commonly called the Bible Belt, were characterized by higher religiosity than other areas, such as the Pacific Northwest and New England, which had a lower prevalence of religious states (Norman, 2018). Given the significant rise of secularism in these other regions, I explored the impact of secularism on the likelihood of educational leaders partnering with local churches. By understanding how secularism influences the willingness of educational leaders to engage with churches, valuable insights can emerge concerning effectively leveraging the social capital of churches to benefit students who may be struggling academically.

Summary

Recognizing the crucial partnership between local churches and urban school districts is essential for addressing the challenges faced in education. Collaboration between churches and public schools can lead to outcomes that are greater than the sum of individual efforts. Churches have the potential to significantly contribute to the success of schools by providing support to students and their families. Schools must foster an inclusive culture and envision inclusivity to establish effective community-school partnerships (Haines et al., 2015). The theories discussed in this literature review offer valuable insights into understanding the complex factors contributing to the achievement gap in urban schools. Educational inequity has been a persistent issue in the United States, particularly in urban districts where the achievement gap is more pronounced in schools with limited per capita spending. Factors such as racial segregation and

household unemployment further exacerbate the achievement gap in urban schools. Despite various initiatives to improve academic outcomes for low-income students, many programs have yielded limited success. Partnering with local churches can help students acquire the necessary skills to thrive in the global economy. By recognizing the potential of collaboration between churches and urban school districts, it becomes possible to address the inequities and challenges students face and work towards closing the achievement gap. Chapter 3 continues the dissertation with a thorough explanation of the methods employed to conduct the research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

In Chapter 3, I outline the methodology and research design used for conducting a multi-case study focusing on the influence of local churches in improving educational equity and academic performance in urban districts. By investigating this phenomenon, I aimed to facilitate the formation of more effective partnerships between local churches and public schools, ultimately reducing educational inequity in urban areas. The chosen method of inquiry for this research was the case study approach, which involves a detailed examination of a complex real-life situation. Case studies focus on investigating a single phenomenon within its authentic context, distinguishing them from studies encompassing multiple topics and data points (Yin, 2018). I addressed a literature gap by providing a comprehensive understanding beyond the constitutional debates surrounding religion and public schools. I examined how churches can contribute to urban districts in overcoming obstacles that hinder their academic missions. Chapter 3 provides a thorough description of the study design, including the research setting, participants, procedures, the role of the researcher, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and considerations of trustworthiness. Additionally, ethical considerations related to the study receive attention.

Research Design

I conducted a qualitative multi-case study involving interviews with participants from three churches in the Northeast region to explore the perspectives of pastors and church leaders on their role in addressing the achievement gap in urban districts. I chose the case study approach to allow for a deep exploration of the participants' experiences and insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research enables the researcher to connect with the participants and

encourages them to express their thoughts and contribute to the overall discourse (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My topic offered a unique perspective not commonly covered in existing scholarly or qualitative studies, making it suitable for a case study method (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). I employed non-statistical inquiry and analysis methods to analyze the participants' lived experiences and uncover insights related to social phenomena. A quantitative research method focusing on statistical causes of the achievement gap would not have allowed for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015); thus, I did not deem the quantitative method appropriate for this study. I adopted a qualitative multi-case study design to understand local churches and urban schools' collaborative efforts to reduce the achievement gap. The analysis process involved extracting and interpreting the meaning of the experiences shared by church leaders, focusing on uncovering and describing the essence of their respective experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

While ethnographic studies typically focus on understanding specific cultural or social groups by identifying behavior and language patterns, I did not focus this study on cultural aspects (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology, on the other hand, focuses on the lived experiences of individuals, while grounded theory aims to develop a substantive approach by analyzing the interactions between people and phenomena (Given, 2008). According to Yin (2018), a case study strategy involves studying a phenomenon as a dynamic process in its natural context, aiming to explain its global scope and complexity. Yin prefers the case study method because it generates meaningful and interpretive inferences from various observable sources. Researchers commonly use case studies to thoroughly analyze organizational phenomena and study specific strategies as social practices (Lavarda & Bellucci, 2022). The researcher must consider access when selecting cases (Given, 2008), and construct validity often receives

considerable attention in case studies due to the use of multiple indicators to represent a theoretical concept (Given, 2008). Multiple foci allow case study researchers to generate accurate and reliable interpretations (Given, 2008), thus enabling researchers to study groups in a targeted manner.

Researchers typically use a case study to investigate a specific topic or issue with clear boundaries (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Access to relevant and contextual material is crucial for a deeper understanding of the subject—in this context, researchers prefer the case study approach because the design assists in describing complex phenomena and drawing inferences from various sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through case study generalization, researchers can expand the scope of the study to a larger population (Yin, 2013). Qualitative case study techniques allow researchers to explore complex phenomena in each context (Rashid et al., 2019), including in-depth studies on factors influencing educational opportunities for minority students. Ebneyamini and Sadeghi (2018) argued that the case study method effectively achieves theoretical and practical goals.

I analyzed data from local churches through a multi-case study to formulate conclusions and make more informed decisions, following Yin's (2018) processes. I recruited pastors and church leaders as participants, chosen to provide insights and realities about their efforts to reduce the school achievement gap. Therefore, I deemed a multi-case study approach appropriate for this project. As a case study design helps determine how and why the phenomenon occurred within its real-world context (Yin, 2018), I used a multi-case study approach to analyze complex issues involving local churches and public schools focused on cross-case comparisons, evaluation, and informed decision-making (Ćwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Ebneyamini & Sadeghi, 2018; Stake, 2013). Some researchers find evidence from multiple cases more compelling

(Ćwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Greene & David, 1984). In a multi-case study, the concept of the single case is crucial for identifying various characteristics and conditions that bind the cases together and provide examples of a phenomenon (Stake, 2013). The analysis in a multi-case study should maintain contextual meaning throughout the report (Stake, 2013).

Research Questions

Central Question

What have been the perceptions of the local church leaders' impact on reducing educational inequity in majority-minority schools?

Sub-Question 1

How do local church leaders perceive the impact of their partnership on improving educational equity and lowering the achievement gap in local schools?

Sub-Question 2

Why do local churches provide services and resources to support educational equity? What are the experiences, barriers, and successes?

Sub-Question 3

Why do factors such as faith and family significantly impact school outcomes?

Setting and Participants

I used a sampling method that ensured the participant pool was representative and provided sufficient confidence in supporting the conclusions (Berndt, 2020). Unlike quantitative research, samples are not randomly selected; non-probability sampling methods are used (Gill, 2020). Non-probability sampling is often employed in exploratory studies, which allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon with a smaller sample size (Hennink et al., 2019). Common non-probability sampling techniques include purposive, convenience, and snowball

(Given, 2008). In this study, I used non-probability sampling to identify three sites based on their location and demographic data. I sent invitations to participate in the study to each church via email, specifically targeting the program directors. The invitations provided information about me, the research purpose, and the study's design. Participants also received an outline outlining their expectations regarding the data collection process and ethical considerations.

Setting

The multi-case study occurred in the U.S. Northeast, specifically in local churches and school districts. The main churches are in the south end of a large city and have multi-generational congregations. The liturgy is vibrant and diverse, incorporating various styles of music. Churches play a vital role in northeast communities, offering multiple programs and activities and serving as a model for other faith communities dedicated to living out their faith through service. I initially reached out to a list of former classmates from the seminary to identify potential local churches that partner with public schools. However, none of the original churches responded positively to my inquiry. I then queried online to expand my search for churches and discovered a defunct faith-based nonprofit organization. The organization's director shared a spreadsheet about numerous churches and nonprofits serving under-resourced schools. I carefully reviewed each site's details to understand better their long-term impact in addressing educational inequity.

Despite being considered an affluent area, the city region where I undertook most of the study houses a significant number of low-to-no-income residents, contributing to one of the highest concentrations of individuals below the poverty living in the area (South End, 2017). With a population of over 38,000, the South End is home to more than 11,600 individuals living with low-to-no income, accounting for approximately 30% of the total population (South End,

2017). The South End also includes various vulnerable population groups, such as people experiencing homelessness and those with low income, with a substantial number of public and subsidized housing units amounting to over 3,300 (South End, 2017).

St. Matthew's Church

The first site chosen was St Matthew's Church (SMC, a pseudonym), an Episcopal church established in the Northeast United States more than 100 years ago and has been deeply involved with the community ever since. Over the past 24 years, SMC has been committed to promoting education in the local community, offering services such as tutoring, mentoring, and after-school activities for underserved students in the area. The church's after-school program provides a comprehensive educational experience for the children, including traditional subjects like music, art, dance, and STEM activities. By incorporating science, technology, engineering, and mathematics into the program, the church ensures that the students are exposed to a wide range of topics, fostering their curiosity and critical thinking skills. The multidisciplinary approach enhances their learning experiences and equips them with valuable knowledge and competencies necessary for success in today's rapidly advancing world. By integrating STEM activities, the church demonstrates its dedication to children's holistic development and preparation for future academic and personal achievements.

A new priest was appointed to revitalize the church and reconnect with the neighborhood. Seeking guidance, the priest consulted a bishop who advised engaging directly with the community to understand their needs. Inspired by this advice, the priest began conversing with passersby at the church's doorstep and encouraged parishioners to do the same. Through these interactions, they gained insights into the genuine needs of the community. Despite encountering impediments at the initial stages, the church remained resilient and used those setbacks as

opportunities for growth and improvement. Church personnel continuously learned from each experience, refining their approach. Through this iterative process, enrichment programs gradually emerged, eventually coalescing into the robust after-school program we see today. The transformative journey revitalized the church and exemplified the power of perseverance and community engagement in effecting positive change and meeting the needs of those they serve.

The Learning Partnership

The second site chosen was The Learning Partnership (TLP, a pseudonym), a nonprofit organization created by a church in the Northeast United States to provide academic and social support to underserved students in local public schools. This Christian organization works with churches, schools, and other nonprofit organizations to empower urban students in urban schools. TLP's mission is to foster the success and well-being of students by cultivating and strengthening partnerships between churches and schools, promoting community engagement at the local level, advocating for systemic improvements, and actively participating in wider networks, coaching, and educational opportunities such as tutoring, career guidance, mentoring, college preparation help, and summer enrichment activities. TLP originated from the intentional vision of a Christian nonprofit organization aiming to bring about meaningful change in the urban context, recognizing the unique challenges faced in urban school districts and the need to address educational inequities. With this goal in mind, TLP emerged to harness the influence of local churches. TLP has also demonstrated leadership and coaching in guiding multiple churches to collaborate in serving a specific school, with each church contributing its unique capabilities. The multi-church partnership approach reflects the diversity and unity of the Christian church. Despite their differences, each church brings strengths, resources, and perspectives to the partnership and a shared sense of responsibility. An example of such collaboration is a

partnership between a predominantly White and predominantly Black church to serve an urban school.

The City Church

The City Church (TCC, a pseudonym) was the third site chosen. TCC partners with local public schools to deliver academic and social services to students. In close collaboration with other organizations, TCC strives to provide educational resources, enrichment activities, and mentorship opportunities to support its underserved student population. Additionally, TCC extends its support to the parents of these students by offering parenting resources that empower them to participate actively in their children's education. The church members feel it is incredibly fulfilling to combine their passion for impacting the community and seeing students grow and thrive through the education programs. Though the pastor is not directly involved in the day-to-day activity of the academic programs, the church has empowered the executive director to create an environment where students receive the necessary tools to succeed. He explained, "Our mission is to stimulate community action for change, ensuring that all children in the city's public schools receive a good education. We see ourselves as coming along to provide encouragement and stand in the gap."

TCC decided to establish the City Education Initiative (CEI, pseudonym) as an independent nonprofit organization to enhance its service to the community. This separation allows CEI to focus specifically on its goals and responsibilities without being weighed down by the broader responsibilities of the church. By becoming an independent entity, CEI gained the ability to address the specific needs of the community it serves more effectively. Additionally, this move allowed the church greater flexibility to collaborate with partners and explore new funding sources. Moreover, as a separate nonprofit organization, CEI can concentrate on its

unique mission and objectives without being limited by the constraints of the church's overarching agenda. With its mission to promote educational equity, TCC's work has profoundly influenced the lives of its congregation and local community. The organization consistently pursues excellence to realize its vision of a future where all students have equal opportunities to reach their full potential, achieved through innovative initiatives and fruitful partnerships.

Participants

I employed a purposeful sampling procedure to gather the most relevant information about the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling involves deliberately selecting cases that provide insightful and compelling information for developing theoretical propositions (Creswell & Poth, 2018), ensuring that individuals who have experienced the central phenomenon are included in the study (Thorne, 2016). I analyzed the collected data to determine their relevance to the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). I collected data from church leaders, staff members, and volunteers in selected churches in the Northeast region of the United States to better understand their perceived impact on reducing educational inequity in majority-minority schools. I identified eight participants as study candidates (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). The research inclusion criteria rested on forming partnerships with schools previously identified as "Need of Improvement" according to NCLB requirements. According to the NCLB, schools must demonstrate adequate yearly progress for 2 consecutive years in the same content area (mathematics and language arts literacy to be considered for improvement (NCLB, 2001). The ESSA (2015) replaced the NCLB and modified some provisions but did not eliminate annual assessment requirements. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021) requested and obtained a waiver from the need for annual assessments in 2019–2020. Students underwent assessment during the

2021–2022 academic year. Through this study, I emphasized schools previously deemed to need improvement.

Researcher Positionality

My role as an associate pastor and an educational specialist in the geographic research area stimulated the rationale for this research. I aimed to address a critical need within urban districts that have low-performing schools. Students and teachers in urban communities face unique challenges compared to their counterparts in suburban neighborhoods. Teaching in urban settings involves distinct instructional and behavioral difficulties. Moreover, urban schools typically have a higher proportion of students from low-income backgrounds, and poverty undeniably links to lower academic achievement (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). Additionally, linguistic, cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity characterize these districts, further complicating traditional approaches to closing the achievement gap. As a Christian, exploring and understanding the perceived influence of selective churches in urban districts is a way to demonstrate care and concern for the community.

Interpretive Framework

I chose *social constructivism* as the interpretive framework for this research study. Social constructivism emphasizes the development of meanings based on individuals' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The social constructivist paradigm recognizes that individuals construct their understanding of the world through interactions and social contexts. Applying a social constructivism interpretive framework assisted my exploration of how churches and local districts operate within this framework, uncovering the complexity of meanings and possibilities of interpretation that emerged from these interactions and contexts. Social constructivist thought assumes that people's experiences are real and that a researcher can understand the participant's

reality if they can glimpse it from their opinions (Jung, 2019). Creating an environment for the participants to describe their experiences drove me to understand the “how and the why” through corresponding interpretations within their respective contexts (Yin, 2018, p. 4).

