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Perceptions of Elementary Teachers Towards the Effectiveness
of Community Resources for Reducing Achievement Gap

by
Carl Adams

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University
2020

Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Carl Adams under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

David Weintraub, EdD
Committee Chair

Cathern Wildey, EdD
Committee Member

Kimberly Durham, PsyD
Dean

Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook*. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Name

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Date

Abstract

Perceptions of Elementary Teachers towards the Effectiveness of Community Resources for Reducing Achievement Gap. Carl Adams, 2020: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: teachers, educational partnerships, community collaboration, university-school-community partnership

Studies indicate that school-community partnerships have positive impacts on the learners and reducing the educational achievement gap is one of the identified benefits. This study sought to examine the development of educational partnerships from the perspective of the teachers. The researcher assumed that teachers play a significant role in the formation and continuation of the partnerships, thereby influencing their success. Consequently, this study sought to explore teachers' experiences with educational partnerships regarding improving academic performance and reducing achievement gaps.

The study used purposeful sampling to select 7 teachers from Title I Elementary school in Central Florida. The school was targeted as a case study because it had just adopted the community-school approach. The primary data collection method that was employed was semi-structured interviews. The collected data was then coded to identify emergent themes. The responses revealed 10 emergent themes, (1) creation of a strong community, (2) provision of essential services, (3) cooperation, (4) active involvement and cooperation, (5) increased support, (6) improved relationships, (7) increase in roles that need new skills, (8) participation, (9) funding, and (10) advocacy. Effective partnership strategies, as described in the literature, were observed, and participants also expressed awareness of such approaches. Moreover, the impact of school-community partnerships in improving student achievement was also noted, as described in the literature. Recommendations for future research and local practice are offered to enhance the knowledge available to the stakeholders as they seek to identify ways to help students and improve their neighborhoods. Nevertheless, due to the unique circumstances of every community, the recommendations should be considered in terms of their application and appropriateness towards enhancing school-community partnerships.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Achievements gaps portend a critical area of concern for educational policymakers as well as teachers, who regard socioeconomic and sociocultural differences as underlying factors that obstruct some of the learners from performing well. Lack of positive relationships between parents, students, and staff in community schools and underdeveloped learning facilities have widened achievement gaps among students belonging to different strata of society and of varied abilities (Vega, Moore III, & Miranda, 2015). Blank and Villarreal (2015) maintain that constructive integration of community resources in an instructional environment and resultant school-community collaboration has the potential to mitigate adversarial effects of socioeconomic, cultural, and behavioral impediments from students' learning path. Since teachers play a crucial role in integrating, utilizing, and amplifying community resources, this study explores the perception of teachers towards the effectiveness of community resources for reducing achievement gaps.

Phenomenon of interest. The current study sought to explore teachers' experiences towards the utility of the community resources in relation to boosting the academic performance of students and, thereby, reducing achievement gaps. On the basis of existing studies, such as Mapp and Kuttner (2013), and Niehaus and Adelson (2014), which highlight that community resources are effective means for schools to harness the required support base, the current study takes into account the perspectives of the teachers' who are key stakeholders enjoined with the responsibility to provide equitable and inclusive learning opportunities for all the learners. Constructs of the study include

dimensions and dynamics of community resources, such as parental involvement, support from business and community actors, nature and extent of the support, and the extent to which teachers are content with the effectiveness and utility of the community resources. The qualitative case study relies on multiple sources of data collection, which include interviews, participant observation, and documentary evidence on the progress of students on achievement standards. Content analysis of the collected data highlights key themes on the dimensions of community support that teachers regard as fruitful towards enhancing the efficiency of the learning environment and providing inclusive learning opportunities to all the students. The findings of the study could also elucidate strategies that teachers regard as productive towards helping students, especially those who have specific learning deficiencies or the ones who need additional learning support. The scope of the case study has been structured under the qualitative research design, relying upon the interpretative paradigm of scholarly inquiries.

Recent studies highlight that effective integration of resources from school and local communities help reduce the impact of socioeconomic and healthcare issues which hamper capabilities as well as the inclination of some of the students to learn effectively. Constructs of the study include dimensions and dynamics of community resources, such as parental involvement, support from business and community actors, nature and extent of the support, and the extent to which teachers feel contented on the effectiveness and utility of the community resources.

The qualitative case study relies on multiple sources of data collection which include interviews, participant observation, and documentary evidence on the progress of students on achievement standards. Data on the prevalence of achievement gaps have

been obtained from school and state records, which provides the basis for constructing the study. Teachers' experiential perceptions were explored using semi-structured interviews, comprising open-ended question items, most of which address the role, extent, as well as effectiveness of community resources towards meeting the learning needs of all the students. On the basis of existing studies, such as Mapp and Kuttner (2013), and Niehaus and Adelson (2014), which highlight that community resources are effective means for schools to harness required support base, the current study takes account of the perspectives of teachers who are key stakeholders enjoined with the responsibility to provide equitable and inclusive learning opportunities for all the learners. Content analysis of the collected data highlights key themes on the dimensions of community support that teachers regard as fruitful towards enhancing the efficiency of the learning environment and providing inclusive learning opportunities to all the students. The findings of the study also elucidate strategies that teachers regard as productive towards helping students, especially those who have specific learning deficiencies or the ones who need additional learning support.

Gaps in academic performances of students within a Title 1 Community School in Central Florida are widening over time, a phenomenon that has roots in a diverse range of factors. Accessory to this phenomenon, the perception of elementary teachers regarding the effectiveness of community resources is a less explored area. This study rests on the premise that positive perception of teachers towards integration and utility of community resources is likely to harness enhanced gains from community resources, which will help teachers in reducing, if not closing, achievement gaps. In this backdrop, the study focused on suggesting viable solutions towards closing achievement gaps among students.

Specifically, the research collected and analyzed varied viewpoints of teachers at the community school in Central Florida was a Title I elementary school.

Background and justification. The research sought to ascertain how community resources can contribute to reducing achievement gaps. Some of the dimensions through which community resources can improve learning experiences include community school partnerships, parent-teacher collaboration, addressing the nutritional and healthcare needs of the learners (Blank & Villarreal, 2015). A report from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in 2019 revealed that achievement gaps between the performance of the 4th and 8th-grade students on testing standards had assumed a sustained trend across the United States.

Encouragingly, in June 2017, Florida Department of Education (FDOE) published, in a press release, a certain degree of improvement in students' performance in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics as compared to that of 2016 (FDOE Press Office, 2017). However, achievement gaps persist in Florida community schools, including the Title I community school, which is the site of this research. Persistence of achievement gaps requires all the stakeholders of education, including teachers, school administrations, parents, and community sources, to join hands and works for the mitigation of factors that hamper some of the learners' path to equivalent performance on educational standards.

Community services and volunteers can facilitate learning processes by establishing a responsive system of moral, emotional, social, and material support for all the involved stakeholders in the learning process and reduce achievement gaps. For instance, resources from community science centers, such as interactive exhibits, can be

used to enhance the students' engagement as well as cognitive skills (Coalition for Community Schools, 2015). In addition to that, visits to informal places, such as children's museums, also provide interactive learning platforms to the students; whereas, outreach programs such as field trips to the local zoo, medical camps, youth empowerment, and development programs, and mentoring can enhance children's practical abilities (Brewster, Pisani, Ramseyer, & Wise, 2016). These engaging learning events for the student aim at reducing achievement gaps in the elementary schools by establishing an inclusive instructional framework.

Extended visits to the community centers allow children to discover interactive learning pathways; therefore, stakeholders in the educational sector should encourage the integration of community resources into classroom settings (Green, & Gooden, 2014). These out-of-school time programs should be regularly scheduled, structured, and supervised to ensure that they benefit the students. School and community resources can arrange collaborative events, targeted specifically at boosting an inclusive and wholesome learning process in addition to the provision of recreational opportunities (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2014). Such cooperative events may capitalize on the provision of instructional materials to improve the students' learning processes and take care of their varied needs by drawing tangible support from communities. Another important community-school partnership venue that can trigger a reduction of achievement gaps among elementary school children includes engaging guest speakers from the community and allowing children to learn from their relevant learning experiences (Haines Gross, Blue-Banning, Francis, & Turnbull, 2015). Distinctively, these community resources provide opportunities and platforms for the students to share

their viewpoints, collaborate experiences, and learn problem-solving techniques. Haines et al. (2015) also asserted that the integration of community resources also helps towards accommodation of cultural differences among learners and establishes a unique balance in the communication and learning processes.

Notably, teachers have the most critical role to serve as an intermediary between learners and community resources. Maintenance of a community climate that is favorable to academic productivity is vital, and under the guidance of teachers, such a climate should aim at orienting students' attitudes and performances towards an inclusive learning environment. Additionally, capitalizing on community resources to facilitate productive academic exercises is also integral in addressing the issue of performance gaps (Haines et al., 2015). In this backdrop, stakeholders can introduce targeted educational reforms to enhance learning experiences and opportunities for all students. For instance, the introduction of comprehensive support services, through resource provision from various organizations, should be aimed at improving educational experiences of and learning opportunities for all the learners. For the intended research site, such organizations may include Central Florida Healthcare and Heartland for Children which can provide healthcare amenities for school children. Another policy should target students left behind in various academic issues and allow them to access supplemental instructional material and resources to meet the stipulated standards. Haines et al., (2015) found that post-school tutoring proved extremely useful in building the capacity of low performing students.

Thus, teachers from community schools and volunteer tutors are encouraged to help students acquire academic prowess and improve their respective performances.

Moreover, donations and other financial streams generated from local communities can be used to help children from low-income households. The children would also benefit from community-based support programs, which may include the provision of free lunch and supplemental assistance initiatives.

Deficiencies in the evidence. A large body of literature focuses on the perception of elementary teachers towards various learning outcome-oriented issues, such as student-teacher relationship (Liu, 2013), problem behaviors amongst students (Gross, & Pelcovitz, 2012), socioeconomic variations among students (Norman, 2016), socioeconomic bias (Kenyatta, 2012) and engagement in school-community partnership (Keil et al., 2016). However, scarce research is available on the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of community resources for reducing achievement gaps. For instance, Blank and Villarreal (2015) stated that stakeholders in the education sector have limited options that they can explore to reduce achievement gaps. In addition, Brewster et al. (2016) and Keil et al. (2016) also asserted that stakeholders in the sector of education should establish specific policies to engage and collaborate with a broad range of community stakeholders.

School-community collaborations can include the establishment of social networks that can help bridge loopholes that hinder certain learners from achieving higher performance standards. Correspondingly, Green and Gooden (2014) stress that increasing demand for quality education in academic institutions necessitates the development of premeditated interventions and solutions. The stipulated interventions may include the development and execution of education policies that reflect the innate values and desires of the community. Additionally, Valli, Stefanski, and Jacobson (2016)

recommended evidence-based strategies and models for school-community collaboration. However, the study did not examine issues regarding the utilization of community resources and their effectiveness in addressing achievement gaps. Based on the phenomenon of interest, the primary objective of the study is to explore how elementary school teachers perceive the effectiveness of community resources towards reducing achievement gaps.

Audience. Findings, as well as observations made from the study, would help teachers, students, parents, and community stakeholders understand the role that community-school partnerships play towards closing achievement gaps among learners. Teachers will be able to understand the nature and adequacy of their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of community-school partnerships. Additionally, community sources will be identified, as well as the productive approaches, to align their input with the needs and requirements of teachers. Parents and their children will also gain an enhanced understanding of the role that school-community partnerships can play towards boosting students' achievement. In this research, the participants who are teachers from a Title 1 community in central Florida were interviewed. The selected school has similar socioeconomic challenges that affect elementary schools of the surrounding communities. Therefore, findings from the study could provide a clear picture of how the community school environment and resources can influence the reduction in achievement gaps.

Setting of the study. The current study was set in an elementary school in Central Florida, where teachers, community-coordinators, and volunteers who provide community services to schools provide the required data input to carry out analysis and reach conclusions. Notably, the school has recently transitioned from an elementary

school to a community school. Teachers play the role of mediator between educational resources and its beneficiaries in a state. Policymakers at both State and Federal levels and involved stakeholders have long been working to implement an equitable educational environment; nonetheless, variations in academic achievements between immigrant children and white children continue to harness the attention of stakeholders. Public schools have initiated strong community partnerships, whereas some of the schools are transitioning completely to community-driven and community-centered educational institutes.

Researcher's role. As a teacher-student, the researcher has a key interest in educational development under the tenets of social justice, where each of the learners, without any regard to one's bloodline or socioeconomic status, avails equitable learning and developmental opportunities. Given the ethnocultural, socioeconomic, and individual variations among learners in a school, integration of community resources to meet the recurrent needs of all the learners has become a well-substantiated view among education policymakers and school administration. However, teachers, community-coordinators, volunteers, and community resources play a critical role in defining the extent to which a school community can utilize available and accruable resources. In this backdrop, the researcher finds it pertinent to explore stakeholders' and teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of community resources towards boosting the performance of learners and, thereby, closing achievement gaps.

The researcher has reviewed the linkage between deficient performances of students and their demographic features and explored opinions of teachers, school administrators, community-coordinators, parents, and volunteers regarding the

effectiveness of community resources towards reducing achievement gaps. For the purpose of data collection, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews and used content analysis to analyze the data.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of teachers, parents, and other stakeholders towards community-school partnerships and how those partnerships affect student achievement. To better understand the perception of teachers towards community-school partnerships, this study focuses on teachers of a community school in central Florida. An important reason for choosing this specific elementary school was because it was transitioning from an elementary school towards a community school. Therefore, the perception of teachers, identification of gaps between their understanding, and their views about the effectiveness of community resources for boosting student achievement are important considerations.

Strong partnerships between schools and community resources have multiple benefits towards boosting academic achievement as well as behavioral development among learners (Baker, Farrie, & Sciarra, 2016; Biddle, Mette, & Mercado, 2018). In line with these observations, this study seeks to explore and identify factors which can strengthen school-community partnership and enhance the effectiveness of such partnerships towards augmenting the performance of the students. Review of the existing literature revealed certain gaps in the effective implementation of school-community partnership programs (Biddle et al. 2018), particularly in relation to the lack of communication among teachers, parents, community resources, and other stakeholders, towards targeted and operational integration of community resources in a learning

environment (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014; Clark, 2016). Furthermore, parental engagement, community arrangements, as well as preparedness, pro-activeness, and efficiency of teachers to make constructive use of community resources for the improvement of learning environment and processes are also of critical importance (Gross, Haines, Hill, Francis, Blue-Banning, & Turnbull 2015). Additionally, this study explores the challenges and hurdles that obstruct effective integration of community, including prevalent gaps in understanding and communication between teachers and parents.

