Educational Inequities and Achievement Gap: Which Way Forward

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Abstract

This Systematic Literature Review highlights the root causes of inequities and explores the potential solutions to bridge the achievement gap. The study utilized the PRISMA guidelines to select the eligible studies presented in the study. The persistent achievement gap globally is evident in the disparities in educational outcomes and economic opportunities. Prejudice and achievement gaps are found in the same communities, leading to a cycle of inequality and limited social mobility. The outcome negates the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 by the United Nations, which calls for ensuring quality education for all (Gust et al., 2024). Yang and Lee (2022) utilize data from PISA 2015 to discover that privileged pupils gain academically from excellent teachers significantly more than their less fortunate counterparts. As a result of this plight, this SLR explores the root causes underlying these pervasive inequities. A thorough, rigorous analysis of the extant research aims to elucidate the multifaceted factors - economic, social, cultural, or institutional - contributing to disparities in educational outcomes. The SLR yielded 72 studies with the themes of inequalities, disparities, colonial legacy, impact on the achievement gap, solutions, and bridging the achievement gap. The study implication is the need to re-evaluate and redesign tracking systems to reduce the impact of socioeconomic status on student outcomes. The study implies that policymakers should prioritize equity-focused policies for inequalities.

Keywords: Achievement Gap, Bridging Achievement Gap, Critical Race Theory, Inequities, Socioeconomic Status

Introduction

The persistent achievement gap globally is evident in the disparities in educational outcomes and economic opportunities among various demographic groups. It is the discrepancy in academic performance between minorities, immigrants, and underprivileged students (Hernandez, 2022). The existence of persistent and pervasive differences in school achievement between groups has been repeatedly confirmed by extensive research (McFarland et al., 2018; Reardon, 2018; Schnell & Azzolini, 2015). For instance, the achievement gap is the most discussed topic in American education as the phrase describes the differences in standardized test results between White and Black pupils, White and Latina/o students, and White students who have just immigrated (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Furthermore, the Achievement gap is a recognized term used across the political spectrum to describe social injustice and societal inequities (Clark, 2013; Harris & Herrington, 2006). Given the importance of this topic, there is a clear need for further research on the achievement gap between students from higher and lower economic backgrounds (Artiles, 2011; Hanushek et al., 2019), making the work in this area crucial In 2007, Fanning asked, 'Is there a global achievement gap?' (p. 28) Moreover, "If we broaden our understanding by slightly reframing our view of the achievement gap to include the learning gap between children who are part of the privileged, dominant culture and children who are in the minority culture and are not privileged, will we find an achievement gap in other parts of the world?" (p. 28). "If we believe that an inequitable distribution of learning reflects discrimination, then will we find that prejudice and achievement gaps are found in the same communities? Is there any part of the world where no one has prejudices, and no one acts on these prejudices in ways that are discriminatory towards children? " (p. 28).

These fundamental questions were reflected in a UNESCO report highlighting education inequality as a global issue, with slow progress toward achieving education for all. Disparities in access to quality education and completion rates persist, notably between higher- and low-income high schools (Gust et al., 2024). According to a National Student Clearinghouse Research Center report, students from higher-income high schools were 25% more likely to enroll in college immediately after high school. They had higher return and completion rates compared to students from low-income schools. Completion rates also varied by school type, with urban schools at 36%, rural schools at 41%, and suburban schools at 47%. These disparities negate Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which calls for quality education for all (Gust et al., 2024). Thus, the significance of addressing the educational achievement gap, particularly race and implicit bias, and ensuring education as a right for all children cannot be overlooked (Howard, 2019). The achievement gap is a complex issue with diverse interpretations. Ladson-Billings (2006) views it as an "education debt" shaped by historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral factors. Wagner (2010) identifies two gaps: one in the quality of education available to different socioeconomic groups and the resulting outcome discrepancy. Sayed et al. (2003) emphasize the complexity of understanding achievement gaps and social injustice due to varying perspectives. Artiles (2021) highlight that efforts to improve education and provide equal opportunities have been influenced by flawed assumptions about race and ability differences stemming from ideologies of meritocracy and individualism.