Philosophical Assumptions

The *theory of assumption* plays a critical role in research projects as it involves identifying visible and invisible phenomena, achievable educational goals, and effective strategies (Wegerif, 2008). Researchers widely recognize the importance of ethical considerations in their work (Mazandarani, 2021). I focused on three philosophical assumptions. The first assumption pertains to ontology, which concerns the nature of reality and its characteristics. The second assumption relates to epistemology, which considers what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified. The final assumption focuses on axiology, which concerns the role of values in research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ontological Assumption

I presented the multiple realities of participants’ experiences, considering the diverse forms of evidence and recognizing that I could not understand these facts in isolation from the participants’ lived environments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ontological dispositions are crucial in qualitative research as they provide a deeper understanding of the researcher’s role in the research process (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Furthermore, researchers’ ontological positions often influence how they describe emotions and determine the dimensions of emotions in the research, and they can significantly impact data collection and coding processes (Kouamé & Liu, 2021). As such, I explored the experiences of the participants using various approaches. Participants provided their interpretations of the perceived impact of local churches in the

selected urban districts. Participants reflected on their perspectives within their respective contexts using diverse research techniques.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology refers to how people acquire and derive knowledge. In qualitative research, researchers strive to closely engage with participants to ensure that subjective evidence is collected based on their viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers must maintain consistency between the research methods employed and the philosophical position taken to ensure the quality of the research (Bleiker et al., 2019). In this exploratory multi-case analysis, I examined various aspects of the collected data to identify the underlying epistemological assumptions influencing student achievement in urban districts. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative techniques allow researchers to broaden their inquiry using an epistemological framework to generate comprehensive data (Bansal et al., 2018). Consequently, I used surveys, in-depth interviews, and a focus group to understand better the phenomenon of partnerships between local churches and school districts. I collected rich and detailed data about participants' experiences, practices, and environments, which will aid in understanding their unique perspectives.

Axiological Assumption

Axiology directly influences qualitative research ethics by providing a framework for making explicit assumptions underlying the research process (Given, 2008). Researchers inherently bring their subjective values and assumptions when interpreting data, a phenomenon called an axiological assumption (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of this proposed study, my knowledge and worldview may have influenced how I interpreted the data. Additionally, my personal beliefs and values might have impacted participant interactions—I employed bracketing

to address this potential bias. Bracketing allows researchers to recognize and set aside their preconceived notions consciously, minimizing the influence of ethnocentrism, egocentrism, and personal experiences (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I aimed to ensure a more objective and unbiased approach to data interpretation by employing bracketing.

Researcher's Role

Qualitative researchers are encouraged to bring their whole selves into the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018); this is evident through the relational component that is central to qualitative research, where the researchers themselves serve as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Unlike in an experimental or quasi-experimental setting, in the capacity of a human instrument, I could immediately respond to questions, make necessary adjustments, and verify the accuracy with respondents without compromising the study's quality (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Moreover, as an associate pastor and educator in the same community, I was aware of my biases and limitations, particularly in church and public school partnerships. This unique background allowed me to connect with participants who shared similar values, particularly the belief that local churches can contribute to addressing community issues by fostering strong networks. The opportunity emerged for participants to recognize the significance of the research and develop a deeper appreciation for the collaborative work we share as fellow pastors and church leaders. Additionally, no direct affiliations exist between the churches and schools involved in the study. In the proposed research, my role as the researcher was solely that of a human instrument seeking to understand the efforts of local church leaders in addressing educational inequity in urban schools. No external assistance was involved in conducting the research. Saint Matthew's Church and the

partner churches were selected for this case study to shed light on the issue of educational inequity in majority-minority public schools.

Bracketing is an analytical technique that allows researchers to access participants' narratives by temporarily setting aside their presuppositions (Gyollai, 2020). The bracketing process often involves the researcher discussing their own experiences related to the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Dörfler and Stierand (2021), from a theoretical perspective, bracketing does not aim for complete objectivity but instead embraces subjectivity and places it at the forefront. By employing bracketing, I consciously examined preconceived notions that may have influenced the data analysis. While it was not entirely possible to eliminate certain preconceptions, I was aware of the biases that could potentially impact the interpretation of the data. Despite my connections with the study's participants as the human instrument, I did not provide personal perspectives on the findings. Regarding the church I serve, it does not have any partnerships with public schools. However, as part of its outreach efforts, my church provides financial resources to Caribbean schools. I do not possess direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation, which ensured the absence of biases, presuppositions, assumptions, or previous experiences related to the phenomenon.

Procedures

Several components are typically involved in a qualitative case study, including archival records, interviews, documentation, physical artifacts, direct observation, and participant observation (Yin, 2018). P. R. Smith (2018) highlighted the importance of data triangulation and using multiple data sources and methods to comprehensively understand the phenomena under study. In line with this, the following procedural framework guided my approach to the case study, aligning with the purpose and rationale of the research. Data collection and management

techniques were initiated based on the research questions and purpose statement, addressing the specific phenomenon of interest. I conducted interviews with participants and transcribed detailed notes to ensure accuracy and facilitate analysis and data analysis per the research purpose, rationale, and research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The analysis of interview data involved transcribing notes and engaging in a critical reading of the transcriptions. Member checking was also employed, allowing participants to review the collected data and ensure its accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I systematically coded each transcript in a line-by-line format and categorized the data into themes to provide a coherent response (Saldaña, 2016).

Permissions

Before data collection commenced, I obtained written site approval for each proposed location (see Appendix A). Further, I contacted the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University and submitted the site approval and application for study approval upon receiving the required permissions. Once I received IRB approval, I contacted the local churches and urban schools to explain the research purpose.

Recruitment Plan

The recruitment process is a central component of the design of a qualitative research study and can help develop a deeper understanding of the participants' attitudes and behaviors (Bonisteel et al., 2021). Using one recruitment strategy is not practical. Webber-Ritchey et al. (2021) advised researchers to use purposive and snowball sampling to increase diversity. Purposive sampling involves matching the sample to the study's objectives and aims, thereby improving the data's rigor, trustworthiness, and results (Campbell et al., 2020). Bonisteel et al. (2021) identified four factors influencing the recruitment process: (a) communication, (b) participant interest, (c) trust, and (d) availability. In line with the analysis of a case study, I

explored the perceived impact of local church leaders on reducing educational inequity in majority-minority schools and gained insights into the processes that may shape their perceptions of program effectiveness. Therefore, I focused on identifying individuals most likely to participate and aligning with the specific criteria and objectives determined by the selected research questions.

I employed purposive sampling, which enhances the overall quality of the research outcomes and bolsters the credibility of the data collected (Campbell et al., 2020), as it ensures that the sampling aligned closely with the aims and objectives of the research, allowing for the collection of more accurate and comprehensive data. I used a sample size of eight, as a qualitative sample size of over 12 participants or more than 30 interviews in a homogeneous population would require justification (Boddy, 2016). The richness of the data received from the cases rather than the quantity determines the sample size in multi-case study research (Yin, 2018). In addition to purposive sampling, I used snowball or chain sampling as it allowed me to identify cases of interest from knowledgeable people about the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I recruited new church leaders through the snowball strategy. A former director of a faith-based nonprofit organization referred them to me, and I selected participants based on their interests.

During the recruitment process, I initially targeted candidates I knew from my time in seminary and ministry partnerships. I leveraged the existing relationships to increase participation rates among church leaders (Marks et al., 2017); I used this approach to facilitate data gathering and help maintain research timelines. Through the convenience sampling process, I acknowledged the potential motivations of the participants, which is a critical consideration (Stratton, 2021). I used communication tools such as email, social media pages, and phone calls to recruit other church leaders. Where necessary, I conducted in-person visits to the sites for

recruitment purposes. Upon obtaining informed consent from the participants, I scheduled and conducted individual interviews. After completing all interviews, I arranged a focus group session using Google Forms. Conducting the focus group in person can reveal differences in people's opinions and behaviors (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). The focus group captured the commonalities and variations in participants' perspectives regarding the perceived impact of local churches on schools and the community. The goal was to foster a conversation and create an environment that reflected the essence of a qualitative research project involving interviews with individuals, groups, or organizations.

The selection of churches and schools focused on large urban populations in the Northeast U.S. By targeting these participants, I sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of students and their families. I employed interviews, focus groups, and surveys as data collection methods. By studying a broad cross-section of churches and districts, I addressed specific hypotheses and provided comprehensive insights that can benefit all churches and schools, regardless of their geographical locations. The qualitative interview is a crucial component of research studies and serves various purposes in data collection (McGrath et al., 2019). A qualitative interview enables the interviewer to pose follow-up questions, allowing for a more profound understanding and insights from the participant. Through qualitative research, one can explore and comprehend diverse experiences and attitudes. I conducted interviews with senior leadership, staff, and church members, enabling the collection of rich and nuanced data from multiple perspectives.

Data Collection Plan

Data collection is a fundamental process in qualitative research, enabling researchers to gain firsthand insight into the experiences of their subjects (Given, 2008). While qualitative

research often emphasizes theoretical aspects of the topic, it also seeks to explore individuals' experiences through empirical data (Given, 2008). Qualitative researchers typically employ multiple data collection methods, necessitating careful selection for a comprehensive understanding (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). In addition to collecting data, researchers must address ethical considerations, plan for potential issues, develop a strategy, and ensure data security (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I employed three primary data collection methods: (a) surveys, (b) individual interviews, and (c) focus groups. Each method offers unique advantages in capturing different dimensions of the research topic (provide appropriate citations for specific advantages).

Demographic Data

According to Salkind (2010), demographic variables are inherent characteristics not subject to manipulation in research. Nonetheless, the importance of demographic data is widely recognized in research reports and contributes to our understanding of a study (Connelly, 2013). Therefore, I collected comprehensive demographic information to describe the sample thoroughly. Specifically, I collected only the demographic information relevant to the study's objectives, as Salkind (2010) recommended. I carefully planned and executed that data collection step to ensure appropriate analysis and interpretation. I conducted the multi-case study at St. Matthew's Church (pseudonym), located in Massachusetts, using church leaders from St. Matthew's Church and leaders from three partner churches in the area. I collected demographics about race, gender, median annual household income, and average educational level from the church membership.

Demographic Data Analysis

Qualitative inquiry is a valuable approach for exploring researchers' interests and questions regarding demographics, as it allows for a deep understanding of participants' current realities (Chatfield, 2018). I collected primary demographic data from the participant church members to provide contextual information and valuable insights into the local communities, thus allowing researchers to connect it with participants' lived experiences, observations, and historical context. Descriptive statistics helped me to describe and summarize the collected demographic data.

Individual Interviews

In qualitative studies, interviewing individuals is a commonly used method for primary data collection as it allows researchers to capture individuals' perspectives on their experiences (Bloomberg, 2022). Face-to-face interviews are often preferred in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). However, in certain circumstances where in-person meetings are not feasible due to factors like distance, travel logistics, research funding, or the complexities of COVID-19, individual interviews were conducted using Zoom, a video conferencing platform. Video conferencing has become an integral tool in qualitative studies, enabling researchers to collect and disseminate data cost-effectively and enhancing the overall participant experience (Gray et al., 2020). I kept interview questions open-ended to facilitate in-depth analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018), allowing participants to provide detailed responses.

I designed the interview questions in this study to facilitate my exploration of the involvement of local churches in urban schools to generate responses that can undergo in-depth analysis. Individual interviews occurred via Zoom with pastors, leaders, program directors, and staff who possess direct knowledge of the church's role in addressing educational equity in urban

districts. All participants responded to the same open-ended questions, allowing them to provide their responses without being constrained by a predetermined format (Yin, 2009). The existing literature informed these questions on the impact of churches in urban districts, particularly concerning improving educational equity and academic performance.

Researchers must establish rapport with participants when conducting qualitative interviews via video conferencing. This rapport-building process enables researchers to gather detailed information and capture the participants' emotions, leading to a rich, unbiased, and accurate description of their experiences while fostering a sense of trust (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). I designed the study's initial questions (Questions 1–3) to build rapport by exploring participants' backgrounds and their exposure to their church's work in the community. Subsequent questions (Questions 4–7) aimed to delve deeper and elicit information about the participants' direct involvement in urban schools and the church's role in this context (Yin, 2009). The responses to Questions 8–10 shed light on the church's partnerships with schools, further enhancing the researcher's understanding of the topic and identifying key factors contributing to the issue. Finally, Questions 11–15 focused on the churches' ministry philosophy, budgeting strategies, and the evaluation of their effectiveness in engaging with urban schools.

An expert in the field, chosen based on their knowledge and community position, provided feedback on the questions to ensure their relevance (Döringer, 2021).

1. Please tell me about yourself and provide some background information about your family. RQ1.
2. What is your role in this church, and how long have you been a member? RQ1.
3. How long has the church been in this community? RQ1.

4. Has the church always been active in public schools; how and why did the church become involved? RQ1.
5. Explain your work in the public schools. What do you do? RQ2.
6. How does your work in public schools contribute to reducing educational inequity? RQ1.
7. What is your perspective on the cause of the educational inequity in the district? RQ1.
8. Describe your partnership with the local school. What works and what does not work? RQ2.
9. Which specific programs does the church offer to the students at the school? Does it also service their parents and their respective families? RQ2.
10. Describe your worldview and ministry philosophy. How do your beliefs and ministry philosophy enable the church to partner with the schools? RQ3.
11. Do you agree with the percentage of your church's budget reserved for servicing the schools? RQ2.
12. Describe the impact of staff members and volunteers involved in the church's ministry in the schools. RQ1.
13. How often do you evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership? Please describe the results of the last evaluation. RQ1.
14. Describe the church's influence on students and families who are church members and those who are not church members. RQ3.
15. Besides your school partnership, describe the other ways you serve the community. RQ1.
16. Describe your successes and failures. RQ2.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

I used Yin's (2011) five-step process to analyze the data, involving the following: (a) assembling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) concluding the data. First, I assembled the data to establish categories. Secondly, I assembled the data to reduce and remove invariant themes of the phenomenon. Thirdly, I reassembled the data and grouped primary themes. Fourthly, I looked for patterns against the individual and focus group interview transcripts and surveys to interpret the meaning of the data. Fifth and last, I summarized the data into a unique structural description of the participant experiences.

