

SUPPORTING THE LITERACY SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS  
WITH RELIGIOUS LITERACY PROGRAMMING

by

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*To God be the Glory!*  
*Wisdom and understanding aligns with the pursuit of literacy. We must acquire  
knowledge and comprehension, which are integral aspects of literacy.*  
*Genesis 11:5-8; Acts 8:29-30*

*“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom: And with all thy getting, get  
understanding.”*  
*Proverbs 4:7 KJV*

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Sherrayna Coleman

## PREFACE

In this manuscript style dissertation, my primary aim was to delve into the intersection of religious involvement and literacy success among African American students. The first manuscript, *Examining the Impact of Religious Engagement on Literacy Achievement Among African American Students: A Comprehensive Review* was submitted to *Religion & Education* on December 19, 2022, and is presented in Chapter 2. The final version, which is entitled, *The Role Religious Involvement Plays on the Literacy of African American Students: A Systematic Review* that was published online in *Religion & Education* in October 2023 and in print in the October 2023 edition is presented in Chapter 3 (Coleman, 2023). Additionally, the manuscript, *Supporting the Literacy Success of African American Students with Religious Literacy Programming: An Intervention Study* submitted to *Race Ethnicity and Education* is presented in Chapter 4.

## ABSTRACT

### SUPPORTING THE LITERACY SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS WITH RELIGIOUS LITERACY PROGRAMMING

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This dissertation explores the intricate connections between African Americans, the Black Church, and educational outcomes, with a focus on implications for literacy development. Grounded in Critical Race Theory, the research seeks to unravel the structural complexities that contribute to the academic achievement gap faced by African American students. The theoretical framework guides an investigation into the potential impact of affiliations with the Black Church on academic success, reading skills, and family literacy needs. The study draws on a comprehensive literature review and a culturally relevant literacy intervention aligned with the Black Church. A unique family literacy book club, incorporating culturally relevant Biblical texts, serves as a focal point for exploring its impact on children's attitudes and beliefs towards literacy. Findings suggest that aligning interventions with the Black Church significantly improves academic success, with CRT revealing structural barriers that can be addressed through strategic partnerships. The study contributes to a nuanced understanding of literacy development within the African American community and highlights the transformative potential of collaboration and culturally responsive strategies. Implications for policy,

practice and future research are discussed within the framework of CRT, emphasizing the need for systemic change to promote educational equity and justice.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRT	Critical Race Theory
AAVE	African American Vernacular English
VBS	Vacation Bible School
CSP	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy
CRP	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE ROLE RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT PLAYS ON THE LITERACY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Education stands as a pivotal force in individual growth, societal progress, and the pursuit of opportunities. However, persistent disparities, such as the academic gap faced by African American students, underscore the complexity of educational inequalities shaped by various social, cultural, and institutional factors. The Black Church, deeply embedded in the African American community, historically serves as a linchpin for cultural identity, support, and resilience. While existing literature recognizes the potential influence of the Black Church on educational outcomes, a gap persists in understanding the specific mechanisms and partnerships that could address the academic challenges faced by African American students (Barrett, 2010a & Curry et al, 2020). This dissertation, framed within Critical Race Theory, seeks to explore the intersections between African Americans' connections with the Black Church and their educational outcomes, focusing particularly on implications for literacy development.

#### **Need and Significance**

This dissertation contributes to the existing body of knowledge by delving into the intricate connections between African Americans, the Black Church, and educational outcomes. By identifying effective strategies and potential partnerships, this research aims to inform educators, policymakers, and community leaders about culturally responsive interventions that have the potential to address the academic achievement gap

within the African American community. Furthermore, the study holds implications for promoting literacy development, fostering a sense of identity, and creating a supportive educational environment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory provides the theoretical lens through which this research examines the complex dynamics of race, power, and education. Originating in legal scholarship, CRT posits that racism is not merely an individual bias but is deeply embedded in legal systems and social structures (Yosso, 2005 & Villapando, 2003). In the context of education, CRT helps uncover how systemic racism perpetuates educational inequities, emphasizing the need to address these issues not only at an individual level but also at an institutional and systemic level. By applying CRT to the study of African Americans' educational experiences within the Black Church context, this dissertation aims to reveal the structural challenges contributing to the academic achievement gap.

### **Research Objectives**

The primary objectives of this dissertation are to investigate the potential impact of African Americans' affiliations with the Black Church and educational outcomes, particularly in the context of literacy development, and to address how connections between African Americans and the Black Church influence educational outcomes, as indicated by the current literature, and when viewed through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Additionally, this dissertation will address the effectiveness of a culturally relevant literacy intervention aligned with the Black Church in improving academic

success, reading skills, and family literacy needs among African American students, considering the structural inequalities identified by Critical Race Theory. This study will also explore to what extent can partnerships between the Black Church, local schools, and community organizations, framed within Critical Race Theory, contribute to improved academic performance and increased enthusiasm for learning among African American students. Finally, this study aims to explore how a family literacy book club, incorporating culturally relevant Biblical texts, impact African American children's attitudes and beliefs towards literacy, taking into account the structural barriers highlighted by Critical Race Theory.

### **Organizational Structure**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapters two and three present a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, highlighting existing gaps, patterns, and insights through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Chapter four, the empirical study, outlines the research methodology, detailing the design, participants, and procedures employed in the study in addition to findings and analysis, discussing the outcomes of the culturally relevant literacy intervention. Chapter five synthesizes the findings, discusses their implications, and provides recommendations for future research, policy, and practice, acknowledging the importance of CRT in informing transformative change in education.

### **Summary**

Through this dissertation, within the framework of Critical Race Theory, a nuanced understanding of the role of the Black Church in influencing educational

outcomes, particularly in the realm of literacy, is sought. The goal is to contribute to ongoing efforts addressing the academic achievement gap among African American students and advocating for systemic change grounded in principles of equity and justice.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT ON LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

This review explored empirical studies from 2012-2022 to understand the influence of religious involvement on educational outcomes of African American students. Thirteen studies were analyzed first using a database to identify how the data related to three guiding tenets from Critical Race Theory. Then, a constant comparative analysis was used to identify themes found related to each tenet. Findings showed that this body of research underscores the importance of the Black Church's community, relationships and trust, challenges to academic disparities, informal learning, faith-based learning, provision of access to programming, and spirituality as a support mechanism.

Keywords: Black Church, literacy, academic achievement, religion

## **Need and Significance**

There is a vast difference between academic achievement in the African-American community and the Caucasian community. Although this achievement gap is known and has existed for decades, little has changed to bridge the gap. Racism framed educational institutions since the beginning of the 20th century and continues, although quite subtly, to impact these educational institutions in the 21st century (Yosso, 2005). Researchers and practitioners are still probing for tools to effectively analyze and challenge the impact of race and racism in U.S. society (Yosso, 2005). “Critical Race Theory can be used to theorize, examine and challenge ways that race, and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices and discourses” (Yosso, 2005). African Americans bring community cultural wealth that could transform how teachers approach lesson plans (Yosso, 2005). African Americans have had to share cultural capital and have developed social capital for survival and success in a world that has been segregated and bound by ubiquitous forces of racism and discrimination (Morris, 2004) and the African American Church has been instrumental in helping African Americans develop and share their capital.

“Historically, the church, the family, and the school are the three most critical institutions whose interactions have been responsible for the viability of the African-American community” (Roberts, 1980). Jeynes (2010) opines that religious relationships and commitments reduce the achievement gap by 50%. Despite this reduction in the achievement gap, religious organizations within the African-American community have traditionally been disregarded by educational institutions, even though

they often have community cultural wealth and literacy assets that can benefit their academic success (Farrow & Farrow, 2019). The lack of attention that is given to African Americans' affiliations to church/religious organizations by educational institutions is a problem because religion, for many African-American students, is a major part of their culture (Dallavis, 2011; Skerrett, 2014). Religious involvement displays more positive relationships with academic achievement for students with low socioeconomic status than those from families with higher socioeconomic status (Regnerus & Elder, 2003). Based on the literature, academic achievement can be impacted when a misalignment exists between school and home (cultural) practices (Farrow & Farrow, 2019). Personal religious affiliations reduce the achievement gap by supporting Black churches and their connections with public school districts. Outside of schools, not many institutions have influenced the development of African Americans more than Black churches (Jordan & Wilson, 2015).

Only one previous literature review was located, which addressed the relationship between personal faith and the reduction of the achievement gap, and it was written more than ten years ago. In this meta-analysis, Jeynes (2010) opined that the achievement gap disappeared entirely if an African-American student was affiliated with a religious organization and also from an intact family. The results of Jeynes's (2010) three meta-analyses were that personal religious faith (believing in a high power, i.e., God) was one of the two largest factors that consistently reduced the achievement gap; personal religious commitment (church membership) reduced the achievement gap by 50%; and attending a religious school reduced the achievement gap by 25%. A more



recent (last ten years) systematic review of the literature that spans more broadly across the literature to focus on how religiosity is related to literacy outcomes is needed. This would guide understanding how more recent research may extend those previous findings.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Daniel Solorzano (1997, 1998) identified three tenets of Critical Race Theory that can inform theory, research pedagogy, classroom curriculum, and policies: the intercentricity of race and racism; the challenge to dominant ideology; and the centrality of experiential knowledge.

*“The Intercentricity of Race and Racism with Other Forms of Subordination:* CRT starts from the premise that race and racism are central, endemic, permanent, and a fundamental part of defining and explaining how U.S. society functions (Bell, 1992; Russell, 1992)” (Yosso, 2005, p. 117-118). Because society functions primarily on race and racism, African-American students will continue to lag behind their counterparts academically. This lens of CRT can be examined by delving into how society ignores how African Americans learn and the capital they bring with them that could improve academic performance in African-American communities.

*“The Challenge to Dominant Ideology:* CRT challenges White privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000)” (Yosso, 2005, p. 117-118). This could be seen through the lens of

cultural capital that African Americans could bring to the table that could contribute to their academic success. This capital should not be ignored but incorporated into the objectives of educators in order to ensure academic success for students of color.

*“The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge: CRT draws explicitly on the lived experiences of people of color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, testimonios, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987, 1992, 1996; Carrasco, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Espinoza, 1990; Montoya, 1994; Olivas, 1990; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Villalpando, 2003)”* (Yosso, 2005, p. 117-118). This tenet of CRT can be seen through the lens of African Americans' affiliations with religious organizations. Historically, the Black Church has been a fortress in the African-American community and, as a result, has sustained a cultural character that has helped African Americans-fight racial prejudice and antagonism against them for generations (Foster, 2009; Quarles, 1987; Randolph, 2009).

## **Methods**

### **Search Process**

I systematically reviewed the literature on how religiosity is related to literacy outcomes spanning the last 20 years. First, I used a three-step search and selection process: The initial search, the screening process, and reference combing, which led to the final selection of relevant articles (see Figure 1.1).

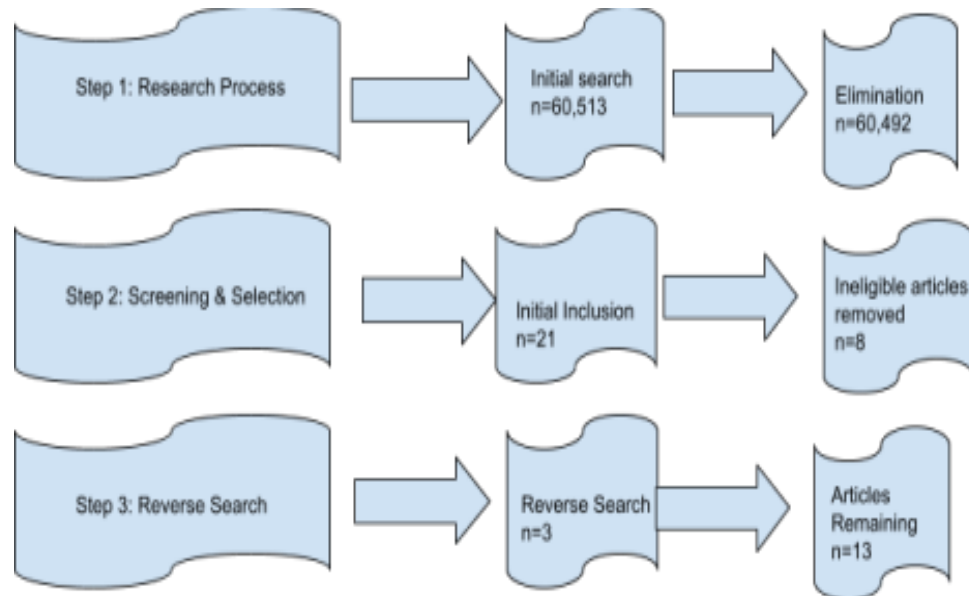
## Article Search and Selection Process

To identify articles specifically about how religiosity is related to literacy outcomes, three databases (ERIC, Google Scholar, and JSTOR) were utilized to search for articles. The following terms were used across searches in all three databases:

- ❖ Black Church, literacy, meta-analysis
- ❖ Black Church, reading, literature review
- ❖ African American church, reading, cultural responsiveness
- ❖ Black Church, reading, educational outcomes

Figure 1. 1

### *Article Search and Identification Process*



I delimited the search to articles from 2002-2022 to locate recently published literature and literature published since the one previous review I found. Additionally, I delimited

the search to eliminate articles that focused on educational aspirations or attainment, but not educational outcomes. This aligned with the review's focus on connections between religiosity and educational outcomes.

The total number of articles located during the initial search was 60,513 articles. These included zero from ERIC, 1,772 from JSTOR, and 58,741 from Google Scholar.

### **Screening and Selection Process**

All the articles (60,513) were screened to determine if they were relevant for inclusion in the literature review. The title and abstract of each article were screened to determine whether they met the following criteria:

1. Published in a peer-reviewed journal between 2012 and 2022;
2. Represent empirical research in which data were collected and analyzed, and
3. Focused on the educational outcomes of African American students affiliated with religious organizations.

Twenty-one articles met these criteria and were further considered for inclusion in the literature review. The remainder of the articles (60,492) were excluded from consideration because they needed to meet one or more of the criteria.

Next, the 21 articles that met the criteria were read in their entirety to ensure that they met the criteria for inclusion. Through this process, 8 of the 21 articles were eliminated as their content did not meet the criteria. For example, after reading one article in its entirety, it focused on religion and youth educational aspirations in a

multilevel approach rather than educational outcomes. It was excluded as it did not focus on educational outcomes. Therefore, after this step, 13 articles met the criteria to be included in this literature review.

### **Reference Combing**

For each of the 13 articles initially identified for inclusion, reference combing (using each article's reference list to find new articles that met the inclusion criteria potentially) and reverse searching (using the Google Scholar "cited by" and "related articles" feature) were conducted to identify any additional articles that might meet the inclusion criteria for the literature review. During this process, three additional articles were identified but then eliminated, resulting in 13 articles from the total being included in the literature review.

### **Analytic Methods**

Initially, in a database, I identified how each article in the review addressed (or did not address) each of the three focal Critical Race Theory tenets: (1) The Intercentricity of Race and Racism with Other Forms of Subordination, (2) The Challenge to Dominant Ideology, (3) The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge.

Then, I used constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) to identify themes related to how the Black Church and educational outcomes are related and aligned with each CRT tenet. First, for "Intercentricity of Race and Racism with Other Forms of Subordination", the data identified three themes—the importance of community, relationships, and trust in the Black Church. Second, for the tenet, "Challenge to Dominant Ideology", two themes emerged—challenging academic disparities and

providing informal learning in the Black Church. Third, for “Centrality of Experiential Knowledge,” three themes were found: the benefits of faith-based learning, access to programming, and spirituality as a support mechanism in the Black Church.

## **Findings**

### **The Intercentricity of Race and Racism with Other Forms of Subordination**

#### ***Community***

Several studies’ findings suggested the importance of community in African Americans’ academic success related to their participation in the Black Church. For example, a study by Glanville, Hernandez & Sikkink (2008) which used qualitative analysis methods from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to conduct surveys and interviews of 7th-12th grade students from 132 schools within 80 communities found that when adolescents participated more frequently in the church community through services and youth groups, they performed better than those in the same community who did not attend. When examining the relationship between attending church on a regular basis and what social networks African Americans were involved in it was found that religious involvement helps define friendship networks. The study found that religious attendance had a significant positive effect on friends’ grades in African Americans. Because these friendship networks within the church community were shared between people who tend to be like-minded, the students all shared similar goals and achievements. Glanville, et al (2008) also found that adolescents who attend religious services and participate in religious activities are predicted to have less truancy than those who do not attend which results in positive educational outcomes.

Another study by Jeynes (2003) that used the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) from the Department of Education found that children associated with religious organizations academically outperform students who are not. This study consisted of 18,726 students, 11% being African American, and questionnaires were given to students, their parents, and teachers as well as achievement tests in order to gauge academic achievement. This study displayed how commitment to religious organizations in the community can be essential to academic success.

Finally, a study conducted by Swindler-Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte (2018) where a qualitative case-study was conducted to examine the complexity of African American middle class children navigating church and school, found that the Black Church created opportunities for African American students to engage in literacy practices that invited the community to engage and participate while schools were more focused on the outcomes of standardized testing. In the church the roles between adults and children shifted to teach the children the routines and the order of services and programs. The studies showed the importance of knowing and understanding the culture of African Americans when considering how they learn and what methods to consider in ensuring they are successful academically. The studies show the theme of community and also one of the tenets of Critical Race Theory. It also displays the importance of knowing and understanding that community is a form of social capital for African Americans and could be highly applicable when considering how they learn and what it takes to ensure their success academically.

## *Relationships*

The Black Church has proven to be a fortress for African Americans to develop relationships with others they feel connected and relatable to. Carter-Francique, McClain and Stephens (2020) in a qualitative study which used Creswell's (2005) six-step method found that the participants (African American grandmothers) were able to use the knowledge acquired in the church to support the grandchildren they had taken on the responsibility of caring for. The participants of this study consisted of ten African American grandmothers from seven churches who were the primary caretakers of their grandchildren. The authors found that the women successfully helped their grandchildren develop academically because of the relationships they developed while participating in educational activities in the Black Church. The activities the authors labeled "the wages of worship" included prayer, preaching, scripture reading and singing. The participants developed communication skills through prayer and preaching which consists of articulating messages to God and about God. This helped the participants to develop and improve their public speaking skills. During scripture reading instructional time the participants read and discussed the material which helped to develop and improve comprehension skills. The participants indicated that the knowledge they received through the connections and relationships developed in the church not only benefited them and helped to improve their skills, but they were able to pass the knowledge and skills to their grandchildren that may be lacking in the classroom.



Participants in a qualitative case study conducted by Curry and McIntosh (2020) in response to interview questions indicated that the relationships that were developed in the partnership between school and church played an active role in equipping African American students with the capital that leads to academic success. This study sought to understand what influence the church had when partnerships were established between church and school. The church, A Joyful Noise Baptist Church, and the school, Successful Preparation High School, both partnered to serve the African American students who seemed to lag behind their White counterparts. When the relationship was developed, and the two entities joined together to work on improving these inadequacies they reported seeing significant improvement in academic success and the morale of the African American students had improved. One participant stated, “This partnership really makes a difference and works to ensure the mission and vision of the school are being met by the school’s leaders and community stakeholders” (Curry & McIntosh, 2020). The participants expressed satisfaction with how the partnership was improving the lives of the students.