After identification of the challenges and impediments, the study focuses on the processes of establishing, strengthening, and sustaining community-school partnerships as well as school-parent engagements. All these processes rely heavily on the flow and efficacy of communication between teachers, community resource providers, and parents (McCart, Sailor, Bezdek, & Satter, 2014). Students with learning deficiencies, disabilities, or those having lower socioeconomic status are more prone to record low academic performance (Clark, 2016). In this backdrop, adequate and effective provision of resources from the community is the key to make up their deficiencies and eradicate hurdles from their learning path; however, effective and timely communication of the resource needs to the community actors is of critical importance. Therefore, this study focuses on the nature, effectiveness, and hurdles in two-way communication as well the extent of understanding between various stakeholders in the educational field and the community resource providers, including parents.

Additionally, the study examined the nature, course, processes, and objectives of the school-community partnerships, to explore the role that community resources,

resource coordinators, and teachers can play to engage community actors, teachers, and parents. Such an exploration will add to the existing body of literature and will also provide a relevant and actionable framework to engage and sustain school-community partnerships. In this regard, the study also developed practical suggestions to meet the goals and expectations, anticipated outcomes, and address the challenges that surface in the course of integration and implementation of community-school partnerships. Moreover, the use of community resources towards increasing parental involvement, reduction in healthcare gaps, increasing attendance, and boosting academic achievement will be major areas of interest for this study.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gaps. Achievement gaps refer to the differences in the performance of children studying at the same academic level (National Education Association [NEA], 2015.). Resembling closely to the opportunity gap and learning gap, achievement gaps can be identified as persistent and significant differences in academic attainment between various groups of students, such as those hailing from white classes and those having African, Hispanic, or any other descent (NEA, 2015).

Community. Community refers to the circle of stakeholders who have interests, relations, interaction, and/or cooperation with the school processes, environment, success, or failure. Heers, Klaveren, Groot, and Maassenvandenbrink (2016) explain that students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community actors who cooperate with the school form the school community; however, the scope of community has gradually enlarged, and includes private businesses, charity organizations, and all other community actors who may establish cooperative collaboration with school.

Community resources. Community resources are the collection of material as well as immaterial resources that community actors can extend to the schools, with the object to meet the learning needs of children, improve the learning environment, and contribute towards the inclusive improvement in school outcomes (Jenkins & Duffy, 2016). In a contemporary scenario, such resources may include the provision of food reserves, healthcare, collaborative cooperation towards behavioral development, and cooperation of community actors in supporting as well as monitoring school processes, children's progress, and learning outcomes (Jenkins & Duffy, 2016).

Teachers' perception. Teachers are likely to develop perceptive opinions regarding all the processes as well as individuals, including students (Magumise & Sefotho, 2018). Magumise and Sefotho (2018) explain that students' behavior, their orientations, their socioeconomic and cultural background, and their behavior in class shape a major part of teachers' perception towards them, whereas, individual inclinations of the teachers also determine teachers' perception towards students. Furthermore, since achievement gaps in academic outcomes of different groups of children affect teachers' evaluation marks, it is highly likely that teachers may have an individualistic understanding as well as perception towards causes and implications of these gaps (NEA, 2015). Additionally, individual teachers may have differential experience in school-community partnership (Magumise & Sefotho, 2018), which may shape their perceptions about the utility and effectiveness of community cooperation for student achievement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

When exploring the perceptions of teachers towards community school's effectiveness in reducing achievement gaps, this study begins with a literature review that examines various significant issues on the subject. It begins by exploring student achievement and how it is determined. It then proceeds to explain what the researcher considered as achievement gaps in schools. Further, it also explores the prevalence as well as the identified causative factors of the achievement gaps such as poverty and low socioeconomic status, which limit access to education among other problems. Moreover, it examined the teachers' perceptions based on their socioeconomic status. The literature review used the issues identified to show the need for engaging the community in order to improve schools. It will present the concept of community and schools, the expected strategies and their associated benefits to students in reducing the achievement gap. The literature review also identified additional factors such as community outreach, demography and level of community support, which influence the success of community schools in addressing achievement gaps. Finally, the key research questions that the study addressed were also based on literature review.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was the social choice theory. It was selected after considering the phenomenon under study, its social context as well as its relevance in the social context. Social choice theory was first formulated by Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794) in an exposition of the voting paradox. Kenneth Joseph Arrow (1921-2017) later improved the theory by adding the decision-making process in the context of economic utility to explain collective consciousness and to develop an

understanding of social undercurrents (Arrow, 1951). Fishburn (2015) asserts that social theory can help to explain the factors that determine choices and preferences of different people as well as groups. In addition, the theory is the most applicable when there are a variety of options and the several stakeholders involved have differing perceptions of such options. Compared to other theories on social issues, social choice theory is more useful in the context of this study. Fishburn (2015) explained that social choice theory incorporates several models and examines individual preferences, judgments, and opinions in a collective framework.

Moreover, the theory also presents a framework for exploring the relationship between social organizations and the communities they serve. In this regard, social choice theory will be used to study the relationship between schools and their communities. Socioeconomic, as well as sociocultural differences, have been identified as the key contributors of achievement gaps among students from diverse communities (Cooper, 2017). Several researchers and authors such as Gross, Haines, Hill, and Francis (2015); Shogren, McCart, Lyon, and Sailor, (2015); McCart et al. (2014), among others have demonstrated that the integration of community resources with institutions of learning and development create school-community partnerships. In turn, the partnerships formed can the address factors such socioeconomic ones, which contribute to lack of academic efficacy among students. According to Norman (2016) the establishment and sustainability of partnerships is also dependent on the attitudes of teachers. Therefore, their perception regarding school-community partnerships is important.

Student Achievement

Performance records of students in standardized tests and other periodic

assessments evidence the effectiveness of the educational environment. Empirical studies, including Norman (2016), Bassok, Latham, and Rorem (2016), and Badger, Miller, Pearce, and Quealy (2018), explicate identifiable variations in the academic performance of learners belonging to different cultural, economic, and healthcare backgrounds. These differences in academic performance transcend beyond academic certifications and limits career prospects of low-performing students throughout their life-courses, a phenomenon that concerns the educational policymakers as well as other important stakeholders of the states who work towards the provision of equitable learning as well as developmental opportunities to all the citizens. Differences in academic performance, – known as achievement gaps (Bassol et al., 2016) or opportunity gaps (Mooney, 2018), – have long been an important subject of scholarly inquiries; however, these gaps persist.

Achievement Gaps in the USA

Differences between the academic performance of students belonging to different cultures, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and abilities are referred to as achievement gaps (Reardon, Cimpian, & Weathers, 2015). Achievement gaps continue to remain a persistent concern for stakeholders in the educational environment, while scholarly research has established that integration of community resources complements learning drives among students, and they elicit better achievement on academic assessment standards. In a study examining various trends and patterns of the achievement gaps among American students, Reardon et al. (2015) analyzed NAEP reports and observed that there was a persistent trend in the difference in the academic achievement of both elementary and secondary students. In particular, subjects such as

mathematics, and skills such as reading, and writing showed the existence of gaps among the students based on socioeconomic as well as ethnic background. Similarly, Badger et al. (2018) and Bassok et al. (2016) have reported significant gaps among American students. In an explorative study, Bassok et al. (2016) identified a variety of factors that contributed to the observed disparities. For instance, the study identified social support, economic disparity socioeconomic variation among students and availability of healthcare among others as key determinants of academic performance among learners especially when they are subjected to taking a standardized test. Moreover, (McCart et al., 2014) asserted that both social and economic standing of Black and White communities are established influences the allocation of developmental and educational resources. In this regard, the lack of equal opportunities in terms of education and community development negatively influences the performance of students from poor families while those from upper social classes tend to have higher academic achievement.

Achievement Gaps: Prevalence and Causative Factors

Achievement gaps have persisted despite the various repeated efforts to guarantee inclusive education. While much research has focused on closing the achievement gaps, Bassok et al. (2016) claimed that there has been a recent interest in examining the factors that cause it, estimation of their impacts, as well as the effectiveness of the interventions. Moreover, Bassok et al. (2016) also highlighted that apart from the socioeconomic and sociocultural impediments, additional factors such as the learning abilities of students also have an influence. Indeed, learning ability in the classroom sometimes manifests as a disability, which interferes with the student's educational outcome. Nonetheless, the students and teachers can benefit from an improved learning environment through

support from the community.

In a statewide longitudinal study, Schulte and Stevens (2015) explored the prevalence of performance gaps in mathematics among students having disabilities. They found that when special education placement was taken as the basis of determining disability among learners, achievement gaps were significantly wider. Another observation made by Schulte and Stevens (2015) enumerated that without any regard to the determination criteria, students with disabilities not only show lower performance than their normal counterparts, but also record slower growth. This study links the prevalence of achievement gaps with the physical and cognitive disabilities, whereas, Bassok et al. (2016) extended the purview of performance-impeding causes onto the socioeconomic as well as cultural context.

Building further on the notion that gaps in academic performance owe much to the availability or non-availability of opportunities, Mooney (2018) asserts that the phrase ‘opportunity gaps’ better describe differences among academic achievement of learners. Regarding the prevalence of performance gaps as a systemic problem that obstructs or, in the least, deprives some students of equitable learning opportunities, Mooney (2018) explicates achievement gaps as an oversimplification of the systemic problems that pull certain children away from securing optimum success.

Socioeconomic Status and Achievement Gaps

Socioeconomic status has been recognized in several studies as a determiner of educational achievement. According to Hansen, Levesque, Quintero, and Valant, (2018), low socioeconomic status of both the African American and Hispanic communities have a negative impact on their ability to access proper education. On a similar note, Maier,

Daniel, Oakes, and Lam (2017) observed a consistent relationship between poverty and low academic performance among students. Moreover, in a study exploring the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic outcomes, Von Stumm (2017) found that learners from low socioeconomic background performed worse compared to their wealthier counterparts.

The study attributed factors such as lack of resources to access supplemental assistance as some of the factors that led to a negative academic outcome among students from poor backgrounds. Meanwhile, students belonging to well-off families do not experience such challenges and have better access to the resources they need, which improves their performance and educational achievement. Persistent high failure rates across the American schools and the linkages of this failure to the demographic attributes of the learners have triggered further research on addressing socioeconomic needs and concerns of the students. Hansen, Meshulam, and Parker (2013) conducted an extensive study to assess the design of a learning-community based course, using mixed-method study design with the object to improve the performance of learners in math. Hansen et al. (2013) found that investing material as well as human resources in the development of community-based programs amplified performance of the students who, consequently, were able to gain mastery over collegiate level math courses with the effective integration of community resources. The math learning community provided extensive ground to the learners who were able to practice and master their mathematical skills and develop those at par with high performing students (Hansen et al., 2013).

Poverty and Low Academic Performance

Maier et al. (2017) regard poverty as a significant, as well as a persistent,

predictor behind the lower performance of learners throughout the academic indicators. Empirical research establishes identifiable linkages between socioeconomic standing (SES) of households and the academic achievements levels of the children. In a study on the correlation between SES and annual academic achievement levels of learners, Von Stumm (2017) found that, as compared to the learners hailing from privileged classes of society, children belonging to families who belong to low SES perform significantly lower in classrooms environment. Von Stumm (2017) also found that low-SES is the major barrier behind the non-provision and non-availability of supplemental assistance programs for students, since those having resourceful and well-off families are better able to exploit due to additional assistance programs as they have better access.

Community resources can be utilized to improve the efficiency of teachers and refine the instructional environment, both inside and out of the class. Instructors have direct contact with students and are primarily entrusted with the responsibility of choosing, determining, and executing instructional practices as well as methodologies, with the objective to improve classroom climate and work towards addressing the learning needs of all the learners. Empirical studies that focus on perceptions and opinions of teachers towards students underscore that the wholistic set of teachers' perceptions predetermine their behavior, which then shaped the behavior of teachers towards learners. Such attitudinal as well as perceptive sets of behavior influence the entire learning process by determining the quality, as well as the intensity and the quantity, of the learning that takes place on the part of students (Ruzek, Domina, Conley, Duncan, & Karabenick, 2015). In a separate study on teachers' perceptions and its relation to students' learning King, McInerney, Ganotice, and Villarosa (2015) observed

teachers not only guide learners, but they also act as the prime mediators.

As mediators, teachers transmit relevant instructional and pedagogical experiences through instructional strategies and classroom environments to learners and enable the latter to capitalize on their individualistic developmental abilities. The multidimensional approaches in which perceptions of instructors influence the routinized learning process span over student-centered elements of pedagogy (King et al., 2015). Additionally, teachers' perceptions and their individualistic orientations when it comes to the allocation, as well as implementation of learning resources, also predetermine the amount and extent of resources that all the students can avail. Moreover, the very approach of instructors in the selection and adaption of role modeling as well as role-playing in classrooms environment, and the strategy that teachers adopt with the object to address learning processes have a direct linkage to the teachers' individualistic perceptions of the students' needs (Ruzek et al., 2015).

Socioeconomic Status and Teachers' Perception of Students

In an explorative study, Norman (2016) explored the formation of teachers' perceptions based on socioeconomic status. The researcher maintains that teachers' perceptions have plausible linkages and determining influence behind shaping their cumulative attitudes to the extent that their individual actions as well as feelings towards the learning process. Teachers' subjective beliefs, their perceptions of other teachers, and those towards children can determine their ability to identify hurdles, or in other cases, aspects of support that students require at a particular moment. Norman (2016) also found that teachers are unaware of the impact of their attitudes and beliefs towards students and learning on the academic and behavioral development of their students. Thus, study

highlighted the hurdles that individualistic understanding and beliefs of teachers towards students create.

More importantly, teachers develop individualistic perceptions towards learners' academic abilities, while the prospects of students' success are determined through assessments. Miller, Kuykendall, and Thomas (2013) posited that experiential knowledge, as well as exposure of teachers regarding socioeconomic status, locality, and neighborhood, play a crucial role in formulating perceptions of learners in minds and cognitions of teachers. Miller et al. (2013) further explained that awareness of teachers regarding students' household environment, family size, income level, the socioeconomic status of ancestral family, and affiliation with a minority race serve as the potential predictor of teachers' specific and even stereotypical beliefs towards students' learning as well as developmental capabilities. Additionally, the teachers' awareness of students' conditions leads teachers to create stereotypical understanding regarding the treatment that such students might have been receiving in their households and what expectations their families may have in relation to the learners' expected performance.