Furthermore, other scholars highlighted the crucial issue of the achievement gap in their studies. Yang and Lee (2022) found that privileged students benefit more academically from excellent teachers than their less fortunate counterparts. Ladson-Billings (2016) describes the achievement gap as an "education debt," disproportionately affecting children from low-

income and racialized backgrounds. Hanushek et al. (2022) suggest that systemic inequities perpetuate these disparities. Shukla et al. (2022) also highlights how biased curriculum design and limited resources in low-income schools exacerbate the issue. Mills and Read (2019) emphasize the importance of equity policies to ensure all students have access to high-quality facilities and resources. Hodgkinson et al. (2019) demonstrate the role of social mobility in closing the achievement gap. Thus, addressing the root causes of the achievement gap and implementing targeted solutions can create a more just and equitable educational system.

Considering the above perspectives on achievement gap, this systematic literature explores the root causes underlying these pervasive inequities. A thorough, rigorous analysis of the extant research aims to elucidate the multifaceted factors - economic, social, cultural, or institutional - contributing to disparities in educational outcomes. Importantly, this review will explore potential evidence-based interventions and policy approaches that promise to bridge these gaps and foster more equitable access. Through a comprehensive, scholarly synthesis of the literature, this work seeks to advance our understanding of this critical challenge and inform efforts to create more inclusive, supportive educational environments that enable the success of all students.

- The following research questions guided this study:
    - What are the root causes underlying educational inequities and achievement gaps, and what potential solutions could help bridge these gaps?
    - How do the disparities in educational attainment perpetuate cycles of poverty, limit opportunities for upward social mobility, and contribute to broader social inequities?
    - In what ways do issues of multicultural education impact achievement gaps?
    - What specific practices and interventions have been effective in facilitating the closure of achievement gaps and promoting more significant educational equity?

Background

Achievement gaps refer to continuous differences in test scores or other results, forming the basis for structural and educational policy reforms (Shukla et al., 2022). Rooted in the legacy of colonialism, racism, and slavery, achievement gaps perpetuate structural inequalities in the United States (Wright, 2022). Critical race theory has showcased that racism is a systemic oppression embedded in society, perpetuating the exploitation and marginalization of communities of color (Kumasi, 2015). According to a Pew Research Center Report (2019), more than 4 in 10 Americans believe that the country still needs to work on providing black people with equal rights compared to whites. Gillborn (2023) used critical race theory to analyze black-and-white inequalities and identified that misleading statements are used to create a false impression of rapid progress in minority student achievement, obscuring the persistent nature of racial inequality. In addition, colonialist and racist ideologies continue to influence the distribution of resources, opportunities, and power, resulting in systemic inequalities affecting educational outcomes and employment opportunities (Gillborn, 2005).

Furthermore, it has been illustrated that white powerholders and policymakers intentionally perpetuate the pattern of racial advantage and inequality structured in domination (Gillborn, 2005). Huang, F. L. (2018) demonstrated that black students are 3.8 times more likely to be suspended than white students, even when controlling for factors like socioeconomic status

and behavior. To create a more just and equitable society, it is necessary to address the historical and intergenerational effects of colonialism and slavery. Researchers must consider how power, race, culture, and socioeconomic status influence educational practices globally. Hanushek et al. (2022) identified trends in socioeconomic status inequalities reflected in the accomplishments of U.S. student cohorts born between 1961 and 2001. Addressing root causes, historical and systemic factors, socioeconomic status, and potential solutions are essential to bridge the achievement gap.

Methods

The systematic literature review under this section adhered to the uniform methodology. For carrying out and documenting the investigation, the systematic review was based on PRISMA criteria (Moher et al., 2009). The recommendations include a checklist of elements that must be included in the review to improve reliability and openness.

Study's Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria are:
a) Studies exploring systemic inequalities such as racism, colonialism, and intersectional forms of oppression on educational outcomes
b) Impact of systemic inequalities on low-income students
c) Historical and intergenerational effects of colonialism, slavery, and racism on the achievement gap
d) Studies incorporating critical race theory.

The exclusion criteria are:
a) Studies that do not acknowledge the impact of systemic inequalities on educational outcomes, economic opportunities, and the achievement gap
b) Studies not published in English.

Search Strategy

I conducted a systematic review using various search databases and terms related to education inequality, racism, colonialism, critical race theory, education policy, and student demographics. I screened and included relevant studies after refining the search using Boolean algebra commands.