Peele-Eady (2011) also conducted a two-year ethnographic study, which included observations, field notes and interviews, and found that during one of the three functions (scholarship, stewardship, and fellowship) where church members functioned as a community, children were positioned to gain knowledge and understand how to become members of the familial community of the church. This allowed the children to “share the floor” which is a privilege that many African American students did not feel they had access to in traditional classrooms. The author (2011) defined scholarship for purposes of

this study as “the explicit ways children acquire religious knowledge.” This is where students partner with religious leaders in the church and are given knowledge of religious subjects and scriptures in the Bible. The leadership that partnered with the children sought to help them develop and improve comprehension skills and encourage them to strive to have a heart for service to the church; and also, to have a concise understanding of the rules for church membership. Stewardship includes instruction that is designed to influence the children’s behavior, so they understand what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable for church membership. Leadership also partnered with the students by modeling how they should conduct themselves. The students were assigned tasks that would normally be carried out by adult members to demonstrate that they understand their roles. Finally, during fellowship the children participated in a variety of activities where they were with other children as well as adults to display the knowledge they had learned about how to conduct themselves.

Another qualitative study in which interviews were conducted with students from six public high schools in a large urban center in the northeastern and midwestern United States, Barrett (2010b) found that religious participation provides African Americans with moral directives that guide their everyday practices and behaviors. One way to reinforce this is through the practice of public affirmation. The celebration of academic success causes African American students in the church to be motivated to be high achievers so they can participate in acknowledgements on Sundays in which achievements are celebrated. Although there are always kids who did not make the grades to participate, it encourages them to work harder so they

may also be acknowledged. Public affirmation encourages students to work hard towards excellence and look forward to being acknowledged in celebrations of success. Pastor Johnson believes that it teaches the children that there are rewards attached to doing well in school and this process has helped his members (Barret, 2010b). Barrett (2010b) also found that one of the Black Church's most important resources offered to African Americans is a place where they can feel valued and where their true talents and abilities can be nurtured. When they have their faith and academic support, Barrett (2010b) found that "success breeds success."

Through the development of relationships, the authors showed that African Americans through relationships with the Black Church have developed cultural capital that is often not recognized by educators. It is important to learn and understand the religious capital that African Americans bring when approaching educational initiatives.

### ***Trust***

African Americans have developed trusted relationships with leadership and members of the church. These relationships are beneficial because they receive help and advice from people whom they felt they could trust and who cared about their endeavors. One of the resources the Black Church has continuously tried to contribute to the lives of African Americans was learning and development. For example, Stephens (2020) in a qualitative study previously mentioned found that participation in worship services and Bible classes greatly contributed to learning and development. The participants were able to pass on the knowledge they received from the church to their grandchildren. The

participants developed a trusted relationship with the leadership of the church to submit to the practices of the church. These trusted relationships were important to the children's academic achievement and the children were able to supplement what they were learning in school.

Jordan and Wilson (2012) during interviews conducted in their comparative study of two North Carolina churches found that academic disparities existed in African American schools and the church leaders were fully cognizant of it. These disparities caused them to feel as though they had to trust and depend upon their own leadership as an additional reinforcement to achieve academically. Participants from both churches shared concerns about there being a lack of equity, care, and community in local schools. This was the reason they felt a distrust with their current system and looked to the church as a trusted source. Participants indicated there was a lack of care and empathy for African American students and they felt it was important that the Black Church be involved in seeking to fulfill their spiritual, moral, and educational endeavors.

In a qualitative study conducted by Hilton and Wood (2012) involving 28 African American male participants, interviews were conducted to determine whether spirituality had a positive impact in academic success, and it was determined that spirituality was described as a means of support for academic success. One of the participants indicated that he felt his faith and spirituality was not accepted outside of the church and felt more comfortable discussing his faith and how it had benefited him academically amongst his church family because of the trusted relationships he shared with them. Once the

participants developed trusted relationships with people whom they felt understood their faith, they were able to submit to their leadership and be more submissive to the doctrine that was being taught. Because of faith in who He (God) is to them the participants trusted that through prayer He will give them the strength and courage to be successful. Personal and spiritual trust are important facets of academic success for the African Americans who participate in religious organizations. It is important that they develop trusted relationships with people and leadership who have the resources to assist them academically in the public school system as well as in the community.

### **The Challenge to Dominant Ideology**

#### ***Academic Disparities***

The academic disparities involving African American students in education has caused African Americans to seek refuge in the Black Church. Jordan & Wilson (2012) revealed this in their study where they retrieved data from online inquiry and document review of public sources that White students surpassed African American students academically. In this comparative case study, one of the participants expressed a feeling of being treated unfairly in the classroom. A female student from Worship Baptist Church said, "Sometimes they look at us and let's say they give a problem, and half the Blacks miss the problem, they think it's because the Black students didn't care or didn't pay attention in class. But if the White people get it wrong then the teachers think they are tired and deserve a second chance." These disparities negatively impact African Americans academically. The Black churches in this study provided academic opportunities for these students in order to attempt to bridge the gap. The participants

pointed out that some teachers have a preconceived idea of what African American students can achieve so they don't put forth the effort to help them.

Another qualitative study which consisted of interviews of a socially activist urban pastor and field work to determine the relationships between religious involvement and educational outcomes among urban African American students found that "neglect is a word that arises frequently in his description of the public schools in the area in which his church resides". Pastor Johnson in this study shared his personal actions to highlight the neglect and mistreatment of students in the public school system in the city where his church resides (Barret, 2010a). Pastor Johnson shared the extreme efforts he went through to try to get the Board of Education in his area to address matters of inequity concerning the African American community. Because these inequities have deep roots it is difficult to try to convince people that there is a problem. Pastor Johnson was committed to ensuring that he does what he can to make sure African Americans are treated fairly.

In a qualitative case-study conducted by Boutte, et al (2018) it was found through observations and interviews that students' abilities are sometimes a direct result of what they learned in the home. This cultural capital is often ignored in the classroom because teachers' perceptions of their students can impact how they approach teaching. In this case, Melissa, the participant, was observed in the classroom as well as in the church. It was found that Melissa adjusted well and adapted to the activities she was presented with. For example, during a time when the children were given the opportunity to perform tasks that would normally be performed by the adults in the

church, Melissa participated with passion and zeal. It was found that Melissa's experiences in the church and at home brought out the best in her classroom experience. During some observation sessions Melissa was observed leading groups in the children's department of her church. At home her parents insisted on excellence in the things she committed herself to, and in the classroom, she performed above her grade level. Her teacher stated, "Her reading indicates she is above grade level." The study with Melissa reveals the importance of teachers seeing African Americans through a broader lens and understanding that each child is different and can bring much more than teachers may expect based upon their own perceptions of them.

### ***Informal Learning***

Informal learning spaces have proven to be beneficial to African American students' learning and development. The Black Church has been instrumental in providing informal religious education to their members and the community to encourage moral, spiritual, and academic success. By way of illustration, in the qualitative study mentioned previously Carter-Francique, et al (2020) found that informal learning such as religious and spiritual activities contributed to personal learning and development. One participant, Jacqueline, remembered, "The elders of the church taught us the importance of sticking together. They also taught us skills for interviewing and job opportunities." This informal learning is often available in the Black Church to provide African Americans with resources to attempt to close the achievement gap that exists between African American and White students. This capital can be passed through generations so African Americans can begin to see illiteracy cycles breaking in their

families and communities. Jacqueline and other participants indicated that because of the educational resources offered by the church they now have the confidence to return to school and earn a bachelor's degree.

Shared characteristics of learning were recognized during observations in a previously mentioned study conducted by Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte (2018). One of the activities included reading the scripture of the week. The minister of the church read the Bible scripture aloud and the children read along from their Bibles. The minister asked vocabulary questions based upon the verse and the children were allowed to informally answer the questions using AAVE without being called upon.

## **The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge**

### ***Faith Based Learning***

Several studies have found that the inclusion of faith-based learning in the education of African American students is influential to their academic success. For instance, in a previously mentioned qualitative study Stephens (2020) found that in the Black church there were many different avenues to learning which included Bible Class, Bible Study or Vacation Bible School (VBS) that consisted of teaching the members of the congregation lessons from the Bible about having morals and spirituality, but it also aided in reading and comprehension skills. The authors labeled this type of learning faith-based learning. Bible Class and Bible Study were basically the same type of faith-based learning where learning occurred in a small group setting. The groups were typically divided by age and the lessons were not typically taught on Sundays but instead on a day during the week. The church members came together to learn the Word



of God in a more relaxed and casual setting. VBS was described as a religious summer school. This faith-based learning was offered for students to attend in the summer months. VBS was also offered as a summer camp, so it also included other fun activities for children to participate in as well as educational reinforcement to prepare for the upcoming school year.

Referring back to the qualitative study conducted by Carter-Francique, et al (2020), it was found that faith-based learning experiences generated skills like reading, comprehension and critical thinking. This study also found that how adults learn can have an impact on how motivated they are, which impacts how they motivate their children. The participants indicated they were able to understand the sermons on Sunday mornings because of what they learned in Bible Class or Sunday School. One participant indicated, “At Bible class we usually discuss a topic from the book that is related to the sermon (Carter-Francique, et al, 2020).” In a previously mentioned study conducted by Barrett (2010b) participants revealed that participating in religious activities or religious organizations served as a social outlet which can form African Americans’ habits and behaviors and encourage positive attitudes which results in positive educational outcomes. For example, one participant indicated that her participation in activities in the church had improved her confidence with public speaking. Some of the programming that the Black Church is known for requires children to speak in front of the congregation and this helped build confidence in students.

Additionally, in the previously mentioned study by Glanville, et al (2008) a qualitative analysis found that teenagers who participate in religious activities impact

and influence their social networks which results in more opportunities for educational resources and more positive educational outcomes. Participating in these activities also promotes friendship networks for students. Papen (2017) noted that the participants engaged in faith-based learning by learning new spiritual songs which included exercising the ability to read by decoding words on a big screen as well as using techniques such as rote learning for memorization. The findings conclude that this interactive faith-based learning included religious activity that was very similar to whole-class reading that is experienced in the classroom and was found to be beneficial to the participants' educational outcomes.

Peele-Eady (2011) identified three core faith-based activities that demonstrated a variety of ways that learning occurs. The three core activities include the Sunday School lesson, the Fourth Sunday March and the giving of Tithes and Offerings. These faith-based learning experiences allow African Americans to develop knowledge and skills to be functional members of society. The Sunday School lesson consisted of explicit instruction of biblical events and scriptural teachings. The aim was to develop comprehension skills. The Fourth Sunday March promoted inclusion of all members of the church, whether young or old, where members gave oral presentations to the congregation where they demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of biblical stories and scriptures. The giving of Tithes and Offerings is an opportunity for all-inclusive participation. The pastor encouraged the children to give financially as the adults give to teach the children financial literacy.

### *Access to Programming*

Studies show that access to programming through non-traditional educational entities such as the Black Church is beneficial to African Americans academically. For example, in the previously mentioned study conducted by Curry and McIntosh (2020) it was found that when the Black Church partnered with the local public school and developed programming African American students benefited academically. A schoolteacher from Successful Preparation High School described the “positive influence” noticed from students who have fallen behind academically in the past and that the programming really made a difference with the students who participated. One participant indicated that they are determined to get the African American youth at their church prepared for success. The Joyful Noise Church committed itself to visit the local school at least three times a week to interact with students to encourage student achievement.

Jordan and Wilson (2012) also found that programs made available to African Americans by the Black Church were in direct contrast to some of the programming they felt they were receiving at their local schools. They suggested that the programming outside of the church from public educators was suggestive of low expectations and the programming at the Black Church was more challenging thus more beneficial to them academically. Additionally, Boutte and Wynter-Hoyte (2018) found that when the church offered literacy programming African American students benefited academically because the same resource was not available to them in their community.

### ***Spirituality as a Support Mechanism***

Several studies show that African American students who participate in religious or spiritual organizations such as the Black Church depend on personal spirituality as a support mechanism to be successful academically. For example, in a previously mentioned study conducted by Jeynes (2003) when participants were interviewed it was found that they believed their success was directly related to their spirituality. Additionally, Hilton and Wood (2012) also found during interviews that participants spoke about having a personal relationship with God. One of the participants, Andrew, indicated that his “ability to dialogue” with God gave him feelings of comfort knowing that he could persist and successfully complete his courses at the community college where he was attending. Participants in this study also indicated that their spirituality inspired them to strive for academic excellence because they believed God to be the fortress of every aspect of their lives.

In a previously mentioned study, Hilton and Wood (2012) found that students depended on their relationship with God as a support mechanism that helped them to work through times that may have been challenging or difficult due to some inequities they may face during their educational journey. Participants in the study indicated that their relationship with God helped them to be successful academically because their faith served as an inspiration to perform at a level of excellence, which was one of the values that was taught that believers in Christ should live by. One participant, Charles, described how sometimes when he is around people who do not support his faith in God, he feels it is a hindrance. Charles expressed feeling more at ease publicly showing faith

because he could relate to those who also shared the same values and beliefs. The inability to have faith publicly affirmed served as a hindrance to Charles thus diminishing his ability to be academically successful.

### **Discussion & Implications for Practice**

In this review of the literature, I looked across the different studies to find patterns that explain the connections between African Americans' participation in the Black Church and their educational outcomes. I sought to explore whether the connection with the Black Church yielded successful academic outcomes. One of the patterns that I found in the literature included the importance of African Americans' connections with the community (Jeynes, 2003; Barrett, 2010b; Glanville, Hernandez & Sikkink, 2008). The findings of this review of the literature extend previous research by identifying that there is a lack of partnership between the Black Church and local schools or other community organizations. As a result, currently schools and other community organizations are not reaping the benefits that the strong community in the Black Church yields for literacy progress. There is a need for the Black Church to partner with schools to help develop the kind of community that supports African American children academically that is also committed to designing programs that will uplift literacy. Because the review of the literature has proven that when African American students engage with other like-minded students who share similar goals they perform better academically (Glanville, et al, 2008), it would be interesting to explore how much improvement teachers would see in the classroom if they developed strategies to partner with the local churches and community organizations. Future research should

explore whether when schools, families, churches, and community organizations partner together to support African American students' whether they will improve academically, are less likely to drop out of school, or be more enthusiastic about learning. Further, research should investigate whether these improvements would lead to increased numbers of students who enroll in higher education, thus, potentially closing the achievement gap in education.

Partnerships between the Black Church and local schools would give African American students a more personalized experience. The partnering between the Black Church and local schools could also better serve African Americans and uplift literacy by collaborating together and developing programming that is diversified. The local schools could learn a lot about the way African Americans learn informally and the Black Church could learn a lot about the way African Americans learn formally. Also, teachers would be able to collaborate with the leadership in the church to learn and understand African Americans' background and lifestyle because students are more successful academically when they feel safe, trusted, and understood. For future research it would be prudent to explore the question: If African American students had access to literacy programs that are designed to address their specific needs directly through the Black Church that provide resources such as tutoring, books, supplies and access to computers and the internet would there be a significant difference in their academic performance?

The review of the literature also showed specific examples of academic skills being passed down from generations (Stephens, 2020; Carter, McClain & Stephens,

2020), yet there has been no systematic study examining cross-generational patterns of literacy learning supported by the Black Church. Although African Americans continue to rise above the challenges they have faced, there is an academic achievement gap existing that needs to be bridged. The Black Church has served as a resource for African Americans thus creating cultural capital that has benefited them academically, but they cannot bridge the gap in education without the help of families, community, and teachers. Barrett (2010b) found that “success breeds success” which addresses the ideology that students who are familiar with academic success have more of a tendency to be academically successful themselves. For example, an African American student whose parents are both college graduates is probably more likely to become a college graduate because it is something that they see as attainable. If the proper strategies are followed in order to address the educational needs of African American students, then academic success will become more of a norm in the African American community; thus, beginning to bridge the academic achievement gap. These strategies would probably create a stronger foundation for African Americans to pass down academic knowledge and success from generation to generation. In future studies it would be fruitful to explore what impact having relationships in the Black Church have on the ability to transfer academic success on to their offspring, and if the ultimate goal is to close the achievement gap, how are these relationships making changes for African Americans that will be sustained from generation to generation.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

The limitations that existed in this study included a lack of articles that met the criteria for this study. First, there was only one literature review that addressed relationships between religious involvement and academic outcomes of African American students that was located which included articles published within the last ten years (2012-2022). There was also a lack of empirical articles (13) that met the criteria of affiliation with the Black Church and African American students' educational outcomes that were published between the years 2012-2022. This displays the need for more research in the area of African American students' educational outcomes who are affiliated with the Black Church.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ROLE RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT PLAYS IN THE LITERACY SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

#### Abstract

This review explored empirical studies from 2012-2022 to understand the influence of religious involvement on educational outcomes of African American students. Thirteen studies were analyzed first using a database to identify how the data related to three guiding tenets from Critical Race Theory. Then, a constant comparative analysis was used to identify themes found related to each tenet. Findings showed that this body of research underscores the importance of the Black Church's community, relationships and trust, challenges to academic disparities, informal learning, faith-based learning, provision of access to programming, and spirituality as a support mechanism for academic success.

Keywords: Black Church, literacy, academic achievement, religion

## **Need and Significance**

There is a vast and inarguable difference between academic achievement in the African-American community and the Caucasian community (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Although this achievement gap is known and has existed for decades, little has changed to bridge the gap. Racism has framed educational institutions since the beginning of the 20th century and continues, although quite subtly, to impact these educational institutions in the 21st century (Yosso, 2005). Currently, researchers and practitioners are still probing for tools to effectively analyze and challenge the impact of race and racism in U.S. society (Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte, (2018). Critical Race Theory, or CRT, represents a critical approach to uncover the visceral structures of power and privilege that perpetuate racial disparities and injustices in society. “Critical Race Theory can be used to theorize, examine and challenge ways that race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices and discourses” (Yosso, 2005, p.118). Yosso asserts, and rightly so, that African Americans bring community cultural wealth that could transform the ways teachers approach lesson plans. African Americans have had to share cultural capital with each other and have developed social capital for survival and success in a world that has been segregated and bound by ubiquitous forces of racism and discrimination (Morris, 2004) and the African American Church, in particular, has been instrumental in helping African Americans develop and share their capital.

“Historically, the church, the family, and the school are the three most critical institutions whose interactions have been responsible for the viability of the African-American community” (Roberts, 1980). Jeynes (2010) opines that religious relationships

and commitments reduce the achievement gap by 50%. Despite this reduction in the achievement gap, religious organizations within the African-American community have traditionally been disregarded by educational institutions, even though they often have community cultural wealth and literacy assets that can benefit their academic success (Farrow & Farrow, 2019). The lack of attention by educational institutions that are given to African Americans' affiliations to church/religious organizations is a problem because religion, for many African-American students, is a significant part of their culture (Dallavis, 2011; Skerrett, 2014). Religious involvement displays positive relationships with academic achievement. For students with low socioeconomic status, religious involvement displays positive relationships with academic achievement more than those students who come from families with higher socioeconomic status (Regnerus & Elder, 2003). Based on the literature, when a misalignment exists between school and home (cultural) practices, academic achievement can be, and invariably is, impacted (Farrow & Farrow, 2019). Support from personal religious affiliations narrows the achievement gap by strengthening the collaboration between Black churches and public-school districts. Outside of schools, few institutions have influenced the academic development of African Americans more than Black churches (Jordan & Wilson, 2015).

Notably, only one literature review from the early 2000s (Jeynes, 2010) addressed the relationship between personal faith and reducing the achievement gap for African Americans. This bears repeating: one literature review written more than a decade ago. In this meta-analysis, Jeynes (2010) argued that if an African-American student was affiliated with a religious organization and from an intact family, the achievement gap

disappeared entirely. The results of Jeynes' (2010) three meta-analyses were that personal religious faith (i.e., believing in a higher power, God) was one of the two largest factors that consistently reduced the achievement gap; personal religious commitment (church membership) reduced the achievement gap by 50%; and, attending a religious school reduced the achievement gap by 25%. Thus, the purpose of this review is to provide a more current and systematic review that spans broadly across the literature and focuses on how religiosity is related to literacy outcomes for African Americans. Such a review would help guide, facilitate, and support understanding of how more recent research may extend those previous findings in the existing literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Daniel Solorzano (1997, 1998) identified three tenets of Critical Race Theory that can inform theory, research pedagogy, classroom curriculum, and policies: the permanence of racism; the challenge to dominant ideology; and the centrality of experiential knowledge.