Need for Community Involvement in Education

Engagement of community resources and families has been increasingly recognized as one of the most effective, reliable, sustainable, and critical links in advancing student achievement by strengthening their learning faculties as well as aligning school environment to the predefined achievement standards (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). However, despite a large body of research and awareness drives, parents and community stakeholders, as well as school administration, especially teaching staff have a long way ahead to avail the maximum utility out of collaboration (Mapp & Kuttner,

2013).

Teachers, parents, and community agencies need to learn to fit their respective objectives into a collaborative framework and must be fully aware of the benefits that each of these vital actors can contribute towards inclusive education (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). Contemporary literature, researchers, school leaders, and policymakers of the education sector are still working and emphasizing on the need to understand how the cooperation from families, community organizations, volunteer groups, private businesses, and other community stakeholders can be maximized (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). In this context, the proposed research focuses on the engagement strategies that directly or indirectly lead to school improvement in general, and boost student achievement, particularly in geographic locations where children of the underserved communities are studying.

The contemporary emphasis on identifying, testing, and refining successful strategies for the improvement of school turnaround presupposes research-based information and sustainable cooperative frameworks of action. Since the enactment of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), increased stress is being paid on the enhanced and targeted involvement of community stakeholders and families of the children, as states, school districts, and educational boards work toward the implementation of its provisions (Wood & Bauman, 2017). ESSA prescribes an extensive framework for the schools that appear to be in need of comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) or, otherwise, targeted support and improvement (TSI) and provides for the formulation as well as execution of individualized and customized improvement plans on school-level (Wood & Bauman, 2017).

The act also encourages school administration to work in close coordination and establish stronger partnerships stakeholders, including community organizations and representatives as well as families of the learners. Under ESSA, the category of CSI schools comprises all those schools which fall at the lowest-performing 5%, while high schools that record lower than 67% graduation rates also fall under the same category (Wood & Bauman, 2017). On the other hand, the schools in which a certain subgroup of learners is consistently underperforming over a specific tenure (Wood & Bauman, 2017). This TSI category focuses majorly on the contemporary trends in achievement gaps and seeks to address gross root causes that impede the achievement of the members of that group.

Community and schools. Essentially there is no single mutually agreed definition of the term community, and likewise, scarce systematic explanations exist in terms of its functions in the educational field (Nishimura, 2017). In common understanding, the school community comprises the geographically proximal area; however, it is hardly a case in developing countries, where school communities may comprise distant agencies and organizations which collaborate with the schools and work towards the realization of predetermined educational goals (Ogawa & Nishimura, 2015). Notably, geographic communities may further be divided into ethnic or linguistic identities, and these elements of diversity further centralize the role that the community can play in developing and improving the educational environment. In this regard, school communities require extensive coordination in relation to the execution of the instructional scheme, arrangement, and management of various events, and management of the school bodies and committees. In a particular locality, multiple schools may exist,

with varying offerings and need, and accommodating learners having diverse cultural backgrounds. Similarly, people hailing from a geographic locality may have an affiliation with diverse cultural and school communities.

Particular context, form, framework, and objective of the community may influence the functions that it plays towards the improvement of the learning environment. By strengthening various forms and patterns of inter-community and school-community collaboration, communities can play constructive as well as a conducive role in promoting social cohesion in school (Portwood, Brooks-Nelson, & Schoeneberger, 2015). A community comprising similar ethnic or linguistic backgrounds usually are regarded as a community; however, it is a common observation that such communities tend to exclude or become competitive towards other similar communities on available resources. These resources may include but are not limited to public finance pool allocation to the school, donor assistance programs, as well as access to the naturally available resources (Nishimura, 2017; Portwood et al., 2015). Therefore, the specific context in which the term community is understood relates to the notion of the extent of participation that such groupings or organizations may contribute towards the learning environment.

School-community framework. A large body of empirical research evidence that socioeconomic factors and socio-cultural affiliations of learners' communities play a central role in defining the performance level that such learners may record on academic standards (Alameda-Lawson, 2014). With the increasing recognition of the role that integration of community resources can play in the management of the school environment, major stress is being paid toward harnessing maximum cooperation from

community stakeholders, with more emphasis being laid on the use of community resources on meeting diverse learning needs of the students belongs to different socioeconomic groups. Research identifies the differential cultural and institutional context in which the educational system and the communities affect the results gained by each of these social systems. Similarly, Nishimura (2014) highlighted that the nature of educational institutes and the proactiveness of the community determines the level of participation as well as representation of the community members in schools by defining the specific role that community services can play. Nishimura (2017) also underscored that the very framework of the school and inclination of community members, including parents and other stakeholders have a visibly constructive influence on the outcomes of students' learning performance as well as their entire life courses.

Apart from supporting the diverse needs of learners in a particular instructional environment, community resources play a pivotal role in streamlining interrelated managerial aspects (Ogawa & Nishimura, 2015). The extended role of community stakeholders in schools is to enable an overview of the managerial practices and give constructive input towards aligning the instructional realm in accordance with the needs of the community. Moreover, with the increasing stress on the decentralization of the educational system, decision making power in educational institutes has significantly been devolved to the community and parental level (Shumow & Schmidt, 2014). Admittedly, owing largely to the scarcity of the available resources on a community level, the extent of power devolved to the community stakeholders is limited in developing countries; however, developed countries, such as the USA, witnesses a significant managerial role of the communities in governing as well as operating

educational system at local level, particularly in schools. In the USA, community stakeholders and local organizations have a long history of supporting the management of local schools by compensating for the weaker areas where educational institutes lack resources.

Active participation of local communities and resultant stronger school-community partnerships have proved a substantive support mechanism in meeting the diverse needs of the educational institutes (Nishimura, 2017; Portwood et al., 2015). Devolution, as well as cooperative collaboration between school and community representatives, have been a productive tool in refining hiring practices and contributing to the support base of the schools in many other similar ways (Potochnik, Romans, & Thompson, 2016). Volunteers from the local community have been helping school authorities monitor class attendance of the learners, providing aid for the establishment of required infrastructure such as classrooms and related facilities, construction of pit latrines, as provision of regular scholarships to address the financial constraints of learners who belong to the disadvantaged classes of the society (Potochnik et al., 2016). By allowing the community stakeholders to work towards the materialization of these and similar objectives, schools have found a reliable partner which complements their resolve to improve the learning environment and work towards the provision of equitable educational opportunities for all the learners, without any regard to their socioeconomic or socio-cultural background.

In a more recent study, Zannikos, McCallum, Schmitt, and Pearson (2018) evaluated the effectiveness two community-based interventions; namely Cover, Copy and Compare (CCC); and Taped Spelling Intervention (TSI), both aimed specifically on

improving spelling performance of the young learners of fourth and fifth graders. Where CCC is a traditional evidence-based procedure for improving spelling, the TSI is a comparatively new procedure with limited scholarly evidence on its effectiveness. However, Zannikos et al. (2018) also observed maximum gains when the spelling improvement practices and interventions were structured in such a way that these activities assumed the form of community-driven activity.

Quite similar to the performance in math and spelling mastery, Ning et al. (2016) assessed the linkage of community resources provided with the reading mastery of the students in Belgium. The Belgian Flemish community had a long tradition of benefitting from its practices wherein educational institutes are given autonomy in terms of resource allocation and distribution, complementing student conduct, and reducing retention rates of students in the same grade (Ning et al., 2016). The researchers found that low performing students in the French community are inherently exposed to more disadvantageous economic which obstructs their academic performance. Additionally, the climate of schools which is negatively supportive for students has been found to be a plausible hinderance for learners. On the other hand, Ning et al. (2016) observed that learners who record medium or, in another case, higher levels of academic achievement have an advantageous socioeconomic and sociocultural background which supports them in their learning path and enables them to record better achievement standards (Ning et al., 2016). Furthermore, the latter group had a more positive as well as supportive climate, complemented with a higher proportion of teachers who are better qualified in pedagogical skills and are more competent in implementing educational strategies (Ning et al., 2016).

Cost of schooling and community's role. Communities play a positive role in dealing away with the financial needs of educational institutes in multiple ways. With the increasing needs of supporting aids and infrastructure required to meet all the learning needs of all the children, educational boards and public funding institutes consistently struggle to amass sufficient funds (World Bank, 2013). Communities have been a reliable and productive actor in meeting the financial gaps accruing from the distributed and deficient funding resources available at the expense of schools. Through various cooperative funding initiatives, communities can effectively collect ample resources and provide those with specific directions to be spent on particular areas where the school needs assistance (Ogawa & Nishimura, 2015). For instance, to ensure that schools may have sufficient seating capacity of stationary, community actors can collaborate to amass funds, invite donors, or initiate public funding campaigns, which help schools gain hands on the collective financing pool.

With the introduction of the fee abolition programs in public schools, pressure on public funds has increased, though marginally. This increased strain on public sector development fund to be apportioned to schools have pushed school boards to look toward other resources from where they can arrange required finance and continue improving the educational environment (Ogawa & Nishimura, 2015; Portwood et al., 2015). Meanwhile, during the last quarter of the twentieth century, America, as well as other countries, witnessed a significant surge in the number of private educational institutes. From the cost of education perspective, private schools can be categorized into two broad kinds, namely, high costs private schools and low-cost private schools, the former of which provide quality education to the children of the wealthy classes, residing mostly in

urban areas (UNESCO, 2015).

On the other hand, low-cost private schools rely majorly on the support of community resources and parents (UNESCO, 2015). It is arguable that low-cost private schools are a substantive alternative to the public schools; however, it has also been observed that, in terms of quality and inclusive education, high-cost private schools also do fairly better. Without any regard to the high-low cost dichotomy, it is evident from the above discussion that community cooperation and support can be a plausible alternative to the deficient public funding and community resources can help schools attain required operational as well as developmental targets successfully.

Community resources and instructional environment. Apart from the provision of direct funding to the schools, the community can support the instructional environment of the educational institutes in substitute, complementary, and critical roles. For instance, where government support is deficient, community representatives and parents among other stakeholders can pool resources and provided the needed services (Lewallen, Hunt, Potts-Datema, Zaza, & Giles, 2015). These substitutive servicing helps the existing schools meet emergent needs and have enough input to arrange for required resources. Furthermore, community resources are effective in providing alternative educational opportunities tools to complement the existing systems (Lewallen et al. 2015). The differentiated demand model explains that the public education system does not have the required capacity to meet the varied needs of learners and expectations of their parents, particularly in relation to the cognitive, linguistic, and religious educational context (Ogawa & Nishimura, 2015). This structural weakness of the public education system determines the need for private education in a particular community. Apart from

private schools to meet above-mentioned developmental needs, cultural communities and other similar community groups also take initiatives and operate non-formal schools for both children as well as adults (UNESCO, 2015). By implementing participatory learning methods and other such inclusive instructional paradigms, community resources may help complement the traditional educational system, enabling it to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Educational performance and achievement of the learners emanate from collective and collaborative efforts of schools, teachers, parents, and community resources, all of whom work in unison to meet diverse needs of the learners and enable them to concentrate on as well as digest the instructional material effectively (Stright & Yeo, 2014). Empirical studies find that students whose parents or caregivers are proactively involved in their education are far more likely to attend school more regularly, adapt well to the learning and school environment, show comparatively more improved behavior, have better peer relationships, have a higher sense of self, develop better social skills, complete homework more consistently, and resultantly, earn better grades (Ogawa & Nishimura, 2015; Portwood et al., 2015). The involvement of the families and communities foster partnering ventures for schools and support strong collaboration between family, community groups, and school stakeholders (Nishimura, 2017). Such collaborations work towards the maximization as well as maximum utilization of the available and attainable resources, helping children eventually to develop healthy and sound behaviors towards their development as well as the learning processes.

Apart from this generalized support that community and families can provide to the learners, integration of community resources and services in the school environment

and classrooms complements the learning needs of children. DePetris, and Eames (2017) sketches out a comprehensive framework for community integration within the classroom environment, owing largely to the utility that community services can add to the school environment. Linking community resources with the instructional environment improves school-related behavior among the learners by strengthening their sense of belongingness and loyalty to the school, can help school administrations reduce suspension and dropout rates, and, most importantly, impacts the academic achievement of the learners positively (Gross et al., 2015) The integration of community resources is brought into effect with the underlying objective of promoting and strengthening a learning environment that supports stronger and reliable partnerships between families, schools, and communities, all with the purpose to boost the performance of the students.

For the productive school-community partnerships, schools and employees of the school, including teachers, are required to involve parents and family members of all the ages. Such involvement presupposes an educational and awareness framework, targeted at parents, throughout the school year (Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014). These awareness campaigns and, often, training activities strengthen parental abilities and refine the focus of the parents to support their children's educational ambitions and keep a consistent evaluative check on the progress that the latter are making in various educational standards. In this relation, school administrations, as well as the teaching staff, are required to maintain a frequent and timely communication regime with the parents, wherein staff keeps families aware of the periodic performance of their children, student progress on academic indicators, and learning strategies as implemented by the school administrations and boards (Wang et al., 2014).

Apart from close coordination with parents and families, schools and teaching staffs are encouraged to establish sound rapport in the local community and readily obtain required resources with the help of local businesses and agencies. In this regard, empirical research stresses the importance of reciprocal and reliable coordination with local agencies and businesses to implement and strengthen community-based as well as community-driven developmental and learning opportunities (Wood & Bauman, 2017). Such opportunities help learners gain smoother and comprehensive development, which eventually promotes ongoing academic achievement among the learners, especially those who lack equivalent learning faculties (Potochnik et al., 2016). Furthermore, by integrating community-based learning and developmental opportunities, schools are in a better position to secure a sustainable improvement in student learning projects, in addition to the formulation and execution of need-based learning opportunities (Potochnik et al., 2016). Moreover, school administrations should also encourage community partners and business stakeholders to assist as well as support learners to make successful educational careers by helping schools mitigate negative factors that impede the learning process.

Teachers' perception and performance of students. Instructors have the responsibility of not only selecting the teaching methods and learning materials but also that of improving and implementing them. Therefore, since they have direct and responsive contact with learners, they have the ability to improve the classroom environment and accommodate students with learning difficulties. According to Ruzek, Domina, Conley, Duncan, and Karabenick (2015) the perceptions and opinions of teachers about their learners have an impact on their behavior. In addition, the attitudes of

the teachers affect the quality of learning as well as the process. Teachers act as both guides and mediators for the students and they transmit relevant experience to them. Thus, there are several ways that they impact the learners. For instance, Ruzek et al. (2015) asserted that the role modeling approach as well as the methods they use when teaching in a classroom, are some of the ways they influence their students. Indeed, Norman (2016) also found that the teachers' perceptions regarding students' socioeconomic status may have an impact on their academic achievement. Depending on the prevailing circumstances, the beliefs of teachers towards the learners can lead to challenges or support to a learner. Unfortunately, Norman (2016) also found that teacher may be unaware of the impact of their beliefs on their students. Thus, the study concludes that some unconscious perceptions that teachers may have about the students may lead to a negative outcome for the students.