After conducting the individual interviews via video conferencing, I transcribed the data from each interview. The transcriptions underwent multiple reviews to enhance comprehension of the content. In addition to the transcripts, I thoroughly examined the detailed notes and other relevant interview documents. I employed a video analysis system to efficiently capture the central ideas and interview details, which involved playing certain sections of the video in slow motion or replaying specific segments to analyze nuances and details of the interviews (Saldaña, 2016). I used the NVivo thematic coding platform to organize, manage, and categorize the data into thematic areas. While computer aids help handle large amounts of data, they cannot replace a strategic approach that involves defining and interpreting patterns and codes (Yin, 2018). I identified and documented noteworthy patterns or concepts that emerged across the data, potentially representing different subthemes (Yin, 2018). Visual displays, such as flow charts and other graphics, were employed to present the data in various formats. Additionally, the frequency of events within each sequence or group of events was tabulated (Yin, 2018). I used

tools such as highlighters, sticky notes, and concept maps to facilitate connections and linkages among the data.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a valuable qualitative research method for collecting data on participants' knowledge, attitudes, and experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015) and help researchers gather data from a specific group rather than a large population sample (Nyumba et al., 2018). Focus groups allow individuals to delve deeper into social issues by engaging individuals in an interview-style discussion (Nyumba et al., 2018). In this study, I selected participants for the focus groups from a random sample and recorded their responses to the research questions, thus facilitating an exploration of differing worldviews or paradigms within the group setting (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), allowing for a greater understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. I moderated the focus group discussions to elicit and capture each member's perspective and sense of reality to explore participants' opinions comprehensively (Yin, 2018). Due to the pandemic, I recognized that the focus groups may convene synchronously on the Zoom platform. Online focus groups have advantages over face-to-face groups, creating a dynamic and competitive environment to enhance participation (Edmunds, 1999). I recorded the sessions and transcribed the content, allowing for subsequent reflection and in-depth data analysis.

Focus Group Questions

I formulated the focus group questions to clarify and validate the insights from the individual interview sessions. However, I did not exclude the possibility of adjusting and supplementing the questions to ensure consistency with the responses received during the individual interviews. My role in the focus group was primarily in moderation, facilitating the

discussion rather than leading it (see Nyumba et al., 2018). My objective was to create an environment conducive to open and honest dialogue, where participants felt comfortable expressing their perspectives without being overshadowed by dominant individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I carefully planned the focus group's composition to foster active exchanges among participants who share common interests related to the study—this approach stimulated meaningful discussions and generated diverse insights within the group (Given, 2008).

1. How can pastors and church leaders enhance their understanding of creating a collaborative and effective local church-public school partnership? RQ1.
2. What role does poverty play in establishing the achievement gap? RQ2.
3. Describe the social networks within the family, school, and community that are essential for academic achievement. RQ3.
4. What is local churches' greatest obstacle when partnering with public schools? RQ1.
5. If you had unlimited funding, identify the top five initiatives you would implement in the schools to help reduce the achievement gap. RQ2.

At the beginning of the focus group session, the researcher introduced the questions to create a safe and comfortable environment for the participants. Questions 1 and 4 aimed to gather the participants' perspectives on the efforts made by local church leaders in addressing educational equity, and I designed them to elicit detailed information and provide an opportunity for participants to share their insights. Questions 2, 3, and 5 served as follow-up inquiries, allowing for further data collection and exploration of any interesting points raised during the discussion and encouraging participants to comment on specific assertions or expand upon certain topics. For instance, I prompted participants to delve deeper into their perceptions of collaborative partnerships with schools and share their perspectives on the impact of poverty

concerning the achievement gap. Furthermore, using Question 3, I prompted participants to describe the social networks essential to academic achievement. Lastly, participants identified several initiatives they would like to implement in schools to help close the achievement gap. Experts in the field reviewed the questions and provided feedback to ensure they were clear and relevant.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

I used Yin's (2011) five-step process to analyze the focus group data, including (a) assembling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) concluding the data. I transcribed the video conferencing data and analyzed it multiple times. For any documents related to the focus group discussions, I analyzed those thoroughly as well. Next, I used a video analysis system to capture the key ideas and the details of the focus group interviews. NVivo supported my efforts to organize the data into various categories, defining and interpreting different patterns and codes (Yin, 2018) after creating a visual display of the data organized into various formats, such as flow charts and graphics. In addition, I tabulated the events in each group or sequence and used concept maps, sticky notes, and highlighters to connect the data.

Survey

Qualitative surveys are valuable for conducting interviews for various research purposes, offering distinct advantages, including open-ended questions, self-administration, and a focused approach to specific topics (Braun et al., 2020). However, unlike individual interviews and focus groups, surveys and questionnaires do not provide the opportunity to validate individual responses (Braun et al., 2020). I carefully designed the survey questions to align with the research objectives and administered the survey using the SurveyMonkey online platform. I

configured the data collection with the *internet protocol address collection* (i.e., computer location on the internet) option disabled and the *anonymized data option* enabled to maintain participant confidentiality, which allowed for anonymous participation. I assigned all participants numerical codes stored separately, and only I maintained access to that information. I securely transmitted data to Ubiqus On-Demand for transcription to ensure participant confidentiality.

Survey Questions

Survey Question 1. Describe your church's influence in the public schools as you have experienced it. RQ1.

Survey Question 2. Why do you believe that local churches should be involved in public schools? RQ2.

Participants responded to two open-ended survey questions formulated in a manner that allowed responses to identify initial themes or issues for further investigation to elicit long-form written answers.

Survey Data Analysis

Surveys provide a broad scope for analysis, from simple to complex, and can be used for various purposes (Bloomberg, 2022). Data analysis and synthesis are both deductive and inductive concepts. The analysis of the survey data involved examining and selecting relevant data sets and identifying coding and themes for analysis, following the methodology outlined by Bloomberg (2022). Additionally, I employed Yin's (2011) five-step process to guide the analysis of the survey data, similar to the approach used for analyzing the individual interviews and focus group data. Yin's process entails assembling, disassembling, and reassembling the data, interpreting the findings, and drawing meaningful conclusions. I created visual displays to organize the survey data in various formats, while tabulations summarized the ideas and

perspectives emerging from each sequence or group. I also used concept maps, highlighters, and sticky notes to establish data connections and further aid in the analysis.

Data Synthesis

Researchers must integrate data collection and analysis throughout the research process to ensure a comprehensive and focused analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In line with this approach, I conducted the data analysis simultaneously with data collection, allowing for ongoing exploration and refinement of emerging themes and categories. I thoroughly examined the transcripts from interviews, focus groups, and surveys to identify the data's similarities, differences, and patterns, ultimately developing meaningful categories and themes. I assigned alphanumeric codes to the identified categories and descriptors, aligning with the conceptual framework employed in the study to organize and code the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By systematically synthesizing the data and reconstructing an integrated explanation, I generated comprehensive conclusions and provided recommendations to inform future studies in the field.

Trustworthiness

Participants play an essential role in validating the trustworthiness of qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher must demonstrate that they thoroughly used the design and approach to produce credible qualitative work (Nowell et al., 2017). In any study, the researcher aims to ensure that the results are credible. Credibility ensures that the process is rigorous and thoroughly analyzed. In qualitative research, rigor denotes the "quality of the research process" (Given, 2008, p. 795). Further, rigorous research yields more reliable results (Given, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed the following criteria to measure the rigor of qualitative research: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

Credibility

In qualitative research, establishing credibility is important for ensuring the trustworthiness and believability of the findings; this can emerge through triangulation, which involves using multiple cases and data sources to validate and corroborate the findings. By examining the phenomenon from different angles, researchers can enhance the credibility of their research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009). Some approaches to evaluating qualitative research include “prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Triangulation involves following numerous methods to collect and analyze data to retrieve the best results and develop a comprehensive view of the phenomenon being studied (Given, 2008; Yin, 2009). Researchers improve the accuracy of their findings and create a more accurate picture of their topic with the help of member checks (DeCino & Waalkes, 2019). I ensured that the participants’ views on data collection were correct and balanced. Credibility in qualitative research closely connects to the extent to which the findings accurately reflect the reality of the phenomenon under study. The researcher must capture the authentic experiences and perspectives of the participants, ensuring that the findings are grounded in their lived realities (Nassaji, 2020). Maintaining ongoing contact with the participants throughout the research process is crucial for establishing trust. Continuous engagement allows for a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences and perspectives, fostering collaboration and openness.

Dependability

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), dependability refers to the finding’s replicability, a process critical to ensure that research findings are consistent and credible. The authors argued that researchers should provide procedural details to make it easier for others to replicate the

study. I documented a detailed description of the steps involved in collecting data in a research journal to minimize the risk of errors and bias in the study and to facilitate replication of the study while ensuring dependability (Yin, 2009).

Confirmability

Confirmability focuses on enhancing the rigor of the research by ensuring that the findings are based solely on the participants' words and narratives rather than external factors or biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By analyzing the participants' narratives within their contexts, I ensured the readers could understand the factors influencing local churches' efforts to address educational inequity in urban school districts.

Transferability

The transferability of qualitative research findings to other contexts or settings is an empirical question that can be assessed by analyzing the presented context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers can facilitate transferability by providing detailed descriptions of the participants and the context, enabling users to make informed judgments about the applicability of the findings (Bloomberg, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative studies pose ethical challenges related to subject selection, impact on participants, objectivity, transparency, accountability, and cultural sensitivities (McEvoy et al., 2017). I prioritized the informed consent process within school settings, involving stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and students (Robey et al., 2019). Data protection and preservation followed the FAIR principles, ensuring the data was findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable (Jansen et al., 2019). I carefully analyzed and addressed ethical issues, including using pseudonyms for schools, churches, and individuals and creating a safe environment for all

discussions. Following the project's completion, I will archive all digital and hard-copy data collected during the study for 3 years. All hard copies of the data will be destroyed following the 3 years. All digital files will be erased using zero-pass overwriting. Although the survey information collected through SurveyMonkey will be maintained, the data collected on my computer will be erased using zero-pass overwriting.

Summary

I examined how local church leaders perceive their impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools. By delving into the experiences of these leaders, I aimed to contribute to the existing literature on the partnerships between local churches and public schools, shedding light on the challenges urban districts face in fulfilling their educational missions and how local churches can assist in overcoming these obstacles. The theoretical framework guiding this study encompassed social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), the theory of motivation, volition, and performance (Keller, 2010), and social equity theory (McKown, 2013). I employed various data collection methods, including individual interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys, to ensure research rigor. By following the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985), I prioritized the credibility and usefulness of the findings. The four-step process associated with trustworthiness helped to enhance the credibility of the results. I explored church leaders' perceptions of their congregations' impact on reducing educational inequity in urban schools using multiple data collection measures. Additionally, I uncovered significant recommendations to guide the development of local church ministry initiatives in urban schools. Chapter 4 continues the dissertation with a presentation of the results.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

My primary objective in this multi-case study was to investigate the perceptions of local church leaders regarding their role in addressing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools. By exploring the experiences of these leaders, my results contribute to the existing body of literature on the partnerships between local churches and public schools. I sought to enhance our understanding of the challenges faced by urban districts in fulfilling their educational missions and how local churches can play a role in overcoming these obstacles. The theoretical framework guiding this study drew upon social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), the theory of motivation, volition, and performance (Keller, 2010), and social equity theory (McKown, 2013). These theoretical perspectives provided a lens through which to examine and interpret the study's findings, shedding light on the complex dynamics at play in the context of education inequity and the involvement of local churches. The purpose of this multi-case study was to examine how church leaders perceive the impact of local churches in reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools in the northeast US, as well as analyze the unique collaborative partnerships between local churches and public schools. To accomplish this, I posed the following research questions.

Central Question

What have been the perceptions of the local church leaders' impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority schools?

Sub-Question 1

How do local church leaders perceive the impact of their partnership on improving educational equity and lowering the achievement gap in local schools?

Sub-Question 2

Why do local churches provide services and resources to support educational equity?

What are the experiences, barriers, and successes?

Sub-Question 3

Why do factors such as faith and family significantly impact school outcomes?

In this chapter, I discuss the cases and participants involved in the research, the identified themes, responses to the research questions, and a chapter summary.

Participants

After a lengthy process involving initial acceptance and subsequent declines from several churches, I ultimately selected three sites that expressed a commitment to participate in the study. Data collection at these sites involved using an anonymous survey, individual interviews, and a focus group comprising program directors, pastors, church leaders, staff members, and volunteers (Table 2).

Table 2*Participant Information*

Participant	Role	Educational experience (years)	Current role (years)
Paula	Lead administrator/senior church warden	35+	12
Lisa	Director	35+	1
Nancy	Senior church warden /teacher	28	4
Sarah	Office administrator	20+	8
Laura	Volunteer/advisory board member	6	6
Rachel	Director	24+	16
Nicole	Director	30+	24
Pastor Eric	Pastor	N/A	12

Paula

With over 35 years in education and 12 years in her current role, when I emailed Paula (pseudonym), the administrator of the after-school enrichment program at St. Matthews Church, I received an enthusiastic response concerning my research study request. Surprisingly, Paula recruited four of her colleagues to participate in the project, which was a pleasant outcome. Paula, who proudly identifies as an Episcopalian and has a background in early childhood public education, brings a wealth of experience to her current role as the leader of the church's after-school enrichment program. Having previously worked as a college professor and a public school administrator, Paula possesses extensive skills and qualifications. Despite retiring from formal education, she remains proactive and dedicated to using her diverse expertise to serve elementary school students and their families.

Lisa

Lisa, a pseudonym for the new program director, assumed her role during a challenging transition period. With 37 years of experience as a retired public school educator, Lisa responded to the call for strong leadership during the unprecedented disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Stepping forward as a volunteer, she took on the directorship with the support of her colleagues, navigating the complexities of running the program during these uncertain times. Lisa's tenure has been characterized by resilience and adaptability as she, alongside Paula and the team, ensures the program continues to serve underprivileged and underserved students, providing them with the necessary support and resources to thrive despite challenging circumstances.

