

The Effect of Teachers' Cultural Stereotypical Belief on Academic Achievement among African American Males

Dr. Talitha Lewis¹, Dr. Lillian Poats² & Dr. Ronnie Davis³

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of teacher's cultural stereotypical beliefs on the academic performance of African-American males. The population for this study consisted of 96 middle school reading and mathematics teachers from middle schools located in urban school districts in Southern and Midwest sections of the United States. A questionnaire was developed to gather the data. The data revealed any attempt to predict the reading achievement scores of African-American male students should include teachers' cultural stereotypical beliefs components of blaming the victim, oppression, pseudoscience, temporal changes, educability, and heterodoxy. These factors account for 25 percent of the variance in reading achievement scores.

Keywords: Cultural Stereotypical Beliefs; Academic Performance of African American Males

1. Introduction

Many social, economic, and academic problems continue to face the African- American male in the public school arena. Often these problems lead to a negative outlook on life due to racism, frustration, despair, and dropping out of school (Rothstein, 2004) Each school year, African American students are assigned a new class schedule, lockers, textbooks, teachers, and, unfortunately, too often they are assigned cultural stereotypes According to Irizarry (2003), teachers' cultural beliefs as they relate to the academic success of African-American males may be the root of the problem. These beliefs are based on the deficit theory model, which assumes that cultural, individual, and environmental factors such as socio- economic status and motivation play decisive roles in the academic success of students. Many educators, particularly non-African American, hold African- American males accountable for their lack of academic success. Teachers often assume that lack of motivation along with other individual and environmental factors are major reasons why black male students are viewed as being incapable of achieving academic success. Thus, the cultural deficit belief model fails to examine how institutional variables like school, culture and teacher expectations impact the academic achievement of African-American male students (Irizarry, 2003)

Student achievement, particularly related to African American-males, has been an important topic for many school administrators, public school stakeholders and teacher- training institutions According to Strayhom (2008), African-American males are often victims of negative stereotypes, such as being considered "lazy", "ineducable," or "dangerous" which reinforces disparity.

¹ Adjunct Professor, Prairie View A & M, FM 1098 Rd & University Dr., Prairie View, Texas 77446, USA.

² Dean, College of Education at Texas Southern University, Texas Southern University, College of Education, 3100 Cleburne St. Houston, Texas 77004, USA.

³ Visiting Professor at Texas Southern University, Texas Southern University, College of Education, 3100 Cleburne St. Houston, Texas 77004, USA.

Dr Pedro A. Noguera (2003), a Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, points out that it is not surprising that there is a connection between the educational performance of African-American males and the hardships they endure within the larger society. He states that in many school districts throughout the United States, African-American males are more likely than other groups to be suspended and expelled from school. Black males are more likely to be classified as mentally retarded or suffering from a learning disability and placed in special education classes. According to Noguera (2003),

African- American males are more likely to be absent from advanced placement and honors courses. In contrast to most other groups where males commonly perform at higher levels in math and science related courses, the reverse is true for African-American males.

Kunjufu (2011) described in his book, *Understanding Black Males Learning Styles*, that culture is a lifestyle and everyone has his own lifestyle. Moreover, many white and black middle class individuals tend to hold cultural stereotypes that if individuals do not have white middle class values, they are culturally deprived. Therefore, some educators perceive students as being culturally deprived when they do not come from middle income homes, with two parents who are college educated and use standard English. Consequently, according to the cultural deficit model, the problem is with the student, not the teachers, curriculum, pedagogy, or administration (Kunjufu, 2011)

Steele (1997) opined that a large share of white teachers lack the necessary knowledge regarding the culture of African-American students. Because of this lack of knowledge, African-American males face negative cultural stereotypes that portray members of their ethnic group as less intelligent than their European-American student peers. Simply stated, many teachers are not prepared to teach African-American students, due to the fact that they have low expectations of them (Au, 2011). Conversely, this lack of preparation may impact the African-American students' academic achievement.

Delpit (1995) contends that many teachers judge their students by making assumptions about what they can do based on stereotypes. He posited that if teachers can obtain knowledge of their students' lives outside the realms of the classroom, then they would have a better understanding of the student's strengths. Therefore, teachers who have insight into the typical African- American male's environment would then not participate in "teaching down" and "dumbing down" the curriculum (Delpit, 1995).

The attitudes and beliefs that teachers have about themselves and others are the framework for their classroom judgments and decisions. In addressing the diversity in schools: Culturally responsive pedagogy, Villegas and Lucas (2002)) state that teacher self-reflection is an important factor in the instructional expectation they have for the academic achievement of African-American male students. Teachers should examine their attitudes as well as their values as they relate to the classroom environment; many of the attitudes are based on stereotypical beliefs. Self-reflection enables teachers to examine their biases and prejudices that relate to teacher expectation and the academic success of African-American male students. Unfortunately, if teachers have limited or negative experiences with other cultures, it can influence their students' opportunity to learn (Milner, 2005). Many educators advocate the use of multicultural programs in U.S. school systems due to the cultural mismatch and cultural discontinuity that occurs (Banks & McGee, 2009; Gay, 2000, Gorski, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). Researchers believe that the multicultural programs allow teachers to learn more about their students' cultures and prepare them to provide better academic instruction.