For instance, a teacher may form their perspectives about a certain student's academic abilities as well as their prospects before having any interaction with them. Irizary (2015) and Miller et al. (2013) asserted that factors such as knowledge about a students' socioeconomic status, and neighborhood have a significant influence on the teacher's perspective of the learner. According to Miller et al. (2013), information such as size of the house, annual income, affiliation with a minority race contribute to the perception of a teacher about the academic capability of a certain student. Additionally, Irizary (2015) established that knowledge about a student's socioeconomic or ethnic background contributes to the teacher's perception about them in terms of treatment at home as well as expectations of the students by his/her parents. Such beliefs lead to formation of stereotypes that have an adverse impact on the educational achievement of

the students.

Parental social networks, children, and teachers. Research has also identified significantly positive results from engaging parental social networks in the form of communities in terms of academic as well as non-academic achievement of the learners. Often regarded as a channel for parental empowerment, social networks entail the broad range of connections and relationships that an individual or any of the community stakeholders may have with others. Such networks may vary in terms of their size, participation, and specific objective, and may include a large group of individuals. However, unlike family engagement programs that comprise only family members of a particular learner and are focused on harnessing improvements in individual students through parent-school collaborative action, parental social network programs envisage schoolwide improvement targets.

A study on collective parent engagement (CPE) program, formulated with the objective of empowering parents of the learners and encouraging them to work together with the schools towards identifying needs of the students, designing and executing policies and programs that specifically address those identified needs, focused on parents and families of 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade learners, enrolled in a Title 1 school (Alameda-Lawson, 2014). By employing a quasi-experimental design and comparing data obtained through a survey on parents from the CPE study group and a control group, the study revealed that participation in the CPE program and resultant parent empowerment was significantly and positively linked to the achievement of the learners on reading standards.

Apart from reading as well as other language learning competencies, whether a

parent has taken part in the CPE program or not was also established to be significantly linked to the improved performance of their children in mathematics (Alameda-Lawson, 2014). Likewise, Potochnik et al., 2016) observed that the participation of the parents in a target-specific, school-oriented social network to be plausibly linked to their children's enhanced performance in mathematics and language scores, as well as increased graduation rates of the schools. This increase in the graduation rate through engagement initiatives signifies a reduction in achievement gaps.

Teachers and school-community partnership. Teachers are in the most suitable position to play the role of a bridge between the needs of the students and engagement patterns of the social groups. With the proactive participation of teachers and their constructive role, the efficacy of the parental and community-based, school-centered social networks can be enhanced (Wang et al., 2014). In a study that focused on the learning paths of the students and their success rate from middle to high school, Wang et al. (2014) observed that teachers provide a critical input in enabling parents and community groups to tread the right direction, as the formers who directly identify the needs of learners, process those needs in content of learning environment and academic achievement standards, and are to convey those needs to the community resources in a discernable and actionable pattern (Wang et al., 2014). As the leader of the learning process and the one who has the opportunity to provide and refine terms of community engagement, teachers are in the most effective position to serve their role in strengthening the targeted and strong school-community cooperation.

Using a sociocultural constructivist approach Wang et al., (2016) observed 11 classes in a longitudinal study. The study was concerned with school-community

collaboration and it explored the cooperation between the teachers and the members of the community. Wang et al. (2016) found that both the teachers and the stakeholders from the community involved with the collaboration understood the impact of the partnership in reducing achievement gaps. Moreover, the researchers also found that in addition to support from the community, their feedback was valuable towards improving the teaching practice of the instructors. Consequently, partnerships helped improve educational outcomes of the students because they also addressed the socioeconomic factors, which negatively affect it.

In another study on school-community partnerships, Clark (2016) investigated the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents in Tennessee regarding the contribution of community resources towards improving both academic and non-academic performance. The study found various contributions that ranged from behavioral modification to socio-cognitive development. Further, Clark (2016) also asserted that students need support from a variety of sources in order to improve their chances of a positive outcome in their education. However, the school alone could not deliver on provided the needed support, which created a need for the community to be involved. Therefore, there was need to form partnerships with the community that integrated the required form of support in order to ensure that students got the support they needed but could not obtain from school.

Cognitive development. Empirical research has found that the contemporary educational environment lacks the essential capacity of providing equitable cognitive development opportunities to all the learners. O'Sullivan, Chen, and Fish (2014) conducted a study on middle school students and observed a strong correlation between

the cognitive engagement of the students and their academic performance. O'Sullivan et al. (2014) used extensive data set from national surveys and observed that engagement on cognitive level by parents and community representatives help learners develop their cognitive skills more effectively and comprehend instructional material more easily.

Researchers also observed that parents or volunteers who provide structured and systematic homework support to the learners helped their children improve their performance in mathematics significantly. In another study, Sibley and Dearing (2014) stressed the need for active discussions and collaborative learning opportunities as a productive tool to help learners understand science and technical concepts. Moreover, Sibley and Dearing (2014) also maintained that community-based and outreach programs that focus on increasing learners' understanding of the technical concepts through practical exposure boost students' performance drastically.

School-Community Outreach and Student Outcomes

Although school-community outreach ventures influence student outcomes, teachers' perceptions of such programs remain as a less explored area (O'Rourke, 2015). School-community organizations, conferences, and family events arranged by school administrations allow parents, community actors, and schools to discuss the range of factors that require attention as well as support to mitigate their adversarial implications for student outcomes (O'Rourke, 2015). Kraft and Dougherty (2014) conducted a study on students of sixth and ninth grade learners, who participated in a summer academy program, designed for supporting students belonging to low-income and minority groups in Boston. Through a clustered randomized trial, parents of the students received regular calls and messages from teachers, informing them about the routine learning process

(Kraft & Dougherty, 2014). By using teachers' logs to record the extent and nature of the teacher-parent communications, and classroom observation to assess students' academic performance, researchers observed that the students of the parents who received outreach communication from teachers regularly were more likely to complete their homework regularly (Kraft & Dougherty, 2014). Such students were more prone to participate in the diverse learning process of the class and needed less redirection for enabling them to focus on the contents of the classroom and learning process (Kraft & Dougherty, 2014).

In a study on six community schools, located inside the premises of the Redwood City School District, Biag, and Castrechini (2016) demonstrated a positive association between the integration of community resources and student outcomes. The schools on which researchers focused were mostly serving the learning needs of the low-income groups and Latino community and had an inclusive framework of extended learning, family engagement, and usage of social support services. Researchers focused majorly on school performance of learners through indicators such as school attendance, achievement outcomes, records on student participation, and found that parents and communities who take part in engagement programs are in a far better position to boost the performance of children on all of these indicators (Biag & Castrechini, 2016). Specifically, on-campus events, volunteer tutoring programs, recreational events, subject-focused supplemental assistance programs, and consistent monitoring by community representatives were significantly linked with the higher attendance as well as improved performance of the learners.

In a 2016 study on four community schools that operated in Rhode Island under Full-Service Community Schools Program, Chen, Anderson, and Watkins (2016)

observed a positive association between the proactive role of community stakeholders and student learning outcomes. The Full-Service program encompassed a broad spectrum of services which were primarily community-centered and community-driven, such as expanded learning initiatives, family engagement framework, provision of healthcare services, reduced or free meals, and family literacy programs (Chen et al., 2016). Researchers employed a questionnaire as a data collection instrument and analyzed the collected data to observe variance.

Apart from the increase in the students' learning capacity, Chen et al. (2016) observed a significant boost in the comfort and satisfaction of the parents on instructional processes. Moreover, the study also highlighted a statistically significant upsurge in the endorsement of the parents for school programs and their children's performance (Chen et al., 2016). All these indicators help learners gain improved confidence in their community-school learning environment, enabling to capitalize upon their inherent as well as extrinsic learning opportunities in a more befitting way.

Demography and School-Community Framework

Since there are identifiable differences in the student achievement depending upon the demographic features of the student population and their academic background, schools and community stakeholders must consider these demographic attributes while arranging a framework of school-community partnerships (Gross et al., 2015). Furthermore, Gross et al. (2015) explained that demographics of the school district, ratio, and dynamics of social environment, and available resources are also important factors to be taken into account while establishing, reforming or strengthening partnership programs with communities (Sugai, Simonsen, Bradshaw, Horner, & Lewis, 2014). In

relation to the varied needs and concerns of different regions, different strategies for the collaboration may prove fruitful for a certain population. Therefore, Sugai et al. (2014) asserted that community representatives and educational leaders must have a clear understanding of the factors that influence the instructional process in a particular community, before implementing a student-centered learning process and community engagement initiatives.

Furthermore, in the context of the expedient need of the inclusive learning environment, O'Rourke (2015) asserted that teachers must have a clear understanding of the learning needs of all the children, especially those of low-performing students and must work towards mitigating negative factors with the help of families and community services. Teachers are in a far better position than parents and administrators to tailor and contextualize the approaches and services that schools need to integrate for boosting the academic achievement of the low-performing children (Gross et al., 2015). Community engagement and parental involvement help schools boost learning by sharing responsibility and supporting learning through targeted action (Sugai et al., 2014). Enabling community actors to access student data would allow them to connect the skills and interests of the students better with the instructional approaches, leading towards the fulfillment of individual learning needs (O'Rourke, 2015). However, in this whole process, input, monitoring, suggestions, and cooperation from teachers assume primary place; therefore, their perceptions about the effectiveness of community resources towards reducing achievement gaps.

Increased Community Support and Achievement Gaps

Efforts such as legislation and reforms have been implemented with the aim of

reducing achievement gaps among American students. However, they continue to persist. According to Baker et al. (2016), financial resources of a school have the potential to impact the performance of the students. In this case, a school funding as well as a support system that ensures fair and responsive delivery of required resources will accommodate the various needs of the students and hence improve their academic performance and reduce or even eliminate achievement gaps. However, Baker et al. (2016) also caution that further research is needed in order to gain empirical evidence on the effect of community resources on the educational outcomes of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

In another study on the understanding of teachers about achievement gaps, Ratcliff, Costner, Carroll, Jones, Sheehan, and Hunt (2016) conducted a survey of 874 educators. The study sought to establish the opinions as well as perceptions of teachers regarding the cause solutions and implications of the achievement gaps. The study found that teachers displayed a broad and critical understanding about the effects of achievement gaps. Moreover, they rated the issue as more important than their salary increments, which suggests that teachers view the issue of achievement gaps as very important.

Moreover, like Bassok et al. (2016) and several other studies, Ratcliff et al. (2016) also found that lack of resources to support the learning process and unavailability of supplemental assistance are some of the issues that contributed to achievement gaps among students in American schools. The study also found that developing school-community partnership would have an impact towards eliminating some of the factors that caused the achievement gaps by eliminating some of the challenges experienced by students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In another study, the effectiveness of

community resources in supporting early childhood education programs was highlighted. In this regard, the study identified integration of support to provide extra-school engagement of early childhood learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds, which would later translate to the development of an improved learning capability and academic efficacy.

Furthermore, additional studies, such as Banerjee (2016), have revealed that non-academic factors are also crucial for reducing and eliminating achievement gaps. For example, Rocha and Nascimento (2018) conducted an empirical study seeking to understand the dynamics of the achievement gaps among the ethnic groups in Brazil. The study found that the achievement gaps could be attributed to various determiners such as household and community among others. Similarly, Chetty, Friedman, and Rockoff (2014) investigated the perceptions of teachers on the underlying causes of achievement gaps. The study found that support from family and friends, motivation and work ethic are also some factors that impacted the academic achievement of students. Moreover, Alvis, Gomes, Martins, and Almeida (2017) identified the role of poverty, uneducated parents and ethnicity in influencing social support for the students. They also found that both the community as well as its resources were important in enhancing socio-cognitive, which was identified as an important determiner of academic performance.

Therefore, the community can contribute various resources to a school to address various needs such as nutrition and healthcare among others. According to Rocha and Nascimento (2018) the community support can help eliminate some of the challenges faced by students, which can then improve the performance of students and consequently their academic achievement. However, despite the various resources provided to schools

by their respective communities, Miranda, Radcliff, Della, and Olympia (2018) identified that mental health is an area that has failed to be addressed. In this regard, there is a need for addressing mental health issues faced by students in schools in order to improve their academic performance. Therefore, the study proposed a framework that could facilitate sustainable community-institute partnership. The framework mainly focused on addressing the healthcare needs of the students in the context of mental health and their importance in helping to reduce achievement gaps.

On a similar note, a study by Biddle et al. (2018) focused on the impact of stress on the performance of students. The study focused on learners from environments perceived to be stressful. Biddle et al. (2018) found that such students did not record higher academic performance due to the extrinsic factors as well as little to no support from their primary social networks. Consequently, the study proposed that collaboration between schools and various organizations in the community are important in order to address such challenges experienced by students. Further, the study also indicated that despite state and federal regulatory policies to enhance such collaborations, sustaining them is difficult. Therefore, the study proposed the development of such partnerships through collaboration-based affinity networks.

Research Questions

To explore the above-stated research objective, this study revolves around exploring the perceptions of teachers towards establishing and sustaining school-community partnerships and strengthening parent-school communication. It will utilize the following research questions to achieve its purpose.

- RQ 1 What are teachers' perceptions of establishing and sustaining a

community –school partnership?

- RQ 2 What actions from parents and other stakeholders do teachers perceive as helpful in establishing and sustaining community-school partnerships?
- RQ3 How do teachers perceive community-school partnerships in regards to its impact on academic achievement among learners?
- RQ 4 What are teachers' perceptions regarding parent-teacher and parent-community communication?
- RQ5 What measures and policy guidelines can be used to strengthen school-community partnerships in community schools?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The study aimed to explore the perceptions of teachers in community schools towards the role and effectiveness of integrating community resources for reducing achievement gaps. The study aimed to capture the understanding, opinions, and perceptions of elementary teachers regarding utilizing community resources to mitigate factors that hinder learners' focus on the instructional material and teachers' in-class content. Based on the research that highlights a range of causes that hinder learners from achieving equivalent academic success, the results of this study expand knowledge on community-school interactions as well as their effectiveness in boosting academic performance in class and raise schoolwide educational outcomes.