Risk of Bias

The included studies show a moderate to high risk of bias due to selection, performance, and detection bias. This limits the strength of the evidence, and caution is advised when applying the findings to real-world settings or broader populations. The risk of bias assessment indicates a moderate to high risk, with the most significant concerns being selection bias (31%), performance bias (36%), and detection bias (33%).

Study Selection and Data Extraction

PRISMA guidelines made post-identification of research and the removal of duplicates easier. The researcher produced the current review articles by doing full-text screening utilizing eligibility criteria and according to screening parameters for titles and abstracts.

Data extraction for articles eligible for the qualitative synthesis was done by tabulating data using attributes that indicated and reflected article inclusion. From the previous systematic analysis, 248 were found in online searches after duplicates. After reviewing the abstracts and conclusions, 72 publications were eligible and chosen based on the prior criteria backed up by four reports. The PRISMA 2020 guidelines were further integrated to update the number of studies included in this review.
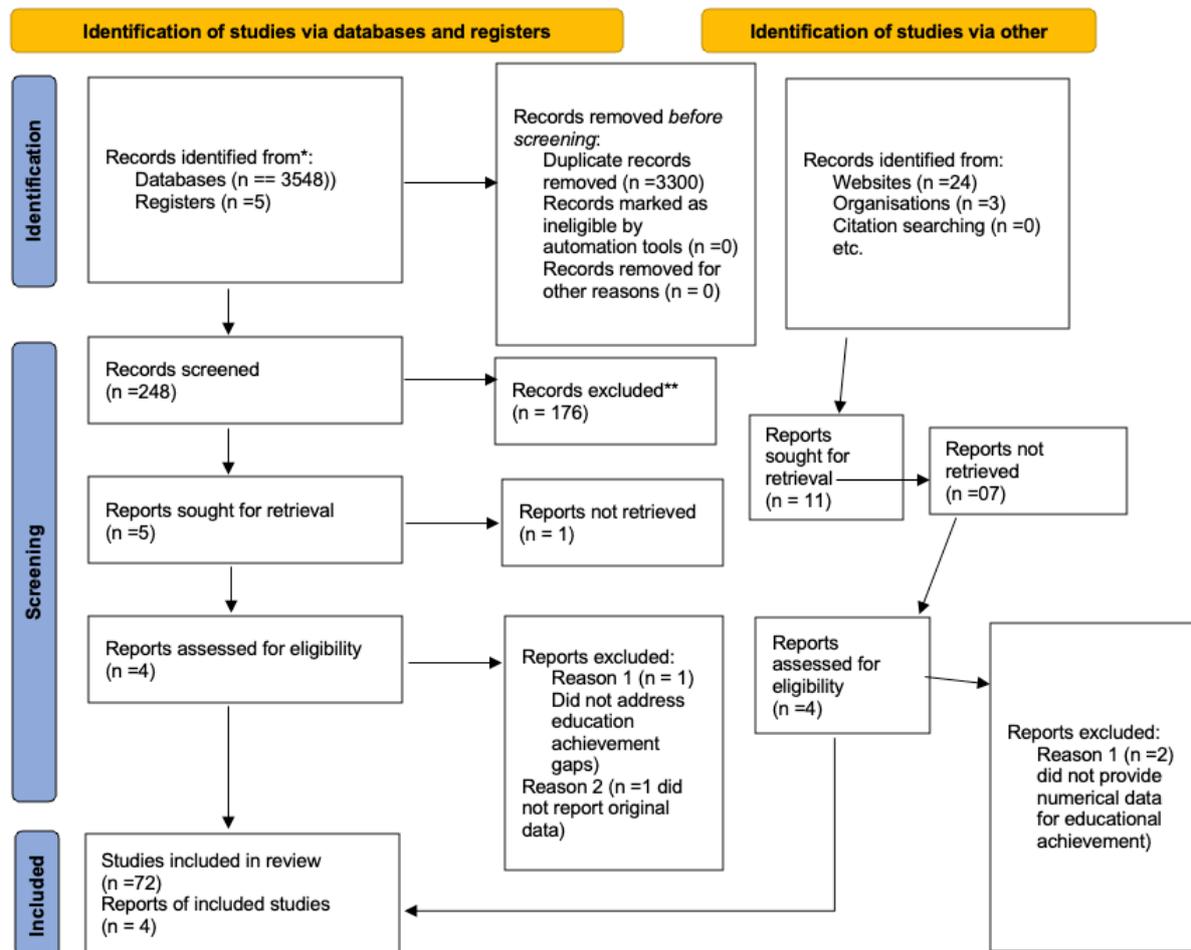

Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

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Findings

Root Causes of Achievement Gap

Inequalities

The studies highlighted the widespread use of attainment and achievement metrics in evaluating education quality. However, these metrics may oversimplify educational inequality and fail to capture essential aspects such as critical thinking and social-emotional learning. These shortcomings perpetuate a narrow understanding of educational success, disregarding broader social and economic factors influencing student outcomes. Criticism

exists regarding the educational system's contribution to global disparities. This issue affects at least two-thirds of young people worldwide, emphasizing the universal nature of the problem. Also, Capitalism's impact on standardized testing results in a narrow focus on critical thinking in education, influencing what is taught, how it is taught, and access to education. This leads to educational inequality, particularly for disadvantaged backgrounds (Irwin et al., 2023; Gust et al., 2024; Giroux, 2020). Racial disparities in education contribute to the academic achievement gap and are driven by competition within the system, suggesting structural bias. Educational equity is essential for America's future, but income distribution and poverty directly affect education input and perpetuate disadvantage (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Haveman & Wolfe, 1994; Howard, 2019). The report by Langthaler and Malik (2023) emphasized the persistent issue of educational inequalities, particularly the lack of prioritization of desegregation policies. School segregation perpetuates educational inequalities and perpetuates the academic achievement gap. The report highlighted the urgent need for policymakers and educators to address the issue of school segregation and develop targeted interventions for more inclusive and equitable education systems.

Considering the above, the educational disparities are deeply rooted in socioeconomic inequalities, as highlighted by Jotterand (2018). The author notes that poverty is a significant predictor of low academic achievement, as students from low-income backgrounds often face numerous barriers to success. These barriers can include limited access to quality educational resources, such as textbooks, technology, tutoring, and inadequate nutrition, healthcare, and housing. Additionally, students from low-income families may experience stress and trauma due to economic insecurity, which can negatively impact their mental and emotional well-being and ability to focus on their studies. Furthermore, poverty can also perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage, as students who do not have access to quality education may struggle to secure better-paying jobs and escape poverty later in life. As a result, the achievement gap between students from high-income and low-income families continues to widen, with students from low-income backgrounds being disproportionately represented among those who drop out of school or struggle academically. The education system's structural inequalities result in disproportionate disciplinary measures for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, affecting their education equity. Gregory et al. (2010) illustrated its impact on academic performance for students of color, while Carter et al. (2017) showed how race influences disciplinary measures within educational institutions, as seen in Brown v. Board of Education. Addressing these racial disparities and rectifying institutional policy inequities is crucial.

Colonial Legacy

This theme was supported by fifteen studies (n=15). Colonialism has had a lasting impact on the education systems, curricula, and pedagogies of these countries, perpetuating cultural imperialism and dominance. The colonial legacy continues to profoundly impact academic achievement, perpetuating the achievement gap between white and African American students. According to Love (2004), the colonial yoke of racism and oppression has been perpetuated through Critical Race Theory. This theory suggests that the concept of white intellectual superiority and African American intellectual inferiority has been deeply ingrained in Western society, resulting in a widening of the achievement gap. The colonial legacy's effects on education include the lack of representation and validation of African American culture and experiences in curriculum materials, as well as the historical erasure of African American contributions to knowledge and innovation (Wiggan, 2007). This has

perpetuated systemic inequalities in education, such as underfunding of schools in predominantly African American communities and the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates of African American students. As a result, African American students face significant barriers to academic success and limited opportunities for social mobility. Ladson-Billings (2019) contended that the education debt is impacted by historical and ongoing structural injustices, including poverty, racism, and segregation, resulting in poor quality education and limited resources for marginalized communities. Maldonado-Torres (2007) also argued that coloniality is a persistent and ongoing structure perpetuating dominance and noted that the colonial legacy has a persistent impact on the representation and validation of Indigenous cultures, histories, and identities in education.