Nancy

Nancy (a pseudonym), a dedicated church member for the past 24 years, is a vital figure in the administration, mainly due to her strong advocacy for the transformative power of education in society. With 28 years in education and 4 years in the current role, her philosophy emphasizes that education is not simply about acquiring knowledge or skills but a crucial tool for empowerment and critical thinking. Nancy firmly believes that without education, young people can be susceptible to manipulation and misinformation, lacking the ability to discern the authenticity or validity of the information they encounter, both in societal contexts and within the church. Her perspective forms the foundation of her approach to the after-school program, where she strives to provide students with the intellectual tools they need to navigate and interpret the world effectively. By fostering critical thinking and promoting a culture of inquiry and understanding, Nancy aims to cultivate an educated society capable of making informed decisions and resisting deceptive narratives. Her belief underscores the program's dedication to holistic education, preparing students for academic success and active participation in society and the church.

Rachel

With over 24 years of experience, around eight years ago, Rachel (a pseudonym), a highly experienced high school educator, was appointed to lead TLP. Drawing on her deep understanding of the educational landscape and the significance of resource utilization, Rachel has diligently carried out her responsibilities excellently, cultivating valuable partnerships and fostering collaboration among numerous churches to serve underprivileged students and positively transform their educational prospects. Her unwavering dedication to the cause has been truly transformative. TLP employs an extensive recruiting strategy. Rachel has gained

recognition within the broader Christian faith community and the education sector, enabling her to match churches with schools needing assistance effectively. She has mobilized volunteers who actively contribute to TLP's mission. After identifying potential volunteers, Rachel carefully matches them with suitable schools, ensuring that tutoring and mentoring services align with each school's interests and needs.

Nicole

Under the leadership of City Education Initiative's executive director, the church plays a crucial role in driving the success of its educational initiatives. With 30 years in education and 24 in the current role, Nicole (pseudonym), CEI's executive director, describes the church's indirect influence, "We strive to provide quality education and equitable opportunities for our students. Our educational programming is designed to be an invaluable resource that prepares our students to reach their fullest potential." CEI has partnered with several community organizations to implement its educational initiatives effectively. Through these partnerships, the church has expanded its reach and impacted various population segments. The educational programming features a variety of offerings, such as after-school programs, college preparation courses, and financial literacy workshops. Additionally, TCC offers career counseling services to help students gain marketable skills and navigate potential job opportunities.

Sarah

Sarah (a pseudonym) is the revered office administrator of her church's after-school program. Her extensive experience proves to be an asset to the community. With a career in education of over twenty years, she has been instrumental in ensuring that the program runs smoothly and aligns with the unique needs of the scholars attending. Her education journey began as a teacher's aide. Her desire to serve prompted her to hone her skills further, leading her

to return to school for her bachelor's degree. Parallel to her responsibilities at the church, Sarah serves as an Administrative Assistant at a prestigious private school catering to students with disabilities. Her meticulous attention to detail and organizational acumen guarantee that educators and students have what they need to succeed.

Laura

Laura (a pseudonym) is a third-generation church member; her mother and grandmother also attended the church. She has served on the advisory board for the last 6 years. She has been instrumental in providing support to the after-school program, particularly in the realms of grant applications and fundraising. While her interactions with the students are mainly during community outreach activities, her impact on the program is profound. Her commitment to supporting the children is undeniable, driven by her strong belief in giving back and making tangible contributions.

Pastor Eric

Pastor Eric (a pseudonym) grew up in a community in the Northeast, admiring the various languages and cultures that helped shape his perspectives. With over 30 years dedicated to spiritual leadership and community service, he stands out as a leading voice of unity and inclusivity. The son of educators, his background serves as a motivation to help bridge the gaps between cultures, understanding that diversity is something to celebrate. In addition to his ministry responsibilities, Pastor Eric finds time to foster community engagement. He believes the church must play a pivotal role in the community. He collaborates with educators, fellow community leaders, and policymakers to ensure that underserved students receive the best education and support.

Results

This section outlines the meticulous methodology employed for data analysis, unraveling the intricate layers of church involvement in education. The process encompassed familiarization with transcripts, coding meaningful units, identifying patterns, and coalescing codes into categories and overarching themes. An extended discussion on the coding of the themes appears in Appendix C. Seven themes emerged, capturing participants' perspectives. Rigorous assessment and refinement ensured theme relevance, followed by in-depth definition and description. These themes then formed the foundation for crafting case studies, showcasing the multifaceted role of churches in education and their contribution to community well-being. After identifying and grouping similar themes, I added each theme across the entire set of questions. Then, I categorized the consolidated themes in descending order according to their total amounts or responses (see Table 3). I incorporated selected quotes that resonated with each theme for reference and illustration.

Table 3

Consolidated Themes and Total Responses

Consolidated Themes						Total Responses
1.	Establishing Trust to Form Partnerships	Trusting Partnership with School	Church-School Partnership	Community Partnership and Collaboration	Trusting Partnership with Community	82
2.	Leveraging Community Resources	Leveraging Community Resources to Support Families	Leveraging Community Resources to Support Students			48

Consolidated Themes					Total Responses	
3.	Continued Community Development	Community Outreach and Development	Community Engagement	Community Engagement and Collaboration	36	
4.	Faith and Family Support	Emphasis on Faith and Family	Support for Faith and Family	Faith and Family Engagement (Belief in Students' Potential)	Faith and Family Emphasizing the Importance of Education	34
5.	Worldview to Pursue Social Justice and Equity	Social Justice and Inclusivity	Pursue Social Justice and Education Inequity	Community Partnership and Collaboration	18	
6.	Experience and Background in Education	Personal Background and Experiences	Hire Staff with Experience and Expertise	Additional Qualified Tutors and Learning Support	18	
7.	Understanding Root Causes of Inequity	Inequity Causes	Poverty Causes	Assessing the Community	17	

Theme 1: Establishing Trust to Form Partnerships

Several subthemes emerged to form the final theme of establishing a trust to form partnerships. Those subthemes were (a) building relationships with school administrators, teachers, and the community, (b) collaborative planning and goal setting, (c) transparency and communication, and (d) openness in sharing decision-making. Comments from participants reflected the overall theme. Trust engendered an environment of open dialogue among stakeholders, allowing them to express their views and opinions actively and uninhibitedly. This kind of environment promotes strategic alignment, effective decision-making, and minimized misunderstandings, ultimately contributing to the success of the programs. Lisa shared:

Although I taught for most of those 37 years in public school, we did not have any relationship at all with any of the churches in the area. So, I was thrilled and surprised. I was mostly surprised that the school district was willing to have such a strong connection

with our church because that's very, very unusual, you know, separation of church and state.

Rachel shared her experience working with institutions of higher learning that send students to intern with her. The trust built between the organizations allows for a seamless exchange of knowledge and resources, benefiting both parties involved:

I've had several interns through the years, and a good number of them were social workers and masters-level students. I basically share them with my partner organizations, like an after-school program. The interns, though, also care about the macro-view, and they want to follow or shadow me in terms of the work we're doing across many churches and systems.

Theme 2: Leveraging Church and Community Resources

In all three cases, leveraging church resources to benefit the community was instrumental in their success. The church mobilizes its congregants to volunteer in different programs. Several subthemes emerged to form the final theme of leveraging resources. Those subthemes are (a) mobilizing volunteer efforts, (b) using church facilities, (c) networking with other churches, and (d) collaborating with local businesses and community resource centers. Comments from participants support the theme. Paula described the process in this manner:

So we only had so many people to draw from and only so many people that weren't intimidated by working with young children, frankly. Then, I began doing some grant writing because I had done that. I was also in administration in my school district and had a lot of grant writing experience out of that. So, uh, we started writing grants, and we were, have been generously funded for years now, primarily through the Diocese of _____ and a few other entities.

Nicole, the director of City Education Initiative, uses her expertise to convene cross-sector partnerships for education and lead difficult public dialogues, especially in areas related to anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion. She stated, “My role involves fostering collaboration among different sectors to address educational challenges and promote positive change.”

Theme 3: Continued Community Involvement

Several subthemes emerged to form the final theme of leveraging resources. Those subthemes are (a) community assessment, (b) ongoing education and training programs for students and parents, (c) economic development programs, and (d) long-term initiatives for students and parents. One participant stated:

And they are, for the most part, women who are refugees from Latino countries, everywhere and anywhere within Latin America. They have seen some, I would say, the dark side of humanity before they came to the United States, and it is a support group for them, and we fund it. It is a time for these women to learn about the schools and how to not manipulate the school district but how to work their way through it if they need something.

Theme 4: Faith and Family Support

Participants from all three cases noted that factors such as faith and family significantly impact school outcomes because they contribute to supportive and nurturing environments for students. Faith can provide a sense of belonging and a moral compass, helping students navigate their lives and make positive choices. Students and their families often view faith-based organizations as complementing students’ education. On the other hand, family is crucial in shaping students’ educational experiences. A stable home environment and engaged parents can

encourage students to focus on their education and help them develop strong values and work habits. Several subthemes emerged to form the final theme of faith and family support. Those subthemes are (a) faith-based values in education, (b) family engagement programs, and (c) family-centered community programs. One participant noted: "I think one of the key things is for a child to have somebody in their life that sees the importance of education." Another participant indicated: "What we're trying to do is to leverage the churches and the faith communities as resources that can help families decrease opportunity gaps."

Theme 5: Worldview to Pursue Social Justice and Equity

Equity and social justice emerged as a common theme across all three cases, highlighting the fundamental belief in the worth and potential of every individual. The participants shared a view of education as a powerful tool for transformation, enabling children to enhance their lives and positively contribute to society. Several subthemes emerged to form the final theme of the worldview to pursue social justice and equity. The subthemes that supported the final emerging theme were (a) staff's engagement in making a difference, (b) church leadership's desire to promote systemic change, and (c) advocacy for educational equity. One participant stated:

Our calling is to support all churches. And so you could say that in terms of around, you know, the different churches, the differences between churches around, you know, race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, geography. And even theology, we are in sort of nondenominational; we are not; we are a para-church organization, right?

Rachel opined:

Our worldview is firmly rooted in compassion, empathy, and an unyielding dedication to achieving social justice. We believe it is our calling to offer support and elevate those

who have been marginalized or face challenges in life. We strive to create an inclusive educational environment where all students can thrive.

Pastor Eric remarked:

Our Public Schools have about 4,000 students who are learning English. Every day, more kids come to our schools from other countries, and they have unique needs. We're always trying to find ways to handle this growing group of students. We have a mix of over 30 different languages. Our streets are vibrant with the presence of people from all these different cultural communities and their native languages.

Theme 6: Experience and Background in Education

Several subthemes emerged to form the final theme of experience and educational background. Those themes are: (a) staff members' credibility as experienced educators, (b) expertise and first-hand knowledge of the challenges, (c) importance of enrichment programs, (d) alignment with mission, (e) adaptability and innovation, and (f) professional development for staff and volunteers. One participant said:

I've also done a lot of teacher training for folks in both the childcare industry as well as in the public schools and on the college level. I supervised student teachers. I did a lot of work for [REDACTED] and supervised student teachers, taught a couple of courses, that kind of thing.

Another participant indicated:

I've also done a lot of teacher training for folks in both the childcare industry as well as in the public schools and on the college level. I supervised student teachers. I did a lot of work for [REDACTED] and supervised student teachers, taught a couple of courses, that kind of thing. Once I was retired for about a year, which was 12, 13 years

ago, something like that, I decided that I needed more to keep me occupied and out of trouble.

Theme 7: Understanding Root Causes of Inequity

Participants from all three cases believe that a gap between affluent and underprivileged students caused by the paucity of affordable academic assistance exacerbates the divide. Several subthemes emerged to form the final theme of understanding the root causes of inequity. Those subthemes are (a) community assessments, (b) addressing economic barriers, and (c) cultural awareness and inclusion. One participant stated:

I do feel like a lot of the inequity comes from opportunities that either student may not have. But if it's around resources, you know, those things hinder or become the barriers for students and families to be able to thrive or focus on the academic piece of learning.

Rachel offered:

Poverty plays a significant role because it increases the possibility of instability in the child's life. Whether it's housing instability or food insecurity, and so certainly food insecurity, it's something that's been well documented. And if a child is lacking in those nutritional needs, that hinders their ability to focus on their studies and to really learn.

And if the family is unhoused or has a lack of stability there, that also can disrupt, you know, the child's education.

Outlier Data and Findings

One outlier emerged from the study's results. That outlier is the profoundly positive impact of churches on students and families. More importantly, this influence extends far beyond the confines of religious membership, signifying a remarkable capacity for churches to engage in more expansive community development initiatives.

Positive Impact of Churches on Students and Families

This exceptional finding underscores the inclusive and far-reaching influence of the case study churches, extending their reach well beyond their congregational boundaries. The data unequivocally demonstrate that these churches actively provide support, empowerment, and valuable resources to their members and non-members. This evidence compels researchers to consider the case study churches as religious institutions and entities shouldering a broader social responsibility, echoing previous research (Baker, 2016). Furthermore, this data challenges conventional assumptions that church education interventions primarily benefit their members; it instead advocates for a more holistic and encompassing approach to social justice and community involvement. While church membership and leadership roles may facilitate the creation of bridging social capital, the frequency of church attendance does not necessarily correlate with a form of social capital (Wuthnow, 2002). Such distinctive insight reshapes our perspective on the multifaceted roles that churches can play in fostering educational equity and underscores their potential as catalysts for broader community well-being. Participant Nancy from St. Matthew's stated, "I really see that the children and families that do not come to our church on Sunday morning still see this as their church and that they are part of us." The influence of the church resonates across diverse spheres of life". The comprehensive analysis of the three case study churches illuminates their profound impact, characterized by the cultivation of bridging social capital that ripples through various facets of family existence. Their endeavors to combat educational inequities weave amongst a broader mission of enhancing community well-being.

Research Question Responses

I created the central question and the sub-questions as a guide to examine church leaders' perceptions of their efforts to reduce educational inequity in majority-minority schools. The participants have positively impacted reducing education inequity in majority-minority schools. This finding aligns with Jeynes' (2010) claim that church leaders' efforts can significantly reduce the achievement gap among minorities. Aligned with Bourdieu's (1986) perspective of social capital, the church leaders leveraged their networks through partnerships with local businesses and other community-based organizations to offer opportunities to the students and their families. The positive impact finding also aligns with Coleman's (1988) viewpoint that social capital emerges through multiple relationships. Similarly, Salloum et al. (2017) proposed that social capital is critical to a school's academic success because it fosters social support for individual students.