Qualitative Research Approach

Given the perceptual and experiential nature of the research objective, this study follows a qualitative approach to research and adapts qualitative research design. The qualitative approach involves an in-depth examination of an issue through consideration and assessment of different situations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to explore the research phenomenon in greater detail and depth, case study design best suits the inquiry as this study seeks to collect data from multiple sources and explore the perceived role of community resources and their perceived effectiveness in reducing achievement gaps. The case study approach helps the researcher explore the attitudes and experiences of the individuals and stakeholders who are related to and are operating in the environment in which the study focuses (Flick, 2017). The method is, therefore, referred to as a naturalistic design since it does not involve the use of interventional experiments to

generate and collect data (Crowe et al., 2011). While this approach is appropriate for use in different disciplines, it is very common in social sciences.

The use of the case study design is intended to help the researcher understand and explain how elementary school teachers in general and community school teachers in particular view the role of community resources and community-school partnerships in their effort to boost cumulative academic performance through equitable learning opportunities for all the learners. The use of case study in the research involved the assessment of the teachers' ability to identify community resources in relation to their effectiveness and integrate those resources in the form of school-community interactions for the intended purpose. The approach would help determine if the increased integration of community resources is an appropriate and supportive intervention strategy in elementary schools and what are the best ways in which the teachers could implement the community-school partnerships to record better classroom outcomes.

This research explored the perceptual understanding of the teachers on how strong community-school partnerships and enhanced integration of community resources in the learning environment can boost the academic performance of the learners. The case study design enabled the researcher to closely examine each dimension of respondents' perceptions and understandings in relation to the records of outcomes that students have scored. Furthermore, the case study approach was better suited to this research because the data collection procedures did not require experimentation, rather observation and collection of data on the existing phenomenon in its naturalistic environment was used for analysis.

Given the nature of the case study research design, relevant data collection

methods were adapted to gather data from the appropriate sources. According to Crowe et al. (2011) and Flick (2017), case studies require that the data collection methods complement the need to collect detailed information for each case, covering different aspects of the case in depth. Notably, data collection methods that did not help the researcher examine the experiences of participants closely and observe the research phenomenon in detail were regarded as inappropriate since they do not align with the intent and scope of the case study design. The appropriate data collection methods complement the process by ensuring that the researcher can compare the experiences of the participants and explore the experiences and opinions of teachers in depth.

Participants

The target population for the current study included community-school teachers who are teaching elementary classes wherein achievement gaps are present and visible. Employing a purposive sampling technique, five to seven teacher respondents who work in a community school of Central Florida were invited as study participants.

To streamline the data collection and analysis procedures, a sample of seven participants, all teachers, were selected purposively employing maximal variation technique as envisaged by Creswell and Poth (2018). The rationale, as well as strength of the purposive sampling, lied in the selection of information-rich cases, which provided sufficient information relating to the issues of central importance for the object of the research and lead towards an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Moreover, purposive sampling allowed the researchers to identify and contact participants according to their own understanding and, more

importantly, convenience (Bornstein, Jager, & Putnik, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2016).

Maximal variation sampling strategy allowed the researchers to identify and integrate members of the target population who have the most widely different attributes in relation to the research interest. Though it is hard to have a representative sample through purposive sampling, scholars, such as Creswell and Poth (2018) and Patton (2015), highlighted that selection of cases and participants who are typical, extreme, and varying from each other maximally allows the researchers to gain aggregate views and opinions of the population; thereby, leading towards a greater degree of representativeness. Furthermore, Creswell (2013) also underscored that, in situations where the sample size is small, integration of maximal variation samples increases the degree of representativeness of the sample.

Purposive sampling is the easiest, least time and effort-intensive, and least expensive. A key disadvantage of purposive sampling is that the findings derived through this strategy are generalizable only to the extent of the sample studied (Bornstein et al., 2013). Nonetheless, given the specificity of the research site and the phenomenon of research interest, convenience sampling was well suited to the framework of the current study. According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) purposeful sampling method is useful for identifying cases that are rich in relevant information. Therefore, the participants that fulfilled the criteria provided valuable information that was helpful in answering the research questions of this study.

Since the study sought to explore experiential and perceptual views of teacher respondents regarding the effectiveness of community resources regarding reducing achievement gaps, a predetermined selection criterion was employed to select the

respondents. While there was no age or gender restriction for the selection process, respondents who worked as elementary school teachers and have teaching experience of two years were chosen. In a review of existing research, Kini and Podolsky (2016) concluded that teaching experience increases the effectiveness of teachers and allows them to opionate regarding the school environment and its dynamics more effectively.

Furthermore, gains in experiential achievements occur largely in the first two years of teaching (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Kraft & Papay, 2014). Therefore, the 2-year experience criterion allowed the researcher to generate rich information regarding respondents' experience relating to the effectiveness of community resources as well as their understanding of the causes behind performance gaps. Moreover, potential respondents selected under the stated criterion were more likely to give broader yet realistic perspectives on how community resources can better be ascertained and integrated into the instructional environment and support learning process for the low-performing students.

Setting

The school targeted for the study is the Title I Elementary school in Central Florida, which had just transitioned as a Community School. The participants were interviewed at the school premises, during breaks or other free timings to ensure that their classes and work routines were not disrupted unnecessarily. With this precaution, the participants were more inclined to participate in the data collection process and were more likely to respond to the interview questions fully and thoroughly based on their experiential and perceptual knowledge. The information concerning the persistence of

achievement gaps was, however, gathered from the records available in the school office as well as from personal records of teachers.

Types of Data Collected

Required information to explore the perception of teachers was collected using semi-structured interviews, was based on open-ended question items. The teachers answered questions about the role that community resources played in relation to socioeconomic and healthcare issues, which hindered some students' performance and thereby impacted achievement gaps. The advantage of using interviews was to enable the participants to answer all the questions directly based on their knowledge and experience. Given that the phenomenon of research interest was neither sensitive nor pertaining to the personal and confidential information, participants were likely to share enough of the information conveniently and openly (Bolderston, 2012). Furthermore, Rahman (2017) explained that mutual and direct interaction between the researcher and the interviewee allowed closer proximity, and thereby ease, between the two, which further improved the quality of communication.

Question items for the respondents were based on the literature review and focused on the partnerships, community resources and achievement gaps to ensure they aligned with the purpose of the study. The question items addressed specific dimensions that informed respondents' understanding and perception of the community resources and that towards prevalence as well as mitigating strategies for achievement gaps. The interview guide enabled respondents to delve deeper into the mutual linkage between community resources and achievement gaps. Specifically, interview questions invited the respondents to express their subjective opinion in relation to the factors that impede the

learning process as well as the academic performance of students and how the integration of community resources can mitigate the adversarial implications of those factors.

Data Collection Tools and Process

The present study employed exploratory interviews as the research tool to generate and collect the required data. Creswell and Poth (2018) highlighted the importance of interviews as one of the methods which bring the researcher as well as interviewee into a process of direct interaction where both can share their experiential knowledge and share information. The rationale behind using an interview was that the potential participants were teachers and were likely to have a broad knowledge and experience.

The teachers' first-hand experience of dealing with classes where achievement gaps continue to exist served as the base of this inquiry, which sought to identify and explore the role of community resources in boosting the academic performance of the learners and improving the environment of inclusive education. The interview session followed a predetermined interview guide, which comprised of specific interview questions (see Appendix A) relating to the research interest as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). Each of the interview questions were structured in such a way as to explore respondents' perspectives regarding a specific dimension of the research interest and delve deeper into their perceptions of the achievement gaps and how the integration of community resources can help teachers and school administrations reduce those gaps.

To develop the interview guide, recent studies that focused on achievement gaps, school-community partnerships, and integration of community resources in the instructional environment were examined to identify areas that correlated to the purpose

of present studies. Particular attention was paid to the research instruments used in accredited studies that sought to explore teachers' perceptions regarding community school partnerships and the role of community resources in improving the academic performance of the learners.

Drawing majorly from the reviewed research instruments, relevant interview questions were adapted with slight modifications to align the interview guide with the purpose of the research. The instrument development process was being based upon the guideline provided by Creswell and Poth (2018).

After preparing the draft interview guide, the questions were validated by a group of experts who took part in the pilot interview as well as review the questions. Based on the pilot feedback and expert panel suggestions, adjustments to the content and the language of the questions were made accordingly before administering the interview guide in the main data collection phase.

Procedures. approval to conduct the research on the proposed research site was obtained from the District Education Board of Central Florida. The approval letter was then included along with the application to obtain permission as well as approval from the Institutional Review Board at the researcher's institute. After the approval, the education board in the targeted school district and the principal of the school were contacted for obtaining permission. After securing requisite approvals, the researcher sent a detailed email message to the potential participants, explaining to them the purpose and scope of the research. The email invited recipients to inform the researcher of their teaching experience, an aspect that enabled the former to select research participants based on the selection criteria of 2 years of teaching experience. The email responders

who showed a willingness to participate and met the selection criteria were sent another email containing informed consent form and a brief introduction to the area of research and their role in the research. According to Rahman (2017), it is important to inform participants about confidentiality. Therefore, the consent form explained the standards which the researchers adhered to ensure the confidentiality and protection of personal information of the participants. Additionally, the researcher contacted the respondents who showed interest through the telephone to arrange an interview schedule and other details. As Hartson and Pyla (2012) recommend, there should be 2 consent forms, one for the researcher and the other for the participant. Therefore, during the first pre-arranged encounter with a participant, the researcher presented a physical copy of the consent form for the participant to sign before proceeding with the interview process. The emailed consent form was retained by the participant while the physical copy was kept by the researcher. Moreover, the participants were reassured of compliance with ethical and confidentiality standards by explaining that their personal information, as well as the information that they were to share, would be used only for the purpose of the study. Most importantly, the researcher also sought permission from the respondents to record their responses before beginning the interview.

All of the interviews were scheduled at the school campus during the free hours, within, which respondents agreed to participate. The interviews were conducted on a predetermined and pre-appointed schedule, for which prior consultation was carried out with the school administration as well as respondents. A third email containing an interview schedule was sent to respondents which also informed them about the voluntary nature of their participation. Moreover, they were contacted by telephone a day before the

interview data to confirm the interview schedule.

Before commencing the interview session, the participants were reassured of the compliance with ethical and confidentiality standards by explaining that their personal information, as well as the information that they were to share, would be used only for the purpose of the study. Further, they were also informed that the responses and the other information was gathered from them would be stored securely. The researcher then produced a printed consent form that was similar to the one contained in the email and the respondents were required to sign. Most importantly, the researcher also sought permission from the respondents to record their responses.

Responses of the participants was recorded using an audio-recorder. During the interview, the researcher ensured that the recorder remained in the sight of the respondents. In addition, the researcher also prepared field notes to list key points that a respondent stressed upon as an important linkage between community resources and the reduction of achievement gaps. The researcher stored the data using various forms of storage. The storage medium was determined by the type of data as well as the collection method. For example, the interviews were recorded using an audio recorder. The researcher used an encrypted computer to store the recorded information. On the other hand, note taking and consent forms were in physical papers and the researcher stored them in a locked cabinet. Likewise, the researcher expected to use various strategies to destroy the data. First, data stored in encrypted computer hard disks would be destroyed by erasing it and sanitizing the hard disks. In contrast, data stored in papers would be destroyed by shredding and burning the shredded papers. All data would be kept for 36 months from the end of the study and destroyed after 36 months from the approval of the

dissertation.

Each interview session lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Right after completion of the interview session, the recording of the interview session was validated with the respondent by inviting them to listen to the questions again as well as their responses, and anything that they add or amend was also recorded in the field notes. Afterward, the audio responses were transcribed by the researcher. Consistency of the transcribed versions was verified by inviting the select group of respondents to reread the transcribed version of responses and approve it by upending their signatures. The data was before coded, categorized, and additional analysis procedures were applied. Since all the respondents were English speakers, transcription allowed the researcher to harness the required chunks of data without any need for translation. The data collected also included documents with information on the class performance of students, such as monthly test results, progress reports, behavior reports, and attendance registers. Despite a slight risk of misinterpretation of the documentary data (Dunn, Arslanian-Engoren, DeKoekkoek, Jadack, & Scott, 2015), this method is advantageous because the researcher took a short time to acquire a large set of data and helped to reduce participant bias.

Afterward, the above-mentioned documents with the records of the students' performance and behavior were obtained. The data collected was then analyzed and the relevant conclusions made. For storage purposes, the audio versions of the interviews were stored in encrypted folders and USB devices, accessible only to the researcher and the faculty. The data from the documents was also stored in secure folders and the researcher took sufficient care to ensure the safety of the entire data chunks.

Ethical Considerations

This study complied with the standardized ethical considerations and ensured the protection of personal information as well as the information that participants provided. It ensured the confidentiality of the participants, protection of identities, the safety of the recorded data, and the accuracy of the responses (Flick, 2017; Iphofen & Tolich, 2018; Mertens, 2015). Personal identities of the respondents were concealed using code names, whereas nothing suggestive of whereabouts was mentioned in the report of the findings. Using Secret Space Encryption software, the recorded data was encrypted to ensure its safety. Furthermore, the researcher cross-checked transcribed versions of interview responses by inviting respondents to review the transcribed data. This process helped the researcher add a core element of validation to the analytical process as well as findings.

Trustworthiness

To further ensure that the data was collected correct and trustworthy, the researcher employed the process of triangulation (Heale & Forbes, 2013). To this end, the researcher evaluated findings from the documentary data pertaining to the class outcomes of the students. Observations from the documentary evidence on the use of community resources in the classroom and the results of students helped the researcher verify deductions and observations made from the interview data. A process of member-checking was also employed in which the participants were invited to validate their responses (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). This revalidation of the responses enabled the participants further clarify the information whenever it was required to ensure that the shared data is accurate, and consequently, led towards an enhanced trustworthiness (Birt et al., 2016).

Potential Research Bias

The researcher's bias may affect the entire research process and the quality and objectivity of the findings. Preconceived ideas of the researcher, stereotypical concepts, and even knowledge of the researcher regarding research questions or topic may result in confirmation bias (Simundic, 2013). To reduce the impact of potential bias, the researcher employed the process of reflexivity and made regular entries in a reflexive journal highlighting methodical decisions as well as reflections regarding what is happening in relation to the researcher's values and interests (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, peer debriefing was also carried out by inviting disinterested peers to probe the researcher's thoughts, values, preconceived notions, and resultant bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, the study employed the reconfirmation process to highlight the discrepancies between conclusions made and the data, enabling the researcher to address, or otherwise, report those areas objectively.