*“The Permanence of Racism:* CRT starts from the premise that race and racism are central, endemic, permanent, and a fundamental part of defining and explaining how U.S. society functions (Yosso, 2005, p. 117-118). Because of how society functions primarily on race and racism, African American students will continue to lag behind their counterparts academically (Bell, 1992; Russell, 1992)” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This lens of CRT can be examined by delving into the ways that society systematically ignores how African Americans learn and the capital they bring with them that could improve academic performance in African-American communities.

*“The Challenge to Dominant Ideology:* CRT challenges White privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000)” (Yosso, 2005, p. 117-118). The resistance against the prevailing ideology can be observed by examining the cultural capital that African Americans possess, which can significantly contribute to their academic achievements. This capital should not be ignored but incorporated into the objectives of educators to ensure academic success for students of color.

*“The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge:* CRT draws explicitly on the lived experiences of people of color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, testimonios, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987, 1992, 1996; Carrasco, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Espinoza, 1990; Montoya, 1994; Olivas, 1990; Delgado Bernal & Villapando, 2002; Villalpando, 2003)” (Yosso, 2005, p. 117-118). This tenet of CRT - that is, varied and personal lived experiences matter in building one’s knowledge- can be seen through the lens of African Americans' affiliations with religious organizations. Historically, the Black Church has been a fortress in the African-American community and, as a result, has sustained a cultural character that has helped African Americans fight racial prejudice and antagonism against them for generations (Foster, 2009; Quarles, 1987; Randolph, 2009).

In synthesizing the discussions within this section, the tenets of Critical Race Theory provide a robust discursive framework that illuminates the intricate interplay between race, education, and societal dynamics. The three pillars of CRT - the

permanence of racism, the challenge to the dominant ideology, and the centrality of experiential knowledge - collectively form a lens through which we can holistically understand the complexities and nuances inherent in educational disparities, mainly focusing on the experiences of African American students.

The discursive framework provided by the tenets of CRT offers a comprehensive lens through which we can understand, analyze, and ultimately address the complex web of race, education, and societal structures. By recognizing the permanence of racism, challenging dominant ideologies, and honoring experiential knowledge, we pave the way for transformative change within educational systems. As we move forward, guided by this theoretical framework, we can rectify disparities and construct a more inclusive, equitable, and enriching educational landscape that uplifts all students, particularly those historically marginalized.

## **Methods**

### **Search Process**

I systematically reviewed the literature on how religiosity is related to literacy outcomes spanning the last 20 years. First, I used a three-step search and selection process: The initial search, screening process, and reference combing, which led to the final selection of relevant articles (see Figure 1).

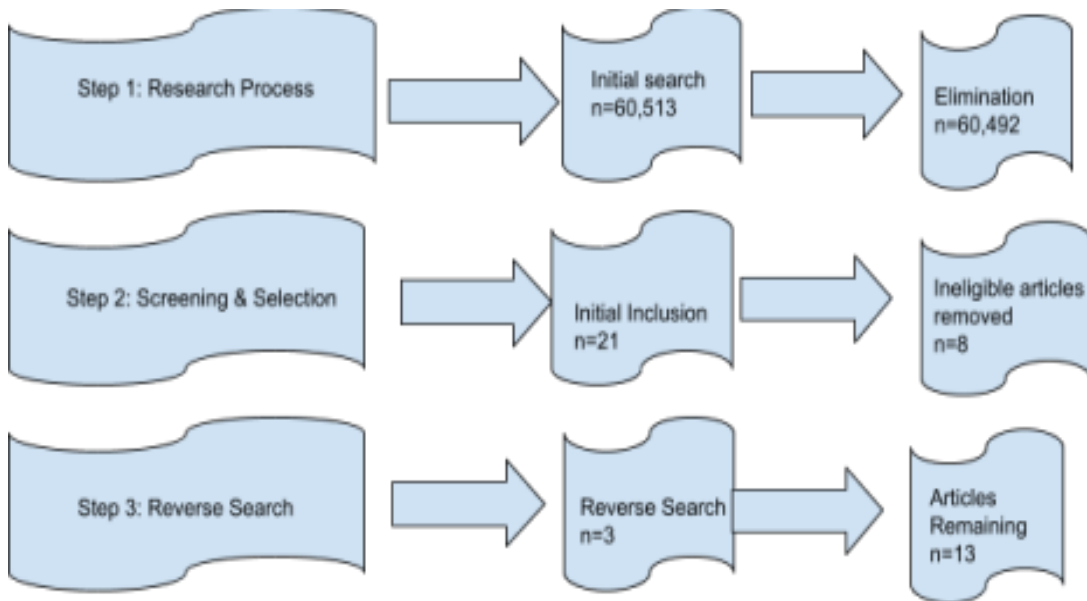
### **Article Search and Selection Process**

To identify articles specifically about how religiosity is related to literacy outcomes, three databases (e.g., ERIC, Google Scholar, and JSTOR) were utilized to search for articles. The following terms were used across searches in all three databases:

- Black Church, literacy, meta-analysis
- Black Church, reading, literature review
- African American church, reading, cultural responsiveness
- Black Church, reading, educational outcomes

Figure 1.1

*Article Search and Identification Process*



Next, I delimited the search to articles published between 2002-2022 to locate recently published literature, but also literature that had been published since the Jeynes' (2010) study. Additionally, I delimited the search to eliminate articles that focused on educational aspirations or attainment but not educational outcomes. This aligned with the review's focus on connections between religiosity and educational outcomes.

The total number of articles located during the initial search was 60,513 articles. These included zero search results from ERIC, 1,772 from JSTOR, and 58,741 from Google Scholar.

## **Screening and Selection Process**

The combined total of articles (60,513) were screened to determine their relevancy for inclusion in the literature review. The title and abstract of each article were screened to determine whether they met the following criteria:

1. Published in a peer-reviewed journal between the dates of 2002-2022.
2. Represent empirical research in which data were collected and analyzed.
3. Focused on the educational outcomes of African-American students affiliated with religious organizations.

Twenty-one articles seemed to meet these criteria and were further considered for inclusion in the literature review. The remainder of the articles (60,492) were excluded from consideration because they did not meet one or more of the criteria.

Next, the 21 articles that seemed to meet the criteria were read in their entirety to ensure that they met the criteria for inclusion. Through this process, 8 of the 21 articles were eliminated as their content did not meet the criteria. For example, after reading one article in its entirety, it focused on religion and youth educational aspirations with a multilevel approach rather than educational outcomes (Nie, 2018). It was therefore excluded as it did not focus on educational outcomes. Therefore, after this step, 13 articles met the criteria to be included in this literature review.

## **Reference Combing**

For each of the 13 articles initially identified for inclusion, reference combing (using each article's reference list to find new articles that met the inclusion criteria) and reverse searching (using the Google Scholar "cited by" and "related articles" feature) was



conducted to identify any additional articles that might meet the inclusion criteria for the literature review. During this process, three additional articles were identified but eliminated, resulting in 13 articles being included in the literature review.

### **Analytic Methods**

Initially, and using a database, I identified how each article in the review addressed (or did not address) each of the three focal Critical Race Theory tenets: (1) The Permanence of Racism, (2) The Challenge to Dominant Ideology, (3) The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge.

Then, I used constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) to identify themes related to how the Black Church and educational outcomes are related and aligned with each CRT tenet. First, for “Permanence of Racism, three themes were identified from the data: the importance of community, relationships, and trust in the Black Church. Second, for the tenet, “Challenge to Dominant Ideology,” two themes emerged: challenging academic disparities and providing informal learning in the Black Church. Third, for “Centrality of Experiential Knowledge,” three themes were found: the benefits of faith-based learning, access to programming, and spirituality as a support mechanism in the Black Church.

### **Findings**

I present the literature review findings organized related to three CRT tenets: permanence of racism, challenge to dominant ideology, and centrality of experiential knowledge. Table 1 presents an overview of the research reviewed and cited in each subsection.

## **Permanence of Racism**

### ***Community***

Several studies' findings suggested the importance of community in African Americans' academic success related to their participation in the Black Church. For example, a study by Glanville, Hernandez & Sikkink (2008), which used qualitative analysis methods from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to conduct surveys and interviews of 7th-12th grade students from 132 schools within 80 communities, revealed that when adolescents participated more frequently in the church community through services and youth groups, they performed better than those in the same community who did not attend. When examining the relationship between attending church regularly and what social networks African Americans were involved in, Glanville, Hernandez & Sikkink found that religious involvement helps define friendship networks. Their study argued that religious attendance significantly positively affected friends' grades in African Americans. Because these friendship networks within the church community were shared between people who tend to be like-minded, the students all shared similar goals and achievements. Glanville et al. (2008) also found that adolescents who attend religious services and participate in religious activities are predicted to have less truancy than those who do not attend, which results in positive educational outcomes.

Similarly, Jeynes' (2003) study, which used the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) from the Department of Education, found that children associated with religious organizations academically outperform students who are not.

Jeynes' study consisted of 18,726 students, of which 11% were African American. Questionnaires were given to students, their parents, and teachers, including achievement tests, to gauge academic achievement. This study displayed how the commitment to religious organizations in the community can be essential to academic success.

Finally, a study conducted by Swindler-Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte (2018), where a qualitative case study was conducted to examine the complexity of African-American middle-class children navigating church and school, uncovered that the Black Church created opportunities for African-American students to engage in literacy practices that invited the community to engage and participate while schools were more focused on the outcomes of standardized testing. In the church, the roles between adults and children shifted to teach the children the routines and the order of services and programs. The studies showed the importance of knowing and understanding the culture of African Americans when considering how they learn and what methods to consider to ensure their academic success. The studies show the theme of community and also one of the tenets of Critical Race Theory. It also underscores the importance of knowing and understanding that community is a form of social capital for African Americans. It could be highly applicable when considering how they learn and what it takes to ensure their academic success.

### ***Relationships***

The Black Church has proven to be a fortress for African Americans to develop relationships with others they feel connected and relatable to. Carter-Francique, McClain, and Stephens (2020), in a qualitative study that used Creswell's (2005) six-step method,

found that the participants (African American grandmothers) were able to use the knowledge acquired in the church to support the grandchildren for whom they had taken on the responsibility of providing care. The participants of this study consisted of ten African-American grandmothers from seven churches who were the primary caretakers of their grandchildren. The authors discovered that the women successfully helped their grandchildren develop academically because of the relationships they developed while participating in educational activities in the Black Church. The activities the authors labeled “the wages of worship” included prayer, preaching, scripture reading, and singing. The participants developed communication skills through prayer and preaching, which consists of articulating messages to God and about God. This helped the participants develop and improve their public speaking skills. During scripture reading instructional time, the participants read and discussed the material, which helped to develop and improve comprehension skills. The participants indicated that the knowledge they received through the connections and relationships developed in the church not only benefited them and helped to improve their skills, but they were able to pass the knowledge and skills to their grandchildren, who may have been lacking in those skills in the classroom.

Participants in a qualitative case study conducted by Curry and McIntosh (2020) in response to interview questions indicated that the relationships developed in partnership between school and church played an active role in equipping African American students with the capital that leads to academic success. This study sought to understand the church's influence when partnerships were established between church

and school. The church, A Joyful Noise Baptist Church, and the school, Successful Preparation High School, partnered to serve the African-American students who seemed to lag behind their White counterparts. When the relationship was developed, and the two entities joined together to work on improving these inadequacies, they reported seeing significant improvement in academic success, and the morale of the African-American students had improved. One participant stated, “This partnership really makes a difference and works to ensure the mission and vision of the school are being met by the school’s leaders and community stakeholders” (Curry & McIntosh, 2020, p. 176). The participants expressed satisfaction with how the partnership was improving the students' lives.

Peele-Eady (2011) conducted a two-year ethnographic study, which included observations, field notes, and interviews, and discovered that during one of the three functions (scholarship, stewardship, and fellowship) where church members functioned as a community, children were positioned to gain knowledge and understand how to become members of the familial community of the church. This allowed the children to “share the floor,” which is an invitation to talk but also a privilege many African-American students did not feel they had access to in traditional classrooms. The author (2011) defined scholarship for purposes of this study as “the explicit ways children acquire religious knowledge.” This is where students partner with religious leaders in the church and are given knowledge of religious subjects and scriptures in the Bible. The leadership that partnered with the children sought to help them develop and improve comprehension skills and encourage them to strive to have a heart for service to the

church and a concise understanding of the rules for church membership. Stewardship includes instruction designed to influence the children's behavior, so they understand what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable for church membership. Leadership also partnered with the students by modeling how they should conduct themselves. The students were assigned tasks that adult members would normally carry out to demonstrate that they understood their roles. Finally, during the fellowship, the children participated in various activities where they were with other children and adults to display the knowledge they had learned about how to conduct themselves.

Barrett's (2010b) qualitative study conducted interviews with students from six public high schools in a large urban center in the northeastern and midwestern United States also found that religious participation provides African Americans with moral directives that guide their everyday practices and behaviors. One way to reinforce this is through the practice of public affirmation. The celebration of academic success causes African-American students in the church to be motivated to be high achievers so they can participate in acknowledgments on Sundays in which achievements are celebrated. Although there are always kids who did not make the grades to participate, it encourages them to work harder so they may also be acknowledged. Public affirmation encourages students to work hard towards excellence and look forward to being acknowledged in celebrations of success. Pastor Johnson believes that it teaches the children that rewards are attached to doing well in school, and this process has helped his members (Barret, 2010b). Barrett also found that one of the Black Church's most important resources offered to African Americans is a place, a fortress, where they can feel valued and where

their true talents and abilities can be seen, nurtured, and celebrated. When African Americans have both their faith and academic support, Barrett (2010b) found that “success breeds success.”

Through the development of relationships, the authors showed that African Americans, through relationships with the Black Church, have developed cultural capital often not recognized by educators. It is important to learn and understand the religious capital that African Americans bring when approaching educational initiatives.

### ***Trust***

African Americans have developed trusted relationships with leadership and members of the church. These relationships are beneficial because they receive help and advice from people they feel they can trust and care about their endeavors. One of the resources the Black Church has continuously tried to contribute to the lives of African Americans was learning and development. For example, Stephens (2020), in a qualitative study previously mentioned, revealed that participation in worship services and Bible classes greatly contributed to learning and development. The participants could pass on the knowledge they received from the church to their grandchildren. The participants developed a trusted relationship with the leadership of the church to submit to the practices of the church. These trusted relationships were important to the children’s academic achievement, and the children were able to supplement what they were learning in school.

During interviews conducted in Jordan and Wilson’s (2012) comparative study of two North Carolina churches, they argued that academic disparities existed in African-

American schools and, notably, that the church leaders were fully cognizant of the deep divide. These disparities caused them to feel as though they had to trust and depend upon their own leadership as an additional reinforcement to achieve academically. Participants from both churches shared concerns about there being a lack of equity, care, and community in local schools. This helped to explain the reason why they felt a distrust of their current system and looked to the church as a trusted source. Participants indicated there was a broader lack of care and empathy for African American students, and the participants felt it was important that the Black Church be involved in seeking to fulfill their spiritual, moral, and educational endeavors.

In a qualitative study conducted by Hilton and Wood (2012) involving 28 African-American male participants, interviews were conducted to determine whether spirituality had a positive impact on academic success. It was determined that spirituality was described as a means of support for academic success. One of the participants indicated that he felt his faith and spirituality were not accepted outside of the church and felt more comfortable discussing his faith and how it had benefited him academically amongst his church family because of the trusted relationships he shared with them. Once the participants developed trusted relationships with people whom they felt understood their faith, they were able to submit to their leadership and be more submissive to the doctrine that was being taught. Because of faith in who He (God) is to them, the participants trusted that through prayer, He will give them the strength and courage to be successful. Personal and spiritual trust are important facets of academic success for African Americans who participate in religious organizations. It is important that they



develop trusted relationships with people and leadership who have the resources to assist them academically in the public school system as well as in the community.

The studies presented differ in several ways, including their research methods, their focus, and specific findings. In terms of research methods, these studies employ different approaches. For example, Glanville, Hernandez & Sikkink's (2008) study utilizes qualitative analysis methods from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, involving surveys and interviews. Jeynes' (2003) study, on the other hand, uses the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) and employs questionnaires, parent and teacher surveys, and achievement tests. Swindler-Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte's (2018) study was a qualitative case study and focused on the complexity of African-American middle-class children navigating church and school. These varying research methods allow for different perspectives and insights into the relationships between the Black Church, community, and academic success.

Regarding focus, Glanville, Hernandez & Sikkink (2008) examined the impact of religious involvement on academic success and social networks within the African-American community. Jeynes (2003) focused on the academic performance of children associated with religious organizations, while Swindler-Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte (2018) explored how the Black Church provides opportunities for African-American students to engage in literacy practices. Then Barret (2010b) explored the role of religious participation in providing moral directives and fostering a sense of value and celebration of academic achievements among African-American students.

Finally, the studies present different findings on the relationship between the Black Church, community, and academic success. Glanville, Hernandez & Sikkink (2008) find that religious involvement, such as attending church services and participating in religious activities, positively affects academic performance and friendship networks among African-American adolescents. Jeynes (2003) reveals that children associated with religious organizations academically outperform their peers who are not. Swindler-Boutte & Wynter Hoyte (2018) demonstrate how the Black Church offers opportunities for African-American students to engage in literacy practices that differ from some of the standards that schools tend to focus on. Barrett (2010b) highlights the significance of public affirmation and the Black Church as a place where African Americans feel valued, and their talents are nurtured and celebrated.

## **The Challenge to Dominant Ideology**

### ***Academic Disparities***

The academic disparities involving African American students in education have caused African Americans to seek refuge in the Black Church. Jordan & Wilson (2012) revealed this in their study where they retrieved data from online inquiry and document review of public sources that White students surpassed African American students academically. In this comparative case study, one of the participants expressed a feeling of being treated unfairly in the classroom. A female student from Worship Baptist Church said, “Sometimes they look at us and let’s say they give a problem, and half the Blacks miss the problem; they think it’s because the Black students didn’t care or didn’t pay attention in class. But if the White people get it wrong then the teachers think they are

tired and deserve a second chance” (p.104). These disparities negatively impact African Americans academically. The Black churches in this study provided academic opportunities for these students to attempt to bridge the gap. The participants pointed out that some teachers have a preconceived idea of what African-American students can achieve, so they don’t put forth the effort to help them.

Another qualitative study which consisted of interviews with a socially activist urban pastor and field work to determine the relationships between religious involvement and educational outcomes among urban African-American students, identified that “neglect is a word that arises frequently in his description of the public schools in the area in which his church resides”. Pastor Johnson in this study, shared his personal actions to highlight the neglect and mistreatment of students in the public school system in the city where his church resides (Barret, 2010a). Pastor Johnson shared the extreme efforts he went through to try to get the Board of Education in his area to address matters of inequity concerning the African-American community. Because these inequities have incredibly deep roots, persuading people of the existing problem proves to be a formidable task. Pastor Johnson was committed to ensuring that he does what he can to make sure African Americans are treated fairly.

