

Literature Review on Racial Achievement Gap in Low Income Communities

Kelsi Frank

Michigan State University

EAD 830

Dr. Yun

March 28th, 2021

We have long been aware of the racial achievement gap, but in recent years it has become a part of the greater public conversation. For example, there has been a greater emphasis on making K-12 standardized testing more approachable to all students but during the events of 2020 it became a question if they should even happen. The Racial Achievement Gap in low income communities has been sufficiently impacted even before the pandemic. From access to good education, to housing, and completing daily life tasks that we take for granted every day.

Firstly, the total share of income claimed by the top ten percent of Americans has risen steadily since 1979. Concurrently, the gap between their incomes and the remaining population has enlarged. According to Reardon (2013), in recent years most of the total national income gains have shifted to the top one percent. Consequently, this trend could be less disturbing if the social safety net and education system were better able to assist children in overcoming the generational wealth gap; however, that has not happened. Instead, in the United States, social mobility has dropped. At this time, the portion of children who are currently earning more than their parents has fallen from about ninety percent for those born in 1940 to fifty percent for those born in the 1980s (Reardon, 2013). This brief review shows an interaction between educational outcomes, social mobility, and socioeconomic status. Based on the outcome, there is a close link between a person's educational achievement and economic birthright (Gordon & Cui, 2018). Therefore, the combination of the growing inequality-based achievement gaps and economic inequality brings many doubts on equality of opportunity, which acts as the main driver for the American Dream.

Secondly, inequality and poverty have many societal effects, from lower life expectancies to poor health among individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds to the destruction of popular democratic ideals. In relation to the education context, children's socioeconomic status, where income is the primary component, is perceived to be one of the significant predictors of academic success, whether that achievement is measured by completion rates, college attendance, high school graduation rates, or test scores (Crook & Evans, 2014). Reardon (2013) stated that due to the close association between educational performance, inequality, and poverty, the achievement gap in the United States grew tremendously from the 1970s to 2000 with a simultaneous development in inequality. Using the work of Gordon and Cui (2018), the possible reason for this situation is that children in higher-income families have many advantages due to greater investments made by their parents. One of these investments is the time that high-income parents spend with their children for academically enriching activities and leisure. Next in this review, I will be analyzing further into neighborhood poverty, segregated communities, and how low income effects on students achievement.

Who faces neighborhood poverty?

A considerable analysis of the American poverty rate by individuals' ethnicity and race exhibits that low-income families and people are more likely to encounter neighborhood poverty than their counterparts. Not Surprisingly, Hispanic and Black families are at a higher rate than Whites to reside in poor neighborhoods. According to Reardon (2013), the racial gap's degree is striking since Hispanic and Black families with an annual household income over \$75,000 are more likely to reside in poor households than the Whites who have an annual household income under \$40,000. As a result, many researchers have increasingly engaged in studies to answer why there is a large ethnic and racial gap in poverty contact. Most of them agree that such a gap

comes from a combination of high levels of racial residential segregation with a substantial racial gap in poverty rates (Gordon & Cui, 2018). They mean that the Hispanic and Black poverty rates are 2-3 times those of the White. Therefore, Hispanic and Black families experience neighborhood poverty rates, two to three times higher than those of White households (Gordon & Cui, 2018). Regretfully, the high neighborhood poverty rates encountered by Hispanic, Black, and low-income households directly decrease their life opportunities relative to Whites in various ways (Gordon & Cui, 2018). Some of them are that they contribute to racial disparities in contact with violence and crime. They further set the platform for high poverty rates in educational institutions attended by Hispanic and Black students (Crook & Evans, 2014). These situations' primary outcome is subjecting the main victims to prolonged neighborhood consequences of living in poor environments.

The Racial Achievement Gap, Segregated Neighborhoods, and Segregated Schools.

It is important to recognize that inequalities in both outcomes and opportunity due to social class and race have been largely studied. Most of the existing literature indicates that achievement gaps start early and usually continue throughout students' years and beyond. Importantly, Fram Miller-Cribbs and Van Horn (2007) emphasized that these gaps are much larger in American society than those in comparable countries. Besides, some scholars have explored how the problems connected to minority and low-income status lead to these gaps. Some of the notable researchers, such as Taylor (2005), have acknowledged that the poorest African American students are truly the most disadvantaged group in the United States' education system. However, Gordon and Cui (2018) state that Black children can only be helped mainly by enhancing economic and social conditions, making most of them unprepared. Concentration on such improvement can make the disadvantaged students utilize what even the best educational

centers have to provide (Crook & Evans, 2014). This conclusion is grounded in two main aspects. The first one is based on economic and social disadvantage; the theory that poverty makes African American students perform poorly academically, but it is actually a plethora of conditions. The second one discusses these disadvantages in economically and racially homogenous schools widens the achievement gap.

Additionally, lower social class children certainly have lesser average achievement than their counterparts, even when exposed to the highest quality instruction due to many disadvantages. This claim is reinforced by Crook and Evans (2014), who stated that teachers in schools that have students who live in poor communities tend to focus on remediation, making them have lesser opportunities to challenge those who can handle community, family, and personal hardships, which commonly disrupt learning. Most importantly, Fram Miller-Cribbs and Van Horn (2007) stressed that poor communities have schools with increased students' mobility; thus, they perform poorly since their instructors spend more time repeating lessons for new learners and have less chances to adapt instruction to their strengths and weaknesses.

