

Factors That Impact African American Students' Learning Performances

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Abstract

Education continues to be a changing, challenging, and complex field of study. There are many hurdles to climb especially when it comes to underrepresented and minority students. Furthermore, minority and at-risk students continue to be of greater concern because these groups of students face prejudicial obstacles, have limited resources, and require additional help. The purpose of this qualitative research case study is to explore the factors that are impacting African American student's learning performances. The specific problem is that some of the factors impacting African American students' learning performances have not been addressed to achieve academic success. This research study will focus on the Detroit Public Community School District (DPCSD), located in Detroit Michigan, to gain the knowledge needed to produce results for the research question posed.

Keywords: Education, African American Students, High School Students, Learning Performances

Background of the Problem

On October 19th, 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order for the Biden-Harris Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Black Americans (The White House, Biden-Harris Executive Order, 2021). The Biden-Harris Administration initiated this policy on a federal level to create economic equity for African Americans in several sub-sectors and includes a policy plan on equitable educational opportunity. Section one of the Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Black Americans Policy, has a common goal of restoring, maintaining, and growing African American student success and attainability in education, both in the primary and secondary divisions (The White House, Biden-Harris Executive Order, 2021).

Although there have been progressive advancements made in school equity, African American academic success, talents, and achievements, the policy acknowledges the disparities among African American students since Brown vs. Board of Education segregation.

According to the policy, schools that have a predominant population of Black American students tend to be underfunded (The White House, Biden-Harris Executive Order, 2021). Underfunding can play a huge role in the services and resources provided to African American students. If schools and districts predominantly serving African American students lack the necessary funds to provide standard educational programs, they run the risk of negatively impacting educational performances among the students. According to College Preparation for African American Students (CLASP), a policy and organization that works for low-income people, African Americans are less likely than white students to have college-ready courses (Tsoi-A-Fatt Bryant, 2015). The researcher further exemplified that, from 2011-2012, 57 percent of the Black students had access to a complete range of science and math courses needed for college readiness, while 81 percent of Asian American students and 71 percent of White students had access (Tsoi-A-Fatt Bryant, 2015). The general problem is that the factors that African American students face may alter the academic performances of African American students that are required for them to achieve academic success. The problem is that some factors impacting African American learning performances have not been addressed to achieve academic success.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative research case study is to explore the factors that are impacting African American student's learning performances. I will focus on the Detroit Public Community School District (DPCSD), located in Detroit Michigan, to gain the knowledge needed to produce results for my research. I have chosen to conduct a qualitative approach to this research study because the factors impacting African American student learning performances can be useful in helping several entities understand learning performances for African Americans. Assari et al (2021) reiterated that Black students continue at an educational risk and that such research is relevant and important, despite their educated parents

Conceptual Framework

The literature for this study contains research on personal factors, socioeconomic, and external factors of African American students. Latoja (2022) and Lukwekwe (2015) both used a conceptual framework that provides a strong foundational basis for this research study. With the use of conceptual frameworks, I have created a framework that best fits this research case study.

Figure 1 establishes the conceptual framework that I have developed using the guidance from (Latoja 2022) and (Lukwekwe 2015).

Latoja (2022) conducted a framework that linked personal student factors and external personal factors to academic performances for Alternative Learning System Completers, various Life-long Learners, and the Senior High School Graduates. Similarly, Lukwekwe (2015), drew on the same factors, renaming them self-assessment, demographic differences, and social presence, which are linked to academic performance outcomes.

My framework is drawing correlations between internal personal factors, socioeconomic factors, and external environmental factors that can impact student learning performances for African American Students (Cookson & Darling-Hammond, 2022).

For example, Student A is having trouble with getting transportation from school because he/she has a parent with a disability, leaving student A without reliable transportation. As a result, student A misses several days at a time resulting in missed and late assignments. Because student A's lack of attendance, is driven by negative socioeconomic barriers, student A runs the risk of having a low academic performance (Cookson & Darling-Hammond, 2022).