Church leaders' partnerships with the local school district provide after-school enrichment programs, emotional support, and confidence-building opportunities for needy students. These activities, in turn, help students better engage with their education during regular school hours. The church's programs and initiatives have been well-received by the community due to their focus on addressing the diverse needs of students and their families. The strong ties with the local churches and the majority-minority schools maintained a supportive structure that facilitated educational opportunities and reinforced positive structure and expectations for at-risk students. These structural benefits align with Bourdieu's (1986) and Coleman's (1988) positions. The success of the partnerships is attributable to their dedicated staff and volunteers, who believe in the vision of providing support for students who might otherwise fall through the cracks in the education system. The partnerships have functioned as social agents advocating for underserved

students and their families while addressing social capital disparities (Ramirez, 2021) to foster academic achievement and engagement (Scales et al., 2021).

Central Research Question

What have been the perceptions of the local church leaders' impact on reducing educational inequity in majority-minority schools?

The central research question supported an understanding of the perceptions of the local church leaders' impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority schools. Generally, the perceptions of local leaders' impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority schools are positive. Church leaders have made significant contributions to address the needs of the community; they offer various programs and resources such as mentoring, after-school enrichment, advocating for educational equity, addressing students' social and emotional well-being, fostering a supportive environment, building partnerships, supporting parents, and collaborating with local schools to align resources. These efforts are associated with McKown's (2013) assertion that social factors can be employed to reduce achievement gaps. Furthermore, through the church-school partnerships' resource allocation, students received emotional support and confidence-building, corresponding with Keller's (2010) theory of motivation, volition, and performance.

Sub-Question 1

How do local church leaders perceive the impact of their partnership on improving educational equity and lowering the achievement gap in local schools?

Sub-Question 1 examined how local church leaders perceive the impact of their partnership on improving educational inequity and lowering the achievement gap in local schools. Local church leaders recognize their partnerships' substantial and positive impact in

enhancing educational equity and narrowing the achievement gap within local schools. Participants firmly believe that their presence and support bring about meaningful changes by fostering relationships, offering valuable resources, and uplifting the community. Participants follow Bragg's (2017) belief that an all-hands-on-deck approach involving numerous stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and community leaders, facilitates academic success. Through the initiation and implementation of various programs and initiatives, churches provide essential services such as tutoring, mentoring, and support to students who may encounter obstacles in their academic journey. Furthermore, churches' efforts build trust and cultivate a supportive atmosphere within school buildings, creating an environment where students and adults feel safe, respected, and supported. As expounded by Morgan and Amerikaner (2018), trust and respect characterize school church leader partnerships---partnerships that have contributed to bridging the achievement gap. Equally, Putnam (2000) emphasized the significance of social capital in narrowing the disparities stemming from differences in privilege, social status, and opportunities by utilizing their social support to benefit underrepresented students through their various networks and connections (Mishra, 2020).

Sub-Question 2

Why do local churches provide services and resources to support educational equity?

What are the experiences, barriers, and successes?

Local church leaders firmly believe in each individual's intrinsic value and potential; they perceive education as a powerful tool for transformation, improving lives, and positively contributing to society. Church leaders aim to address social and economic inequalities through education, offering opportunities for individuals to break free from the cycles of poverty. In this pursuit, churches consider it their calling to serve and uplift marginalized or disadvantaged

individuals by creating an inclusive educational environment that fosters the thriving of all students. Churches have become a potent source of social capital (Putnam, 2000) by attending to the needs of the underserved (Pieterse, 2011), supporting Hall et al.'s (2018) assertion that community collaboration is critical to achieving societal goals.

The experiences, barriers, and successes in providing these services may vary. Churches work alongside public school students, implementing a range of programs and initiatives to promote relationship-building, improve college acceptance and retention rates, and reduce educational inequity. Churches provide resources, mentoring, and support to students facing barriers to academic success. Challenges include effectively addressing the needs of a growing population of English language learners, navigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and finding ways to maintain a culturally diverse and supportive school environment.

Successes are evident in providing after-school enrichment, tutoring, mentoring services, and extending positive practices into after-school spaces. Churches actively foster partnerships with local schools, emphasizing clear communication, collaboration, shared goals, and aligned resources to support the needs of students and schools alike. Notably, the impact of churches extends beyond their own church-member families to non-church-member families, providing them with a sense of community, support, and additional opportunities for growth and development. According to Jordan and Wilson (2017), such church-school partnerships can positively impact minority students' academic standing. The improvements may go beyond traditional academic achievement and foster resilience and cultural wealth development (S. Park et al., 2017).

Sub-Question 3

Why do factors such as faith and family significantly impact school outcomes?

Sub-Question 3 was the answer to why factors such as faith and family significantly impact school outcomes. Faith and family provide students with strong support systems, helping them overcome the impediments they may confront in their education. Faith and family can offer emotional support, encouragement, and a sense of belonging that can contribute positively to a student's mental and emotional well-being; this can translate to increased motivation, engagement, and, ultimately, better academic performance. Furthermore, faith and family play a significant role in shaping the values, perspectives, and beliefs students adopt and apply to their education. A strong faith or belief system can instill virtues such as perseverance, determination, empathy, and responsibility in students, giving them a solid foundation to approach education with a positive attitude and a strong work ethic. Family involvement in a student's education can profoundly impact their motivation, self-esteem, and overall academic performance. Parents and other family members can actively participate in their child's educational journey, providing encouragement and positive reinforcement for their achievements. This involvement benefits the individual student and strengthens the relationship between the school, the family, and the wider community, creating a supportive network where students can thrive academically and holistically.

The findings align with Harris et al.'s (2020) claim regarding the collective responsibility of parents and schools in educating children across various educational stages (Castro et al., 2015). In addition, Tan et al. (2020) emphasized the significance of parental involvement in fostering academic achievement, including setting expectations, participating in school functions, and demonstrating the value of education (Jeynes, 2016). Church leaders have socially transformed (Beukes, 2019) by fostering positive networks via social capital despite significant

challenges, as supported by Hope et al.'s (2019) conclusion that church-based support networks are critical to the success of minority youth.

Summary

I explored the perceptions of local church leaders regarding their impact on reducing educational inequity in majority-minority urban schools. My objective was to identify best practices that can guide the development of new programs and enhance the sustainability of existing initiatives. I collected data for the study through surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups. I used Yin's (2011) five-step process for the analysis, involving categorizing and grouping primary themes based on patterns found in the interview transcripts and survey responses.

Sub-Question 1 focused on understanding the perceived impact of church leaders' partnerships on improving educational inequity and narrowing the achievement gap. Cross-case analysis revealed common themes across the cases. Church leaders believed that their impact was significant due to factors such as establishing trust within the community, leveraging church and community resources, embracing a worldview centered on equity and social justice, recognizing the root causes of educational inequity, having extensive experience and background in education, and acknowledging the influential role of faith and family in student achievement.

Sub-Question 2 aimed to clarify the motivations behind churches providing services and resources to support educational equity and identify the successes and challenges encountered. Cross-case analysis indicated that local churches provide these services and resources to create an inclusive educational environment where all students can thrive. Churches view education as addressing social and economic inequalities and strive to bridge these gaps by offering services and resources to marginalized individuals. The case study churches have achieved success in

providing after-school enrichment, tutoring, mentoring services, and establishing partnerships with local schools. Churches have also supported both church-member and non-church-member families. However, challenges identified include the increasing diversity of students and responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sub-Question 3 focused on exploring the factors of faith and family that impact school outcomes. Faith and family profoundly influence school outcomes through various mechanisms, providing emotional support, stability, and encouragement to students, creating a nurturing environment that fosters improved academic performance. Chapter 5 completes the dissertation with an analysis of the results, recommendations, and a summary.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

I examined local church leaders' perceived impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools in the Northeast of the United States and the impact of church partnerships on reducing educational inequity and narrowing the achievement gap in local schools. The study involved pastors, program directors, administrators, and staff members who shared their experiences, motivations, barriers, successes, and the influence of faith and family. Chapter 5 presents a detailed description of the study findings and a comprehensive discussion. The implications of the findings for policy and practice are also explored, along with considerations of the theoretical and methodological implications. In Chapter 5, I further discuss the limitations and delimitations of the study, provide recommendations for future research, and conclude with a summary.

Discussion

In this multi-case study, I sought to identify church leaders' perceived impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools. I selected three cases using purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Data collection included a survey, individual interviews, and a focus group for triangulation. Participants included pastors, senior churchwardens, program directors, administrators, and staff members. All cases included churches and organizations from the Northeast of the United States.

Sub-Question 1 focused on the perceived impact of church leaders' partnerships in reducing educational inequity and narrowing the achievement gap. Cross-case analysis revealed several factors contributing to their significant impact. These included the establishment of trust among stakeholders, the leveraging of church and community resources, a worldview driven by

equity and social justice, a commitment to ongoing community development, an understanding of the root causes of educational inequity, extensive experience and background in education, and the recognition of faith and family's influence on student achievement.

Sub-Question 2 explored the motivations behind churches' support for educational inequity in majority-minority schools, as well as their successes and challenges. The analysis indicated that local churches provide services and resources to address educational inequity by offering additional support to students who may face academic challenges. Churches aim to create an inclusive environment where students can thrive, seeking to address social and economic inequalities through education. Church leaders reported stronger relationships with families in their communities, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. The challenges faced by participants in all three cases were notably related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing population of English Language Learners.

Sub-Question 3 examined why factors such as faith and family impact school outcomes. Across the three cases, faith and family positively influenced students' academic achievement. Faith and family provide a stable and supportive environment that fosters learning, community support that reinforces academic skills, positive role models that inspire students to strive for excellence, and a foundation for cultivating good habits such as discipline, perseverance, and respect for oneself and others.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The findings from Chapter 4 provide valuable insight into the perceived impact of church leaders in reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools. The analysis revealed seven interconnected themes that underscore the importance of various factors. These themes include the establishment of trust among stakeholders, the utilization of community resources,

the adoption of a social justice philosophy, a deep understanding of the root causes of inequity, a commitment to ongoing community development, educational expertise, and the recognition of the influential role of faith and family. The themes contribute to the existing knowledge on addressing education inequity and offer valuable guidance for future research and practice in this area.

Establishment of Trust

Church leaders repeatedly emphasized the significance of building strong relationships and fostering collaborations among educators, parents, local leaders, and other community members; this suggests that effective partnerships and trust-building initiatives are crucial in addressing education inequity in majority-minority urban school districts. Trust plays a crucial role in fostering quality community relationships, as A. M. Fitzgerald and Quiñones (2019) highlighted. Mutual respect, relationship building, and open communication characterize trust. Trust-building emerged as a foundational leadership practice in this multi-case study, contributing to a cohesive vision to improve student academic outcomes (Mayger & Hochbein, 2021). Church leaders successfully built trust through their collaborative social networks, which fostered social capital that benefitted students and their families. Putnam (2000) emphasized the importance of social capital, which relies on relationships characterized by authentic trust and a sense of equality among network members. These findings underscore the significance of effective partnerships and trust-building initiatives in addressing education inequity.

Leveraging Church and Community Resources

Closely related to establishing trust is the need to leverage community resources to cater to the needs of underserved students. Church leaders and local school districts are strongly committed to leveraging community resources to foster sustained success (Aidman & Baray,

2016). Leaders engaging with community partners tend to view positive results in student achievement (Sebring & Montgomery, 2014). To help bridge gaps in funding and resources that the local schools faced, the church leaders in the study consistently tapped into their community, thus ensuring that underprivileged students had access to services that they normally would not have had.

The church leaders' efforts in fostering community involvement resulted in enhanced educational opportunities and outcomes, ultimately expanding equity and access in their communities; this aligns with the understanding that community assets play a crucial role in promoting academic success (Green, 2015). By leveraging existing community resources and partnerships, the church leaders created more equitable educational opportunities for students in majority-minority schools; this highlights the importance of recognizing and utilizing community assets in addressing educational inequities.

Worldview of Equity and Social Justice

Church leaders in the multi-case study demonstrated a worldview centered around equity and social justice, which influenced their values and beliefs regarding equality and fairness. Church leaders' worldview went beyond mere knowledge of social justice, as these leaders actively became agents of social change to promote equity and justice (Goodman et al., 2004). Leaders exhibited empathy, cultural humility, and a strong commitment to serving underserved students in their community, and as a result, leaders fostered cooperation and encouraged open-minded dialogue to support marginalized community members. These findings highlight the importance of having a comprehensive understanding of social justice principles in addressing educational inequity in public schools.

Continued Community Development

Equity in education cannot materialize in isolation; equity requires comprehensive community development efforts. Equity, in turn, emphasizes that community cohesion strengthens by fostering a sense of belonging, trust, and collaboration among members (Islam et al., 2020).

Understanding Root Causes

Wolterstorff (2006) declared that one of the main goals of teaching is to help students develop a sense of justice. Previous researchers have recommended that educators teach students about the structural causes of economic inequality to understand how merit-based and non-merit-based factors impact social mobility in the United States (K. C. Barton & Levstik, 2004; Parkhouse & Arnold, 2019). Teacher education programs must equip teachers with the skills to promote equitable and socially just educational outcomes for underserved students (Mills & Ballantyne, 2016; Sleeter, 2014). Community leaders serving underprivileged populations must understand the root causes of inequity to develop effective strategies that address the underlying issues (Walcott, 2021). Participants sought to identify the root causes of educational inequity and worked towards reducing and eliminating it, highlighting the importance of comprehensive approaches that address the systemic issues contributing to educational inequity.

Experience and Background in Education

The need for teachers to work effectively and efficiently with diverse populations has become increasingly important (D’Cruz, 2007). Extensive education experience was perceived to be an essential component of the success attained by the church leaders. Notably, leaders recognized the value of expertise and firsthand knowledge of the educational systems and

practices; this demonstrates that staff members and volunteers with educational backgrounds and experience can provide strategies to address inequities in majority-minority schools.

Faith and Family Support

Faith and family play crucial roles in the education of students in majority-minority school districts, as highlighted in the multi-case study. Faith and family contribute to developing resilience, enhancing academic performance, and providing practical, emotional, and network support that strengthens students' confidence to face educational challenges. Faith and family also instill values such as respect, perseverance, and discipline, essential for students to excel academically and in other aspects of their lives. Moreover, faith communities and families serve as inspiring role models, showing students from similar backgrounds that academic success is attainable. Faith communities and families also connect students with academic support and guidance resources.

Underrepresented students benefit from various forms of social capital from personal and institutional networks, which can impact their academic success. Mishra (2020) demonstrated that low-income first-generation college students heavily rely on their families for emotional and spiritual support, contributing to their academic success. Participants created an environment where students experienced the presence of family and faith, providing them with the support, motivation, resources, advocacy, and sense of belonging needed on their educational journey; this analysis indicated that integrating faith and family-centered approaches can have a positive impact on student's educational outcomes.