In a qualitative case study conducted by Boutte et al. (2018), it was found through observations and interviews that students’ abilities are sometimes a direct result of what they learned at home. This cultural capital is often ignored in the classroom because teachers’ perceptions of their students can impact how they approach teaching. In this case, Melissa, the participant, was observed in the classroom as well as in the church. It

was found that Melissa adjusted well and adapted to the activities she was presented with. For example, when the children were allowed to perform tasks typically performed by the adults in the church, Melissa participated with passion and zeal. It was found that Melissa's experiences in the church and at home brought out the best in her classroom experience. During some observation sessions, Melissa was observed leading groups in the children's department of her church. At home, her parents insisted on excellence in what she committed herself to, and in the classroom, she performed above her grade level. Her teacher stated, "Her reading indicates she is above grade level." The study with Melissa reveals the importance of teachers seeing African Americans through a broader lens and understanding that each child is different and can bring much more than teachers may expect based on their perceptions.

### ***Informal Learning***

Informal learning spaces have proven beneficial to African-American students' learning and development. The Black Church has been instrumental in providing informal religious education to its members and the community to encourage moral, spiritual, and academic success. By way of illustration, in the qualitative study mentioned previously, Carter-Francique et al. (2020) found that informal learning, such as religious and spiritual activities, contributed to personal learning and development. One participant, Jacqueline, remembered, "The elders of the church taught us the importance of sticking together. They also taught us skills for interviewing and job opportunities." This informal learning is often available in the Black Church to provide African Americans with resources to attempt to close the achievement gap that exists

between African American and White students. This capital can be passed through generations so African Americans can begin to see illiteracy cycles breaking in their families and communities. Jacqueline and other participants indicated that because of the educational resources offered by the church, they now have the confidence to return to school and earn a bachelor's degree.

Shared learning characteristics were recognized during observations in a previously mentioned study conducted by Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte (2018). One of the activities included reading the scripture of the week. The church minister read the Bible scripture aloud, and the children read along from their Bibles. The minister asked vocabulary questions based on the verse, and the children were allowed to answer the questions using AAVE without being called upon.

These studies differ in their specific research focuses, research methods employed, and the aspects of African-American students' educational experiences that they examined. While Jordan & Wilson's study focuses on academic disparities, Barret's study explores the relationship between religious involvement and educational outcomes, and Boutte et al.'s study examined the impact of cultural capital on students' abilities. Each study sheds light on different aspects of the challenges faced by African-American students and the role of the Black Church in addressing those challenges.

## **The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge**

### ***Faith-Based Learning***

Several studies have found that the inclusion of faith-based learning in the education of African American students is influential to their academic success. For

instance, in a previously mentioned qualitative study, Stephens (2020) found that in the Black church, there were many different avenues to learning, which included Bible Class, Bible Study, or Vacation Bible School (VBS) that consisted of teaching the members of the congregation lessons from the Bible about having morals and spirituality. Still, it also aided in reading and comprehension skills. The authors labeled this type of learning faith-based learning. Bible Class and Bible Study were the same type of faith-based learning where learning occurred in a small group setting. The groups were typically divided by age, and the lessons were not typically taught on Sundays but instead on weekdays. The church members came together to learn the Word of God in a more relaxed and casual setting. VBS was described as a religious summer school. This faith-based learning was offered to students attend the summer months. VBS was also offered as a summer camp. Hence, it also included other fun activities for children to participate in as well as educational reinforcement to prepare for the upcoming school year.

Referring back to the qualitative study conducted by Carter-Francique et al. (2020), it was found that faith-based learning experiences generated skills like reading, comprehension, and critical thinking. This study also found that how adults learn can impact how motivated they are, which impacts how they motivate their children. The participants indicated they could understand the sermons on Sunday mornings because of what they learned in Bible Class or Sunday School. One participant indicated, “In Bible class, we usually discuss a topic from the book related to the sermon (Carter-Francique et al., 2020).”

In a previously mentioned study conducted by Barrett (2010b), participants revealed that participating in religious activities or religious organizations served as a social outlet that can form African Americans' habits and behaviors and encourage positive attitudes, which results in positive educational outcomes. For example, one participant indicated that her participation in activities in the church had improved her confidence in public speaking. Some of the programming that the Black Church is known for requires children to speak in front of the congregation, which helped build students' confidence.

Additionally, in the previously mentioned study by Glanville et al. (2008), a qualitative analysis found that teenagers who participate in religious activities impact and influence their social networks, which results in more opportunities for educational resources and more positive educational outcomes. Participating in these activities also promotes friendship networks for students. Papen (2017) noted that the participants engaged in faith-based learning by learning new spiritual songs, which included exercising the ability to read by decoding words on a big screen and using techniques such as rote learning for memorization. The findings conclude that this interactive faith-based learning included religious activity that was very similar to whole-class reading experienced in the classroom and was beneficial to the participants' educational outcomes.

Peele-Eady (2011) identified three core faith-based activities that demonstrated various ways that learning occurs. The three core activities include the Sunday School lesson, the Fourth Sunday March, and the giving of Tithes and Offerings. These faith-

based learning experiences allow African Americans to develop knowledge and skills to be functional members of society. The Sunday School lesson explicitly taught biblical events and scriptural teachings. The aim was to develop comprehension skills. The Fourth Sunday March promoted the inclusion of all church members, whether young or old, where members gave oral presentations to the congregation where they demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of biblical stories and scriptures. The giving of Tithes and Offerings is an opportunity for all-inclusive participation. The pastor encouraged the children to give as the adults give to teach the children financial literacy.

### ***Access to Programming***

Studies shows that access to programming through non-traditional educational entities such as the Black Church is beneficial to African Americans academically. For example, in the previously mentioned study conducted by Curry and McIntosh (2020), it was found that when the Black Church partnered with the local public school and developed programming, African-American students benefited academically. A schoolteacher from Successful Preparation High School described the “positive influence” noticed from students who have fallen behind academically in the past and that the programming made a difference with the students who participated. One participant indicated that they are determined to prepare African-American youth at their church for success. The Joyful Noise Church committed itself to visiting the local school at least three times a week to interact with students and encourage student achievement.

Jordan and Wilson (2012) also found that programs made available to African Americans by the Black Church were in direct contrast to some of the programming they



felt they were receiving at their local schools. They suggested that the programming outside of the church from public educators was suggestive of low expectations, and the programming at the Black Church was more challenging and thus more beneficial to them academically. Additionally, Boutte and Wynter-Hoyte (2018) found that when the church offered literacy programming, African-American students benefited academically because the same resource was not available to them in their community. While the studies highlight the positive impact of the Black Church's programming on African-American students, it is worth recognizing that other potential benefits could be achieved through other educational entities like the Boys and Girls Club or the Boys and Girls Scouts.

### ***Spirituality as a Support Mechanism***

Several studies show that African American students who participate in religious or spiritual organizations such as the Black Church depend on personal spirituality as a support mechanism to be successful academically. For example, in a previously mentioned study conducted by Jeynes (2003), when participants were interviewed, it was found that they believed their success was directly related to their spirituality. Hilton and Wood (2012) also found during interviews that participants spoke about having a personal relationship with God. One of the participants, Andrew, indicated that his "ability to dialogue" with God gave him comfort, knowing that he could persist and complete his courses at the community college he attended. Participants in this study also indicated that their spirituality inspired them to strive for academic excellence because they believed God to be the fortress of every aspect of their lives.

In a previously mentioned study, Hilton and Wood (2012) found that students depended on their relationship with God as a support mechanism that helped them to work through times that may have been challenging or difficult due to some inequities they may face during their educational journey. Participants in the study indicated that their relationship with God helped them succeed academically because their faith inspired them to perform at a level of excellence, one of the values taught that believers in Christ should live by. One participant, Charles, described how sometimes, when he is around people who do not support his faith in God, he feels it is a hindrance. Charles felt more at ease publicly showing dedication because he could relate to those with the same values and beliefs. The inability to publicly affirm faith hindered Charles, thus diminishing his ability to be academically successful.

These studies all differ in their specific research focus, methodologies employed, and the aspects of faith-based learning and its impact on African-American students' academic success that they examine. Each study provides unique insights into the role of faith-based education within the Black Church and its influence on various educational outcomes.

### **Discussion & Implications for Practice**

In this literature review, the author examined the different studies to find patterns that explicitly connect African Americans' participation in the Black Church and their educational outcomes. The author sought to explore whether the relationship with the Black Church yielded successful academic results.

Table 1:1 Literature Review Findings

<p><b>Permanence of Racism</b></p>	<p><b>Community</b> The involvement of African Americans in the Black Church community has shown a positive correlation with academic success</p>	<p><b>Relationships</b> The Black Church fosters relationships that empower African Americans with cultural capital which drives academic success</p>	<p><b>Trust</b> Collective engagement in the Black Church community among African Americans has been linked to enhanced academic performance</p>
<p><b>Challenge to Dominant Ideology</b></p>	<p><b>Academic Disparities</b> The Black Church has emerged as a sanctuary in its role in addressing educational inequities in the public school system for African Americans</p>	<p><b>Informal Learning</b> The Black Church serves as a valuable informal learning space for African Americans by breaking of educational cycles and closing achievement gaps</p>	
<p><b>Centrality of Experiential Knowledge</b></p>	<p><b>Faith Based Learning</b> Students engage in faith-based learning that reinforces moral and spiritual values and also enhances academic abilities</p>	<p><b>Access to Programming</b> The provision of specialized programming through non-traditional entities like the Black Church has significantly benefited African American students academically</p>	<p><b>Spirituality as a Support Mechanism</b> African American students' engagement with the Black Church reveals that personal spirituality serves as a support mechanism driving academic success</p>

One of the patterns found in the literature included the importance of African Americans' connections with the community (Jeynes, 2003; Barrett, 2010b; Glanville et al., 2008). The findings of this literature review extend previous research by identifying a lack of partnership between the Black Church and local schools or other community organizations. As a result, schools and other community organizations are not reaping the benefits that the strong community in the Black Church typically yields for literacy progress.

There is a need for the Black Church to partner with schools to help develop the kind of community that supports African American children academically and is also committed to designing programs that will uplift literacy. Because the review of the literature demonstrates that when African American students engage with other like-minded students who share similar goals, they perform better academically (Glanville et al., 2008), it would be interesting to explore how much improvement teachers would see in the classroom if they developed strategies to partner with local churches and community organizations. Future research should explore whether when schools, families, churches, and community organizations partner to support African-American students, they will improve academically, are less likely to drop out of school or be more enthusiastic about learning.

Further, research should investigate whether these improvements would lead to increased numbers of students who enroll in higher education, thus potentially closing the achievement gap in education. Partnerships between the Black Church and local schools would give African-American students a more personalized experience. This type of

experience matters because it impacts agency and self-efficacy. Intentional partnering and collaboration between the Black Church and local schools would also better serve African Americans by uplifting their literacy and diversifying programming. The local schools could learn a lot about how African Americans learn informally, and the Black Church would gain insight into how African Americans learn formally.

Also, teachers would be able to collaborate with the leadership in the church to learn and understand African Americans' background and lifestyle because students are more successful academically when they feel safe, trusted, and understood. For future research, it would be prudent to explore the question: If African American students had access to literacy programs that are designed to address their specific needs directly through the Black Church that provide resources such as tutoring, books, supplies, and access to computers and the internet would there be a significant difference in their academic performance?

The literature review also showed specific examples of academic skills being passed down from previous generations (Stephens, 2020; Carter et al., 2020). However, no systematic study has examined cross-generational literacy learning patterns supported by the Black Church. Although African Americans continue to rise above their challenges, an academic achievement gap must be bridged. The Black Church has served as a resource for African Americans, thus creating cultural capital that has benefited them academically. Still, they cannot bridge the gap in education without the help of families, communities, and teachers. Barrett (2010b) found that "success breeds success," which addresses the ideology that students who are familiar with academic success have more

of a tendency to be academically successful themselves. For example, an African American student whose parents are both college graduates is probably more likely to become a college graduate because it is something that they see as attainable. Suppose the proper strategies are followed to address the educational needs of African-American students. In that case, academic success will become more of a norm in the African-American community, thus beginning to bridge the academic achievement gap. These strategies would probably create a stronger foundation for African Americans to pass down academic knowledge and success from generation to generation. In future studies, it would be fruitful to explore what impact having relationships in the Black Church have on the ability to transfer academic success to their offspring, and if the ultimate goal is to close the achievement gap, how are these relationships making changes for African Americans that will be sustained from generation to generation.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

There was a lack of empirical articles (13) that met the affiliation criteria with the Black Church and African American students' educational outcomes published between 2012-2022. While this was not necessarily a limitation for providing this literature review, it does highlight the need for more research on African-American students' educational outcomes who are affiliated with the Black Church.

Youth engagement within religious institutions is critical when examining the Black Church's impact on African-American students' educational outcomes. While the study primarily focuses on the role of religious involvement in literacy outcomes among this demographic, the contemporary landscape of youth participation in religious

activities cannot be overlooked. Considering youth engagement within the Black Church is crucial when interpreting the study's findings. Suppose the study did not explicitly account for changes in youth attendance or engagement in today's church. In that case, it is essential to recognize that this factor could influence the observed outcomes. The extent to which youth engagement has shifted within the context of the Black Church may have implications for the study's results.

While my literature review did not include any studies that were conducted online, it is important to consider how online engagement could alter the nature of relationships within the church community (vs. face-to-face engagement). The lack of physical presence and in-person interactions due to online delivery methods could impact the depth and authenticity of connections among members. Without the shared experience of attending physical services and events, individuals might feel less connected to the overall church community, potentially impacting the sense of unity that this research highlighted. Also, while online platforms offer convenience, they can introduce communication challenges, which could have implications for the quality of relationships within the church. Finally, the potential lack of personal interaction in online settings might influence the extent to which individuals internalize and apply the church's teachings, which could indirectly affect the findings related to personal development and spiritual growth.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SUPPORTING THE LITERACY SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS WITH RELIGIOUS LITERACY PROGRAMMING: AN INTERVENTION STUDY

Addressing the academic achievement debt between White and African American students is crucial for equitable education. While successful literacy tutoring programs have been implemented in the United States for African American students, a debt remains. Previous research highlights the need for strategic interventions that not only enhance academic skills but also affirm the cultural identities of African American students. This study provided targeted educational initiatives using a 12-day (1 hour per day) researcher designed reading intervention connected with the Black Church involving 50 African American students and their parents. The data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA to analyze the differences between the Intervention group and the Control group. The results indicated notable variations in reading and comprehension between the Intervention Group and the Control Group. However, there were no significant alterations observed in parents' attitudes and beliefs when comparing the two groups.

Keywords: Literacy, Black Church, academic achievement, religion



The academic achievement debt that exists between White and African American students is a phenomenon that should be addressed strategically (Yosso, 2005). While the achievement gap refers to existing disparities in academic performance that are often based on factors like race or socioeconomic status between White and African American students, the achievement debt suggests an acknowledgement of historical and systemic issues contributing to these disparities (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This emphasizes the need to address and rectify the underlying inequalities. Essentially, achievement debt recognizes the cumulative effects of past injustices that continue to impact educational outcomes for African American students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Addressing the achievement debt is a prerequisite for effectively closing the achievement gap as it targets the root causes of educational disparities, ensures equity, builds trust and inclusivity, maximizes impact, and promotes social cohesion. Moreover, the pivotal role of the Black church in African American communities cannot be overstated, as it historically has served as a beacon of resilience, empowerment and advocacy.

The Black Church, integral to the African American community, was overlooked in past literacy tutoring programs. Connecting with the Black Church can leverage its community networks and cultural knowledge. This collaboration offers a familiar, supportive context for learning, and access to mentors and bridges academic and spiritual aspects, enhancing student engagement and success (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Race Theory (CRT) proposes that race continues to be a significant factor in educational inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For this reason, African American students, particularly those of low socioeconomic status (SES), tend to do poorly in

school. Ladson-Billings and colleagues (1995) argued that low SES status and structural racism breed educational failures in African American students. Although the literature over the last two decades has revealed that religious activities such as Sunday school and Bible study have proven to boost the academic achievement of African American students in several ways, the social and community-based activities (fellowship activities, outreach programs, youth and family activities, counseling and support groups and music and arts programs) in the Black Church are not explicitly literacy tutoring programs (Stephens, 2020; McIntosh, 2020).

Programs that address the social and cultural needs of African Americans while improving reading skills can help address the persistent academic achievement debt faced by African American students. However, previous literacy tutoring programs failed to focus on identity affirmation and connecting with the Black Church (Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte, 2018). It is essential to develop more comprehensive and effective programs that celebrate the unique identities of African American students while leveraging the strengths of the Black Church community.

An African American Christian school presents a unique and promising opportunity to address these shortcomings comprehensively. By conducting an intervention within the context of such a school, we can bridge the gap between academic enrichment and identity affirmation. The Black Church has historically played a central role in the African American community, providing spiritual, social, and educational activities (McMillon & Edwards, 2000). Within the walls of an African American

Christian school, we can harness the powerful synergy between faith-based values, cultural pride, and educational excellence (Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte, 2018).

Integrating literacy tutoring programs into African American Christian schools can address both educational and identity needs. This approach bridges the academic achievement gap while fostering cultural pride and identity affirmation (Acosta & Duggins, 2018). By embracing the Black Church's rich heritage and community resources, we can create a comprehensive program that improves academic outcomes and celebrates African American students' unique identities (Acosta & Duggins, 2018). The purpose of this study was to explore the literacy needs of African American students who attend an African American Christian school through a reading intervention that measures reading comprehension and vocabulary skills, as well as attitudes, confidence, self-efficacy, and family practices and, based on the needs that are revealed, to develop literacy programming, which would include the social and cultural pedagogy that is required to meet the needs of these students.

Recognizing the cumulative effects of past inequities demands a comprehensive approach that prioritizes equity, inclusivity, and justice. CRT offers a lens through which to analyze the intersecting dynamics of race, power and education highlighting the need to confront institutionalized racism and dismantle oppressive structures that perpetuate disparities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory suggests that race is a social construct shaped by power dynamics. Four tenets of CRT guide out-of-school literacy programs for African

American students: (1) the permanence of racism, (2) the commitment to social justice, (3) the importance of experiential knowledge, and (4) counter-storytelling (Yosso, 2005, pp. 117-118; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001 & Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

### **The Permanence of Racism**

The permanence of racism opines that race and racism are an eternal reality and that society will always function based on race, gender, or class (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Although there is a clear need for community literacy programs to help address the issue of oppression, such programs do not currently exist, making it difficult for society to recognize and address this problem within communities (Yosso, 2005, pp. 117-118). Based on the literature review, it has been found that incorporating culturally sustaining pedagogy or CSP in classrooms is not standard practice. This lack of utilization reflects a concerning trend of disinterest in improving pedagogical approaches, reflecting one of the critical tenets of CRT - the permanence of racism. This means that despite efforts to address racism in education, it persists as an ongoing issue, as evidenced by the lack of implementation of CSP in classrooms. This suggests that systemic and institutional barriers continue to hinder the creation of more inclusive learning environments.

The literature review revealed that the current programming shows how cultural inclusivity for African Americans and their learning that differs from their counterparts are essential. For example, when culturally relevant pedagogy was included in a literacy program in a study conducted by Acosta & Duggins (2018), the students were encouraged to use prior knowledge based on cultural experiences. Research studies have

shown that incorporating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) in literacy programming can lead to positive educational outcomes for African American students. Studies conducted without CRP have yielded mixed results, indicating that the program's efficacy may be improved by incorporating CRP.

### **The Commitment to Social Justice**

The commitment to social justice opines that CRT is dedicated to ensuring a response to racial oppression that completely renovates the design of the oppression of socially impoverished people (Yosso, 2005, pp. 117-118). Looking through this lens of CRT, it becomes evident that African Americans must have access to the same quality literacy programming in their communities that is available in White communities (Yosso, 2005, p. 118).