Participants of the Study

Fundamental source collection will be four in-depth, structured interviews based on prepared interview questions arranged by the researcher. The researcher will conduct four face-to-face interviews with each participant within the DPCSD, located in Detroit, Michigan. Although a limited number of participants exist in this research, the information provided is accurate and valid regarding the topic presented (Dahal 2022).

Review of the Literature

Defining Education Success & Performance

What is education, academic success, and academic performance? I wanted to take this opportunity to speak on the definitions and concepts because they are consistently discussed, but not fully defined. According to Webster's Dictionary, education is the “field of study that deals mainly with methods of teaching and learning in schools” (Webster, 2024). York et al. (2015) identified academic success as a personal student achievement based on performative output in educational settings. York et al. (2015) defined academic performance as similar, citing it as the measurement of student achievement across subjects in educational settings. In addition, It is important to note that education can be both formal and informal. Lastly, the goals for academic success and academic performance can vary based on the person, culture, community, and educational institutions. In this in-depth review of the literature, I will demonstrate the complex factors that impact the academic success and accomplishment of African American students.

Socioeconomic Factors in Education

Racial Inequality and Discrimination

Racial inequalities and discrimination are not new practices inflicted on the African American Community. Today, many African Americans face some form of racism throughout their daily lives in many circumstances (Gurley 2022). Racism, discrimination, and prejudicial behaviors have occurred in real estate, business transactions, law enforcement, and education. Education is

not exempt from racism, especially for African Americans in low-income and high-poverty neighborhoods (Oakes, J et al, 2021). As Oakes, J et al (2021) inferred, it appeared that the North Carolina government intentionally created a lack of resources and funding for schools and areas that were low-income, which happened to be predominately minorities such as African Americans and Hispanics.

It is important to bring light to two traumatic historical events for the African American community. The first diabolic event that has a huge impact on the African American community is slavery. Slavery can be dated back to 1619, as the British were the biggest importer of African slaves to America as part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which started in the mid-sixteenth century and lasted until 1865 (Reese, 2019). The Transatlantic Slave Trade consisted of the trade of many goods for human labor, which, in this case, is African people that would be soon used as slaves. African men, women, and children were shipped over were across the ocean in sadistic conditions, and there many who died along the way. African slaves were raped, beaten, denied hygienic routines, had limited food, and worked treacherous hours that could be between eight and fourteen hours (Reece & O'Connell, 2015). Many researchers, such as Oakes J et al (2021) and Cookson & Darling-Hammond (2022), believe that the disadvantages and obstacles that African Americans face today have a huge impact on the community's ability to thrive in areas such as academia.

The second tragic and vicious historical event that has an impact on the African American community is Jim Crow. Jim Crow consisted of laws that detailed how previously enslaved and documented African Americans could essentially live and navigate throughout society (Craemer et al. 2020). All Jim Crow laws were overturned in 1964 and 1965, with the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act (Giggie 2008). Per the research, Jim Crow laws may have formally been overturned in 1964 and 1965. However, some people of specific communities continued to discriminate and racially target African Americans across many industries and sectors. African slaves could not learn during slavery in 1619 and could not learn after slavery in 1865. The question posed here is how one can learn without proper teaching, resources, and skills, especially when the ability to learn has been denied for over 200 years.

With this knowledge today, many researchers, such as Giggie (2008) and Reece & O'Connell (2015), have concluded that slavery has played a key role in African Americans' performance, success, and attitudes toward education. I mentioned redlining in this section, which was a form of racial discrimination to limit African Americans to particular communities. African Americans lived in terrible communities with little to no resources, and education was one of them. Many enslaved people were deprived of learning to read, and this played a role in limited teachers and schools for the community.

As a result, several generations passed down the burden of illiteracy, which took years to unpack and overcome Reece & O'Connell, (2015). The burden of illiteracy is impactful today because there have been families that believe in making their children work or conduct labor activities to generate income for the household instead of allowing them to sit in a classroom and learn (Craemer et al. 2020). The example listed above is based on income disparities and household needs. As a result of this behavior, those same children become adults and sometimes perpetuate the same narrative, continuing the cycle of illiteracy and low academic attainment for African Americans (Craemer et al., 2020).