Interpretation of Findings

Chapter 4 provided the study's results, detailing the perspectives of church leaders' impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools. Participants'

perspectives provide insights into strategies for enhancing educational opportunities for underserved minority students, underscoring a holistic approach to confronting educational disparities. The findings demonstrate that the church leaders' views align with established academic theories. The data analysis revealed several significant themes.

The Value of Trust in the Face of Community Challenges

Cooperation, information sharing, and establishment of social networks cannot exist without trust. When parents, educators, administrators, and church leaders trust one another, they can collaborate to support student achievement. Social capital is a direct byproduct of trust because it eliminates uncertainty in interpersonal interactions. Church leaders responded effectively to community challenges of education inequity due to the trusting relationships they established with the local schools, which fostered collective problem-solving capabilities. Trust is a critical element in tackling community challenges in education.

Proper Use of Community Assets

Local church leaders can support various initiatives to address educational disparities by harnessing human, physical, and community resources. Within any community, there may be untapped resources. However, faith-based organizations can play a pivotal role in community development by amplifying social ties and community resources.

Promoting Social Justice

Church leaders can successfully challenge systemic inequity, spotlight fairness, and empower other community leaders to do the same. The perspective of grappling with socioeconomic disparities is a core value of the participant case study churches—they believe all students should have access to quality educational opportunities, regardless of their background.

The Role of Faith and Family

Faith and family can be foundational in helping reduce education inequity because they provide a stable environment, structure, and emotional support. Faith-based settings can instill habits of resilience, perseverance, encouragement, and unconditional love, which can motivate students facing challenges. Local churches, religious nonprofits, and families offer students a sense of belonging where mentors and positive role models can inspire them toward academic achievement, highlighting the multifaceted approach to addressing disparities in majority-minority schools.

Implications for Policy or Practice

I investigated local church leaders' perceived impact on reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools in the Northeast of the United States. My findings and interpretations on reducing education inequity in urban school districts have significant implications for policy and practice. The implications for policy stemming from this multi-case study research call for a multifaceted and collaborative approach. Students could benefit from integrating inclusive practices, targeted resource distribution, and strategic partnerships with faith-based organizations and other nonprofits to foster a more equitable education system where all students are empowered and able to realize their full potential regardless of their background.

Implications for Policy

Our educational system must fully implement certain procedures for education to be truly inclusive and equitable. First, inequity in education must be acknowledged. Then, effective policy-making decisions must be incorporated. Each component not only shapes the learning environment but also influences the educational outcomes of underprivileged students.

Trust-Building. Addressing education inequity requires establishing and nurturing trust between community stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, parents, church leaders, and other community members. Policies and practices should prioritize creating an environment of trust, fostering positive relationships, and supporting open communication. Promoting collaboration between schools and community organizations can broaden students' experiences and enhance their social and emotional development.

Leveraging Community Resources. To support and improve education initiatives, policymakers and practitioners should develop strategies that actively engage community members, organizations, and faith-based institutions. When a community recognizes and uses its diverse resources, the gap in educational opportunities can be bridged. This level of community engagement ensures collective responsibility for educational achievement.

Adopting a Social Justice Worldview. Adopting a social justice philosophy is crucial for addressing education inequity. Policies should reflect a commitment to fairness, equality, and inclusivity; this will help eliminate systemic barriers and promote equitable access to quality education for all students.

Continued Community Development. Policymakers should prioritize investments in community infrastructure, social services, and economic development to create an environment that supports educational equity for all underserved students and their families. Focusing on continued community development will result in addressing certain interventions more readily. Consequently, community leaders will become proactive rather than reactive.

Understanding Root Causes. A community must identify and understand the root causes of educational inequity. The next step would be to establish policies focusing on

conducting in-depth research examining systemic issues such as poverty, racial disparities, and institutional biases. Addressing the root causes will make room for sustainable change.

Educational Expertise. Having a background in education and developing expertise in education is crucial. Policymakers and practitioners should design effective interventions and programs and invest in professional development opportunities for stakeholders to enhance their knowledge and skills in addressing education inequity. Acknowledging the value of diverse educational backgrounds underscores the value of various perspectives and the potential for culturally responsive experiences.

The Influence of Faith and Family. Faith and family are integral components in influencing students' educational outcomes. Creators of educational policies and practices must recognize and respect students' faith, family values, and cultural backgrounds. By embracing inclusive and culturally responsive approaches to education, students can develop a sense of belonging, leading to increased engagement and improved academic achievement. The influence of faith and family can create a supportive and enriching learning environment for students.

Implications for Practice

The implications of the research study on church leaders' perspective on reducing education inequity in urban school districts extend to various stakeholders, including school administrators, pastors, after-school and enrichment program directors, other church leaders, parents, students, and other community stakeholders. Each stakeholder can contribute to implementing practices to promote educational equity and foster a supportive learning environment. Such an approach acknowledges a broader academic discourse emphasizing interdependence in influencing educational achievement.

Implications for Pastors and Church Leaders. Pastors and church leaders have the potential to make a significant impact in addressing education inequity by advocating for equitable access to education for all students. Leaders can work with school administrators to provide resources, mentorship, and after-school programs that align with the values and goals of their congregations. To further amplify their efforts, churches can establish independent nonprofit organizations that reduce education inequity; this allows them to focus on their spiritual initiatives while empowering the nonprofit to concentrate solely on their mission. With the church's support, these nonprofits can mobilize their parishioners to actively engage with local school districts actively, fostering positive family-school partnerships and supporting initiatives to achieve social justice within the education system.

Implications for Parents. In the capacity of advocates for their children's education, parents can actively engage with school administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders to voice their concerns and contribute to decision-making processes. Parents should strive to create a positive learning environment at home, emphasizing the value of education, setting high expectations for their children, and fostering a learning culture. Parents who are informed, involved, and supportive can contribute to reducing education inequity.

Implications for School Administrators. I emphasized the significance of taking a proactive stance in addressing educational inequities. District administrators should cultivate a collaborative culture that values community involvement, actively seeking partnerships with local churches, after-school programs, and other community organizations. Furthermore, administrators should prioritize providing professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their cultural competence and promote inclusive education practices. By embracing

these approaches, educational institutions can work toward creating a more equitable and inclusive learning environment for all students.

Mentorship and After-school Program Directors and Community Leaders. Leaders should assign their efforts to the goal of reducing education inequity; they can design and implement targeted programs that address specific academic and social needs of disadvantaged students. By leveraging community resources, these leaders can provide services that complement the school curriculum and reinforce learning. Collaborating with schools and parents can ensure a coordinated approach to supporting students and closing achievement gaps.

Students. Students can gain empowerment by assuming responsibility for their education and advocating for their needs; this arises through active participation in student organizations, involvement in decision-making processes within the school, and collaborative efforts with administrators to establish an inclusive and supportive school environment. By taking these actions, students can promote cultural understanding and respect among their peers, fostering a climate that values diversity and promotes social justice.

Other Community Stakeholders. Community stakeholders, including nonprofits, civic organizations, local businesses, and other community members, can be crucial in addressing education inequity and promoting social justice. Community members, leaders, and organizations must provide valuable support through financial contributions, mentorship activities, internship programs, and scholarships designed for disadvantaged students. Community stakeholders can reduce education inequity and create more equitable opportunities for all students by actively engaging in partnerships with schools.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The study has offered evidence for theoretical applicability relevant to education and clarified various aspects of educational disparities in urban districts. The findings underscore the crucial role that social capital plays in influencing educational outcomes. I demonstrated how social networks, relational dynamics, and community engagement help remove barriers that prevent some students from achieving their full potential. The implications of these findings are twofold: (a) they contribute to the existing body of knowledge in academic research, and (b) they provide practical understanding for educators and church leaders striving to reduce education inequity in urban districts. In the following section, I explore the implications in greater detail, examining how the research not only substantiates existing theories but also paves the way for theoretical and empirical analyses.

Empirical Implications

So far, limited research has examined the perceived impact of church leaders in reducing education inequity, specifically in urban districts in the Northeast of the United States. Existing studies have primarily focused on regions assumed to be more religious, such as the Bible Belt (Bennett & Foldes, 2014). Consequently, there is a research gap regarding the role of church leaders in public schools in regions outside of the Bible Belt; I addressed this gap by exploring the perceived impact of church leaders in the Northeast and their engagement in urban school districts. I employed a case study to provide insights into the complexities of education inequity and address the research gap. I used anonymous surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups to explore the experiences and perspectives of the participants comprehensively. I sought to answer the central question regarding the perceived influence of pastors, program directors,

administrators, and staff members from the identified churches and faith-based nonprofit organizations.

Social capital has proven to be an influential theoretical framework for providing stability, academic support, and mentorship to young people (Demir, 2021; Mishra, 2020; Okpych et al., 2023). Building upon the foundational theories presented in Chapter 2, the empirical findings in this section highlight that the deployment of strategic partnerships and forming collaborative efforts to achieve specific outcomes can successfully mitigate educational inequities among underserved students (A. White et al., 2021). Researchers have posited empirically tested findings and further elaborated in this chapter that faith-based organizations in urban areas can foster resilience and empowerment within these communities (Gourley et al., 2023; Tarpeh & Hustedde, 2021). Furthermore, schools that leverage the community's support can enhance the academic achievement of students at risk of adverse outcomes (Symons & Ponzio, 2019).

This study contributes to the field by recognizing the significance of leveraging community resources, establishing trust among stakeholders, embracing a worldview that prioritizes equity and social justice, drawing on extensive experience and educational background, fostering a commitment to ongoing community development, understanding the root causes of education inequity, and acknowledging the influence of faith and family on education inequity. By examining how religious and philosophical worldviews impact education outcomes in a region not typically associated with strong religious influence, this study provides insights into the intersection of faith, social contexts, and educational inequities. This unique perspective expands the existing body of research and enhances our understanding of the multifaceted factors at play.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretical implications of this study draw upon social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000), social equity theory (McKown, 2013), and Keller's theory of motivation, volition, and performance (Keller, 2010) to examine the perceived impact of local church leaders on reducing educational inequity in majority-minority public schools. These implications shed light on social, cultural, and religious factors within educational contexts. The findings of this study align with social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000) by emphasizing the importance of building trust and utilizing community resources. Previous research has established a link between individual-level trust in one's community and the presence of community-bridging and community-bonding social capital (D. Kim et al., 2006; Subramanian et al., 2002). Furthermore, social capital and intersectoral social partnerships are considered inter-complementary processes that rely on trust and a non-monetary nature to address social problems effectively (Plotnikov, 2021). By highlighting the role of social networks, relationships, and community support in addressing educational inequity, the study supports the premise that social capital plays a vital role in educational outcomes.

In majority-minority school districts, administrators can draw inspiration from Coleman's (1988) social capital theory to foster a supportive environment by recognizing and leveraging the diverse social capital present within their communities. By acknowledging the value of social connections, networks, and resources, administrators can establish partnerships with pastors, faith-based nonprofits, church leaders, and other community stakeholders. These partnerships, rooted in Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital, can provide students with access to additional academic support, mentoring, and enrichment opportunities, enhancing their educational experiences and outcomes. Similarly, pastors, church leaders, and directors of faith-

based nonprofits can use Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory; they can leverage their social networks and resources to support initiatives promoting educational equity. Collaborating with school administrators can offer additional academic opportunities, tutoring and mentorship programs, and extracurricular activities aligning with faith-based communities' values. Through active partnership engagement, all stakeholders can contribute to reducing educational inequity and fostering social justice.

Per McKown's (2013) social equity theory, federal, state, and local school administrators must prioritize resource allocation that addresses the needs of underserved students; this involves implementing policies that ensure a fair and equitable distribution of resources, instructional materials, technology, and facilities across schools and districts. By promoting a system of fair resource allocation, administrators can contribute to reducing educational inequities and create an environment conducive to learning and social justice. Parents can draw inspiration from McKown's (2013) social equity theory to advocate for their children's educational rights and actively foster a culture of inclusivity and social justice. Parents can collaborate with federal, state, and local school administrators to address educational inequities, promote positive family-school partnerships, and support policies that advance social equity. By staying informed, being involved, and providing support, parents can effectively contribute to reducing educational inequity. Aligned with Keller's (2010) theory of motivation, volition, and performance, administrators should prioritize fostering intrinsic motivation and a sense of agency among students. Administrators can provide student voice and choice opportunities, allowing students to participate in their education actively and set goals that align with their values and aspirations. This approach empowers students, enhancing their motivation, self-efficacy, and academic performance.

Limitations and Delimitations

Acknowledging limitations and delimitations is critical to understanding the scope and implications of the findings of a research study. Limitations are the potential shortcomings beyond the researcher's control that arise from the design and methodology, including sample size, data collection, and analysis (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Limitations explain features that may negatively affect the accuracy or generalization of the research results (Prabhu, 2020). Understanding these aspects would allow researchers and readers to approach the results. Delimitations are "the limitations consciously set by the authors themselves" (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018, p. 157). Limitations are the choices that set the boundaries, outline the scope, and narrow the focus of the study; these choices are controllable and include the research questions and the populations chosen for the research and define what the study is not addressing.

Limitations

A sample size of eight participants can be considered limited, particularly for generalizing findings to a larger population (Maxwell, 2012); this may be a potential lack of diversity and representativeness of the sample. Furthermore, a small sample size may fail to capture the variability of the population being studied (Creswell, 2014). However, one must note that the diversity of the participants' unique experiences supports this study's small sample size. Malterud et al. (2016) argued that a sample size of eight can be appropriate if the participants possess diverse experiences that correspond to the research question. Sample size appropriateness depends on the richness and diversity of the participant's involvement in the field (Anderson, 2019). Another limitation relates to the study's multi-case study design. The findings of multi-case studies may not always be generalized to the broader populations due to

their context specificity (Yin, 2018). In this study, the findings of the church leaders and majority-minority schools might present a limitation to applicability in different contexts.