McNair (2012) used African American literature to examine African American students' academic outcomes and found that children and their parents developed an appreciation for African American literature. The focus of the study was to examine how participants would respond to having access to books they could identify with because the text contained African-African American culture. This study showed the importance of providing quality literacy resources for African American students equal to White children.

### **The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge**

Including experiential knowledge in education is necessary and valuable for African American students. By connecting their cultural background with their learning, students are more likely to be engaged and motivated in the educational process, resulting

in academic success. Anderson and colleagues (2015) found that students are more likely to be academically successful when they build on the traditions of their cultural practices. Educators should incorporate diverse cultural perspectives into teaching methods to create more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. When students see the relevance of their cultural practices, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and successful in their educational pursuits (Anyon et al., 2015).

### **Counter-Storytelling**

Counter-storytelling challenges dominant narratives by sharing marginalized perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte's (2018) study demonstrates how the Black Church can serve as a site of counter-storytelling by showing how African American students navigate church and school. This challenges dominant narratives and power structures, allowing African-American students to learn, grow, and challenge the systemic barriers that often hinder their progress. The Black Church can serve as a site of counter-storytelling, promoting educational opportunities for African Americans to challenge systemic barriers.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review explores the Black Church's role in promoting literacy and positive educational outcomes for African American students. It highlights three themes: The Church as an Agency for Learning, The Church as a Community, and The Church Provides Access to Programming. The review also reveals different literacy programs available to African American students and their educational outcomes. These include

Addressing Social and Cultural Needs, Improving Reading Skills, and Addressing Family Literacy Needs.

## **Aspects of the Black Church that Support Positive Educational Outcomes**

### ***The Church as an Agency for Learning***

Several studies found that the Black Church served as a setting where informal learning took place that had a positive impact on educational outcomes for African American students (Carter-Francique, 2020; Stephens, 2019; Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte, 2018; Barrett, 2010; Glanville, 2008; Papen, 2017; Peele-Eady, 2011; McMillon & Edwards, 2000). Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte (2018) examined the complexity of African American middle-class children navigating church and school. They found that the church provided opportunities to engage in activities heavily saturated with literacy fundamentals. The goal was to cultivate a love for God by teaching Biblical principles and uplifting literacy practices through informal learning techniques they would not experience in classrooms.

The findings also showed that the participants were encouraged by this informal learning to become active community members. In particular, the study found a contrast in the literacy instruction that one participant received compared to what was received from the church. In school, this participant was limited due to a lack of accommodation, but in the church was supported by church literacies such as "AAVE, dance, song, and communal responses" (Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte, 2018, p. 385).

Barrett (2010) found that students in their senior year at a public high school in an urban area of the midwestern United States indicated that religious involvement

contributed to more positive attitudes and habits, which resulted in positive educational outcomes. It was found that involvement with the church shifted their mindset to more positive thinking, encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning outcomes, resulting in positive educational outcomes.

Similarly, Glanville (2008) found that teenagers involved in religious activities were more likely to have increased familial and social networks. This encouraged students because they were all learning the same values and principles, thus positively influencing their lives. These social networks and their interactions in the church resulted in positive educational outcomes. Papen (2017) found that religious activity, such as worship, allowed students to make connections between oral and written language. This activity invited students to rely on their knowledge of the words in songs to build sight vocabulary over time. Similarly, Peele-Eady (2011) found that pedagogical strategies such as "call and response" facilitated African American children's abilities to deliberately focus on the specific biblical lessons previously taught through a sermon or Sunday School class lesson.

### ***The Church as a Community***

The Black Church has supported African Americans by creating a community of like-minded individuals who build relationships with peers and leaders. This community has been beneficial to African Americans academically. This type of capital should be acknowledged in classrooms and community programs and incorporated into curriculum-based educational programming. Jeynes (2003) found that religious students academically surpassed students who were less religious or not religious. A previously



mentioned study by Barrett (2010) found that relationships developed in the church allowed for the developing of a sense of community support that promulgated academic achievement. Glanville's (2008) previously mentioned analysis also touched upon the importance of community in church relationships. The results suggested that participation in religious activities played a role in encouraging involvement in voluntary programs and extracurricular activities. When Papen (2017) addressed the singing of hymns in the church worship services, the connection and experiences allowed the students to feel connected with their peers and the church's leadership. This sense of security comforted them and allowed them to feel safe and secure in the environment.

Carter-Francique and colleagues (2020) indicated that participation in church-sponsored activities contributed to learning and development. The knowledge gained through the Black Church and its educational activities helped break generational educational barriers hovering over families for years. Participants felt they could pass on skills that were developed through reading and regurgitating the explanations of biblical stories and scriptures to their grandchildren. Carter-Francique and colleagues (2020) also found that the church community served as a beam of support for families and helped to mark significant improvements in their lives. One participant indicated she felt encouraged to seek higher education because of the skills she gained in the church.

Curry & McIntosh (2020) conducted a qualitative case study and found that participants shared how meaningful relationships and community were to their success. One participant stated that the church has consistently played a role in addressing gaps by fostering loving relationships with Black church members. Peele-Eady (2011) also found

that when the students in the church fellowship with their peers, they receive guided instruction and direction. This fellowship benefited members of all ages when they received instruction in any given area.

### ***The Church Provides Access to Programming***

Accessibility to programs that accommodate the needs of African American students is imperative to close the achievement gap between African American students and White students. Curry & McIntosh (2020) addressed this importance in their study, where a local church partnered with a local high school to develop programming to academically serve the African American community. Jordan & Wilson (2012) pointed out that African Americans fought hard and long for communities to be desegregated so that African Americans could experience the same benefits that Whites experienced, but the result of the desegregation caused a decrease in community.

While having access to programming in the community is important, it is also essential that access to programming be available in the church community. Many churches make resources available to members to cultivate academic excellence, such as Bible classes, tutoring services, and community job fairs. Boutte & Wynter-Hoyte's (2018) study revealed that the church's structures and literacies provided access to opportunities that were unavailable in classrooms. For example, contributing to the learning process helped students feel more confident. More relaxed settings made students feel more comfortable and confident when speaking in front of others.

## **Successful Elements of Tutoring Programs for African-American Students**

### ***Addressing Social and Cultural Needs***

Several studies showed that community-based literacy programs could benefit African American students' academic success. Acosta & Duggins (2018) noted the role that communities could play when advocating for the literacy success of African American students. The authors noted that these programs could influence African American students' academic success if they carefully compose a program that addresses their specific social and cultural needs (Acosta & Duggins, 2018). During interviews, Acosta & Duggins (2018) found that instructors believed that based on their experience and the historical misidentification of African Americans, it is crucial to "solder students' identities" to affirm their intellectual abilities.

Similarly, Anderson, Anderson & Gear (2015) found that students' understanding of the world surrounding them forms their foundation of culture and that their culture is an expression of their knowledge. The findings suggest that learning occurs when students build from the traditions of their cultural practices. These cultural practices help students to understand, notice, think, and remember. The results found that creating a balance of home, community, and school allows African American students to create and contribute to their academic scenario, which could lead to building a solid literacy foundation that would lead to better academic outcomes and moving closer to closing the achievement gap between African American and White students.

### ***Improving Reading Comprehension***

Anyon and colleagues (et al., 2018) sought to examine the impact of a community-based after-school program on students in grades K-12. The participants were located in low-income neighborhoods where the demographics consisted of racially segregated settings. During this study, the intervention included a structured literacy and reading program. The lessons focused on improving participants' reading skills and other academic subjects. This study showed that participants increased independent reading levels over the academic year.

Bayless and colleagues (2018) found that participants performed significantly better with reading proficiency than those who did not participate in literacy programming. The findings confirm that participation in these types of programs can intercede into the educational pathways for students who would be considered to be at-risk due to their socioeconomic status.

Kirkner & O'Donnell (2014) also examined an after-school program with African American student participants in an urban high school. The study revealed that participants had significantly higher GPAs, test scores, and attendance after participating.

A pilot study conducted in a city-wide intervention of African American students examined "summer learning loss or slide" and found that tutoring sessions that are short but high in intensity may be beneficial to help students stay on track during summer months (Bender et al., 2020, p. 5). The study found that students could keep a steady pace

and avoid the "summer learning loss" that would generally be expected (Bender et al., 2020, p. 5).

Davis and colleagues (et al., 2021) also conducted a quantitative analysis and found significant mean changes in students' reading skills, where results suggested that their program helped prevent summer reading loss for students in Grades 3-5. These results also indicated that the students experienced gains in vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The study showed that 20% of the students experienced summer reading loss, and approximately 40% ended the summer program reading at higher levels than they started.

***Other Positive Effects of Literacy Programming: Completing Schoolwork, Improved Efficacy and Attitudes, and Shifts in Family Practices***

Like community-based literacy programming, several studies show that after-school tutoring programs benefit African American students academically. For example, Allen (2015) found that most teachers concluded that tutoring programs were valuable tools for African American students. The teachers indicated that the benefits were inclusive of students completing schoolwork, getting help with and completing homework assignments, improving grades, and helping students who were falling behind and needed a plan to catch up and get back on track to pass on to the next grade level (Allen, 2015).

The literature also found that students tend to show increased efficacy regarding getting good grades and reading achievement (Biddle, et al., 2017). This quantitative analysis focused on a cohort of 28 minority students who participated in EdVenture and

its after-school program. Surveys were distributed to the participants in the fall and spring, and school progress reports were collected. Once the teachers reported their perceptions of each student's academic proficiencies, they were rated according to a scale: Below, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. This study revealed a significant increase in the belief that they were good at something, which improved efficacy beliefs.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does an intervention delivered in an African American Christian school, and designed based on tenets of Critical Race Theory and research on successful interventions for African American children, impact changes in children's outcomes for reading performance (comprehension and vocabulary), attitudes, confidence, self-efficacy, and family practices as measured by children's pretest vs. posttest differences on a researcher designed curriculum-based measure, and oral survey responses, as compared to children at the same school who do not receive this intervention (i.e., control group)?
2. How does the family book club piece of the intervention impact changes in parents' outcomes for attitudes, confidence, self-efficacy, and family practices related to literacy, as measured by survey responses, as compared to parents at the same school who do not receive this intervention (i.e., control group)?

### **Methods**

#### **Setting**

The intervention for this study occurred at Harmony Heights Academy (all names are pseudonyms), located in a midwestern mid-sized city. The researcher chose this

school because it was an essential institution in the local community and played a significant role in the lives of many African American families. Its location was in a predominantly African American community, and its willingness to participate in a research study on literacy development in this population was crucial in choosing this school. Most of the students who attended Harmony Heights Academy were African American, and the school is a non-denominational K-8th grade school committed to modeling the love of Jesus Christ to students while offering a solid academic educational experience.

The school building was in an urban area surrounded by small businesses, homes, and other community organizations. The school's interior was spacious and well-lit, with comfortable seating and classrooms. Overall, this school provided a welcoming and supportive environment for the families and children.

### **Participants**

All students who fit the criteria were invited to participate. The participants were selected by convenience sampling based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study and who met the criteria of being African American and in grades 1-4. Fifty African American students in grades 1-4 participated, whom I randomly assigned to two groups with 25 students assigned to each group. These two groups consisted of a control group and an intervention group. Students with language delays, cognitive delays, medical conditions, or other disabilities that may have significantly impacted their ability to participate in the intervention and take the pre-and post-tests and interviews were not included in the study.

## **Materials**

### ***Lesson Plans***

The intervention included 12 literacy lessons created by the researcher. The lessons addressed comprehension and vocabulary and aligned with the tenets of CRT and previous research literature that suggested successful practices for interventions serving African-American children. For example, four lessons included call and response and worship songs where students learned moral values and positive character traits through Biblical lessons, engaged in call and response, and sang worship songs. Also, the lessons combined elements of Biblical teachings designed to engage students and help them connect with the lesson actively. The lessons were designed to align with a commitment to social justice and provide structured literacy instruction that addresses the cultural needs of the students.

### ***Family Graphic Novel Discussion Component***

Six lessons were followed by a Family Graphic Novel Discussion component. This component included families' discussions from "The Almighty Bible Biblically Accurate Graphic Novels" that align with the intervention lessons. These books encouraged continued discussion on the lesson topic between children and their families. Each child was sent home with a book and a guide sheet. The guide sheet included questions and sentence starters to facilitate the conversation. Parents were instructed to read to children, or children could read to parents. This was left up to each family. Then, families were instructed to use the guide sheet to help facilitate their discussion about the book and record their responses on the guide sheet. During the subsequent lesson,



students used the completed guide sheet to support their further discussions about the books in small groups using accountable talk cards with similar sentence starters as were on the guide sheet.

### ***Pre- and Post-tests***

The researcher created a curriculum-based assessment to evaluate children's understanding of target words and comprehension skills taught in the intervention. Two assessment versions were used for pre-and post-testing, with the exact target words and choices presented in different orders. Children circled the number corresponding to the meaning they believed matched the word. Comprehension skills were tested using four different spiritual passages, with a similar length and difficulty across pre-and post-testing. The comprehension task for each passage remained the same.

### ***Parent Survey***

One parent of each child who participated in the study was asked to respond to a survey with ten Likert-scale questions about families' self-efficacy, attitudes, and family practices concerning literacy. The survey was sent to parents embedded in an email. The same survey was distributed to parents before and after the intervention.

### ***Child Interview***

Each child who participated in the study was asked to respond to an orally administered 11-question survey. It contained 11 Likert-scale open-ended questions about children's attitudes and beliefs about reading and their family's literacy practices. This same survey was administered to children before and after the intervention.

## **Data Collection**

### ***Pre-testing***

Before the intervention, parents were emailed the link to the parent survey, and the parents completed them and returned them via email. Also, the researcher administered the student pre-intervention interview to the entire group of children. During the interview, the researcher read each question aloud to the group, and children circled their responses on a printed form. The child pre-intervention interview took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Finally, the researcher met with all the children to administer the researcher-designed curriculum-based assessments for vocabulary and comprehension skills. At this time the researcher read each question aloud to the group, and the children circled their responses on the printed form. This whole group administration took about 30-40 minutes.

### ***Intervention***

Across 12 days, the researcher taught each of the 12 lesson plans. Additionally, each child was engaged in a family book club with their parents that aligned with the intervention lessons. The relevant books and guide sheets were sent home with the students to support families' book club discussions each day after the lesson. Families recorded responses on the guide sheet based on their discussion and returned them to class for discussion the following day.

### ***Post-testing***

On the last day of the intervention, parents were emailed the link to the parent survey, and the parents completed them and returned them via email. Also, the researcher administered the post-intervention student interview to the entire group, using the same procedures as pre-testing.

Finally, the researcher met with all the children in the intervention group to administer the researcher-designed curriculum-based assessments for vocabulary and comprehension skills, using the same procedures as pre-testing.

### **Data Analysis**

This study had two predictor variables: the intervention and the control group. Additionally, it had multiple outcome variables: comprehension and vocabulary (from the skills pre-and post-testing); and confidence, self-efficacy, and family practices (from the child interviews and parent surveys).

To address RQ 1, a repeated measures ANOVA was used to compare multiple student outcomes (comprehension, vocabulary, attitudes, confidence, self-efficacy, and family practices) across the intervention and control groups.

To address RQ 2, a repeated measures ANOVA was used to compare multiple parent outcomes (attitudes, confidence, self-efficacy, and family practices) across the intervention and control groups.

### **Findings**

This study aimed to explore the literacy needs of African American students who attend an African American Christian school through a reading intervention that

measures reading comprehension and vocabulary skills, as well as attitudes, confidence, self-efficacy, and family practices and, based on the needs that are revealed, to develop literacy programming, which would include the social and cultural pedagogy that is required to meet the needs of these students. The study was framed within the theoretical construct of CRT, and the data presentation will address these research inquiries.

### **Research Question 1**

#### ***Pre- to Post-Test Intervention Results***

To assess the efficacy of the intervention, a comprehensive analysis was conducted to determine its impact on student's overall performance in combined reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. This investigation aimed to ascertain whether the intervention yielded a statistically significant difference in students' proficiency levels. The outcomes of this assessment are presented in Table 1, which states the statistical results obtained through repeated measures ANOVA. The first analysis examined whether the intervention made a significant difference in students' change in their combined reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. Table 1 below shows the statistical results of this repeated measures ANOVA.

These results indicate two significant effects. After taking the impact of the intervention into account, there was an overall significant difference in scores from pre- to post-intervention assessment.

More importantly, after considering the overall change over time, there was a significant difference between the students in the intervention and the control groups. The

pattern is shown below in Figure 1, with the intervention group shown using a dashed line and the control group shown using a solid line.

The two groups started with the intervention group nine percent lower than the control group (Effect Size = -0.58 SD). However, the control group decreased its performance over time (Effect Size = -0.32 SD), while the intervention group increased its performance (Effect Size = +0.85 SD). These results support the argument that the intervention had an essential impact on the combination of reading comprehension and vocabulary for students.

The subsequent analysis examined whether the intervention made a significant difference in students' change in their reading comprehension and their vocabulary performance, analyzed separately. Table 2 below shows the statistical results of this repeated measures ANOVA conducted on the reading comprehension total.

These results indicate the same significant difference between the intervention and control groups in their change over time as was observed for the overall test. Table 3 below shows the statistical results of this same structure of repeated measures ANOVA conducted on the vocabulary total.

These results again indicate the same significant difference between the intervention and control groups in their change over time, as observed for reading comprehension and the overall test. The pattern is shown below in Figure 2. In this figure, the intervention group is shown using a dashed line, while the control group is shown using a solid line, as shown in Figure 1. In addition, the percentage correct for the

comprehension score is shown in orange, while the percentage correct for the vocabulary score is in blue.

The patterns for comprehension and vocabulary separately followed the general pattern observed with the complete test data. The two groups started with the intervention group 10% lower than the control group for comprehension (Effect Size = -0.68) and 12% lower than the control group for vocabulary (Effect Size = -0.46 SD). However, the control group decreased their performance slightly for comprehension (Effect Size = -0.22 SD) and somewhat more for vocabulary (Effect Size = -0.68 SD). However, the intervention group increased their performance in comprehension (Effect Size = +0.34 SD) and vocabulary (Effect Size = +0.95 SD). These results further support the argument that the intervention had an essential impact on the combination of reading comprehension and vocabulary for students.

**Table 1**  
*Results of Repeated Measures Analysis of the Full Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Test*

**Within-Subjects Effects**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	10.89	1	10.89	4.34	.042
Time * Intervention	53.29	1	53.29	21.26	.000
Error(time)	120.32	48	2.51		

**Between-Subjects Effects**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	8854.81	1	8854.81	764.88	.000
Intervention	.01	1	.01	.001	.977
Error	555.68	48	11.58		

**Table 2***Results of Repeated Measures Analysis of the Overall Reading Comprehension Test*

<b>Within-Subjects Effects</b>						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Time	2.890	1	2.890	1.902	.174	
Time * Intervention	13.690	1	13.690	9.012	.004	
Error(time)	72.920	48	1.519			
<b>Between-Subjects Effects</b>						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Intercept	4970.250	1	4970.250	727.265	.000	
Intervention	1.210	1	1.210	.177	.676	
Error	328.040	48	6.834			

**Table 3***Results of Repeated Measures Analysis of the Overall Vocabulary Test*

<b>Within-Subjects Effects</b>						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Time	2.250	1	2.250	3.724	.060	
Time * Intervention	12.250	1	12.250	20.276	.000	
Error(time)	29.000	48	.604			
<b>Between-Subjects Effects</b>						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Intercept	552.250	1	552.250	348.606	.000	
Intervention	1.210	1	1.210	.764	.386	
Error	76.040	48	1.584			

***Student Survey Results***

In this study, one variable of reading frequency was assessed through a single item derived from students' responses to the Family Practices Questionnaire. This questionnaire inquired about the frequency of reading outside of school. Through a repeated measured analysis, the research aimed to discern the intervention's influence on

the change in reading frequency from pre- to post-assessments. The findings are detailed in Table 4, shedding light on the impact of the intervention on students' reading habits.