In closing, based on Cookson and Darling-Hammond (2022), it can be agreed that some African American students, especially in low-income and impoverished communities, require a greater need for resources in the academic environment. The school systems and the government must account for this issue moving forward when conducting budgets and education packages for the year.

Disparities

I previously began this section with racial inequalities, slavery, Jim Crow laws, and discrimination because they all play a major role in African American wealth disparities. Based on research, we cannot conclude the informal years of depravity, racism, and discrimination that took place for African Americans and impacted their wealth opportunities. Examples include redlining, denying education attainment and diplomas, stealing land, rejecting real estate opportunities, and devaluing the assets of African descendants (Craemer et al., 2020). The hurdles that African Americans had to endure historically have left the community with several generations of obligations to tackle, and wealth has been a societal pillar that has left the community struggling to obtain their familial needs (Craemer et al. 2020) (Reece & O'Connell, 2015).

According to the United States Census Bureau data of 2022, the nation's poverty level was low at 11.5%, the same as the previous year, 2021. The African American population's poverty level had fallen to an all-time historical low of 17.1 percent for 2022. This is the lowest it has been since the recording of 1959, which reflected a poverty level of 55.1% (Shrider et al., 2021). It is important to note that 1959 is still a part of the years in which Jim Crow laws were enacted and enforced. Poverty rates hit a historical low for African American children, with a percentage of 22.3% as of 2022. The poverty rate for adults between 18 and 64 was 14.9%, which is another historical low (Shrider et al., 2021). Lastly, for adults 65 and over, the poverty rate was 17.6%, statistically the same as in 2021. Although the poverty level has fallen, the overall state of poverty for African Americans remains tragic and in need of additional change (Shrider et al., 2021).

The United States Census Bureau uses two indicators to measure poverty: the Official and Supplemental Poverty Measurement. The Official Poverty Measurement dates back to 1959, and it measures pre-taxed income based on family size, number of children, and household age in comparison to the national average threshold (Shrider et al., 2021). The Supplemental Poverty Measurement dates to 2009 and incorporates federal and state taxes, work and medical expenses, geographic variation in housing, and various government programs in place to support low-income and impoverished families (Shrider et al., 2021).

For 2022, the Supplemental Poverty Measurement for the African American population was 17.2%, an increase from 2021 at 11.3%. The researchers, in this case, concluded that COVID-19 assistance programs contributed to the increase of the Supplemental Poverty Measurement (Shrider et al., 2021). Thus, according to the data, groups that carried a ratio greater than 1.0 exemplified a greater representation of poverty while those with less than a 1.0 ratio represented a lower representation of poverty. For example, the African American population in 2022 was 13.2%, which was roughly 49 million people. However, African Americans made up 20.1% of the population in poverty in 2022. This means that the African Americans, in this case, had more African Americans in poverty relative to the African American population. African Americans were overrepresented in poverty per the data.

The attitudes, beliefs, and personality traits are developed in these negative environments and, therefore, play a role in negatively shaping the students' identities throughout life experiences (Cookson & Darling-Hammond, (2022)). The conclusion can be drawn from the fact that low-income and impoverished students have a greater chance of being disadvantaged academically because of the negative effects that stem from being within lower-class communities and environments.

Parental Involvement

Berkowitz et al. (2017) and Wilder (2013) identify and perpetuate the importance of

parental involvement in education success and performance. Per the research, the student's outcome is not limited to school administration and teachers. The student's outcome is also heavily impacted by the student's home condition and parental involvement. Seeing that African Americans make up a larger population of poverty relative to their overall United States population, an African American student has a greater chance of being a part of an educational institution that is among the low-income or impoverished communities (Oakes, J et al 2021) (Shrider et al., 2021). This means that the parents are low-income and suffer income disparities and that can result from the lack of education, health problems, addiction, and generational trauma (Berkowitz et al., 2017). If this is taking place at home, then the student is extremely disadvantaged and the student can express poor academic achievement levels.