Data Analysis and Coding Process

The research analysis was conducted on the transcripts of the interviews that were obtained for this study. The study had sent invites to nine teachers. However, one of the recipients did not wish to participate in the study while the other had scheduling conflicts and chose to withdraw just before the interview. Only seven teachers were interviewed for this study. The data was analyzed based on the theoretical framework of the study. In addition, the social constructivist paradigm was employed due to the importance of considering the unique experiences of the participants. The findings were then categorized based on the research questions according to the approach used for data analysis.

The analysis comprised of various steps, which ensured that the interpretation of the gathered qualitative data aligned with the design of the study as well as its research objective. At the outset after the data collection phase, the first step of analyzing the qualitative was bracketing, which involved the identification of any preconceived ideas and normative concepts relating to the topic and eliminating them to avoid stereotypical elements throughout the analysis phase (Mertens, 2015). Further, to get acquainted with the collected data, transcribed versions of the interviews were read, reread, and sifted through to identify emergent themes. The reading and cross-reading process was based on the research questions. However, this preliminary sifting of the data was meant to establish a rapport and cognition of the data. The next step began the formal analytical phase. The researcher identified emergent themes that answered the research question and highlighted the teacher respondents' perspectives towards school-community partnerships and their effectiveness in reducing achievement gaps.

Where preliminary steps prepared the data for smooth and streamlined analysis, identification of themes helped the researcher categorize and code the responses (Mertens, 2015). Responses were then coded using coding in an active approach, which, according to Flick (2017) entails attribution of a code based upon the essence of the text. Computer software programs, enable researchers to analyze a large amount of textual data, comprising of documents, to identify underlying prevalent themes and patterns (O'Neill et al., 2018). Therefore, based on the recommendations of Hilal, Alabri, 2013; O'Neill, Booth, and Lamb (2018), NVivo software was used to organize and identify linkages and key themes relating to research questions. Identification of themes enabled the researcher to attribute meaning to data sets and interpret responses to deduce

meaningful concepts that explain the research objective.

The first step of coding was to anonymize the interview questionnaires in order to eliminate any personally identifying information. The researcher changed the names of the participants to “Subject 1 to 7”. The coding process also involved the use of NVivo software. It provided several methods that a user could categorize textual information, which made it suitable for the analysis process. The researcher adopted categorical aggregation followed by thematic analysis to analyze the data. First, the responses were aggregated based on the research question. Table 1 (see Appendix B) shows the relationship of each interview question to the research questions and the related category.

Word frequency and word searches were then used to identify frequently occurring words in the aggregated responses that were then used to develop themes based on each research question. For instance, the word “strengthen” was common in the aggregate responses of the first research questions. The question related to the reason for establishing as well as the sustenance of school-community partnerships. Similarly, “participation” was another word that was observed to be frequent in the responses for the first research question. The word was also observed in the second research question, which examined the actions that teachers viewed as useful in sustaining school-community partnerships. Consequently, the word was discussed in several finding sections of the study. It is essential for the participants to speak their mind and record the exact spoken speech without any unnecessary alterations. The alterations that the researcher introduced included the silences or lengthy stops that were not useful for the analysis. There were no changes in the words that the participants used to answer their interview questions.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the analysis of the data that was collected during this study. The research seeks to identify how teachers perceive the effectiveness of school communities in reducing achievement gaps. The researcher examined the various factors that determine student achievement in an academic setting in literature. The study identified socioeconomic status, and community involvement as key determinants of academic achievement among study. The researcher gathered teachers' perceptions about how student achievement can be improved using school-community partnerships. The findings of the analysis are presented in this chapter and are categorized based on the research questions.

Context of Study

The researcher used a qualitative case study approach in order to gain a deeper understanding of the perception of teachers who had participated in a school community partnership in the United States. Moreover, a case study approach was suited for this research because it was bounded by both time as well as place. In this regard, the study was conducted after the teachers had just participated in implementing a school-community partnership. Further according to Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2014) case studies are useful when investigating problems, the existing solutions, and identification of the best among available alternatives based on scientific evidence. Moreover, a case study approach is useful for studying the phenomenon in the social context (Göttfert, 2015). The social context of the study was education, the program under study was the school-community partnership, and the phenomenon was the impact

of school-community partnerships in helping to improve student achievement from the perspective of the teachers.

The framework of choice for this study is the social choice theory, which is concerned with collective decision making in a community. In this case, the social choice theory will be examining the relationship between schools and their communities and their impact on academic performance from the perspective of the teachers. It will help to identify the strategies that teachers view as helpful and important in reducing achievement gaps in learning institutions under the school-community partnership model.

In a qualitative case study, the context of this research is critical. The context of the current study includes both the community as well as the location that the study was carried out. The study was conducted in a small community within a large metropolitan area in the United States. The community was made up of middle- and working-class residents who were surrounded by lower-income communities. All the organizations, as well as the schools involved in the partnership, were from the local neighborhood. However, the study focused on the perception of the teachers in the elementary school and hence other stakeholders were not included in the study.

Observation of the community that was involved in the study helped to identify the conditions that led to the creation of a school-community partnership. In this case, the surrounding areas had faced a decline and the residents were concerned about the inadequacy of various important services in their neighborhood. For example, the public schools in the area had recorded poor performances in the area, and some were in unsafe areas. Therefore, parents lobbied the city officials to create a charter school near the community to help address some of their concerns. Various meetings regarding the

quality of education and challenges children might face led to the formation of partnerships with the new school in order to improve the academic achievement of the students.

Studies on school-community partnerships involving teachers have focused on their role in development, maintenance, and utilization. For example, Turner (2019) focused on the role that teachers can play in expanding the scope of the parent teacher relationship in order to create an inclusive environment that addresses the student's needs. Similarly, Finn-Stevenson, (2014) described the approaches that teachers and students can use in order promote the concept of school-community partnership. Saltmarsh, Barr, and Chapman (2015) also described the appropriate preparation of teachers for them to fill their roles in school-community partnerships. This study did not find any research that was solely focused on teachers' perspectives about improving student achievement. Thus, the findings of the research will add to the available literature and hopefully inspire a new focus for future research regarding school-community partnerships.

Results for Research Question 1

The first research question attempted to establish the perceptions of the teachers regarding the necessary conditions for the establishment as well as the maintenance of school-community partnerships. Questions 1, 2 and 3 of the interviews were related to this research question. The researcher expected them to draw their responses from their experience in establishing a school-community partnership as well any theoretical knowledge they had regarding the issue. The research question sought to understand whether the teachers understood the expected behavior of the different stakeholders in the

school-community partnership. The researcher understood that since teachers were key influencers in establishing and maintaining a school-community partnership their understanding of their role as well as the expected behaviors of other stakeholders was an important determinant for success. Three key themes that emerged from the aggregated responses for the first research question. They were (1) the creation of a strong community and (2) provision of essential services, and (3) cooperation.

Creation of a strong community. The first question in the interview was meant to establish the perception of the teachers regarding the objective of the stakeholders when starting the school-community partnerships. All the respondents indicated that the need to create a strong community was the main factor in establishing community schools. They described the issue using various perspectives that could all be described as aiming to improve the support for education efforts in the community. The form of support that resulted in a stronger community was either social or economic. The social sense arose when participants expressed the need for communities to be cohesive and the schools to have access to the local services in the community that they may need. The first respondent, Subject 1 indicated that school-community partnerships help support individuals, which strengthens the community. Similarly, the second respondent, subject 2, indicated the need to build relationships between the community members and the schools as a key objective. Further, Subject 6 and 7 expressed the need for availing several resources to the students in the schools. On the other hand, the economic sense arose when some of the respondents, such as Subjects 2 and 3 cited at-risk and disadvantaged communities. Subject 4 provided the response that bests sums up the theme by stating that the reason for establishing a school-community partnership is “To

get families more engaged and to uplift the community.” The response shows that most teachers viewed the value of having a strong community from both social and economic perspectives.

Provision of essential services. The second question of the interview wanted information regarding the conditions that teachers think parents, as well as the local community, face in order for them to decide on developing a school-community partnership. In this regard, all the respondents indicated the provision of essential services as key to the formation of school-community partnerships. The respondents explained that the unavailability of some services due to various reasons results in the need for school-community partnerships. The stakeholders observed that various services were not available to the students in a normal school setting. Some of the unavailable services were due to the school policies while others were caused by the socioeconomic status of the parents. Moreover, some of the problematic policies were difficult to change especially in public schools. The school-community partnership offered an alternative where the parents and other stakeholders could pool their resources in order to cater to the local community. Thus, after creating a charter school, partnering with willing organizations in the community offered an alternative where the parents’ needs, in the context of their children, as well as those of the students were addressed. The teachers interviewed observed such an issue as some of the reasons that contributed to the community developing a consensus of not only creating a charter school but also the school-community partnerships. Subject 2 highlighted issues related to food and health among others that contributed to absenteeism among students from low-income families. The various programs in a school-community partnership helped alleviate some of the

issues faced by such learners. Similarly, Subject 4 highlighted the lack of ability among families to provide the needed services on their own. As such, the school-community partnership offered an approach for them to combine their resources in order to provide the services. Subject 6 indicated that the conditions that give rise to the implementation of school-community partnerships include, “The need for exposure to, and support for services that are not being provided at home.” The response highlights the theme of the provision of essential services to the community.

Cooperation. The third question on the interview sought to explore the perception of the teachers regarding the necessary actions to sustain the partnerships. Like the first interview question, it sought to understand the conceptual knowledge that teachers had regarding maintaining school-community partnerships. The responses that the teachers gave regarding the issue resulted in the theme of cooperation. It emerged in various words and phrases that the respondents used to illustrate the need for the stakeholders to work together. Words such as “communication”, “participation” and “link” were used by the respondents to illustrate the need to work together, which the researcher then categorized under the common theme of cooperation. The teachers indicated that for the partnership to function properly as envisioned by the stakeholders, everyone must play their part by fulfilling the responsibilities of their roles. Moreover, the stakeholders must ensure continuous communication amongst themselves to identify challenges early on and develop appropriate responses. Finally, the teachers also highlighted the need for trust among the stakeholders in order to ensure that the identified goals were achieved. Thus, the sustenance of the partnership was dependent on stakeholder participation, communication and building of relationships based on trust. In

this case, all the stakeholders involved were required to work with each other to achieve their objectives. Moreover, the teachers perceived cooperation as necessary for maintaining the school-community partnerships. Subject 5 indicated that a link between the school and the community as well as the service programs is necessary for supporting a school-community partnership. Similarly, all the responses also indicated the importance of fulfilling the various responsibilities that each stakeholder is assigned to in order to ensure the partnership functions smoothly.

Results for Research Question 2

The second research question dealt with examining the actual situation at the school. The question wanted to ensure that the teachers' perceptions obtained while researching the first research question were being observed and applied in real situations. It wanted to ensure the expected behaviors highlighted in the first question were being observed during the implementation of the school partnership. It helped to situate the study in its context by helping to identify the strategies that were being applied when implementing a school-community partnership. Questions 4, 5, and 6, in the interview, explored the second research question. They sought to examine the specific actions that the teachers had observed in their community that had facilitated establishment as well as sustenance of a school-community partnership. Comparing the responses of the research would ensure that the teachers' perceptions were based on real situations. Question 4 focused on the behaviors of the stakeholders that the teachers felt were helpful in establishing and maintaining a school-community partnership. Question 5 focused on the observed behaviors that further enhance school-community partnerships. Finally, question 6 examined the interaction of the stakeholders during the implementation

process. Analysis of the aggregated responses to these three questions revealed the themes of active involvement and cooperation, which is in line with what the teachers had indicated is necessary for the establishment and maintenance of school-community partnerships.

Active involvement and cooperation. Questions 4 and 5 of the interviews attempted to establish the various behaviors that parents and other stakeholders used to support the implementation of a school-community partnership. All the respondents identified behaviors that showed that the other stakeholders were actively involved in supporting the partnership in order for both the school and the community to thrive. For example, Subject 2 indicated that parents attending the programs that were offered were helpful. In addition, subject 4 indicated that proper leadership of the stakeholders was also a necessary behavior in implementing and supporting a school-community partnership. Subject 1 indicated that “Having involvement from parents and other stakeholders can provide a foundation in the school to start up partnerships with the schools.” Thus, parents being actively involved was viewed as a necessary and important action in helping to support the school community partnership. Further, Question 6 focused on how the teachers perceived the interaction of the various stakeholders. Cooperation was reflected in various responses regarding the interaction of the stakeholders. The teachers reported a willingness to cooperate with others in order to implement the partnership and support it for the benefit of the community. As such it was viewed that the willingness to participate and cooperation went hand in hand towards supporting the implementation of the school-community partnership.

Results for Research Question 3

Research Questions 1 and 2 focused on establishing the context of the school community partnership. Research Question 3 helped to establish how the context creates benefits for the students through the multiple ways that school-community partnerships impact the life of a student as well as their academic achievement. Questions 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 were related to this research question and they examined the impact of the behavior of teachers and students and examined their link towards improving student performance. The researcher focused on establishing actual improvement in academic performance as reported by the teachers, but also a change in behaviors that were associated with high academic achievement. For example, Subject 1 reported witnessing reduced absenteeism among the students, which the respondent attributed to improved academic outcomes among the students. Analysis of the aggregate responses relating to questions under the Research Question 3 revealed the themes of (1) increased support, (2) improved relationships and (3) an increase in roles that needed new skills.

Increased support. Questions 7 and 8 dealt with the changes that were brought about by implementing a school-community partnership. Questions 9 and 11 examined how the changes impacted student behavior as well as their academic performance. Question 7 attempted to inquire about the issues that were associated with school-community partnerships that the teachers thought were helpful to the students. question 8 examined the opportunities that were created for the students due to the partnership. Finally, Question 9 and 11 explored the improvements in academic performance as well as changes in student behavior that the teachers attributed to the issues examined in Questions 7 and 8. In regards to question 7, the respondents indicated that school-

community partnerships were supportive to the students. The support came from various stakeholders of the partnership including the parents, teachers and others involved such as mentors. For example, Subject 1 also stated that the partnership “Supports the learning and development of all students.” Similarly, Subject 4 explained that the school-community partnership “... gives the students more access to help such as tutoring, mentoring, and medical needs.” Therefore, all the participants agreed that support was a key characteristic of school-community partnerships that made them successful in helping students.

Question 8 further explored the support that the respondents had cited by asking about any gains or opportunities that were created by the school-community partnership. The teachers cited both learning opportunities as well as time for extracurricular activities, which is important for children while growing. For instance, Subject 3 indicated that through the school-community partnership, students had benefited from “Opportunities for outreach programs provided by places like local community colleges, local banks, and local health services. Students can learn about how these things operate to make their community livable.” Further, Subject 7 also indicated that “Students have after school programs available such as gardening, dance team, math, cub scouts...etc.” Based on the responses from question 8, the school-community partnership created various opportunities for learning and support for the students.