This is further exacerbated by unequal powers in today's world, which continue to reinforce the colonial era modeling approach in educational systems. The legacy of colonialism perpetuates neocolonialism and racial/ethnic disparities, leading to ongoing structural injustices. Resolving these injustices requires decolonizing educational leadership and going beyond policy and structural shifts to include Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. (Abu-Shoman, 2013; Lee, 2002; Regmi, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2019; Jaramillo, 2013; Tuck and Yang, 2018). Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that decolonization involves more than just incorporating diversity and inclusivity into education. It requires dismantling colonial and imperial structures that have shaped education. They assert that decolonization demands a fundamental transformation of the education system, encompassing the curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional structures. This transformation should be grounded in a critical understanding of the ongoing impacts of colonialism and imperialism on marginalized communities. Including diverse perspectives is insufficient; true decolonization necessitates disrupting power structures perpetuating inequality and marginalization. This process involves acknowledging and appreciating Indigenous knowledge, challenging dominant narratives, and combatting stereotypes and racism. The dominance of Western epistemology characterizes coloniality, prioritizing Western knowledge over indigenous knowledge. This has led to the marginalization of indigenous cultures and perpetuated power imbalances, (Mignolo 2018).

Disparities

Reardon (2018) emphasized the widening achievement gap between children from high- and low-income families born in 2001 compared to those born 25 years earlier. The impact of geographical location on academic achievement was highlighted, especially for Black students in the United States (Morris & Monroe, 2009). The southern region of the U.S. has historically faced neglect and underinvestment in education, leading to a widening academic achievement gap for Black students, perpetuating inequalities due to historical segregation and systemic racism. The achievement gap disproportionately affects students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and immigrant families, perpetuating inequality in education (Hanushek et al., 2019). This gap is not fully explained by parents' educational level (Schnell & Azzolini, 2015). Differences in work and the long-term consequences of unequal learning experiences also contribute to this disparity (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Furthermore, ethno-racial disparities within schools have far-reaching impacts on academic achievement and schooling outcomes (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Cultural and ethnic differences among student groups can significantly affect academic achievement and schooling outcomes, impacting native and immigrant students (Berkowitz et al., 2017).

Thus, addressing these disparities is vital to ensuring that all students have an equal chance to succeed academically and achieve their full potential (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Teachers' lack of recognition of students with migration backgrounds, particularly their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, can significantly exacerbate the achievement gap (Vieluf & Sauerwein, 2024). Similarly, Salmela-Aro and Chmielewski (2019) found that students from low-income backgrounds tend to perform worse than their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, with significant gaps in reading and mathematics. To address this issue, culturally sensitive education and support for teachers working with diverse student populations are essential (Kozleski & Waitoller, 2017).

Achievement Gap

Sixteen studies supported the theme that the achievement gap profoundly impacts student engagement, decreasing motivation and interest in learning. The National Center for Education Statistics analysis of NAEP data sheds light on the magnitude and trends of these gaps over time, helping to identify potential causes (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d). The data reveals that despite addressing them, these gaps have persisted and even widened in some cases. The achievement gap is described as an "education debt," disproportionately impacting children from low-income and racialized backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2016). McFarland et al. (2018) state that the persistent gap between racial and ethnic groups has resulted in declining student engagement. Addressing the achievement' gap is crucial to promoting student engagement and motivation and achieving educational equity. Additionally, the gender gap in education persists in some regions, perpetuating existing inequalities (Friedman et al., 2020). The increasing economic segregation of schools perpetuates the achievement gap, impacting diversity and representation in the student body (Reardon & Owens, 2014). This segregation exacerbates the achievement gap, mainly affecting students from low-income backgrounds (Giroux, 2020). These persistent issues highlight the systemic inequalities that must be addressed for a more equitable society. The achievement gap is exacerbated by poverty, which significantly impacts students' academic achievement (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Poverty can limit students' access to resources and opportunities, affecting their ability to succeed in school (Autor, 2014). Addressing poverty is crucial in reducing the achievement gap and ensuring that all students can succeed. The achievement gap is reflected in persistent racial and economic disparities in labor market outcomes, with race being a significant factor. Unfair disciplinary practices and other factors contribute to these disparities. Quality teaching can help address the achievement gap and reduce racial and economic disparities (Carneiro et al., 2005; Chetty et al., 2012; Okonofua et al., 2016; Wiggan, 2007). The achievement gap reflects persistent racial and economic disparities and systemic issues in education. Hanushek et al. (2012) found that while some countries and the United States have improved student achievement, others have stagnated or experienced declines, indicating more work is needed. Harris and Herrington (2006) also highlighted the unintended consequences of accountability standards and policies, which can narrow curricula and increase testing pressure, widening the achievement gap.