Based on this information from Wilder (2013) and Berkowitz et al. (2017), one could conclude that parental knowledge significantly impacts the academic success of the child when it comes to parental involvement in the student's academic journey.

Attitudes

Per Nieuwenhuis et al. (2021) and Owings et al. (2022), low-income or impoverished African American students are more than likely to have a negative attitude or response to educational settings. As Nieuwenhuis et al. (2021) stated, the students have too many obstacles to overcome, which can provoke feelings of hopelessness and anxiety. African American students within low-income and impoverished communities have more negative examples or opportunities than they do positive ones throughout their communities Nieuwenhuis et al. (2021). This creates another problem because things such as crime, safety, and starvation can impact a student's attitude toward education and cause poor or no academic success and achievement. Per the research conducted by Anderson et al. (2018), 70 percent of low-income African American youth indicated success in school was a top priority. Also, 89 percent of the youth agreed it is important to obtain a postsecondary education. Based on the study conducted, the students continued to have optimistic aspirations for their futures in academia.

Creating a holistically peaceful environment with everyone, students, teachers, administrators, and parents, can implant the required behavior that is mandated throughout the educational institution (Pacific Crest et al., 2016; Anderson et al., 2018).

Neighborhoods

Berkowitz et al. (2017) found that the community that a student lives in can have an impact on the student's life and this includes their educational journey. For example, when a student lives within a low-income or impoverished community, they may be subjected to negative experiences within the community. Per Cookson & Darling-Hammond (2022) and Berkowitz et al. (2017), low-income and impoverished communities can offer more negative factors than positive ones. Some of these negative factors can be high levels of crime, drug activity, poor infrastructure, poor security, and the lack of financial support. If student A has issues at home pertaining to any of the factors listed above, Student A has a greater chance of performing poorly academically.

With improved neighborhoods and communities, students within the communities can have a greater advantage. Improved security, resources, safety, and financial aid can help with students' behavior. Students in low-income and impoverished communities tend to have a greater chance of psychological, mental, physical, and behavioral issues (Manduca 2018).

Schools

School location can have a huge influence and impact on a student's academic achievement (Sohn et al. 2022). Shrider et al. (2021) found that African Americans, per the census data of 2022, are overpopulated in poverty relative to the overall African American population. This means that there is a great number of African Americans in low-income and impoverished communities. Referencing the section above, researchers have expressed the drawbacks or cons to low-income and impoverished communities; and have expressed the impact that this has on the educational sectors. Schools within low-income and impoverished communities are heavily underrepresented and underfunded. The schools within these communities require funding based on need and based on research; this has not been conveyed to the government when the fiscal budget is created for financial institutions (Sohn et al. 2022).

What can be concluded is that the laboring of more resources, financial and non-financial, within low-income school systems can improve the academic achievements among the students within the communities (Oakes, J et al, 2021).

Participants and Findings

Participant One of the research study is an executive leader within the DPSCD. Participant One found that there are factors that are impacting African American student learning performances. According to Participant One, the factors that are impacting African American student learning performances are as follows: low school funding, behavioral health issues (mental health), systemic education inequity, parental and family support of students, non-proficient academic grading system, school facilities, and education regulation. Participant One believes that the factors listed above are negatively impacting African American students' learning performances. Participant One identified these factors through research, professional experience, and personal observation.

Participant One believes that funding is an essential factor impacting African American students' learning performances within the district. The school district is pushing for a funding package based on need. DPSCD has a great number of low-income students. The students traditionally need more services because they lack necessities at home. There have been cuts for things such as teacher pay cuts, art class cuts, and gym cuts. For this reason, the school system has employed help from lobbyists to help bring in additional funding to help the students prosper, to provide additional services such as behavioral health specialists, and to provide better infrastructure and facilities.