### ***Reading Frequency***

The first variable considered was reading frequency. This measure was based on students' responses to Reading Frequency and the question, "How often do you read outside of school." The repeated measures analysis on this variable examined the impact of the intervention to see if the intervention changed the reading frequency from pre- to post-assessments. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 4.

These results showed a significant difference in the change over time in reading frequency ( $F=36.3$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The means for each group from before to after the intervention period are shown in Figure 3. This figure is formatted in the same way as Figure 1. It is evident in this figure that the students in the control group did not change their reported reading frequency at all (Effect size = 0.08 SD). Those in the intervention group increased significantly (Effect size = 1.94 SD).

**Table 4**

#### *Repeated Measures Results for Reading Frequency*

<b>Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts</b>					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	5.760	1	5.760	43.200	.000
time * Intervention	4.840	1	4.840	36.300	.000
Error(time)	6.400	48	.133		

<b>Tests of Between-Subjects Effects</b>					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	70.560	1	70.560	214.359	.000
Intervention	.640	1	.640	1.944	.170
Error	15.800	48	.329		



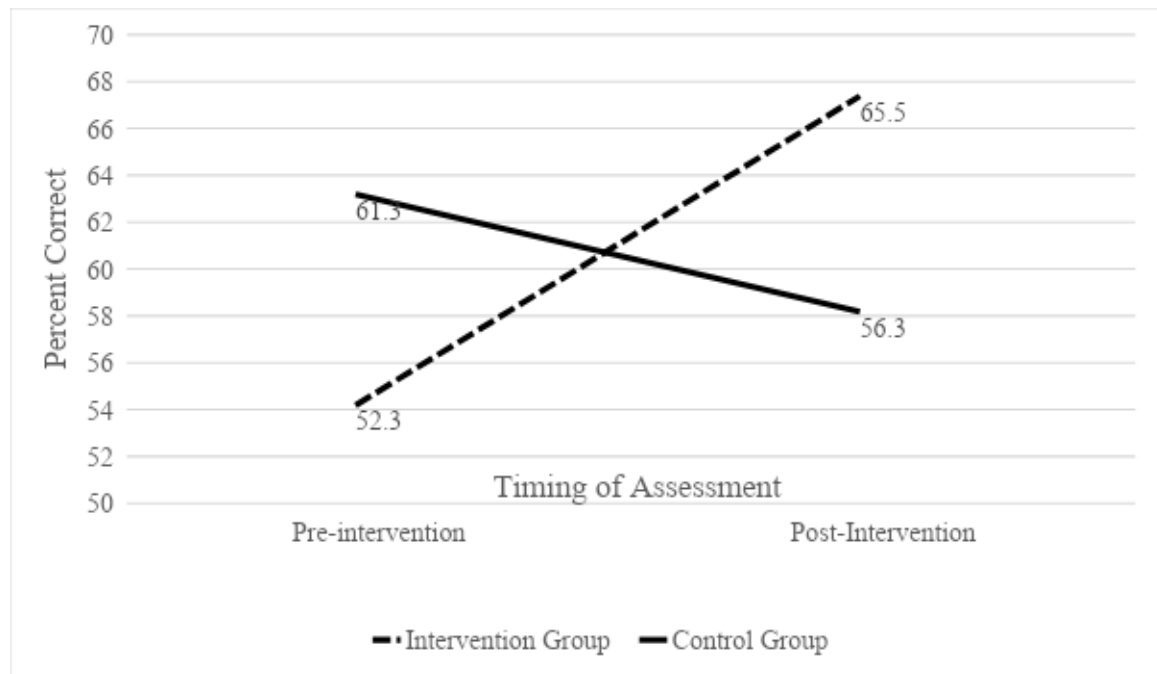
### *Seeing Oneself in Reading*

The second variable analyzed from the student survey was their responses to “How much do you see yourself and your community in your reading and writing experiences?” The repeated measures analysis on this variable examined whether participating in the intervention changed students' responses to this question compared to the control group. The results are shown in Table 5.

These results showed a significant difference in the change over time in students seeing themselves in their reading ( $F=37.4, p < .001$ ). The means for each group from before to after the intervention period are shown in Figure 4. This figure is formatted in the same way as Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Comparing the Estimated Marginal Means Over Time Between Intervention and Control Groups*



It is evident in Figure 1 that the students in the control group did not change their response to whether they saw themselves in their reading (Effect size = -0.08 SD). Those in the intervention group increased significantly (Effect size = 2.28 SD).

### ***Reading Efficacy***

The third variable analyzed from the student survey was their responses to Reading Efficacy on the following questions: “How much do you enjoy reading? How confident do you feel when you read? How comfortable do you feel reading and talking about books? Are you good at reading and talking about books?” The repeated measures analysis on this variable examined whether participating in the intervention changed students' responses to this question compared to the control group. The results are shown in Table 6.

These results showed a significant difference in the change over time in how much the students enjoyed reading ( $F=803.5$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The means for each group from before to after the intervention period are shown in Figure 5. This figure is formatted in the same way as Figure 1.

It is evident in Figure 1 that the students in the control group did not change their reported response to how much the students enjoyed reading (Effect size = -.26 SD). Those in the intervention group increased significantly (Effect size = 1.71 SD).

### ***Reading Utility***

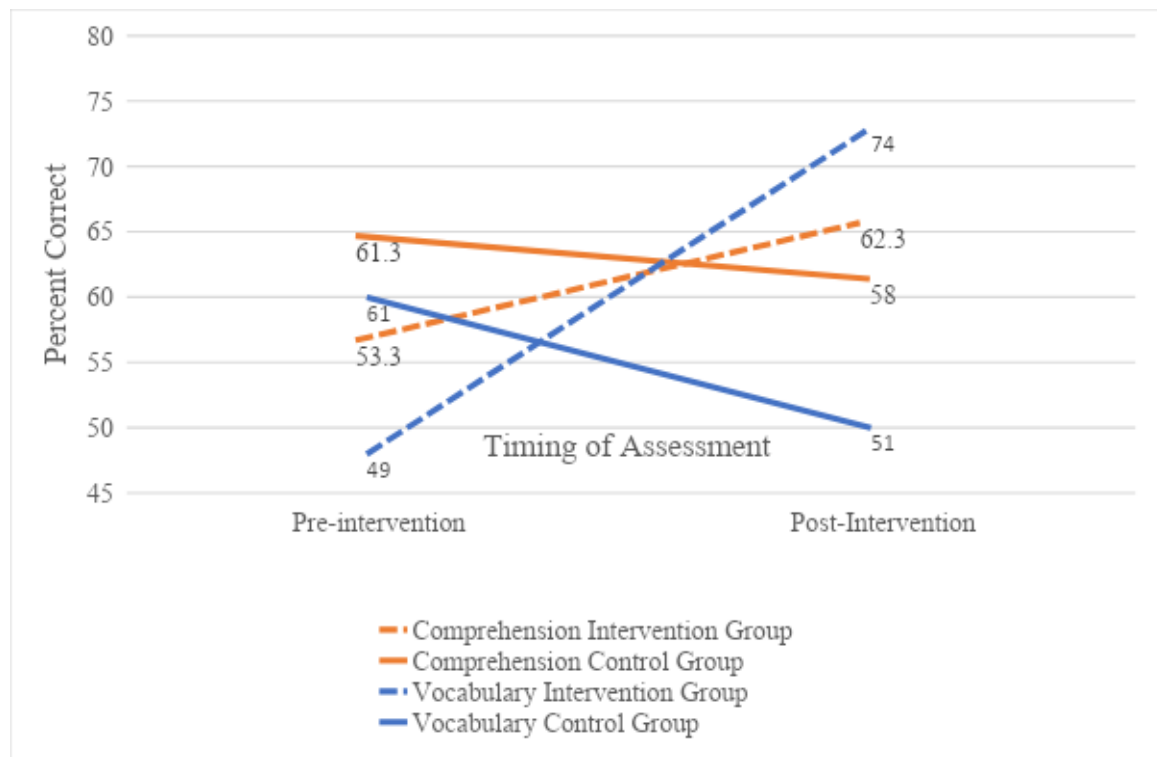
The fourth variable analyzed from the student survey, which fell under the “Reading Utility (attitudes, self-efficacy)” category, included students’ responses to the following questions: “How much do you think reading can help you learn new things and

How much do you think reading can help you understand and solve problems?” The repeated measures analysis on this variable examined whether participating in the intervention changed students' responses to this question compared to the control group. The results are shown in Table 7.

**Figure 2**

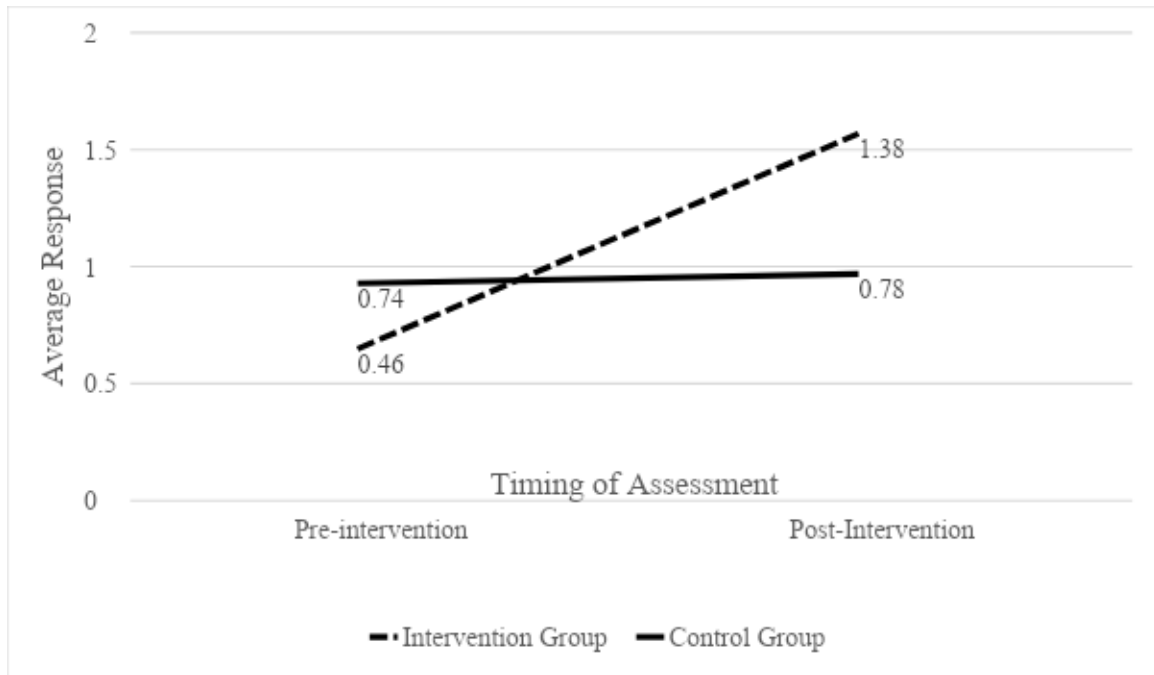
*Comparing the Estimated Marginal Means Over Time Between Intervention and Control Groups for Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Percent Correct*

These results showed a significant difference in the change over time in Reading Utility ( $F=65.6, p < .001$ ). The means for each group from before to after the intervention period are shown in Figure 6. This figure is formatted in the same way as Figure 1.



**Figure 3**

*Comparing Change in Student-Reported Reading Frequency Between Intervention Group and Control Group*



**Table 5**

*Repeated Measures Results for Seeing Oneself in Reading*

**Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	7.290	1	7.290	32.400	.000
time * Intervention	8.410	1	8.410	37.378	.000
Error(time)	10.800	48	.225		

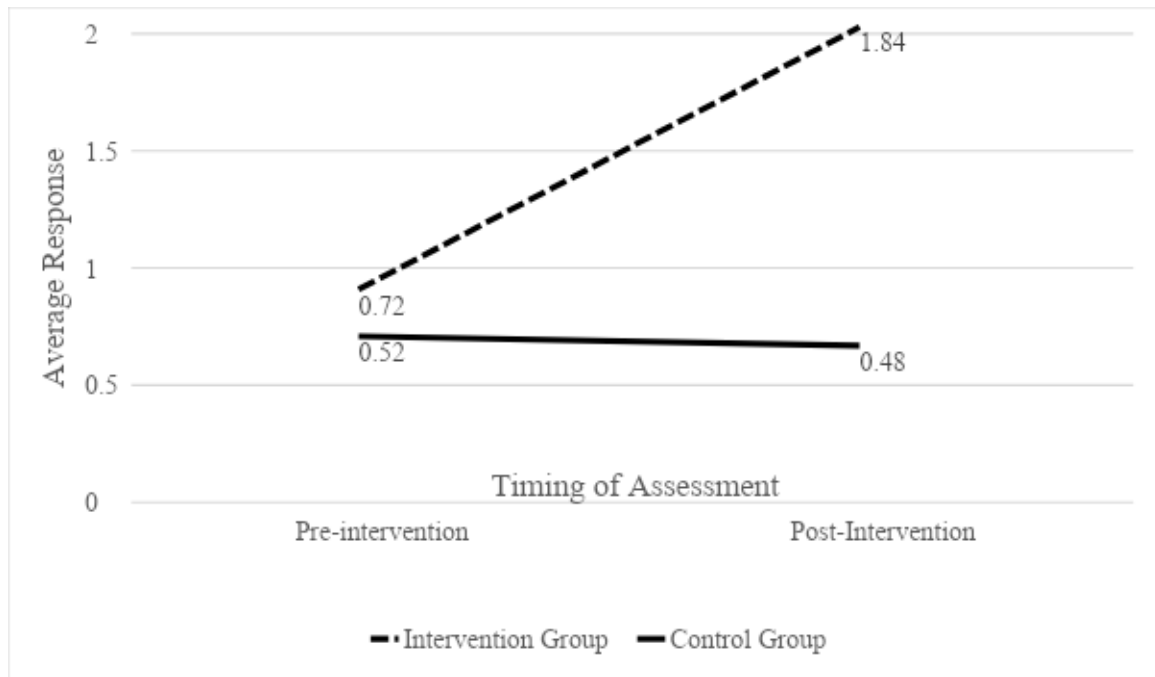
**Table 5 - Continued**

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	79.210	1	79.210	377.190	.000
Intervention	15.210	1	15.210	72.429	.000
Error	10.080	48	.210		

**Figure 4**

*Comparing Change in Student Reported Seeing Themselves in Their Reading Between Intervention and Control Groups*



It is evident in Figure 7 that the students in the control group did not change their reported response to how much the students enjoyed reading (Effect size =  $-.1108$  SD). Those in the intervention group increased significantly (Effect size  $0.163 =$  SD).

**Table 6**

*Repeated Measures Results for Reading Efficacy – How Much Do Students Enjoy*

*Reading*

**Tests of Between-Subjects Contrasts**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	.028	1	.028	.472	.496
time * Intervention	3.868	1	3.868	65.679	.000
Error(time)	2.827	48	.059		

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	168.134	1	168.134	803.474	.000
Intervention	.321	1	.321	1.535	.221
Error	10.044	48	.209		

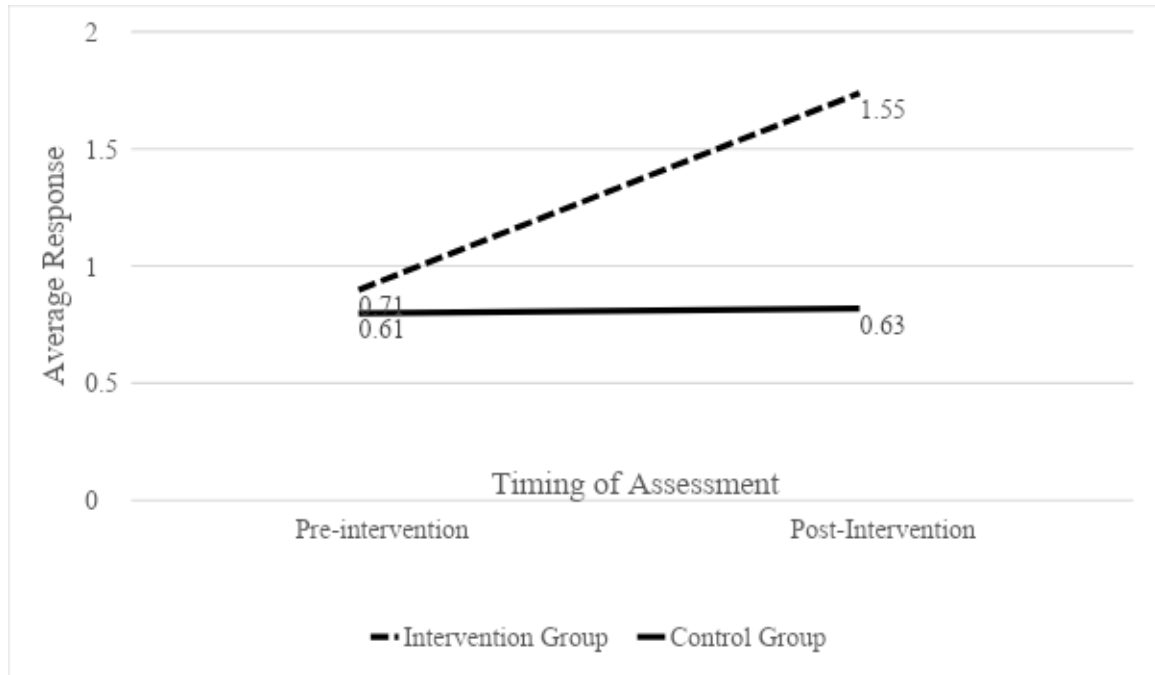
The fifth variable analyzed from the student survey, which fell under the “Reading and Family Practices” category, included students’ responses to the following questions: “How often do you read with a family member at home? How helpful do you find it when a family member reads with you? How often do you talk with your family about the books you read yourself? The repeated measures analysis on this variable examined whether participating in the intervention changed students' responses to this question compared to the control group. The results are shown in Table 8.