Question 9 and 11 then sought to investigate whether the support had any observable benefits in the short time that the partnership had been implemented. In this case, it sought to identify the effectiveness of school-community partnerships in reducing poor performance and the various factors that cause the change in academic outcomes.

For example, Subject 1 noted reduced absenteeism. Moreover, Subject 5, explained that “Students have become more interested in school and unruly behavior has somehow reduced.” Lastly, Subject 7 noted that after implementing the school-community partnership, “Students have increasingly started to participate in after-school activities especially when they are facilitated by professionals.” Therefore, the support created by a school-partnership program made students to become more engaged in school, which resulted in improved academic performance.

Improved relationships. Another theme that was noted based on the responses of the teachers was improved relationships with the students. When teachers were asked about the changes, they had noted among themselves, after implementation of the school-community partnerships, they mentioned improved relationships with the students. The respondents were addressing Question 10, of the interview, which sought to identify any changes the teachers had experienced. For example, Subject 1 observed that “Teachers have become more informed about the issues affecting students, which enables them to tailor the learning environment accordingly.” On a similar note, noted that “Teachers develop relationships with students and come to see them as complete humans with lives outside of the classroom. These relationships lead to better communication between teachers and students.” Thus, school-community partnerships also led to improved relationships, which might also contribute to improved academic outcomes.

Increase in roles that need new skills. Teachers also noted that after implementing the partnership, some of them realized they had more responsibilities. However, the added responsibilities also coincided with their lack of skills in handling them. Consequently, some teachers resorted to learning new skills to embrace their new

roles. The increased responsibility in regards to student problems created a gap in skills as some teachers felt they did not have adequate knowledge to handle the responsibility. As such, some teachers, such as Subject 5 observed that “Teachers are taking up courses that were they previously unable to, which enhances their skills in teaching and handling student problems.” However, not all the teachers welcomed the new responsibility by learning new skills, some such as Subject 7 felt overwhelmed, which indicates a need to investigate the impact that partnerships may have on teachers.

Results for Research Question 4

Research Question 4 dealt with changes in communication among the stakeholders after the implementation of the partnership. Since the stakeholders before the partnership were mainly parents, the question focused on the changes observed among parents. Questions 12 and 13 of the interviews were related to research question 4. Question 12 asks for the teacher’s involvement with the partnership in order to ascertain that they had the experience required to respond to the changes. While the issue of criteria had been addressed in the selection criteria, the researcher felt it was important to include the question in order to give context to the respondents’ views regarding their observed changes. Analysis of the aggregated responses from the two interview questions revealed the theme of participation.

Participation. Teachers noted that parents became more involved with the children’s education after implementing the school-community partnership. The various activities organized at the school, such as family nights and other after school extracurricular activities, created bonds between the child and their parent, which was reflected by the continuous participation of the parents. Communication between the

teachers and the parents also increased as they sought to help the students. Indeed, almost all the respondents had a favorable view regarding the increase in the participation of parents. For example, Subject 1 indicated that “Parents may be more willing to actively participate in their child’s education and build better rapport with their teachers.” Additionally, Subjects 5 and 6 agreed that parents were having more meetings. Indeed, Subject 6 noted that “I have just noticed that some teachers are having more meetings with parents and their students.” However, Subject 7 noted the opposite indicating that some parents, as well as other stakeholders, avoided the program. Therefore, participation was the key theme, with most of the respondents agreeing that it had increased among parents and only one respondent stating that it had fallen.

Results for Research Question 5

Research Question 5 dealt with possible improvements that the government could help to make in order to improve school-community partnerships. The related questions in the interview were numbered 14 and 15. The questions were geared towards identifying any challenges that might be eliminated through assistance from the government based on the teacher’s perceptions. The two themes that emerged were (1) funding and (2) advocacy.

Funding. The theme of funding emerged from responses in question 14 and 15. They requested the participants to suggest any help the government could provide to improve school-community partnerships. Most of the respondents indicated funding for more resources would be welcomed. For example, Subject 1 stated that the government should “Allow opportunity for more funding and resources.” Subject 7 agreed with the view and stated that “The government could award long term funds to help sustain the

community partnership programs within the schools.” Thus, funding emerged as a theme and the majority of the respondents agreed that it was one of the approaches that the government could use to assist

Advocacy. Advocacy is another theme that was identified from the responses as another approach that the teachers indicated could help in promoting school-community partnerships. Advocacy from the government was expressed as the ways the government could structure policies geared towards encouraging the formation and support of school-community partnerships.

Synthesis

This chapter described the findings of the data analysis. It highlighted the various themes that were identified based on the responses of the participants. The first research question attempted to explore the knowledge of the teachers regarding school-community partnerships. It sought to establish their expectations in order to ensure they were reasonable by comparing them to past literature on school-community partnerships. The respondents identified the desire to create social and economic strength in the community was the main objective of setting up a school-community partnership. The analysis also found the desire was created due to the absence of various services to students such as medical and counseling that provided a gap for the partnerships to fill. After implementing the partnership, the teachers also identified cooperation as necessary to maintain it. The second research question then sought to examine whether the teachers were using or had observed the use of the strategies they had highlighted when they were involved in implementing the School-community partnership. This question wanted to examine the context of the partnership under investigation in order to identify any

anomalies that might differ from conventional approaches. However, no deviation was found because the analysis of responses offered by the teachers led to the identification of active involvement and cooperation among stakeholders as necessary for the implementation of the school-community partnership understudy, which corresponded with the findings of the teachers' expectation in the first research question.

Since the analysis did not identify any anomalies in the implementation of the school-partnership, the third research question then investigated the various ways it contributed to improving the outcomes of the students. The analysis found that increased support, improved relationships between the teachers and parents as well as the emergence of new roles that required the acquisition of new skills were the main changes that teachers observed. While all the three themes have a positive impact on the students' academic performance, it was not clear whether all three had to be present. Thus, future research should investigate the influence of each factor. The fourth research question then sought to identify the changes in communication among the parents and teachers since implementation. The previous question had indicated that they had improved and the fourth research question sought to identify how they had changed. The analysis found that parents became more willing participants of their children's education, which was helpful for boosting performance. Finally, the last question sought to determine how the school community partnerships can be enhanced in order to improve their effectiveness. Policies that could increase funding and advocacy of school-community partnerships were identified because they would add more financial and social support. Financial support was necessary for the programs while the social aspect was meant for enhancing participation among the stakeholders involved.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The seven participants involved in this study expressed their unique perceptions regarding their creation of a school community partnership. Based on the findings presented in Chapter 4 of this study, most of the teachers involved desired to create a better learning environment for their students. They were selected because they have experience in working with school-community partnerships, which enhanced the reliability of their perspectives on the matter. They showed a strong desire to help their students improve by enhancing their learning opportunities. This discussion aims to organize the findings into a descriptive account that can be used by various stakeholders to improve school-community partnerships. This chapter elaborates and interprets the findings of the research in relation to the research questions and describes the implications of this study. It also makes recommendations for further research as well as local practice.

Discussion of the Findings

Research Question 1 attempted to establish the reasons for the formation of school-community partnerships. Similarly, interview questions 1 and 2 focused on establishing these motives. They were revealed in the analysis by the themes of (1) creating a stronger community and (2) provision of essential services. The results of the study indicated overwhelming support for the need to create a strong community in order to improve student outcomes. The support was mainly from a collaborative perspective due to the different relationships created. For example, some of the relationships that created the spirit of collaboration were parent-student and teacher-parent relationships. The collaborative perspective was best described by Subject 4, who stated that a motive

for creating school-community partnerships is "To get families more engaged and to uplift the community." The response highlighted the importance of the relationships created, especially with families, in helping the students to improve their academic achievement.

The perspective aligned with the available literature regarding student achievement. In this case, creating a strong community started by involving the parents in the academic context. Strategies such as family engagement, as described by Wood and Bauman (2017), are useful in improving student performance. They provide an opportunity for students to share their academic life with their parents. Moreover, parents also establish relationships with the teachers and other stakeholders. Such an approach ensures that the academic achievement of the students is a collective effort as opposed to only involving the teachers and the learners. Shogren et al. (2015) found inclusivity to be an important aspect of creating school-community partnerships. They noted that inclusion involved ensuring constant communication between parents and teachers as well as other stakeholders. Additionally, the highlighted benefits of inclusivity were improved communities since they were reciprocal to all the stakeholders involved (Shogren et al. 2015). Therefore, both the community partners, as well as the schools, benefit from the partnership. These mutual benefits help create a stronger society as each party realizes the importance of others in the community.

The theme of provision of services as a reason for creating school-community partnerships was also supported by existing literature. Von Stumm (2017) asserted that the socioeconomic status of students was a determinant of student achievement. Students from low social income households displayed a lower academic achievement that was

independent of intelligence. Consequently, Mooney (2018) proposed that part of the reason that such a gap exists is because of the difference in opportunities available to children depending on their socioeconomic status. Mooney (2018) went on further to states the educational achievement gap that was created due to social-economic status should be renamed to opportunity gaps in order to reflect the true problem. Similarly, Reardon et al. (2015) also found that socioeconomic status influenced academic achievement, although the researchers were not able to determine its contribution towards the gap. Moreover, the authors also expressed concern regarding how it affected different races, as some could be more affected than others. Therefore, one of the solutions proposed towards closing the opportunity gap in order to eliminate that of educational achievement is school-community partnerships. Maier et al. (2017) found that community schools help students from low-income families to improve their educational outcomes as they cater to their needs. The typical practice of involving different stakeholders in school-community partnerships enhances the provision of services needed by students from low-income families, which helps improve their educational achievement. Moreover, the involvement of various parties in the partnership, such as parents, was beneficial to all students as it increased their academic outcomes (Wang et al. 2014). Therefore, school-community partnerships help to improve student academic outcomes by addressing the various needs of students, especially those from poor economic backgrounds. The goal of forming partnerships is to help combine resources in order to be able to provide the needed services.

The theme of participation revealed the strategies adopted by stakeholders to maintain a school-community partnership. In this case, the teachers noted that increase

involvement with the parents through communication was a key aspect of ensuring that the partnership continued while also guaranteeing its benefits. The teachers noted the use of various events such as family nights to enable students and their parents to build relationships around academic work. For instance, in a question related to additional recommendations for support, Subject 4 indicated more family nights would be appropriate. Similarly, Subject 3 indicated that “I have seen things like parent night evolve into a festival where information about products and services are shared to families.” Consequently, events such as family nights were being employed at the school in order to create opportunities for family engagement. While some teachers felt they needed to be increased, the fact that they held such events indicated that they employed evidence-based methods to create proper relationships with the families of the students as well as engaging them with school work, which is important for achievement. The respondents mainly focused on their interactions with families and no other partnership stakeholders since all of them worked with the parents. The issue of creating events for families is supported by literature in that it provides opportunities for improving the partnership. According to Mapp and Kuttner (2013), the lack of such opportunities results in partnerships that are ineffective since the stakeholders are unable to address some of the issues affecting the students. These relationships, as Wood and Bauman (2017) explain, are important as they enable families to be involved with the student’s studies even at home. Moreover, such types of engagements create more interest in parents to participate in helping to determine the school needs, prioritizing them as well as mobilizing resources to address them. Further, participation helped create a sense of shared responsibility among the stakeholders, which was crucial for the

success of the students. Wood and Bauman (2017) assert that engaging parents, as well as other stakeholders in a school-community partnership, facilitate communication in order to support their child's education. Participation, according to Haines et al. (2015), helps to build partnerships that rely on establishing relationships, respect, and focus on building dialogue. The respondents highlighted the issue of increased meetings with parents as one of the approaches that the partnership was sustained because they encouraged the involvement of the students' families with education. Thus, participation is an approach that the respondents identified as useful for maintaining school-community partnerships.

Additionally, findings from Research Question 1 revealed that after creating a school-community partnership, teachers viewed cooperation as essential for it to be sustainable. In this regard, cooperation involved fulfilling the various roles that each stakeholder was assigned to in order to ensure the partnership operated smoothly. The cooperation relied on each of the stakeholders communicating with each other in order to find common ground about the various issues that needed to be addressed. Moreover, the cooperation was based on trust among each other in order to facilitate teamwork, which was necessary for sustaining the partnership. For example, Subject 3 stated that "A level of trust must be built to ensure services are not seen as Catch-22 or services that will harm trust. Parents must be willing to take time to visit the school and take advantage of the programs provided in assisting and informing them." Therefore, the respondents viewed cooperation from parents as well as the building trust among themselves as necessary for maintaining the partnership. The perspective is supported by literature findings, which indicate that engagement of the various stakeholders is important in order to guarantee its sustainability. McCart et al. (2014) acknowledge that trust is an important

aspect of engagement. Trust helps in facilitating the changes associated with school-community partnerships, which enables cooperation among the members. McCart et al. (2014) assert that without trust, the relationship between the stakeholders is negatively impacted, which also affects the implementation of a school-community partnership. Wood and Bauman (2017) explains that family engagement creating such relationship is important for family engagement. In this case, family engagement involves enabling parents to help their children with schoolwork while at home. Therefore, teachers must trust that their students have some form of assistance from the parents, and parents must cooperate by offering it when the tutor or the learner requests for it. Wood and Bauman (2017) noted that family engagement by the schools was important because it ensured the sustainability of the school-community partnership. Indeed, in family-school relationships, Wood and Bauman (2017) found that trust was an important factor. Therefore, cooperation based on trust among the stakeholders is a key aspect of sustaining school-community partnerships.

The findings from Research Question 1 were the preconceived notions that teachers had regarding the factors that were necessary to sustain a partnership. Consequently, Research Question 2 sought to ascertain whether the strategies described by the teachers were also being implemented successfully in their school-community partnership. In this case, the research question aimed at establishing the actual situation at the school and help identify any disparities between the teacher's preconceived ideas and reality. The interview questions fulfilled the objective by inviting the participants to share the various behaviors that they viewed were supportive in regards to ensuring the partnership continued in order to assist the students. They confirmed that indeed the

practices that they had highlighted as necessary for the sustenance of a partnership were being employed in order to ensure the success of their situation. For instance, the teachers reported they were willing to cooperate with other stakeholders in order to ensure the success of the partnership. Moreover, they described the interaction between the different stakeholders as positive. For example, Subject 4 stated that “The interaction seemed positive. The stakeholders walked around the campus and asked questions.” The statement described an environment that was conducive for sustaining a school-community partnership as collaborated by the literature. For instance, Gross et al. (2015) expressed that schools had to have an inviting culture in order to ensure all the stakeholders participated in the partnerships under various capacities. The respondent’s statement indicated that a similar strategy of appealing to the stakeholders using various strategies such as implementing an open-door policy to them was necessary for the sustenance of a partnership. The observation is similar to that of Nishimura (2017) in that an inviting culture must cultivate the willingness of the stakeholders as opposed to command them in order to be successful. The finding was also supported by Wood and Bauman (2017), who found that a diffused leadership structure in school-community partnership was more effective at increasing the academic achievement of students. Notably, empowering parents to take leadership results in their adoption of more responsibility for the education of their children, which is associated with higher student achievement.