Also, Participant One advocates for a change in regulations so that funding can be used as needed. When the government provides funding to the schools, the schools are required to use the funding for specific services only. For example, grants such as Title 31A will not allow the school to use the funds for teacher's pay or to fix a building. This causes a problem because if there are funds remaining from the Title 31A grant budget, the school must let that funding go to waste when the funds could have been used for several other services for the students.

Additionally, factors such as behavioral health and parental engagement and support are needed throughout the school system. As mentioned above, there is a large population of students who come from low-income families and need additional help in school. For example, some students do not receive medical attention at home for mental health issues with that problem is brought to the school each day. The school system must engage and support the students in efforts to help them prosper academically. Furthermore, the lack of parental and familial engagement and support impacts the student's performance because the school and administration are limited to the

student in an academic capacity. For example, if students are sent homework home, the parents or legal guardians must confirm that the student completes the assignments. Without the parent and family support, a component of the student's academic journey is missing, which can cause problems for the student.

Participant One mentioned two additional factors: systematic education inequality and improving the grading system to a proficient level. Historically, African Americans have been marginalized with the introduction of slavery, Jim Crow, and constant discrimination. As a result, Participant One believes this has greatly impacted African American educational opportunities today. There has been a system in place and the foundational structure significantly put African Americans at a disadvantage. Because of this, Participant One has made it a priority to reform the current academic grading system to increase proficiency academically for the student's growth.

To address the learning performances among African American students, the DPSCD has decided to incorporate the following strategies: improve the grading system, expand wellness services throughout the school systems, identify behavioral health issues, expand the communication between the schools and families, and maintain lobby support to provide equitable funding for students. DPSCD has identified the need for these strategies through personal and experimental observations and research. The barriers to these strategies include the development of a solid plan. Some areas will require trial and error to reach a solid and optimal plan, the problem will be constant changes needed as strategies are implemented. Second, the school must have an adequate number of administrative support and credential support, to incorporate the strategies above. Also, the second barrier is money. The funding needed to incorporate some of the strategies is limited.

The first strategy that was tackled on the list was to increase funding. That strategy is in process and the school system received the first payment of adequate funding for the student during COVID-19. With this as an example, the school system is hoping to fight for equitable funding like the amount given during COVID-19, for the future. Second, the school has dramatically improved academically. This has been shown in schools throughout the district where every student has passed a grade level or there were no students that failed a course. Progression is terrific for the school system because it is showing positive results from the proposed strategies. The school system has measured this strategy or progression with the use of data, tracking the grades of students.

Lastly, the third and fourth strategies tackled include the school employing social hubs that provide wellness and health support to both students and families. For example, instead of a student going home for the day and missing class, they can take a trip down to the social hub and seek the necessary health attention that is needed. Also, the hub would help engage relationships with parents and families that are in need. For example, if families do not have money for food, they would be able to come in and seek food from the pantry within the social hub. This social hub would be made up of school psychologists, therapists, nurses, and behavioral health professionals. The wellness, health, and family support strategies are being measured through data collected within the social hub and from the professionals within the social hub.

All the strategies listed above are in process to aid the Detroit Public Schools Community District in growth for the sake of the student's academic prosperity. Participant One hopes to see the Detroit Public Schools Community District become the number one school district in the years to come because the school system has made a tremendous comeback with the improvement in academic performance. The recovery of the school system will take time, however, the number one barrier, funding, is a factor that Participant One takes very critically and will continue to fight for through legislation.

Participant Two is a leader and Principal at one of the high schools within the Detroit Public

Schools Community District. Participant Two found that the factors impacting African American student learning performances included: income, attendance, parental involvement, behavioral problems (bullying and fighting), and student academic competence. Participant Two has 27 years of experience in educational leadership and has identified the factors listed above through research, professional and personal observation, and experimental activities. Participant Two socially engages with teachers, students, parents, and the community to understand problems and provide solutions. Participant Two would identify the factors listed above as negative factors impacting African American student learning performances.