***Reading and Family Practices***

These results showed a significant difference in the change over time in Reading and Family Practices ( $F=1.361$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The means for each group from before to after the intervention period are shown in Figure 7. This figure is formatted in the same way as Figure 1

**Figure 5**

*Comparing Change in Student-Reported Reading Efficacy Between Intervention and Control Groups*



**Table 7**

*Repeated Measures Results for Reading Utility - Learning New Things and Solving Problems*

**Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts**

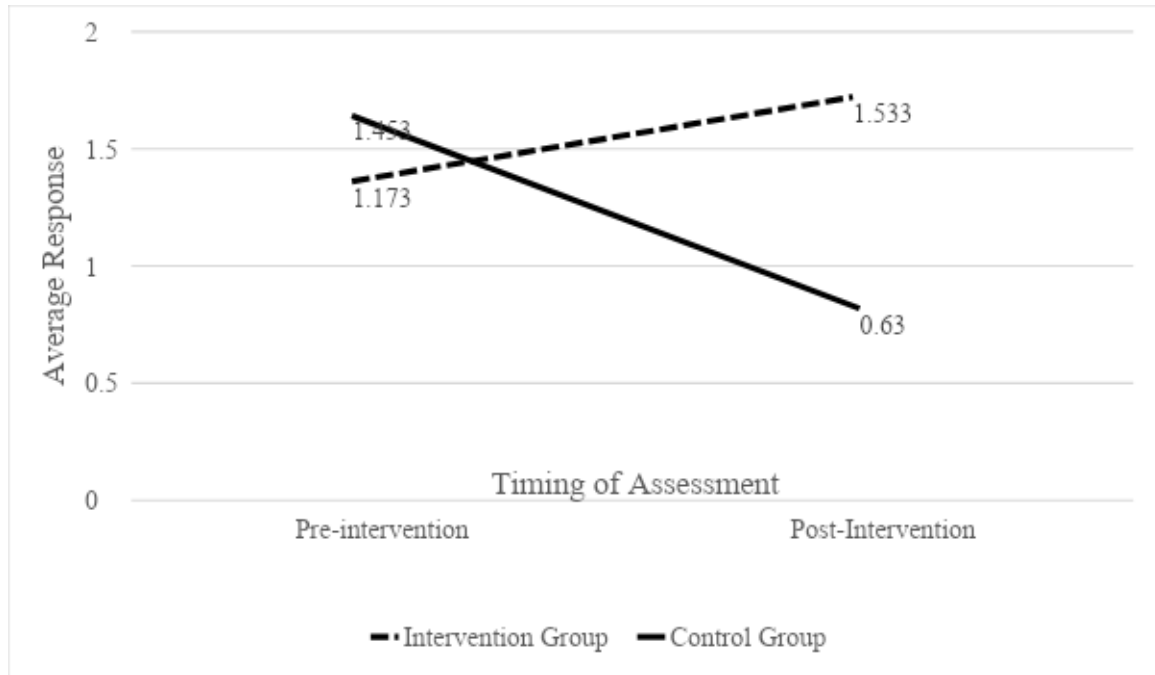
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	.028	1	.028	.472	.496
time * Intervention	3.868	1	3.868	65.679	.000
Error(time)	2.827	48	.059		

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	168.134	1	168.134	803.474	.000
Intervention	.321	1	.321	1.535	.221
Error	10.044	48	.209		

**Figure 6**

*Comparing Change in Student-Reported Reading Utility - Learning New Things and Solving Problems Between Intervention and Control Groups*



The students in the control group did not change their reported response to how much the students enjoyed reading (Effect size = .1.96 SD). Those in the intervention group increased significantly (Effect size .597 = SD).

## **Research Question 2**

### ***Parent Survey Results***

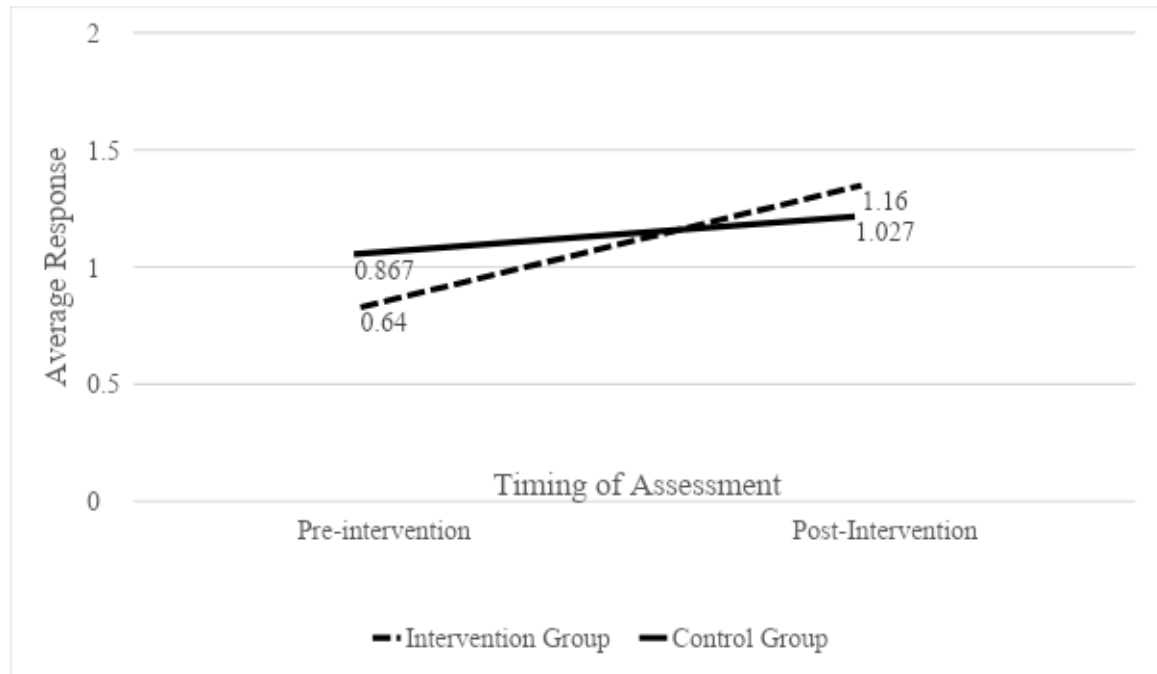
The first variable analyzed from the parent survey, which fell under the “Further Education (attitudes)” category, included parents’ responses to the question: “How likely are you to pursue further education for yourself?” The repeated measures analysis on this variable examined whether participating in the intervention changed parents’ response to this question compared to the control group. The results are shown in Table 8. These



results showed no difference in the change over time in the question regarding further education ( $F=.537, p < .468$ ).

**Figure 7**

*Comparing Change in Student-Reported Reading and Family Practices Between Intervention and Control Groups*



**Table 8**

*Repeated Measures Results for Reading and Family Practices*

**Repeated Measures Analysis**

<b>Tests of Within-Subjects Effects</b>					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	2.054	1	2.054	20.282	.000
time * Intervention	1.361	1	1.361	13.437	.001
Error(time)	4.862	48	.101		

**Table 8 – Continued**

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	80.401	1	80.401	358.519	.000
Intervention	.001	1	.001	.005	.944
Error	10.764	48	.224		

**Reading and Family Practices**

The second variable analyzed from the parent survey, which fell under the “Family Practices in Literacy” category, included parents’ responses to the following questions: “How often do you read with your child at home? How often does your child talk to you about the importance of reading? How often do you model reading behavior for your child by reading books, magazines, or newspapers? How often do you engage in activities that promote literacy with your child, such as playing word games or writing stories together? How often do you provide positive feedback to your child when they read well or progress in their reading skills? How often do you encourage your child to choose books that interest them?” The repeated measures analysis on this variable examined whether participating in the intervention changed parents’ responses to these questions compared to the control group. The results are shown in Table 9. The results showed no difference in the change over time in these questions regarding Family Practices in Literacy ( $F=1.534, p < .223$ ).

The third variable analyzed from the parent survey, which fell under the “Parent Self-Efficacy” category, included parents’ responses to the following questions: “How confident do you feel in your ability to help your child with their reading? How important is it for your child to read for pleasure? How important is it for your child to have strong

reading skills? The repeated measures analysis on this variable examined whether participating in the intervention changed parents' responses to these questions compared to the control group. The results are shown in Table 10.

**Table 9**  
*Repeated Measures Results for Family Practices in Literacy*

**Tests of Between Subjects Contrasts**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	.902	1	.902	2.038	.162
time * intervention group	.679	1	.679	1.534	.223
Error(time)	16.380	37	.443		

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	260.053	1	260.053	327.657	.000
intervention group	4.177	1	4.177	5.263	.028
Error	29.366	37	.794		

**Table 10**

*Repeated Measures Results for Parent Self-Efficacy*

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	.248	1	.248	1.405	.243
time * intervention group	.248	1	.248	1.405	.243
Error(time)	6.524	37	.176		

**Table 10-Continued**

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	813.975	1	813.975	2200.552	.000
intervention group	4.812	1	4.812	13.010	.001
Error	13.686	37	.370		

These results showed no difference in the change over time in these questions regarding Family Practices in Literacy ( $F=1.405$ ,  $p < .243$ ).

**Discussion**

In the following sections, I discuss how the findings from this study extend the previous findings from studies that underscored the potential of literacy tutoring for African American students (Curry & McIntosh, 2020; Jordan & Wilson, 2012 & Boutte-Wynter-Hoyte, 2018) and promise of literacy learning through connections to the Black Church, such as (1) addressing the social and cultural needs of African-American students (Acosta & Duggins, 2018 & Anderson & Gear, 2015; ) (2) improving the reading skills of African-American students (Calhoun et al., 2018; Gunn, et al., 2011; Bayless, et al., 2018; Kirk & O'Donnell, 2014; Bender et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2021; Begeny & Mitchell, 2014), and (3) addressing the family literacy needs of African American students (Allen, 2015; Aidman & Malerba, 2015; McNair, 2013; Biddle et al., 2017 & Gao et al., 2016).

**Social and Cultural Needs**

Researchers in earlier studies asserted that community-based literacy programs that focused on literacy tutoring could enhance the academic success of African-

American students. Acosta & Duggins (2018) highlighted that programs tailored to address social and cultural needs could positively impact academic achievements. Earlier researchers also determined that establishing a harmonious blend of home, community, and school environments empowers African-American students to actively shape and contribute to their academic landscape (Anderson et al., 2015). The present study extends these previous findings by demonstrating that aligning the intervention with the Black Church significantly improved academic success. The intervention was designed to meet the participants' cultural and social needs, incorporating religious literacy content that promoted a holistic learning environment. This approach fostered a stronger connection to their cultural and religious heritage while promoting a sense of identity, belonging, and purpose.

### **Improved Reading Skills**

This investigation was similar to earlier studies because it illustrated enhanced reading proficiency following a reading intervention involving students in grades 1-4. Building upon the findings of Anyon (2018) and Bayless et al. (2018), this study, conducted over a shorter time frame, revealed significant advancements in reading and comprehension skills among participants compared to the control group, as evidenced by pre- and post-testing results. While Anyon and colleagues (2018) had previously found that intervention lessons contributed to students' improved reading abilities, their study took considerably longer to achieve similar results. The critical difference between my study and Anyon's was that my curriculum was culturally relevant and connected with the Black Church, whereas Anyon's was not. Thus, the faster positive outcomes resulting

from my culturally relevant intervention with religious pedagogy and family involvement suggest that we can potentially speed up growth by incorporating CRP aligned with the Black Church. I surmise that the religious component, with a focus on the Black Church, emerged as a powerful catalyst for engagement and motivation and played a pivotal role in creating a supportive and enriching learning environment so the participants could feel a sense of belonging and cultural affirmation, which supported their accelerated learning.

### **Family Literacy**

This study offered unique and distinctive insights compared to previous literature highlighting the efficacy of after-school programs targeting African-American students (e.g., Biddle et al.,2017). The unique combination of family involvement, CRP, the connection to the Black Church, and a holistic approach through the family literacy book club distinguishes my study from previous research. This study's demonstration of a statistically significant change over time in how students perceive themselves in their reading experiences aligns with the identified uniqueness of my approach. Incorporating spiritual and cultural identification within the text, specifically relating to the Black Church, emerges as a critical factor in fostering a more robust connection for participants. (See Table 4) The observed more profound and meaningful engagement with the intervention in the context of these cultural and spiritual elements provides empirical support for the assertion that this approach, distinct in its multifaceted design, indeed uncovers nuanced insights into the impact of the intervention on attitudes and beliefs. This, in turn, contributes to a more enriched understanding of the overall effectiveness of my strategy, differentiating it from previous literature that may not have integrated such a

comprehensive and culturally relevant approach. This approach has the potential to uncover nuanced insights into the impact of the intervention on attitudes and beliefs, providing a more enriched understanding of the overall effectiveness of my educational strategy. The findings in Figure 4 substantiate that incorporating spiritual and cultural identification within the text fosters a more robust connection for participants and suggests a more profound and meaningful engagement with the intervention.

My study found that incorporating a family literacy book club with culturally relevant Biblical texts can significantly impact African-American children's attitudes and beliefs towards literacy. This approach recognizes the family environment's role in educational development and can facilitate a stronger connection to the material. The study's findings showed that exposure to culturally specific content promoted literacy and facilitated a sense of identity formation among the students, resulting in positive shifts in attitudes and beliefs towards reading.

### **Implications**

Based on the findings from my study, four implications for practice can be drawn. First, the positive literacy growth results underscore the importance of implementing literacy programs specifically tailored for African-American students. This suggests that investing in literacy programs that cater to African-American students' social and cultural needs can have a meaningful impact on their educational experiences. Further, such interventions build students' self-confidence and encourage positive attitudes toward learning.

Second, the emphasis on culturally relevant Biblical text highlights the importance of cultural competence in curriculum design. The positive outcomes of my study may prompt curriculum developers to consider how cultural diversity and identity can be included in educational materials. This could lead to more inclusive curricula that resonate with a diverse student population, fostering a sense of belonging and relevance in the learning process.

Third, policymakers in the education sector may find effectiveness in family involvement programs like the family literacy book club. Recognizing the impact of such initiatives on student attitudes and beliefs, policymakers could consider allocating resources and support for developing and implementing similar programs on a larger scale. This could include creating guidelines or policies encouraging schools to actively involve families in education initiatives.

Fourth, refining the intervention strategies could prove prudent in future research. The lack of changes in family literacy practices suggests a need to reevaluate and potentially refine the components of the intervention. This could involve revisiting the family literacy book club's structure, content, or delivery methods. Understanding why certain elements did not influence family literacy practices can guide adjustments to enhance the effectiveness of future interventions. Further, the absence of changes in family literacy practices underscores the importance of aligning intervention goals with the intended outcomes. If the primary focus of the intervention is to impact student attitudes and beliefs regarding literacy, the design and implementation might need to be adjusted to address and measure changes in family literacy practices directly. Clearly



defining objectives and tailoring interventions accordingly can improve the precision and effectiveness of educational strategies. Finally, given the lack of changes in family literacy practices, future interventions might consider incorporating explicit parent education components. This could involve workshops, informational sessions, or resources designed to educate and empower parents in supporting their children's literacy development at home. Providing parents with specific knowledge and tools regarding literacy could contribute to more significant changes in family literacy practices.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While this study contributes valuable insights into the effect of a culturally tailored intervention on the academic outcomes of African-American students in a Christian school setting, it is important to acknowledge three limitations that may influence the interpretation of the findings.

First, the study's sample size may limit the generalizability of the results. The intervention was conducted in a specific African-American Christian school, and caution should be exercised when extending these findings to a broader population. Future research should aim for a larger sample size to enhance the study's external validity. Second, the intervention was implemented over a relatively short time frame. A more extended intervention period might provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sustained effects of the program on students' academic performance. Future studies could explore the long-term impact of similar interventions on reading skills and other educational outcomes. For example, future research could involve conducting a longitudinal study to track participants' academic progress and literacy development over

an extended period, allowing for a more in-depth understanding of the sustained effects of the intervention on African-American students' educational outcomes. Future research could compare intervention strategies tailored to address African-American students' social, cultural, and family literacy needs to improve academic performance.

Incorporating standardized measures and multiple data collection methods could validate self-reported information. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, or observations, can provide valuable insights into the students' experiences and perceptions. By addressing these limitations, scholars can further advance our understanding of how interventions tailored to African-American students' needs contribute to positive academic outcomes.

### **Declaration of Interest**

I am dedicated to promoting academic equity and literacy success for African American students through culturally relevant Biblical interventions. I have no personal or financial interests that could affect the integrity of this study. Transparency and providing valuable insights in education are my top priorities. My dedication to impartiality underscores the importance of this research in enhancing literacy outcomes for African American students through culturally sensitive Biblical interventions. This study was approved by Oakland University Institutional Review Board (Approval Code - FY2023-284) and adheres to ethical guidelines, priorities and the well-being and confidentiality of participants.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In synthesizing the findings from the literature review and the empirical study, several crucial themes emerge, shedding light on the potential impact of African Americans' connections with the Black Church on their educational outcomes. By identifying patterns and gaps in existing research, we can pave the way for future investigations and interventions aimed at addressing the unique needs of this community.

The literature review highlighted the importance of African Americans' connections with their community, emphasizing the role of the Black Church. However, an identified gap indicates a lack of partnerships between the Black Church and local schools or community organizations. Future research should explore the potential benefits of establishing such partnerships, examining whether collaborative efforts between schools, churches, and community organizations contribute to improved academic performance, reduced dropout rates, and increased enthusiasm for learning among African American students.

Collaboration between the Black Church and local schools presents an opportunity for a more personalized educational experience. This partnership could facilitate a two-way exchange of knowledge, where schools gain insights into African Americans' informal learning styles from the Black Church, and the church learns about formal educational approaches. This collaborative effort could contribute to a deeper

understanding of students' backgrounds and lifestyles, fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

The unique family literacy book club introduced in the empirical study, coupled with culturally relevant Biblical texts, demonstrated a significant impact on African American children's attitudes and beliefs toward literacy. Future research should explore the scalability of such programs and whether access to literacy initiatives directly through the Black Church – offering resources like tutoring, books, supplies, and technology access – results in substantial improvements in academic performance.

While the literature review mentioned the passing down of academic skills through generations, there is a notable gap in systemic studies examining cross-generational patterns of literacy learning supported by the Black Church. Future research should delve into the long-term impact of relationships within the Black Church on the ability to transfer academic success to future generations, thereby contributing to sustained changes in African American communities.

Addressing the academic achievement gap requires a multifaceted approach. Collaborative efforts involving families, community organizations, teachers, and the Black Church can potentially create a stronger foundation for academic success within the African American community. Future studies should explore the sustained impact of these strategies on closing the achievement gap and promoting academic success as a norm.

The limitations of the current study, such as the scarcity of relevant articles, underscore the need for more research around African American students' educational

outcomes affiliated with the Black Church. Future research should focus on expanding the body of literature, incorporating diverse methodologies, and exploring a broader temporal range to enhance our understanding of the complex dynamics at play.

This comprehensive discussion emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts, the potential of personalized educational experiences, and the need for culturally relevant interventions to address the unique needs of African American students within the context of the Black Church. Future research in these areas has the potential to inform educational practices, policies and interventions that contribute to addressing the education debt and eliminating the achievement gap and promoting sustained academic success in African American communities.

APPENDIX A  
IRB APPROVAL LETTERS



**Institutional Review Board**

**Date:** May 23, 2023

**Study #:** IRB-FY2023-284

**Study Title:** Supporting the Literacy Success of African American Students with Religious Literacy Programming: An Intervention Study

**Submission Type:** Initial

**IRB Decision:** Exempt

**Research Team:**

Sherrayna Coleman

Tanya Christ

Based on applicable federal regulations, the above referenced study has been determined to be Exempt, with the following categories:

**Notes for Researcher(s):**

This submission includes the following approved documents:

- Recruitment Script
- Date-Stamped Child Assent Form V 5/23/23
- Date-Stamped Parental Permission V 5/23/23
- Date-Stamped Parent Consent Form V 5/23/23
- Data Collection Tools

Note: The date-stamped Assent/Consent/Permission documents can be found under Attachments in the Submission Details page in Cayuse. Approved documents must be used in obtaining consent/assent/permission from participants.

**Letter and Consent Document:**

This letter along with the IRB approved (date-stamped) consent document can be found in Cayuse in the [Submission Details](#) page under [Letters](#) and [Attachments](#), respectively. Please make sure to use the most recent IRB approved version of the consent form in consenting participants.

**Permission from Research Site(s):**

Please note the following:



- This IRB exemption determination letter means that this research has met one or more of the federal criteria for exemption per 45 CFR 46.104- Exempt Research.
- Before the research is initiated, permission to conduct research at a given site must be obtained from all research locations listed in the IRB submission. You must keep copies of all such permission letters for your files.
- It is the responsibility of each researcher to follow all applicable policies and procedures of any outside institution where the research will be conducted.

**Modifications:**

Any changes to this exempt project must be reviewed by the IRB prior to initiation by submitting a MODIFICATION request. Do not collect data while the changes are being reviewed. Data collected during this time cannot be used in research.