Cycles of poverty limit opportunities for upward mobility and contribute to social inequity, especially for disadvantaged students in an overly testing-focused education system. Lavrijsen and Nicaise's (2015) findings indicated that educational tracking exacerbates social inequalities in reading achievement, with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds being more likely to be assigned to lower tracks and performing poorly in reading. The authors also found that the negative effect of tracking social inequalities is more pronounced among boys than girls. Artiles (2011) concluded that an interdisciplinary approach is

necessary to understand and address systems shaped by racialized beliefs and stereotypes, perpetuate educational inequalities and marginalize students and that educators, policymakers, and researchers must work together to develop more inclusive and equitable educational practices that recognize the complex interactions between race, culture, and ability.

Solutions and Bridging Achievement Gap

The theme was explored through eighteen studies (n=18), discussing interventions that address the achievement gap and promote educational equity. Wang and Eccles (2012) emphasized the impact of social support from teachers, parents, and peers on student school engagement. Meanwhile, Schnell et al. (2015) highlighted the significance of family involvement in predicting educational success. Both studies emphasized the positive influence of support systems on student engagement and the correlation between higher family involvement and better educational outcomes. Heckman et al. (2010) found that the High Scope Perry Preschool Program positively affected participants, showing the importance of investing in early childhood education to improve outcomes and reduce social inequality.

Furthermore, in the study by Demie and Mclean (2015), the authors identified ways to narrow the academic achievement gap by deploying the best teachers and supporting free school meals for students from disadvantaged homes. They suggested that deploying the best teachers and providing free meals could bridge the academic achievement gap globally. By identifying and developing high-quality teachers through professional development, mentorship, and incentives, students can receive instruction from experienced educators who can effectively address their learning needs. This can lead to increased attendance, participation, and engagement. When combined with systematic changes to transform educational policies and practices, such as addressing systemic inequalities and resource disparities, a positive impact on educational equity and student outcomes can be seen. Oakes and Lipton (2007) argue for such changes to enhance school social justice and equity.

Additionally, positive changes in poverty level and income distribution could positively affect students' academic performance, as Dumais-Desrosiers and Janosz (2019) pointed out in their meta-analytic synthesis of the relationship between socioeconomic status and achievement. "Cultivating equity literacy among educators is essential for creating equitable and just educational environments that support the success of all students (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). This involves developing inclusive pedagogies, fostering student engagement, and promoting social mobility to close the achievement gap (Harper & Quaye, 2015; Hodgkinson et al., 2019; Mills & Read, 2019). By implementing these strategies, educators, administrators, and policymakers can enhance educational opportunities and outcomes for all learners.

According to Strietholt et al. (2018), educational policies should address socioeconomic inequality that significantly impacts student performance. The current policies are insufficient in addressing this issue and may not be sufficient to reverse the trend. The authors suggest that policies must go beyond rhetoric and address systemic barriers and biases perpetuating inequality (Strietholt et al., 2018). Moreover, Strietholt et al. (2018) study suggested that current policies may even exacerbate existing inequalities, as they often focus on individual-level solutions, such as teacher training or parental involvement, rather than addressing the broader structural issues. This approach may inadvertently reinforce existing power dynamics

and reinforce inequalities. To effectively address the decline in academic performance and achievement gap, educational policies must prioritize a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of socioeconomic inequality (Wang & Eccles, 2012). This includes recognizing the interplay between individual, family, and societal factors that contribute to unequal opportunities and outcomes (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Along the same line, a study by Mardon and Ahmed (2023) stated that learning inequity in the Indigenous population is described, and the rationale and relevant approaches to education, including prioritizing a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of socioeconomic inequality for Indigenous people, are also stressed. Policies must also acknowledge the role of systemic barriers, such as lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure, and discriminatory practices, in perpetuating inequality. It can, therefore, be argued that closing the achievement gap can be viewed as a social justice issue as it entails not only attending to the academic learning needs of students but also addressing the social and economic causes that contribute to inequality. Carter and Welner (2013), in their work, stressed the principle of equity in education and stated that the solution to this problem can be sought in programs and mechanisms that are aimed at providing equal education to all.