Concurrently, researchers have documented that children from low-income communities are not prepared to learn, forcing their educators to concentrate less on learning and more on discipline; hence, widening the achievement gap. Consequently, children in poor neighborhoods are bounded by more violence and crime, making them vulnerable to stress, which interferes with their learning (Gordon & Cui, 2018). Other factors that make children from low-income societies perform poorly are numerous. For instance, Lacour and Tissington (2011) stated that children from low-income communities have less exposure to mainstream society, serving as an indicator that they have less understanding of Standard English, which is vital for their future success.

Furthermore, few parents from such communities have a strong education, which implies that the schools in those areas are less advantaged due to low parental pressure for a higher quality curriculum (Borg, Borg, & Stranahan, 2012). Similarly, more illiterate parents signify that children have fewer college- and university-educated role models to copy and have fewer friends whose families set higher academic standards.

The effects of low-income communities on students

Reduced readiness for school

School readiness serves to reflect students' capability to succeed both socially and academically in any educational institution. This concept calls for the necessity of suitable emotional health, motor development, physical well-being, age-appropriate general knowledge, age-appropriate language skills, age-appropriate social knowledge and competence, and a positive attitude to new experiences (Crook & Evans, 2014). Numerous studies have documented that living in poor communities reduces children's readiness for school through neighborhoods, schooling, home life, and health. This claim was reinforced by Okur (2020), who reported that six poverty-related factors (effect poverty has on the child's social network (such as relatives, parents, and neighbors), community characteristics (such as school characteristics, the concentration of poverty, and crime in the neighborhood), the timing of poverty (such as the age of the child), the period of poverty, the depth of poverty, and the incidence of poverty) are recognized to affect development in school readiness. Furthermore, children's homes have a significant effect on school readiness (Taylor, 2005). In this regard, students from low-income families are less likely to get stimulation and cannot learn the social skills needed to prepare them for school (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Common problems that emerge are parental

inconsistency (in relation to parenting and daily routines), poor role modeling, lack of supervision, and regular caregivers' regular changes.

Also, American studies have portrayed the connection between decreased school readiness and low-income households. Lacour and Tissington (2011) noted that students from low-income communities score very low on communication and vocabulary skills, copying and symbol use, knowledge of numbers, ability to pay attention, and cooperative play with peers than those from higher-income households. Gordon and Cui (2018) found that schools made up of many students with low school readiness lived in neighborhoods characterized by high social risk, including poverty. On the other hand, Lacour and Tissington (2011) concluded that students from lower socioeconomic status households failed in a receptive vocabulary test than their counterparts. Therefore, this evidence is unanimous in that poor children go to school at a behavioral and cognitive disadvantage. What makes matters worse is that schools are not capable of equalizing this gap.

Poor educational attainment

Finally, more studies emerging from the successive research have repeatedly indicated that socioeconomic factors have persistent, pervasive, and large impacts on school achievement. For instance, Borg, Borg, and Stranahan (2012) investigated child outcomes and income. The findings signaled that higher incomes were continuously linked with better outcomes for students, especially in school and cognitive measures. Essentially, socioeconomic disadvantage and other risk factors connected to poverty (such as high family stress and lower parental education) have an adverse effect on academic achievement and cognitive development. On top of that, Borg, Borg, and Stranahan (2012) showed strong impacts between socioeconomic status and exposure to risk factors. For example, parents from poor communities are likely to have

premature babies, who in turn are disproportionately at higher risk of recording poor academic results than those with the same neonatal record from a higher-income background.

In conclusion, if we do not find ways to close the gap between high and low income students, the inequalities will continue to grow for decades. As Reardon (2013) states, “If we do not find ways to reduce the growing inequality in education outcomes, we are in danger of bequeathing our children a society in which the American Dream—the promise that one can rise, through education and hard work, to any position in society—is no longer a reality. Our schools cannot be expected to solve this problem on their own, but they must be part of the solution.” School districts and educators need to help advocate for their students for equitable learning and resources in order for us as a nation to close the gap and help guide betterment for our children for years to come.

References

- Borg, J. R., Borg, M. O., & Stranahan, H. A. (2012). Closing the achievement gap between high-poverty schools and low-poverty schools. *Research in Business and Economics Journal*, 5, 1.
<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.457.2437&rep=rep1&type>
- Crook, S. R., & Evans, G. W. (2014). The role of planning skills in the income–achievement gap. *Child Development*, 85(2), 405-411. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12129>
- Fram, M. S., Miller-Cribbs, J. E., & Van Horn, L. (2007). Poverty, race, and the contexts of achievement: Examining children's educational experiences in the US South. *Social Work*, 52(4), 309-319. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/52.4.309>
- Gordon, M. S., & Cui, M. (2018). The intersection of race and community poverty and its effects on adolescents' academic achievement. *Youth & Society*, 50(7), 947-965.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X16646590>
- Lacour, M., & Tissington, L. D. (2011). The effects of poverty on academic achievement. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 6(7), 522-527.
- Okur, Ş. Ü. K. R. A. N. (2020). Predictors Of Executive Function in Early Childhood: Urban And Rural Poverty. *Unpublished Ph. D. thesis*). Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. <http://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12625460/index.pdf>
- Reardon, S. F. (2013). The widening income achievement gap. *Educational Leadership*, 70(8), 10-16.

https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/LISCenter/2019%20Inequality%20by%20th%20e%20Numbers/Instructor%20Readings/Conwell-2.pdf

Taylor, J. A. (2005). Poverty and student achievement. *Multicultural Education*, 12(4), 53.

<https://search.proquest.com/openview/3c9d66c77504e21370c0b718cf66e27f/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=33246>