**Record Retention:**

Exempt projects will be retained by the IRB office for three years after the last action on the project.

You are approved to start the research. Please retain a copy of this notification for your records.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office.

Thank you.

The Oakland University IRB



**Institutional Review Board**

**Date:** September 20, 2023

**Study #:** IRB-FY2023-284

**Study Title:** Supporting the Literacy Success of African American Students with Religious Literacy Programming: An Intervention Study

**Submission Type:** Modification

**IRB Decision:** Exempt

**Research Team:**

Sherrayna Coleman

Tanya Christ

The IRB has reviewed the Modification submission related to the above referenced study and determined that the changes listed below do not affect the exemption status of the study. The Modification submission is Approved and the study remains Exempt per federal regulations.

The approved modifications are the following:

1. The location of the study will change from being conducted in a Black Church (Agape Love Church) to an African-American Christian school (Westside Christian Academy). Permission letter from the school is included in the submission.
2. The criteria for participants will change from 1-2 grade African American students to 1-4 grade African American students.
3. The study will be conducted over a 4 week period in a school setting (5 day school weeks) as opposed to the 12 weeks at a church setting (Sunday services once a week). The number of lessons has not changed; it is still 12.
4. Revise Parental Permission, Parent Consent form to change the research location to Westside Christian Academy.
5. Revise the Child Assent for the school children to change the duration of the study to 4 weeks instead of 12.
6. Addition of a clarification in the IRB application that this study focuses on the academic outcomes of African American students when exposed to religious literacies, so students who are not African American will be excluded.

This submission includes the following approved documents:

- Revised Child Assent for School V 9-20-23
- Revised Parental Permission for the School V 9-20-23
- Revised Parent Consent Form for the School V 9-20-23

The IRB approved (date-stamped) Parent Consent, Parental Permission and Child Assent document(s) have been published under Attachments in the Submission Details page. Please make sure to use the most recent IRB approved version of the consent documents in consenting participants.

You are approved to implement the aforementioned modifications. Please retain a copy of this notification for your records.

This letter can also be found in Cayuse under the Letters tab in the Submission Details page.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office.

Thank you.

The Oakland University IRB

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE FROM RELIGION AND EDUCATION FOR THE  
ROLE RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT PLAYS ON THE LITERACY SUCCESS OF  
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Ref: RELED-D-23-00001R1  
228310592

The Role Religious Involvement Plays on the Literacy of African American Students: A  
Systematic Review  
Religion & Education

Dear Sherrayna Coleman,

We have considered your revised manuscript and are pleased to accept your paper in its current form which will now be forwarded to the publisher for copy editing, typesetting, and then publication in Religion & Education. We particularly appreciate your care taken to respond to the reviewers' comments.

You will receive proofs for checking, and instructions for transfer of copyright in due course.

The publisher also requests that proofs are checked through the publisher's tracking system and returned within 48 hours of receipt.

Thank you for your contribution to Religion & Education and we look forward to receiving further submissions from you.

Best regards,

Michael D Waggoner, PhD  
Editor-in-Chief  
Religion & Education

APPENDIX C

CURRICULUM-BASED ASSESSMENTS FOR VOCABULARY AND  
COMPREHENSION SKILLS

**COMPREHENSION**

**Passage 1: Genesis 2**

***“The Lord God took a handful of soil and made a man. God breathed life into the man, and the man started breathing. The first man was called Adam. The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and to look after it. The Garden of Eden was a beautiful place.”***

Monitoring & retelling question: According to the passage, who created the first man, Adam?

- A. A group of people
- B. An animal
- C. The Lord God
- D. The man created himself

Visualizing question: Which of the following best describes the image that comes to your mind when you read the following sentence from the passage: “The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and to look after it. The Garden of Eden was a beautiful place.”

- A. A man surrounded by beautiful flowers and trees
- B. A man standing in front of a big house
- C. A man climbing a mountain

- D. A man dancing

Predicting question: Based on the information provided in the passage, what might happen next in the story of Adam?

- A. Adam would start flying
- B. Adam would run away from the garden
- C. Adam would enjoy living in the garden.
- D. Adam would turn into an animal

Questioning question: What question might you ask to learn more about the story of Adam based on the information provided in the passage?

- A. What was Adam's favorite color?
- B. Was there a grocery store in the garden ?
- C. Why did God create Adam?
- D. What did Adam have for breakfast this morning?

**Passage 2: Exodus 3**

***“One day Moses was looking after sheep when something caught his eye. A bush was behaving very strangely. It was flickering with flames, but its leaves weren't burning up. He took a closer look. Moses? Boomed a big voice. Most jumped back. The bush was talking to him. I have heard my people's cries, God said. I have seen their tears. So I have come down to rescue them.”***



Monitoring & retelling question: What did Moses see when he was looking after the sheep?

- A. A big tree.
- B. A burning bush.
- C. A singing bird.
- D. A flying kite.

Visualizing question: Close your eyes and imagine the scene from the story. What did the bush look like?

- A. Colorful
- B. Small and dying
- C. Flames around the leaves
- D. A big rock

Predicting question: What do you think Moses might do next after hearing the big voice from the talking bush?

- A. Run away in fear.
- B. Yell at the bush.
- C. Ignore the voice and continue watching the sheep
- D. Stay and listen to what the bush has to say.

Questioning question: What question might you ask to learn more about this passage?

- A. Did Moses see a unicorn near the talking bush?
- B. Why were the bush's leaves not burning up?

- C. Do sheep scare easily?
- D. Can bushes really talk?

-

### **Passage 3: Exodus 3**

***“So Moses went to Pharaoh. “Pharaoh, Moses began, God says – “God?” Said Pharaoh, “Never heard of him.” Moses kept going. “God says let his people go free.” “Why should I?” Pharaoh said. “I don’t want to and I won’t.” So he didn’t. So God gave Pharaoh ten warnings, called plagues. First, God made frogs come hopping and leaping and jumping. In your bed frogs, in your hair frogs, in your soup frogs, all over everywhere frogs. Make them go away, Pharaoh screamed, “Then your people can go.” So God took the frogs away.”***

Monitoring & retelling question: What did God do to Pharaoh when he refused to let the people go?

- A. Sent a strong wind.
- B. Made it rain frogs.
- C. Turned all the water into blood.
- D. Sent a swarm of bees.

Visualizing question: Close your eyes and imagine the scene from the story. How did the frogs look?

- A. They were all sitting around a pond.
- B. They were in everything and everywhere.
- C. They were hiding.

D. They were only Pharaoh's house.

Predicting question: How do you think Pharaoh felt about all the frogs?

A. he thought it was really funny.

B. He was excited to make frog soup.

C. He was scared and angry about all the frogs in his kingdom

D. He thought it was all his wife's fault

Questioning question: What question might you ask to learn more about this passage?

A. Why did God take the frogs away?

B. Why did the frogs get into Pharaoh's bed, hair and soup?

C. Did Pharaoh let the people go after God took the frogs away?

D. Why doesn't Pharaoh like frogs?

### VOCABULARY

Creation

A. To make something smaller

B. To make something new

C. To take something away

D. To destroy something

Kingdom

A. A place where one important person is in charge

B. A place where only rich people live

C. A game with fighting

D. A type of candy

Wander

- A. To walk to school
- B. To drive in a car
- C. To run fast or jog
- D. To walk around without going anywhere in particular

Descendents

- A. Machines that can fly in the sky
- B. People who are really tall
- C. Children or grandchildren
- D. People who live far away from their families

APPENDIX D  
STUDENT INTERVIEW

## Student Interview

1. How much do you enjoy reading?
  - 0=Not at all
  - 1=Some
  - 2=A lot
  
2. How confident do you feel when you read?
  - 0=Not at all
  - 1=Some
  - 2=A lot
  
3. How often do you read with a family member at home (for the intervention group)  
(post-test - add "other than the book club")?
  - 0=Never
  - 1=Sometimes
  - 2=Every day
  
4. How helpful do you find it when a family member reads with you (for the intervention group post-test, add "other than the book club")?
  - 0=Not helpful at all
  - 1=Somewhat helpful
  - 2=Very helpful
  
5. How often do you read books by yourself outside of school?
  - 0=Never
  - 1=Sometimes
  - 2=Every day
  
6. How much do you think reading can help you learn new things?

- 0=Not at all
- 1=Some
- 2=A lot

7. How much do you think reading can help you understand and solve problems?

- 0 - Not at all
- 1 - Some
- 2 - A lot

8. How often do you talk with your family about the books you read by yourself?

- 0 - Not at all
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - A lot

9. How much do you see yourself and your community in your reading and writing experiences?

- 0 - Not at all
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - A lot

10. How comfortable do you feel reading and talking about books?

- 0=Not at all comfortable
- 1=Kind of comfortable
- 2=Very comfortable

11. Are you good at reading and talking about books?

- 0=Not at all good
- 1=Kind of good
- 2=Very good

APPENDIX E  
PARENT SURVEY



## Parent Survey

These survey questions can help identify areas where families may need to improve *self-efficacy, attitudes, and family practices in regard to literacy*. The survey results can be used to create literacy programs and initiatives that help families develop skills in these areas and promote overall literacy development for children.

1. How confident do you feel in your ability to help your child with their reading?
  - A. Very confident
  - B. Somewhat confident
  - C. Not very confident
  - D. Not at all confident
  
2. How often do you read with your child at home (for intervention group add "outside the book club")?
  - A. Every day
  - B. Several times a week
  - C. Once a week
  - D. Less than once a week
  
3. How often does your child talk to you about the importance of reading?
  - A. Every day
  - B. Several times a week
  - C. Once a week
  - D. Less than once a week
  
4. How often do you model reading behavior for your child by reading books, magazines, or newspapers?
  - A. Every day
  - B. Several times a week
  - C. Once a week
  - D. Less than once a week
  
5. How often do you engage in activities that promote literacy with your child, such as playing word games or writing stories together?
  - A. Every day
  - B. Several times a week
  - C. Once a week
  - D. Less than once a week
  
6. How important is it for your child to read for pleasure?
  - A. Very important
  - B. Somewhat important

- C. Not very important
  - D. Not at all important
7. How important is it for your child to have strong reading skills?
- A. Very important
  - B. Somewhat important
  - C. Not very important
  - D. Not at all important
8. How often do you provide positive feedback to your child when they read well or progress in their reading skills?
- A. Every time
  - B. Most of the time
  - C. Sometimes
  - D. Rarely or never
9. How often do you encourage your child to choose books that interest them?
- A. Every time
  - B. Most of the time
  - C. Sometimes
  - D. Rarely or never
10. How likely are you to pursue further education for yourself?
- A. Very likely
  - B. Somewhat likely
  - C. Not very likely
  - D. Not at all likely

APPENDIX F  
FAMILY BOOK CLUB GUIDE SHEET

Family of Faith Book Club  
Guide Sheet

Before Reading:

- Title of Book:
- Author:
- Illustrator:
- Brief summary of the book:

During Reading:

1. What was your favorite part of the book and why?
2. Who was your favorite character and why?
3. When reading the part about \_\_\_\_\_ I was thinking \_\_\_\_\_.
4. I'm still confused about \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What was the funniest part of the book?
6. What did you learn from the book?
7. Did you learn any new words this week?
8. What do you think will happen next?

APPENDIX G  
THE CREATION LESSON PLAN

## The Creation Lesson Plan

### Section 1. Spark (5-7 minutes)

Introduce the lesson by greeting students and asking if they have ever heard of the story of how God created the world. Engage the students by asking them to name some of the amazing things that God created; i.e., oceans, mountains, volcanoes, etc. Explain to the students that they will be learning to read and understand the story of creation as it is written in the Bible.

### Section 2. Learning Goals/Instruction:

By the end of this lesson students will be able to read and understand the story of creation in Genesis 1 & 2

#### 2a. Skills:

Reading/comprehension/Vocabulary 113.51

#### Skills and Content Learning Standards:

- Students will monitor comprehension during reading, and retell after reading.
- Students will express their understanding of target vocabulary words.

#### Literacy Objectives:

- Comprehension: Students will monitor the narrative elements in the story of creation using a graphic organizer, and use this to retell after reading.

#### How Objectives will be addressed:

*Comprehension:* Students will use their understanding of the narrative elements in the story of creation to explain the message of the text by using graphic organizers. They may discuss the significance of God's creation of the world and how it relates to their own lives.

- The teacher models how to read the first verse, and records the information on the graphic organizer for the first creation day event.
- The teacher reads the next verse and asks students to tell a partner what event should go in the next box on the graphic organizer. Listen and provide feedback as they do this task. The teacher asks a student to share and corrects them as needed. (Continue through all seven days of creation.)

- The teacher models how to use the graphic organizer for support to retell the story. Ask students to each take a turn to retell the story to their partner. Listen and provide feedback as they do this task.

### **Section 2.b: Identities:**

The teaching of the Creation lesson can help students to develop a deeper understanding of their own identities and the identities of others, as well as a greater appreciation for the diversity and complexity of the natural world.

1. **Reflection:** As students learn about the story of Creation, they may begin to reflect on their own beliefs, values, and experiences. They may consider how their own identities are shaped by their relationships, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. In addition, they may begin to appreciate the diversity of identities and experiences that exist among their peers.
2. **Empathy:** The story of Creation teaches students about the interconnectedness of all living things and the importance of caring for one another. As students learn about the value of kindness and compassion, they may develop a greater sense of empathy for others and a deeper understanding of the impact that their actions can have on the world around them.
3. **Community:** The story of Creation can also help students to develop a sense of community and shared identity. As students learn about the shared experiences and beliefs that unite us as humans, they may feel a greater sense of belonging and connection to their peers and to the larger world around them.
4. **Respect:** The teaching of the Creation lesson can help students to develop a greater respect for the natural world and the diversity of life that exists within it. As students learn about the importance of stewardship and responsibility, they may develop a greater appreciation for the value of life and the interconnectedness of all living things.

### **Section 2c. Intellect:**

In this lesson, the students will develop a more meaningful understanding of the world and put their knowledge into action through personal reflection as well as art and storytelling.

- **Personal reflection:** The students will be encouraged to reflect on their own values and beliefs about the world around them. This will help them to gain a deeper understanding of their own identities and their role in shaping the world around them.
- **Art and Storytelling:** This will help the students explore the themes and messages of the Creation story in a creative and engaging way. This can help them to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the beauty and complexity of the natural world.

### **Section 2d. Criticality or Critical Literacy:**

It will be important to discuss the underlying power structures and ideologies that shape our understanding and representation of various social groups. In the case of the representation of God/Jesus as a white male, critical literacy would involve questioning why this particular image has become so dominant in Western cultures and what implications this may have for other groups. The representation of God/Jesus as a white male is rooted in historical and cultural contexts that perpetuate white supremacy and patriarchy. This can result in the marginalization and erasure of other races and genders from mainstream narratives and reinforce harmful stereotypes and biases. Therefore, critical literacy demands an examination of how representations of God/Jesus are shaped by these systems of power and how they can be challenged and transformed to be more inclusive and equitable.

- The teacher will ask open-ended questions that allow students to share their thoughts and experiences. For example, “What do you think Jesus looks Like?” Or “Have you ever seen a picture of Jesus?”
- The teacher will use visuals or drawings that represent different skin tones to show diversity in appearance. This can help children understand that God/Jesus can be represented in many ways.
- Encourage children to ask questions as this conversation can be an opportunity to promote diversity, acceptance, and inclusion.

### **Section 2e. Joy:**

By elevating beautiful and truthful images, representations, and narratives about self and others through the creation story, students can develop a greater sense of appreciation, respect, and empathy for themselves and others, which can promote happiness and well-being.

This lesson can advance students’ happiness by elevating beautiful and truthful images, representations, and narratives about self and others in several ways:

1. Celebrating diversity: The Creation story emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living things and the beauty and diversity of the natural world. By highlighting and celebrating diversity in all its forms, including cultural, linguistic, and physical diversity, students can develop a greater sense of appreciation and respect for themselves and others.
2. Promoting positive self-image: By emphasizing the goodness and inherent worth of all living things, the Creation story can help students to develop a positive self-image and a greater sense of self-worth. This can help to promote happiness and well-being.
3. Encouraging empathy and compassion: The Creation story can help to promote empathy and compassion by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living things and the importance of stewardship and responsibility. Encouraging students to consider the impact of their actions on others and the natural world can develop a greater sense of empathy and compassion.



4. Fostering a sense of awe and wonder: The Creation story is full of beautiful and powerful images and narratives that can inspire a sense of awe and wonder in students. By encouraging students to explore and appreciate the beauty and complexity of the natural world, they can develop a greater sense of happiness and joy.

### **Section 3. Layered Texts:**

- Children of Color Storybook Bible/Contemporary English Version
- Pictures of Creation via the following website:  
<https://www.freebibleimages.org/search/?Q>
- Creation Poem by James Weldon Johnson

### **Section 4. Vocabulary and Concepts:**

The vocabulary and concepts central to this reading lesson on the Creation story will include:

- Creation
- Kingdom
- 

To teach this vocabulary and concepts the following methods will be used:

- Pre-teaching: Introducing and explaining new vocabulary and concepts before the reading lesson to provide students with a better understanding of the text.
  - Start by introducing the vocabulary words to the students.
  - After introducing the words, model how to use each word in a sentence.
  - Provide students with opportunities to practice using the words in guided practice activities:
    - First, give the students a sentence stem and ask them to complete it using one of the vocabulary words.
    - Show the students a picture and ask them to use one of the vocabulary words to describe what they see in the picture.
    - Finally, give the students an opportunity to practice using the vocabulary words independently by writing a sentence using each vocabulary word.

### **Section 5. Misconceptions:**

1. *The Creation story is a scientific explanation of how the world was created:* Many people assume that the Bible's account of creation is a scientific explanation of how the world was created. However, the creation story is a religious text that uses a symbolic language to convey theological truths about the nature of God and humanity. The Bible's

account of creation is not meant to be taken as a scientific explanation of how the world came into being.

2. *The Creation story in the Bible is meant to be taken literally:* Some people believe that the creation story in the Bible is a historical account that should be taken literally. However, the creation story is a symbolic account that conveys theological truths about the nature of God and humanity. The story uses poetic language and symbolism to convey these truths, and it is not meant to be taken as a literal historical account.
3. *The Creation story in the Bible is incompatible with scientific theories of evolution:* Many people assume that the creation story is incompatible with scientific theories of evolution. However, many religious traditions, including Christianity, have found ways to reconcile their beliefs with scientific discoveries. Some Christians, for example, see the creation story as a symbolic account of God's work in the world, while also accepting the scientific theory of evolution.
4. *The Creation story in the Bible teaches that humans have dominion over nature:* Some people interpret the Creation story in the Bible as teaching that humans have dominion over nature and can use it for their own purposes. However, this interpretation is not accurate. The creation story teaches that humans have a special relationship with the natural world and that they are responsible for caring for it. This responsibility involves stewardship and care, rather than domination and exploitation.

#### **Section 6. Informal Assessment:**

- *Participation:* Observe whether the students are actively participating in the activities and discussions throughout the lesson.
- *Comprehension:* Assess whether the students understand the vocabulary and concepts covered in the lesson through discussions, questioning and responses.
- *Application:* Evaluate whether the students are able to apply the concepts covered in the lesson to their own lives and experiences.
- *Engagement:* Observe whether the students are engaged and interested in the lesson.
- *Collaboration:* Assess whether the students are able to work collaboratively in group activities and discussions, which can indicate whether the objectives related to interpersonal skills are being met.

#### **Section 7. Closure:**

- Creative expression: Allow the students to express what they learned through a creative drawing activity.
- End the lesson with a song of worship.
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*The studies found that literacy programs could play an influential role in the academic success of African American students if they are careful to compose a program in such a way that addresses the specific social and cultural needs of African American students.*

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