The theme of increased support was discussed in the context of the help as well as the opportunities that students were able to access after the implementation of a school-community partnership. The respondents explained that students accessed more

assistance involving not only schoolwork but also with other issues, which enabled them to improve their academic performance. Moreover, the respondents also indicated that school community partnerships also encouraged the students to participate in extracurricular activities, which increased their engagement at school thereby improving their academic performance. These findings are corroborated by available literature in that student support as well as participating in activities that help them to be engaged with school are important for improving their academic achievement. For instance, Wood and Bauman (2017) assert that social networks established by school community partnerships help students to improve their academic performance. They are useful in that they are able to identify student needs and respond appropriately to them in order to assist the students. In this case, the constant communication among the teachers, learners and their parents, created an environment where the students' needs were always addressed appropriately. The teachers communicated with parents regarding issues faced by a student and using the learner's input they were able to develop effective strategies to help deal with their problems. As such, students received increased support that helped to address the various challenges they faced, which affected their academic performance. Wood and Bauman (2017) explained that parental involvement under various capacities is associated with increases in student achievement including improved scores in their exams. Additionally, Bassok et al. (2016) also indicated that continuous focus on academic content among students also created nonconductive environment for learning. Students developed various maladaptive behaviors such as stress, which impacted their motivation as well as self-confidence and ultimately their grades. Extracurricular activities that were implemented under the school-community partnership program

helped the students to focus on other issues and tasks as opposed to only their academic work, which reduced their stress and increased their engagement. Further, family engagement, according to Wood and Bauman (2017) predicated changes in student behavior such as reduction in absenteeism and improved academic achievement. The finding also collaborated an account by a respondent who also noted reduced absenteeism after implementation of the school-community. Therefore, the increased support provided to students by school-community partnerships is one of the reasons that it is effective at reducing student achievement gaps.

The theme of improved relationships also provided a framework for discussing the impact of implementing school-community partnerships. The respondents noted that after implementation of the partnership, they experienced an improved relationship with their students. These improved relationships created a chance for the teachers to view the lives of students, which enabled them to develop an understanding that facilitated communication. Teachers were able to understand issues outside the classroom that were affecting the students and therefore offer possible solutions that could help them. The main benefit of the improved relationship was the positive affect that students experienced with their teachers, which created an environment that facilitated academic achievement. According to Norman (2016) teachers' perceptions of their students have an impact on their achievement. These perceptions determine a teacher's attitude towards a student, which has an impact on their achievement. King et al. (2015) found that the emotional state of students was a key influencer of their academic performance. Students with positive affect were likely to perform better compared to those with negative ones. King et al. (2015) theorized that students with positive affect were able to learn and

memorize information easily. As such, improved relationships created an environment that fostered positive affect. In this case, the teachers were able to identify emotional issues that might affect the student and perceive them as the problem as opposed to viewing the learner as uncooperative. As such, the teachers were able to help the students and enable them to develop positive effect that improved their academic outcomes.

The theme of increased roles was also identified as an impact of implementing the school-community partnerships. The respondents explained that the partnership increased their roles in the school and they were not adequately trained for the new responsibilities. Consequently, some resorted to returning to school to acquire the necessary skills in order to contribute. The majority welcomed the opportunity as they believed enhancing their skills would enable them to become better teachers to their students. However, others resented the new responsibilities but did not oppose the implementation of school-community partnerships. The findings of this are supported by those of Ruzek et al. (2015) in that teachers have an influence on the achievement of the students. Ruzek et al. (2015) explained that the strategies used by teachers to motivate their students are a factor in influencing their academic performance. As such, since the school-community partnership involved the creation of a variety of approaches that teachers can use to motivate students, most found themselves unprepared for some of the new roles. Consequently, they required to improve their skills in order to become competent in the new roles, which resulted in an improvement in student performance.

Implications

It is important to note that community collaboration can occur without the need for changes at both the state and national levels. This study took place in an elementary

school that had implemented a school-community partnership recently during the time it was carried out. In most situations, people forget that they need to take the initiative in order to facilitate the manifestation of the results they desire in the world. Therefore, parents, teachers, and community leaders should feel empowered to initiate the change towards implementing school-community partnerships whenever they perceive them to be beneficial to the students and the community.

Further, while this study highlighted strengthening of the community ties and provision of essential services as one of the main reasons creating school-community partnerships, there is also a need to identify other additional goals that are unique to the community. For instance, the provision of services is a broad term, and the stakeholders of the school-community partnership should engage in assessing the needs of the community in order to develop the appropriate goals that the partnership should fulfill. They should also identify the appropriate strategies that will help in strengthening the community. Ensuring this first step of creation is implemented according to the needs of the community will help in not only sustaining the partnership but also ensuring that it benefits the students as intended.

In addition, maintenance of the partnership appears to be one of the difficult aspects of school-community partnerships. The different parties have to ensure that they keep their commitments by fulfilling their different responsibilities. It involves each party taking concrete steps to engage with the other using various strategies such as communication and the creation of opportunities that will facilitate the partnership to be maintained in order to provide the expected benefits to all the stakeholders. Participation is a key part of maintaining school-community partnerships, and all the stakeholders

should be aware of the required responsibilities in order for it to be successful.

Moreover, a long-term perspective should be adopted when developing a school-community partnership in order to implement appropriate strategies for its sustainability. In the current study, active involvement and cooperation were the main strategies used to ensure sustainability. In particular, an open-door policy, where the stakeholders were allowed to access the school and ask questions, was used in order to create an environment that appealed to all the participants involved. Such strategies should be implemented as early as possible in order to ensure that the collaboration is sustainable.

Finally, the effectiveness of a school-community partnership was ascertained in this study. However, the researcher found that the approach is effective because it enables the implementation of strategies that help to address the needs of the students. In the current case study, students received more support from the community in the form of parental involvement, improved relationships with their teachers as well as receiving essential services that they were unable to access at home. Moreover, the collaboration led to teachers acquiring new skills that further improved their ability to work with the students. The collaboration effort highlighted in this case study illustrated that school-community partnerships are effective. However, the effectiveness was dependent on designing and implementing appropriate systems that target the needs of the school and the community.

Limitations of the Study

A small sample size potentially restricted the generalizability of the findings; however, the integration and perusal of multiple data sources, as necessitated by the case study research design, helped reduce this limitation. Given the specificity of the research

site and a smaller number of participants, this study highlighted the teachers' perceptions regarding effectiveness of community resources in reducing achievement gaps in a community school in central Florida, which may offer little insight on teachers' perceptions in other school districts. Additionally, use of open-ended questions in interviews may have resulted in somewhat broad or misleading responses, rather than answering the questions directly (Flick, 2017). However, the researcher employed a great degree of care and attention to keep the interviews on track and keep the interviewee focused on the scope of the interview guide.

Recommendations

The reason for interpreting findings in a research project is for the researchers to identify the lessons learned. This study sought to expand knowledge regarding strategies for improving educational outcomes. Based on the knowledge gained from the research, the researcher made the following recommendations for future research as well as local practice.

First, additional perspectives from other stakeholders could be considered. For example, the students', parents', and community leaders' perspectives can be explored in order to identify their notions of an effective school-community partnership. Determining the perception of other stakeholders about school-community partnerships can help to add further knowledge about implementing them in order to guarantee success.

Second, funding was a theme identified from suggestions for government efforts towards supporting school-community partnerships. Considering that provision of services to students was one of the reasons for establishing a school-community partnership, funding was an essential part of sustaining them. In this case, funding could

be provided to schools operating under the school-community partnership model in order to improve their services and be able to cater to more students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Additionally, the theme of advocacy was another strategy that was identified by the teachers for the government to help maintain school-community partnerships. It involved suggestions that did not involve funding but could be pursued by the government in order to promote school-community partnerships. The teachers cited practices such as offering incentives to schools implementing partnerships in order to encourage the adoption of the approach. The use of policies to encourage support for school-community partnerships was identified as an approach the government could use to help sustain the existing collaborations as well facilitate the creation of new ones, thereby helping to improve student outcomes across the nation.

However, according to Maier et al. (2017), such practices by the government exist in order to support school-community partnerships. For instance, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a policy that was passed in 2015 to help support school-community collaboration. Under the act, various programs such as the Promise Neighborhoods have been implemented to help provide funding to school-community partnerships. Moreover, states have also implemented their initiatives towards supporting and advocating for school-community partnerships. Nevertheless, the fact that the teachers interviewed did not highlight these programs suggests that they have not been successful. As such, a recommendation for both federal and local levels is to publicize the programs that support school-community partnerships. The approach will help in creating awareness among the teachers, the public as well as the students, which so that as many educational

centers as possible can implement partnerships.

Similarly, the provision of services is also another theme that revealed the reason for the formation of school-community partnerships. In this case, it mainly revolved around the issue of socioeconomic status and its association with low academic achievement. Therefore, the teachers perceived that school-community partnerships could help provide services that were unavailable to students, especially those from low-income households, in order to enhance their chances of improving their academic achievement. Moreover, some of the needed services could not be provided by the schools because they would stretch a school's budget since they required hiring additional staff to support them. Community school partnerships offered a cost-effective approach to providing the services since it involved obtaining them from local organizations that serviced them or requesting funds from such institutions in order to provide them. Notably, all the respondents noted that some services that impacted the students and consequently, their educational achievement were unavailable at home for some students and were also not provided at school. The services that some of the respondents highlighted were those related to food and health. Therefore, by partnering with institutions or pooling financial resources, the parents and the schools were able to provide them, which helped increase the chances of improving. Consequently, the effectiveness of a school-community project in helping the students and the community is dependent on identifying the needs of both parties and developing a partnership that will benefit them. A recommendation for local practice is to ensure that the unique needs of the community are identified and partnership is structured in a way that will help address them.

Summary of the Study

School-community partnerships have been recommended as a solution to improving student achievement. This study sought to determine whether it was effective at reducing achievement gaps among students from the perspective of the teachers. The study adopted a case study approach in order to fulfill its objective. It identified a school that had adopted a school-community partnership in order to examine the impact. The reasons that achievement gaps exist in the education system are several, but socioeconomic status is one of the main causes that can be prevented using the strategies employed by the school-community partnership in the current study. Other factors identified in the literature but with minimal impact were student's learning abilities as well as socio-cultural factors. The research identified 5 questions related to school-community partnerships that could be used to determine the effectiveness of the approach in reducing achievement gaps. Data were collected using interviews from seven participants who had participated in the implemented school-community partnership. The analysis of the collected data revealed various themes that enabled the researcher to understand the context of the school-community partnership. The study found that school-community partnerships are effective at reducing achievement gaps. School-community partnerships are effective because they create the conditions that foster learning as well as school engagement, which are important for improving student outcomes. Various other considerations need to be made by the stakeholders to ensure that a school-community partnership is created, maintained, and sustained over a long period in order to reap the associated benefits of improving the achievement of the students as well as that of the community.

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Appendix A
Interview Questions

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What do you think is the purpose of establishing community-school partnerships?
2. What do you perceive as the conditions that lead to the emergence of community-school partnerships?
3. What conditions or practices do you think are necessary to sustain the partnerships?
4. How could shared specific behaviors or actions from parents or other stakeholders help facilitate the establishment of community –school partnerships?
5. Have you observed other stakeholders actively participating in the establishment of community –school partnerships? If so how?
6. How would you describe the interaction of the stakeholders during the development of the partnership?
7. How do you think community-school partnerships help students?
8. What opportunities for students have been created by community-school partnerships that would be helpful to students?
9. What changes have you noticed among the students after implementation of community-school partnerships?
10. Are there any changes behaviors or practices among teachers that could be attributed to community-school partnerships? Are they helpful to students?
11. Are there any changes behaviors or practices among students that could be attributed to community-school partnerships? Are they helpful to students?
12. How would describe your involvement with parents and the community during

the development of community-school partnership?

13. Are there any changes between the communication of teachers, parents and the community after implementing the community-school partnership? If so, how?
14. What actions do you think the government can take to help sustain community-school partnerships?
15. What policies would you like implemented that can help to sustain community-school partnerships?

Appendix B

Relationship of Research Questions to Interview Questions

Appendix B

Relationship of Research Questions to Interview Questions

Table 1
Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research question	Corresponding Interview Questions
What are teachers' perceptions of establishing and sustaining a community – school partnership?	<p>What do you think is the purpose of establishing community-school partnerships?</p> <p>What do you perceive as the conditions that lead to the emergence of community-school partnerships?</p> <p>What conditions or practices do you think are necessary to sustain the partnerships?</p>
What actions among parents and other stakeholders do teachers perceive as helpful in establishing and sustaining community-school partnerships?	<p>Could you share specific behaviors or actions from parents or other stakeholders that facilitate establishment of community – school partnerships?</p> <p>Have you observed other stakeholders actively participating in the establishment of community – school partnerships? If so how?</p> <p>How would you describe the interaction of the stakeholders during the development of the partnership?</p>
How do teachers perceive community-school partnerships in regards to its impact on academic achievement among learners?	<p>How do you think community-school partnerships help students?</p> <p>What opportunities for students have been created by community-school partnerships that would be helpful to students?</p> <p>What changes have you noticed among the students after implementation of community-school partnerships?</p> <p>Are there any changes behaviors or practices among teachers that could be attributed to community-school partnerships? Are they helpful to students?</p> <p>Are there any changes behaviors or practices among students that could be attributed to community-school partnerships? Are they helpful to students?</p>
What are teachers' perceptions regarding parent-teacher and parent-community communication?	<p>How would describe your involvement with parents and the community during the development of community-school partnership?</p> <p>Are there any changes between the communication of teachers, parents</p>

What measures and policy guidelines can be used to strengthen school-community partnerships in community schools?

and the community after implementing the community-school partnership? If so, how? What actions do you think the government can take to help sustain community-school partnerships? What policies would you like implemented that can help to sustain community-school partnerships?