The students that are attending high school are traditionally low-income and they have additional needs that are not fulfilled at home. This income disparity has created additional problems for the students such as the ability to get to school, low parental involvement in the students' educational journey, and the lack of supplies needed for school. Parents are not involved for several reasons, and the reasons include attitudes toward education, career responsibilities, health issues, and transportation problems. Participant Two noted that parents were not engaging or showing up to parent-teacher conferences. These meetings are great ways to build a student-teacher-to-parent relationship. Participant Two also noticed that there is a trend in parental involvement as the student ages. The parent believes that the older a child becomes, the more independent they become, and the lack of involvement is needed in their educational journey. Furthermore, the students have developed their attitudes because of their negative socioeconomic factors and have become bored and disengaged in the classroom. The students cannot maintain focus on the courses due to the lack of purpose and understanding. Understanding and purpose can be explained multiple times by the administration, however, it is up to parental and familial support to reinforce the importance of education success.

Participant Two found attendance to be the most impactful factor in African American student's learning performances. Participant Two noticed that children who missed the classes had a hard time understanding the material, completing assignments, and lacking engagement with the course material. Also, the poor attendance of students caused problems for the teachers because it required them to do additional work to get the students caught up with learning materials. Furthermore, if a student is not present in class, then how can the student learn and retain the material given? As a result, the student performs poorly, and this poses an issue for the school administration, the school district, and the student.

One example given by the principal was a student who continued to miss class at an alarming rate. He was able to consult the student in a meeting and found that the student had to miss class to watch a sibling. Behavior like this is horrible for the student's academic success because the constant absence from school will result in poor academic performance. As mentioned by Participant Two, some of the teachers would not accept late work and this was hurting the students. Participant Two has noticed that some teachers have an "old school" way of doing things and Participant Two noticed that this mindset needed to be changed. Participant Two is aware of the changing society and has asked the staff to adapt to the new society of students.

After understanding the situation of absenteeism, the principal incorporated a strategy where students would be marked down for late material, but the material would still be accepted. Given the example above, if the student's parents have no regard for their educational journey, the question becomes how can the student care about their educational journey. The strategy implemented above was the best form of ramification at that time while the problem of absenteeism is being solved.

Participant Two, the principal, has implemented to compact the factors impacting African American student learning performances. First, Participant Two wants to increase social engagement among the students, teachers, and parents. This strategy helps increase attendance,

minimize bullying and fights, and create a safe space for students. This strategy is number one and ongoing. It was through social engagement that Participant Two was made aware of the reason behind the excessive attendance problem. Furthermore, Participant Two has found that social engagement helps students and gives them motivation to attend and participate in classroom activities.

Lastly, social engagement decreased bullying and fighting within the school. Students talk more about their emotions because social health is a priority and foundation for the school. Students and administrators are aware of the social engagement commitment and students use this tool to help themselves. Instead of fighting, the students may first reach out to the staff and seek guidance that deters the altercation. The last strategy is to create a safe and soft environment for the students. Students should feel safe attending class and understand that they have a place where they can seek help when needed. Before the social engagement strategy was implemented, the students had a “don’t snitch mentality”. Now, those students feel pride and protection when they reach out to a staff member regarding a problem at school.

The barriers to the strategies mentioned above are administrative participation, incoming freshman class accumulation, and student participation. Participant Two noted that the incoming freshman class has a hard time becoming accustomed to the high school’s policies and environment. It is essential to know that many freshman students come from low-income households and poor-performing middle schools, and they try to bring those habits into an environment that has been altered for prosperity. Participant Two also noted that there was a time when it was challenging to get the students and teachers on board for the social engagement change. Many teachers wanted to go home after a long day. Also, the students could not understand why they had to attend class and engage with the teacher or other students.

The strategies implemented have been successful so far. It is essential to know that the strategies are still in progress and that continuous improvement is needed in efforts to obtain the school’s goals. The school has been able to measure the social engagement portion by recording the number of fights taking place. The school was experiencing many fights and after incorporating the social engagement strategy, the teachers and administrators noticed a decrease in fights.