Furthermore, educational policies must prioritize a more equitable distribution of resources, including funding, staffing, and facilities. This may involve re-examining budget allocations and redistributing resources to schools serving low-SES communities. Policies must address teacher recruitment and retention issues in these communities and provide targeted support for students from low-SES backgrounds (Heckman et al., 2010). Ultimately, educational policies must prioritize a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the complexity of socioeconomic inequality and addresses its root causes. By doing so, policymakers can work towards creating a more equitable education system that promotes student performance and achievement for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Inclusive education practices foster education equity. Loreman et al. (2005) provided practical strategies for educators to promote inclusive education, including developing inclusive curricula, using inclusive teaching practices, and fostering positive student relationships. Therefore, using inclusive teaching practices and fostering positive relationships with students can create more inclusive and supportive educational environments. Portes (2008) advocated for a cultural approach recognizing the importance of students' cultural backgrounds and experiences in shaping their educational experiences and outcomes. Making education inclusive, the cultural approach recognizes the importance of students' cultural backgrounds and experiences can help create more inclusive and equitable educational environments. Culturally inclusive education practices through culturally responsive pedagogy will improve educational outcomes and reduce the academic achievement gap. Gay (2018) indicated how cultural differences can impact students' experiences and outcomes and provides strategies for teachers to develop cultural competence, build relationships with students, and design culturally responsive lessons. Clark (2013) highlighted the importance of addressing systemic barriers through promoting inclusive teaching practices and fostering a sense of belonging among students. In this regard, closing the achievement gap and eliminating educational disparities are complex and multifaceted social issues. Other strategies suggested by a case study conducted by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) stressed teacher professional development as one that focuses on enabling teachers to cope with students' differences.

In addition, it is important to develop a cultural understanding reflective of culturally responsive and inclusive teaching practices. Grant (2005) highlighted the need for teachers to

develop a deep understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds, including their values, beliefs, and traditions, and to use this knowledge to inform their teaching practices. Saint-Hilaire (2014) emphasized the need for teachers to move beyond surface-level awareness of diversity and instead develop a deeper understanding of their students' cultural experiences, values, and beliefs. As Lee and Buxton (2020) and Au and Ferrare (2015) highlight, culturally responsive teaching is vital to embracing diverse students' cultural content in the curriculum and teaching. As a result, a deeper appreciation of diversity improves education outcomes, thereby reducing the achievement gap. Therefore, Ameny-Dixon (2004) encouraged incorporating diverse perspectives, experiences, and knowledge into the curriculum to promote cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and critical thinking based on democratic principles that upheld cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an interconnected world based on multicultural education. Multicultural education requires teachers to develop a deep understanding and appreciation of their students' cultural backgrounds, as emphasized by Grant (2005) and Saint-Hilaire (2014). This cultural competence enables teachers to design and implement culturally responsive teaching practices, as outlined by Gay (2018). By integrating a multicultural education framework, educators create equitable learning environments.

Conclusion

This SLR highlights the root causes of inequities and explores potential solutions to bridge the achievement gap. This systematic literature review was based on 72 studies and four reports that answered the question and provided insights on the achievement gap, educational inequalities, disparities, and impact on the achievement gap. The study utilized a systematic review methodology whose search terms on databases depended on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The emerging themes were discussed in-depth and depended on the publications within the theme. The themes that emerged were inequalities were answered with thirteen (n=13) studies, colonial legacy (n=15), disparities (n=14), impact on achievement gap (n=16) as well as solutions and bridging achievement gap with eighteen (n=18) studies. The methodology's strengths are based on the method's comprehensive nature. This systematic review method identifies all relevant studies regardless of publication status. Through such efforts, the evaluation became more comprehensive, reducing the risk of bias. As a result of its nature, it is reproducible because it can be replicated. On the other hand, its limitations were due to the limited availability of evidence as sources. As a result, it limits the scope as well as conclusions. The study implication is the need to re-evaluate and redesign tracking systems to reduce the impact of socioeconomic status on student outcomes. The study implies that policymakers should prioritize equity-focused policies for social inequalities.

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