While anonymous surveys can inspire honest responses, they are limited by the inability of the researcher to ask follow-up and clarifying questions. Anonymous surveys may unintentionally encourage untruthful responses. Lastly, group dynamics may influence focus groups, where one participant might influence others by dominating the discussions. Although these limitations must be acknowledged, many elements of the research design mitigated them. For example, I crafted questions in a neutral manner, which did not suggest a desired answer (Fowler, 2014). Respondents clarified and expanded their answers. I recorded the interviews to ensure data accuracy and to allow for transparency. Focus group participants were allowed to speak equally, thus removing the possibility of one participant dominating the discussions. Guidelines ensured that all participants had turns to speak (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Additional study limitations derived from geographic locations, as all sites were limited to the northeastern U.S. In addition, I did not involve any Catholic churches, only Protestant churches, including Episcopalian, Baptist, and non-denominational churches. One faith-based nonprofit organization in the study collaborates with more than 60 churches, none Catholic. Furthermore, using qualitative studies in a specific region of the country limited the findings' generalizability across the U.S. Despite the limitations, the procedures adopted ensured that the collected data were of high quality and that the church leaders' experiences supported the conclusions reached.

Delimitations

Certain delimitations were necessary to limit the scope of the study. These delimitations involved the selection of the sites for the multi-case study. Sites were identified for inclusion if

the churches or faith-based nonprofits serviced schools in the Northeast of the United States that were once deemed “Need of Improvement” according to NCLB requirements. Though the ESSA (2015) replaced NCLB and modified some of its provisions, it did not eliminate annual assessment requirements. Christian pastors, priests, and leaders of Christian faith-based nonprofits serving majority-minority schools led the study churches. These delimitations focused data collection on organizations with significant religious and cultural similarities that will allow for transferability to similar organizations in the future.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study sought to tackle a gap in research, more study is needed to investigate the scope of the impact of church leaders’ efforts to reduce education inequity. There are several recommendations to consider.

1. Research is needed to focus on the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members involved in the collaborations. Their insights could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and impact of these partnerships.
2. Research is needed to compare collaborations involving protestant churches and non-protestant churches. A comparative analysis could also provide insights into the unique contributions and challenges specific to protestant church collaborations.
3. Researchers must explore the impact of denominational differences. This study involved uniformity within protestant churches. Denominational differences could impact the nature and effectiveness of collaborations. New research could explore how various protestant denominations approach and engage with urban schools.

4. Researchers can explore the long-term impact of church-school collaborations on education inequity. Assessing factors such as academic outcomes, student engagement, graduation rates, and community development over an extended period can help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of these partnerships.
5. Research is needed to enhance generalization and identify potential regional variations. Future research could expand the study to include multiple regions across the United States.
6. Further research is necessary to investigate the inclusion of failed collaborations in the study of churches' efforts to reduce education inequity in urban schools. By examining failed collaborations, researchers can gain valuable insights into churches' barriers and challenges in their endeavors. Understanding these obstacles can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved in church-led initiatives to address education inequity.
7. Researchers should explore the intersectionality of inequities, such as race, socioeconomic status, and nationality, and how they impact church-school partnerships. Education inequity is a complex issue influenced by multiple intersecting factors. Examining the intersectionality of these inequities in the context of church-school partnerships can provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities that arise.

Conclusion

I investigated the perceived impact of local church leaders in reducing education inequity in majority-minority urban schools in the Northeastern United States. I examined the

experiences, motivations, barriers, and successes of pastors, program directors, administrators, and staff members involved in these efforts. Data collection involved surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups across three selected sites. Through cross-case analysis, my results revealed several significant perceptions among church leaders, including building trust with stakeholders, leveraging community resources, embracing a worldview that promotes equity and social justice, and recognizing the influence of faith and family on student achievement. The findings underscore the need for a deeper understanding of education inequity's underlying mechanisms and dynamics. This knowledge can guide the development of targeted interventions and policies tailored to specific contexts and populations, ultimately promoting greater educational equity.

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Appendix A
Site Approval Letter

June 27, 2022

Kenslio Ojentis
Ph.D. Student
Liberty University
1971 University Boulevard
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Dear Kenslio Ojentis:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled, "A Case Study of the Local Church Leaders' Perceived Impact on Reducing Inequity in Majority-Minority School Districts". I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study with the [REDACTED], a program of [REDACTED] and some of its church partners.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

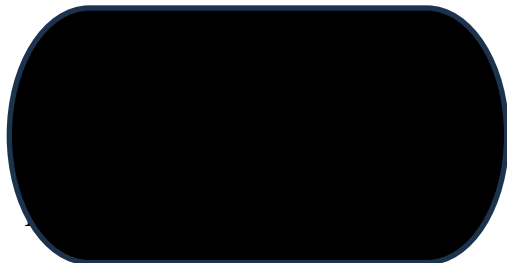
I will provide our membership list to Kenslio Ojentis, and Kenslio Ojentis may use the list to contact our members to invite them to participate in [his/her] research study.

I grant permission for Kenslio Ojentis to contact a few selected church partner staff members and volunteers of the [REDACTED] to invite them to participate in his research study.

I will not provide potential participant information to Kenslio Ojentis, but we agree to send his study information to description of potential participants] on his behalf.

I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and publication.

Sincerely,

A large, solid black rounded rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Appendix B

Initial Codes (in Step 2)

Table B1

Initial Codes (Step 2)

Participants' quote	Code assigned	Code defined/explained
<p>“From what I have seen, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has the trust of the local schools, which is key to building relationships with the families.”</p>	<p>Establishing Trust</p>	<p>Building credibility between the church, community members, and schools to create strong partnerships.</p>
<p>“Public schools represent the multi-faceted community that the churches are part of. For churches that want to build relationships and have impact on students, families and staff in ways that could be harder to foster outside. Churches bring hope, encouragement, and care to people in these communities. These three things go a long way to minister to individuals. And for the practical and academic needs of students, churches are resourced to make a difference in the life of a student.”</p>	<p>Family/Social Network</p>	<p>Involving the faith community and families in educational pursuits, creating a supportive network, and offering spiritual guidance.</p>
<p>“I see the neighborhood that our church is physically located in and the neighborhood that we serve and there are a lot of underserved children in our neighborhood. We always focused on the children that had the least and needed the most. So that's where we as a church shine, you know, to welcome those students that needed the extra time.”</p>	<p>Social Justice and Inclusivity</p>	<p>Ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have access to educational opportunities</p>

Participants' quote	Code assigned	Code defined/explained
<p>“██████████ has offered the ██████████ School a safe, inclusive, empathetic community for children most in need of an accepting afterschool environment.”</p>	<p>Programs Offered</p>	<p>Creation and provision of supplementary educational programs to enhance learning</p>
<p>“But in any case, I would say ██████████ Church is one example. And we're still like they're still working there, there, there, you know this, this is the year of the new, you know, the school closed and this past summer. So like they're actually forming new relationships with new schools with the result of like staff moving to other schools. I also would like to say, I mean I gave a lot of examples about different types of activities, but I wanna say maybe I guess a few other examples of stories I would say is. So one example I'll just also mention here this one. Is a partnership between. It was between two school and 2 churches. And then they added a third one. They had about six to seven years of very successful partnership.”</p>	<p>Community Engagement and Collaboration</p>	<p>Working in cooperation with the community to understand and meet students' needs</p>

Participants' quote	Code assigned	Code defined/explained
<p>“My church engages with the local public school through our afterschool enrichment program. This prom provide students between kindergarten and 5th grade opportunities to experience the arts, life skills, and continued education.”</p>	<p>After-school enrichment</p>	<p>Additional learning and activities outside the normal school hours to engage and educate students</p>
<p>“Our church’s Enrichment Program is able to fill in many of the gaps that a city school simply can not fill. In some cases we are able to enhance, or add to, what the school works to do. We bring to the children a chance to make their own decisions, and then to evaluate how they came to that decision and how they might choose differently next time. We allow them to be creative. We offer activities based on "STEAM". And most important perhaps, we help them to learn kindness, respect, and an understanding for diversity.”</p>	<p>Empowerment and education</p>	<p>Resources, support, and opportunities that enable and inspire students and their communities through education</p>

Participants' quote	Code assigned	Code defined/explained
We provide mental health resources too that have become, it was a problem prior to, it was an ugly problem prior to COVID, but now it's out of control. Even more often it's a little bit of emotional support and confidence building so that when they go to school the next day they feel a little bit better about themselves so that they're a little bit more able to learn.	Support and empathy	Offering emotional and practical support and resources, understanding the specific context of each student's needs.
“Churches bring hope, encouragement, and care to people in these communities. These three things go a long way to minister to individuals. And for the practical and academic needs of students, churches are resourced to make a difference in the life of a student.”	Support for faith and family	Integrating the church's influence with support from families in the context of education
“And so I kind of voluntarily, you know, unpaid. I kind of took, took on that position with help, not by myself. Um And so for a, for a year now, I have been the person um in charge and running it, but I've had to learn a lot of things like grant writing. I had never written a grant in my life. I had to learn how to do that.”	Grant support	Recognizing the significant importance of financial support

Participants' quote	Code assigned	Code defined/explained
We offer students and their families an array of support from various partners in the same community right at the students' schools. The community and the schools leverage their shared resources to help students succeed.	Positive impact on students	The tangible benefits of educational efforts resulting in academic achievement and overall student wellbeing
“We offer activities based on "STEAM". And most important perhaps, we help them to learn ... an understanding for diversity.”	Exposing students to new experiences	Providing students opportunities to explore new ideas, activities, cultures to enhance their education and personal health
“We have a food pantry that operates 22 Saturdays a month. Um We have our community garden where we offer that. They raised beds and we offer families in the community, uh you know, to claim a bed for the summer and to use for their, for their family's purposes. And we've had um neighbors participate in that as well as families of the kids. Um And when I say neighbors, I mean, immediate neighborhoods, neighbors and as well as uh families of the kids in the program. Um I know that um we do, we've been offering space lately to a group of Guatemalan immigrants, uh fairly recent Guatemalan immigrants as well as uh it was a group of Afghan women. Uh Again, they were very new immigrants uh to the community.”	Community assistance programs	Providing resources and assistance such as food to support families in need, contributing to a stable environment suitable for learning

Participants' quote	Code assigned	Code defined/explained
<p>“Churches can provide an environment which stresses the child’s spiritual/social/emotional growth without the pressure of academic demands required by the schools. It is an introduction into a religious environment that they or their family may not otherwise have the chance to experience.”</p>	Emotional and spiritual support to families	Offering holistic guidance to uplift and support students and their families
<p>“Well, I think the greatest obstacle we’ve faced so far is just limited capacity. I wish we could do more. Um And so we need to engage more members of our um of our team. Um And, but also, um we’re just constrained by time.”</p>	Limited capacity	Recognizing constraints in resources, staffing that may affect efforts.
<p>“Well, um I retired from public school teaching two years ago. Um I had 37 years in, um although I taught English and science, social studies was the course that I taught um for most of those 37 years.”</p>	Staff with experience and expertise	Seeking professionals with the relevant skills and expertise to lead and support church educational programs to public school students
<p>“I would add to reduce the teacher student ratio. I mean, there’s no denying a teacher with 30 kids in front of her versus a teacher with maybe 10 Children in front of her or you know, 15 Children make a huge difference. Um That to me is a big one teacher student ratio.”</p>	Reducing teacher-student ratio	Decreasing the number of students per teacher to enhance personalized instruction

Participants' quote	Code assigned	Code defined/explained
<p>“I think um adding to what um [redacted] and [redacted] have said um having even additional tutors, you know, for, for students so that every student could have a tutor available to them. And really, I think also accommodating the different learning styles because not every not every child learns the same way, you know, some, some Children are hands-on learners and and um the opportunities to to really explore and accommodate different learning styles.”</p>	<p>Additional qualified tutors</p>	<p>Providing supplementary educational support through experienced tutors</p>
<p>“But if I had unlimited money I would bring back all of the things that were taken away from the kids because of funding, um, or, you know, and not everything’s been taken away but certainly it, it’s shrinking, you know, that art, art and music and, um, theater, um things, things that allow Children, uh, you know, to, to experiment with things that they might not have had the, the opportunity to do on their own or with their family, especially if money is tight. Um, you know, we took our kids to uh play and that you would have thought that it was the greatest thing ever and all of us, if, you know, like that’s, it’s not a big deal. Um, most of them can’t afford, they can’t afford dance lessons. Um, you know, and, and even at the older grades, middle school age, you know, all of those, you know, what are they, they don’t call it home</p>	<p>Restoring/expanding of enrichment programs</p>	<p>Reviving and /or growing the enrichment opportunities to give students a much broader and richer educational experience</p>

anymore. I'm old, um,
whatever they call it now. But,
um, it, you know, craft kinds
of things that have been taken
away. Um, they need to
experience those things and,
and I wish that they had the
chance. That's what we try to
give them when they do come
to our programs. All those
things that just aren't in the
schools anymore.”

Table B2*Codes to Categories (Step 3)*

Codes assigned	Category assigned	Category defined/explained
Community Engagement, Relationships, Inclusivity	Community collaboration and inclusion	Working with community stakeholders, including non-church members, assisting with food pantries, offering support to families, and adapting to various challenges and needs to create a unified community.
Establishing Trust, Trusting Partnerships with Schools and Community	Trust and partnerships	Building relationships with school administrators, teachers, and staff members, fostering trust, and engaging with various community members to form collaborative partnerships.
After-School Enrichment, Restoring, and Expanding Enrichment Programs	Programs and enrichment	Ongoing education programs, after-school enrichment, training that support students and their families.
Education and Empowerment, Staff with Expertise and Experience, Reducing Teacher-Student Ratio, Additional Qualified Tutors	Empowerment and education	Utilizing educational experts, providing professional development, collaborating with other institutions to support students and their families.
Empathy and Support, Support for Faith and Family, Access to Community Resources, Food Pantry, Emotional and Spiritual Support	Support and resources	Leveraging church facilities, mobilizing volunteer efforts, creating community resource centers, and networking with other churches to support educational programs
Social Justice and Inclusivity, Pursue Social Justice and Education Equity	Social justice and equity	Advocacy for educational equality, fairness, community mobilization for change to support students and their families.

Codes assigned	Category assigned	Category defined/explained
Impact on Students' Academic and Wellbeing, Exposing Students to New Experiences, Adaptation and Growth	Positive impact and success	The positive impact effects on students' academics resulting in success
Faith and Family Engagement, Faith and Family Emphasizing the Importance of Education, Faith and Family Support, Effective Collaboration Between Networks	Faith and family	Strengthening students' achievement through family involvement, integrating faith values, emphasizing the importance of education
Grant Support, Generosity of Parishioners, Limited Capacity, Flawed View of Separation of Church and State, Staff Turnover	Challenges and limitations	Understanding and addressing barriers such as limited capacity, staff turnover, a flawed view of separation of church and state, and other challenges that may impede efforts to reduce educational inequity

These categories are critical to understanding how church leaders address educational inequity and are actively involved in various aspects of community, family, and social justice to impact underprivileged students positively.