Also, the school has been able to track attendance with this social strategy. The conversation surrounding the student's need to be in the classroom has been preached from the school to the student’s home. As a result, the attendance, which is recorded through the survey, has improved dramatically. This has resulted in academic success for the students as well. A student needs to be present and engaged to perform academically proficiently. The school has also created a smart pass system to combat attendance. Students have a two-minute limit to use a hall pass and the system tracks how long each student has been gone from the classroom. This allows teachers and administrators to catch students doing things that are not appropriate, and this also decreases bullying and fighting.

Lastly, the administration has observed a decrease in student aggression. The students talk about their problems through the social engagement initiative and therefore release their anger through therapeutic conversations. The creation of a safe, happy, soft environment has forced the students to change their attitudes, and this has put the students in a positive and prosperous academic position.

Participant Three is a teacher for a high school within the Detroit Public Schools Community District. Participant Three has over two decades of experience in educational leadership and teaching. According to Participant Three, parent involvement, mental and emotional support, attendance, and narcotic and drug use, were factors that impacted the learning performances for African American students. Participant Three found that the factors above negatively impacted the students. Participant Three discovered the factors listed above through

conversations with the students, personal and professional observations, experiments, and research.

Participant Three found that the absence of parental support had a major impact on the student's academic performance. Participant Three provided a great example of the need for family and parental support with a boxing match analogy. She talked about a fight that took place with George Foreman. During the fight, his opponent was beaten badly but decided to remain in the boxing match because the opponent decided to listen to the crowd and not his corner. Participant Three encourages her students to listen to their corners and not the crowds. The corner signified the support system. She believes that a student without strong parental and familial support system are at risk for low educational outcomes.

Participant Three goes on to discuss how the absence of parental and familial support has caused a great deal of mental and emotional issues for the students. The students have shaped their ideas through negative experiences, which has played a part in their academic performances. Students often use profanity and engage in inappropriate behaviors such as dating and explicit content. The students are watching and listening to material that involves inappropriate language and visuals. For example, dating has become a priority for high school students, and when teachers such as Participant Three approach the student in the hallway with a companion, the student begins to misbehave because he or she is being disciplined and forced to attend class.

Attendance was another factor, and it coincided with the use of narcotics and drugs. Students are simply not attending class because they do not want to. Participant Three has taken it upon themselves to reach out to the students and parents to stress the importance of class attendance for the student. According to Participant Three, missing class is detrimental to the student's academic career. Participant Three believes the students must be in class to properly understand the material and move on to the next grade level. Participant Three also notes that the parents do not care and leave it up to the student when attending class. When some students do show up to class, they show up under the influence of drugs such as marijuana. The justification for this behavior is the legalization of marijuana in the state of Michigan. The parents are also hands-off in this situation as well.

To combat and tackle these negative factors, Participant Three has incorporated three strategies to help the students achieve academic success. The influence of these strategies was a one-time field trip that changed the mindset of the students. As a result, Participant Three discovered how to engage and motivate the students.

The first strategy is to engage parents with parent-teacher conferences. Participant Three is going as far as asking corporations if they are willing to give parents paid time off for parent-teacher conferences. The goal is to reinforce the importance of parent-teacher conferences because it takes a community to aid a child throughout their academic journey.

Second, Participant Three has decided to implement yearly field trips to centers and institutions locally to take the students into another environment. The students have responded incredibly to the field trips, and this has motivated the students to attend class to ensure a spot for the field trip. The students are traditionally of low-income status and live in neighborhoods that are not pleasant. A change in scenery gave the students the needed motivation to continue. Lastly, Participant Three has open communication and engagement activities to restore motivation and hope among the students. Giving hope and encouragement back to the students has helped make them feel worthy.

According to Participant Three, the above strategies have been successful, and this was discovered through conversations with the students, surveys about the field trip, and positive attitudes towards parent-teacher conferences. There are a few barriers to the strategies, and they include challenges with getting the parents' support, student adjustments to positive behavioral habits, and ensuring students get to class. Barriers will exist, but in between times, Participant

Three continues to carry out the strategies listed above to aid the students in superior and proficient academic achievements.

Participant Four has held several leadership positions throughout the Detroit Public Schools Community District. Participant Four has over three decades of experience in educational assessment, leadership, and teaching. Participant Four found the following factors impact African American students' learning performances; racism, classism, community division, curriculum measurement, students' behavior (lack of emotional support), and the lack of boundaries between students and administrators. Participant Four has identified these factors to be negative and, therefore, negatively impacting the students' educational outcomes. These factors were discovered through research, experimental activities, personal and professional observations, and school data.

Participant Four found that boundaries and educational assessments greatly impacted African American students' learning performances. The student-to-teacher relationship needs to be re-established because boundaries must exist within educational institutions. Students should not talk to or treat their teachers as they would treat their peers and friends. According to Participant Four, this was a growing trend during her time as an educational leader. Students should understand who has the proper authority and power within the classroom to recognize their role as students and meet academic expectations.

Secondly, there needs to be curriculum advancements and educational measurements. The goal for Participant Four was to ensure that academic standards were exceeded for each grade level and to confirm that the curriculum was updated and scanned for future advancements. Participant Four's ideology is to ensure that students are academically where they need to be, which goes for each grade level within the district.

Also, parental, administrative, and community engagement and involvement in the student's academic journey are essential for success. Participant Four found a lack of leadership and engagement played a significant role in the students' poor academic performances. The lack of leadership has led to disorganization, unsafe student environments, and disorderly administrators. When Participant Four became principal, opening and closing various schools within DPSCD, the first area to tackle was organizing leadership and administration and restoring the schools to a clean and orderly manner. How can students focus and learn when the building is uncleaned, the administration is unorganized, and the environment is unsafe?

The strategies that Participant Four implemented to combat the factors listed above are focusing on the student's well-being holistically and on curriculum testing measurements. Participant Four was influenced to introduce the strategies identified above based on low school ratings and poor test scores. Things such as a change in environmental infrastructure changed the students' outcomes because they had a better learning environment. This also created a safe environment for communication and transparency. Furthermore, this improved the collaboration among the leadership team, the administration, and the students. Also, continuous curriculum testing and educational measures ensure that students understand and retain the correct information to perform proficiently.

The strategies that Participant Four implemented were successful, and this was measured through testing data, collecting surveys, and observing cohesiveness in leadership and administration. The schools conducted business efficiently and effectively and this was reflected in the students' academic improvements. The barriers to the strategies include the lack of participation among the community, leaders, parents, and administrators. There can be egos involved in education that alter or change the trajectory of an outcome for policy implementation. The system is more focused on a political view than ensuring the students' quality and success.

Conclusion

Education continues to be a challenging and complex field of study. Leadership within the educational sector can be even more dynamic and complicated as society develops. There are many hurdles to climb, especially when it comes to underrepresented and minority students (Anderson et al., 2018). The goal of this case study was to examine the factors that are impacting African American student's learning performances. This is a crucial topic because African American students continue to fall behind in academic success (Assari et al, 2021). In this case study with the Detroit Public Community School District, we concluded that factors impact African American students' learning performances. Per the findings, the factors are negative.

Based on the qualitative research findings, factors impacting African American students' learning performances include poor parental involvement, poor school funding, absenteeism, mental and emotional health issues, drug and narcotic usage, poor leadership, administrative disorganization, poor school infrastructure, poor curriculum advancement and measurements, and the lack of boundaries between students and teachers. These negative factors are slowly diminishing as many leadership members tackle the problems that require immediate attention. These strategies include two-minute hall passes, lobbyists for funding, test measurement, curriculum updates, restructuring leadership and administrative staff, creating social stations, increasing emotional and social support from the schools, and field trips for motivation. Based on the participants, all the strategies implemented and, in the process, played a crucial role in aiding the African American students in this case study. The strategies listed above have improved learning performances for the African American population and can restore the academic success of the students within the Detroit Public Community School District.

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