Table B3

Secondary Code Cycling in Relation to Themes

Categories assigned	Theme assigned	Theme defined/explained
Trust and Partnerships Community Collaboration	Trust to form partnership	Emphasizing the importance of building trust among various stakeholders, including schools, families, and community organizations, to forge partnerships that enhance educational opportunities and reduce educational inequity.
Support and Resources Community Collaboration and Inclusion	Leveraging community resources	Using existing community resources, networks, and collaborations to support families and enrich educational experiences. This fosters a sense of empowerment and sustainability in the community.
Impact and Success Programs and Enrichment	Continued community development	Addressing the need for ongoing development efforts within the community, such as creating and maintaining educational programs, enriching activities, and other initiatives that promote growth, adaptation, and resilience.
Faith and Family	Faith and family	The role of faith and family in education, where churches provide support and emphasize the importance of education, integrating faith values, and promoting family engagement.

Categories assigned	Theme assigned	Theme defined/explained
Social Justice and Equity	Worldview to pursue equity and social justice	Seeking to pursue social justice and education equity advocating for fairness, equal access, and inclusivity to educational opportunities.
Empowerment and Education	Experience and background in education	The recognition that staff and volunteers with experience and expertise are essential. It highlights the need for professional, targeted support to meet diverse educational needs of students and their families.
Challenges and Limitations	Understanding root causes of inequity	The deep understanding of the underlying causes of educational inequity, including systemic barriers, lack of resources, and cultural biases.

These themes offer a structure to interpret and comprehend the diverse endeavors of church leaders in tackling educational inequality. They demonstrate how different initiatives, resources, and principles are intertwined and contribute to an effort to improve education for underserved students of the community.

Table B4

Final Themes

Themes
Trust to Form Partnership
Leveraging Community Resources
Continued Community Development
Faith and Family
Worldview to Pursue Equity and Social Justice
Experience and Background in Education
Understanding Root Causes of Inequity

Appendix C

Detailed Discussion of Results by Data Source

Questionnaire Results

I began by thoroughly reading the transcripts multiple times to familiarize myself with the data. Next, I initiated the coding process, wherein I identified meaningful data segments and assigned preliminary codes to them. This involved breaking down the data into smaller segments and applying relevant codes, often at a sentence level. Following this, I conducted a comprehensive review and analysis of the coded data to identify patterns, commonalities, and connections among the codes. These codes were then grouped into corresponding categories, representing broader concepts.

Subsequently, I organized these categories into seven overarching themes. To assess the prevalence and variations of each theme across the entire dataset, I collated and organized the codes, categories, and themes. Following this, I refined the themes, aligning them more closely with the research questions. Each theme was carefully defined and described in terms of how it reflected the dataset. Finally, I interpreted the data, extracting meaningful insights from the themes and discussing their implications. This information served as the basis for constructing the case studies. These categories, representing fundamental themes, were systematically organized into a coherent framework comprising seven overarching themes. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and variations within each theme, I meticulously collated and organized the codes, categories, and themes across the entire dataset. This process facilitated a comprehensive assessment of the dataset's landscape. As the analysis progressed, I continuously reviewed and refined the identified themes, meticulously considering their relevance to the overarching research questions. Each theme underwent a thorough definition

and description, with an emphasis on elucidating how it authentically represented the dataset. Subsequently, I embarked on the interpretation of the data, extracting meaningful insights from the emergent themes and engaging in a nuanced discussion of their implications. The insights derived from this rigorous analysis were subsequently harnessed to construct the comprehensive case studies, thereby ensuring that the research findings were effectively communicated and elucidated within the broader context of the study.

Anonymous Survey Results

The anonymous survey yielded findings from two open-ended questions, shedding light on the pivotal role of churches in harnessing community resources to address disparities, particularly evident in responses to the first question concerning the influence of churches. A predominant theme that emerged was the cultivation of trust, underscored by six respondents advocating for trust-building programs and five respondents emphasizing the broader importance of trust. Although not all respondents explicitly mentioned their churches' initiatives, many acknowledged the use of community resources.

Table C1

Anonymous Survey Results

Emerging Theme	Emerging Theme	Emerging Theme	Outlier based on literature	Predominant Theme
Leveraging Community Resources	Trust Enrichment Programs	Trust 5 Responses	(none)	Leveraging Community Resources
7 responses Leverage resources to support families.	6 responses Faith and Family Support 5 responses	Providing academics and enrichment	Not all churches should be involved in public schools.	Leveraging Resources to Support Families
6 responses		4 responses		

Interview Results

This section delves into the insightful outcomes derived from the personal interviews conducted as a vital component of this study. The qualitative interviews provided an in-depth exploration of the perceptions, experiences, and viewpoints of the participants, shedding light on the multifaceted dynamics of church involvement in urban schools. Table 4 presents a concise summary of the key results obtained from these personal interviews. Each interview question has been correlated with the dominant themes that have surfaced from participants' narratives. The subsequent narrative analysis highlights the richness of the data gleaned from these interviews, elucidating the themes that encapsulate the participants' valuable insights and offering a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives on the role of the local church.

Results from Personal Interviews

Table C2

Personal Interview Results

Questions	Emerging theme	Emerging theme	Emerging theme	Outlier based on literature	Predominant theme
1. Please tell me about yourself and provide some background information about your family.	Personal background and experiences 8 responses	Hobbies/ interests/ values/ beliefs 4 responses	Goals/ aspirations 3 responses	(none)	Background/ experiences
2. What is your role here in this church, and how long have you been a member?	Community engagement 7 responses	Leadership/ staff 6 responses	Length of membership 4 responses	(none)	Community engagement
3. How long has the church been in this community?	Several decades 5 responses	A long time 2 responses	Over a century 1 response	(none)	Several decades

Questions	Emerging theme	Emerging theme	Emerging theme	Outlier based on literature	Predominant theme
4. Has the church always been active in public schools; how and why did the church become involved?	Community outreach and development 8 responses	Collaboration with school administration 6 responses	Support for student-enrichment program 5 responses	(none)	Community outreach and development
5. Explain your work in the public schools? What do you do?	Church-school partnership 8 responses	Community development 7 responses	Social justice and reducing inequity 7 responses	(none)	Church-school partnership
6. How does your work in public schools contribute to reducing educational inequity?	Emphasis on faith and family 7 responses	Church and school partnership and collaboration 6 responses	Leverage community resources 6 responses	Community voting	Emphasis on faith and family
7. What is your perspective on the cause of the educational inequity in the district?	Socio-economic factors 8 responses	Lack of funding 6 responses	Cultural and language barriers 3 responses	(none)	Socio-economic factors
8. Describe your partnership with the local school. What works and what doesn't work?	Community engagement and collaboration 8 responses	Establishing trust 7 responses	Programs offered/enrichment 6 responses	(none)	Community engagement and collaboration
9. Which specific programs does the church offer to the students at the school? Does it also service their parents and their respective families?	After-school enrichment 8 responses	Empowerment and education 6 responses	Empathy and support 4 responses	(none)	After-school enrichment

Questions	Emerging theme	Emerging theme	Emerging theme	Outlier based on literature	Predominant theme
9a. Does it also service their parents and their respective families?	Support for faith and family 5 responses	Access to community resources 5 responses	Inclusivity 3 responses	(none)	Support for faith and family; access to community resources
10. Describe your worldview and ministry philosophy. How do your beliefs and ministry philosophy enable the church to partner with the schools?	Social justice and inclusivity 8 responses	Community partnership and collaboration 7 responses	Education and empowerment 5 responses	(none)	Social justice and inclusivity
11. Do you agree with the percentage of your church's budget reserved for servicing the schools?	No; grant support essential (for equity) 7 responses	No; generosity of parishioners (worldview to combat inequity) 4 responses	No; desire for increased funding (to assist with equity) 4 responses	(none)	No; grant support essential
12. Describe the impact of staff members and volunteers involved in the church's ministry in the schools.	Positive impact on students' academics and wellbeing 8 responses	Trusting partnership with schools and community 8 responses	Exposing students to new experiences 3 responses	Providing services to non-members	Positive impact on students' academics and wellbeing and trusting partnership with schools and community

Questions	Emerging theme	Emerging theme	Emerging theme	Outlier based on literature	Predominant theme
13. How often do you evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership? Please describe the results of the last evaluation.	Success stories 6 responses	Disruptions and transitions due to the pandemic 4 responses	Surveying of parents and teachers 3 responses	(none)	Success stories
14. Describe the church's influence on students and families who are church members and those who are not church members.	Faith and family engagement 7 responses	Inclusion of non-church members 7 responses	Community assistance and programs 5 responses	(none)	Faith and family engagement and inclusion of non-church members
15. Besides your school partnership, describe the other ways you serve the community.	Food pantry and other community resources 8 responses	Emotional and spiritual support to families 5 responses	Inclusion of immigrant families 4 responses	(none)	Food pantry and other community resources
16. Describe your successes and failures.	Building relationships and community 8 responses	Positive impact on students and families 8 responses	Adaptation and growth 3 responses	(none)	Building relationships and community and positive impact on students and families

Based on the data presented in Table C2, the insights gathered from personal interviews are grounded in responses to a total of sixteen open-ended questions. These interviews provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the strategies employed by churches to tackle educational disparities within public schools. During these interviews, participants willingly shared their personal backgrounds and experiences, thereby unveiling a wide spectrum of

interests, values, and aspirations. These individual perspectives served as the bedrock upon which their unique approaches to community engagement were built.

One overarching theme that prominently surfaced was the paramount importance of active participation within the community. This theme manifested itself through the diverse leadership roles undertaken by individuals, coupled with their longstanding affiliations with both their respective churches and the local community. It is worth highlighting that many of these churches have maintained a continuous presence for several decades, and in some instances, over a century, underscoring their unwavering commitment to outreach and community development.

Central to the involvement of churches in public schools was their collaboration with school administrators and their staunch support for programs designed to enrich the educational experiences of students. These collaborative endeavors encompassed church-school partnerships, initiatives aimed at fostering community growth, and a commitment to pursuing justice, all of which were identified as effective means of mitigating educational disparities. Furthermore, the holistic approach embraced by these churches underscored the pivotal role of faith and family values in their strategies.

Participants also pointed out several contributing factors to educational inequality, including socioeconomic constraints, inadequate funding, and cultural barriers. The intricate relationship between churches and local schools was further elucidated through recurring themes such as initiatives focused on building trust, active engagement within the community, and the implementation of targeted programs aimed at enhancing the lives of students. Notably, churches extended their influence beyond the student population by offering after-school enrichment programs catering to children, along with providing empathy and support to parents and entire families.

The viewpoints and convictions expressed by participants underscored their steadfast commitment to justice and inclusivity, both in their broader worldview and in the execution of their ministerial duties. They displayed a dedicated resolve to forge meaningful partnerships with schools, all the while voicing concerns about funding and advocating for increased grants to promote educational equity. The positive impact of their collective efforts became evident through students' improved academic achievements, the nurturing of trusting relationships with local schools, and the creation of opportunities that enriched the lives of students.

Despite the formidable challenges posed by systemic barriers, the results presented a compelling narrative of how churches exerted a far-reaching influence through faith-based initiatives that engaged families and provided unwavering support to both members and non-members within their communities. In addition to their involvement with schools, churches actively participated in a wide array of community services, including the operation of food pantries and the provision of emotional assistance to families, including those from immigrant backgrounds.

Focus Group Results

In this section, we explore the results stemming from our focus group discussions, which revolved around critical questions aimed at understanding the dynamics of local church-public school partnerships and their impact on educational equity, as shown in the table below. These insightful inquiries, framed to extract the expertise and perspectives of participants, have revealed a mosaic of emerging themes and dominant perspectives. Through these dialogues, we unravel how various elements, such as trust-building, social justice, resource mobilization, the role of poverty in the achievement gap, and the significance of interconnected social networks, converge to shape the collaborative efforts between local churches and public schools. The

findings presented in this table offer a rich tapestry of insights into the multifaceted landscape of church-school partnerships and their implications for educational equity.

Table C3

Focus Group Results

Questions	Emerging Theme	Emerging Theme	Emerging Theme	Outlier based on literature	Predominant theme
1. How can pastors and church leaders enhance their understanding of creating a collaborative and effective local church-public school partnership?	Establishing trust 8 responses	Pursue social justice and education equity 5 responses	Leverage community resources 5 responses	(none)	Establishing trust
2. What role does poverty play in establishing the achievement gap?	Providing academics and enrichment 4 responses	Leverage resources to support families. 6 responses	Faith and family support 5 responses	(none)	Leveraging resources to support families
3. Describe the social networks within the family, school, and community that are essential for academic achievement.	Faith and family emphasizing the importance of education 8 responses	Effective collaboration between networks (family, faith, school) 6 responses	Family members' and belief in student's potential 3 responses	(none)	Faith and family emphasizing importance of education
4. What is the greatest obstacle local churches face when partnering with public schools?	Limited capacity 6 responses	Staff turnover 3 responses	Flawed view of separation of church and state 1 response		Limited capacity
5. If you had unlimited funding, identify the top five initiatives you would implement in the schools to help reduce the achievement gap.	Hire more staff with the right background and experience/expertise 7 responses	Reducing teacher-student ratio 3 responses	Additional qualified tutors and learning support with 3 responses		Hire more staff with the right background and experience/-expertise

Drawing from the insights gleaned in Table C3, the focus group inquiry encompassed five open-ended queries. These inquiries yielded valuable revelations regarding the concerted efforts of churches to address educational disparities within public schools. The predominant theme that surfaced was the imperative role of trust-building in facilitating effective collaboration between pastors, church leaders, and educational institutions. Furthermore, participants underscored the critical significance of pursuing social justice initiatives and harnessing the potential of community resources. The findings also shed light on the intricate relationship between poverty and the emergence of achievement gaps, underscoring the pressing need to bolster families through academic support, enrichment activities, and spiritual guidance. Regarding factors contributing to success, participants emphasized the pivotal role of a supportive environment rooted in faith and family values. Conversely, one of the foremost challenges encountered by churches in their partnerships with public schools is their limited capacity. This highlights the paramount importance of acquiring the requisite resources and developing a nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved in these collaborations. In a hypothetical scenario characterized by boundless financial resources, participants articulated their priorities, which encompassed recruiting staff members possessing relevant backgrounds and expertise, diminishing teacher-student ratios, and augmenting the provision of qualified tutors and comprehensive learning support services.