Students from racial minorities and poverty-stricken backgrounds have the greatest magnitude of disparities. The disparities in academic performance according to race and economic differences are constantly increasing. Educational policymakers place a great deal of emphasis on at-risk populations. Research indicates that students from racial minorities and poverty- stricken backgrounds have the greatest magnitude of disparities (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Rothstein, 2004). These disparities are rooted in the perceptions of teachers, particularly white teachers, regarding their cultural stereotypical beliefs. With this in mind, policymakers are seeking research-based pedagogy that will assist students from racial minorities and poverty- stricken backgrounds, to develop a stronger academic foundation, such as African-American males. Traditionally, urban schools are characterized as serving children from low income backgrounds. However, poverty is not the only component that limits academic achievement. When minority students from low socio-economic homes are compared to their non-minority peers with the same income and amount of schooling, the disparity between academic performances narrows only slightly (Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

Even though minority students, such as African-American males, come to school with academic and motivational issues, when they are faced with teachers who already have stereotypical beliefs about their abilities, they are certain to meet the teacher's low expectations, and these students probably will not do well academically. The limited amount of empirical research concerning teachers' perceived cultural stereotypical beliefs reveals that this phenomenon has had a negative effect on the academic behavior of African-American male students (Diamond, Randolph and Spillane (2004); Figlio (2004); and Alvidrez and Weinstein (1999)).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of teacher's cultural stereotypical beliefs on the academic performance of African-American males. Specifically, this study was concerned with the effects of the six components of teachers' cultural stereotypical beliefs (blaming the victim, oppression, pseudoscience, temporal change, educability, and heterodoxy) on the classroom performance of African-American males in reading and mathematics. Thus, it was hypothesized that six components of teachers' cultural stereotypical beliefs did have some predictive power regarding the academic performance of African-American males in reading and mathematics.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The present investigation was based on the deficit thinking theory. The deficit thinking theory is a micro level of analysis emphasizing that students who fail in schools do so principally because of internal deficits or deficiencies (Valencia, 1997). Every educator involved with the school has a stake in the welfare of the students in the classroom, particularly the teacher. Thus, the way the teacher perceives the deficiencies of any group of students has a profound effect on how these students will perform academically within the classroom.

The deficit thinking theory asserts those teachers' low expectations of poor academically students have an impact on their educational success. The relevancy of the deficit thinking theory to this study is that it blame the students and their environment for their academic shortcomings in the classroom. Additionally, Valencia (1997) opined that deficit thinking theory further asserted that students of color have intellectual deficiencies or handicaps resulting from their family structure, linguistic background, and culture.

In reference to this study, the application of the deficit thinking theory would stress that teachers especially those who hold cultural stereotypical beliefs would have favorable perceptions regarding the academic deficiencies of African American male students. Therefore, it is assumed that these perceptions are made by teachers regardless of their social categories.

2. Methodology

2.1 Type of Research Design

A correlational research design was used in this study. This type of research design examined the relationship between and among variables. Additionally, the correlational design ascertained the predictability among two or more variables (Gay et al, 2002).

2.2 Population and Research Setting

The population of this study consisted of 96 middle school reading and mathematics teachers from middle schools located in urban school districts in Southern and Midwest sections of the United States. School District A was part of nine regions and enrolled approximately one million students. School District B consisted of five independent school districts where most of districts are located in the suburban or semi-rural areas surrounding the metropolitan area.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was developed since there was no standardized instrument appropriate for the particular purpose of this study. The procedures employed in developing the instrument were as follows:

1. Cultural stereotypical beliefs of middle school teachers were defined, and items were developed to measure them. These categories were constructed after a thorough review of the related literature.

2. The instrument was submitted to a group of educators and researchers on an individual basis for suggestions and recommendations. This assisted in establishing a degree of validity for the instrument.
3. The pilot study was conducted to aid in deciding whether certain items should be eliminated, added, or altered. Additionally, the pilot study was used to determine an estimation of the reliability for the instrument. For the percent study, an alpha coefficient of .72 was completed for pilot study.

The instrument was divided into three sections. The first section consisted of five (5) socio-demographic items. The second section of the instrument contained eighteen (18) items under the auspices of the six characteristics of the teachers' cultural stereotypical beliefs in the form of a Likert-type scale. The items in this section called for the participants in this study to check one of five fixed-alternative expressions: Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and

Strongly Disagree. Each of the aforementioned expressions was assigned the following weight (scores) for analysis purposes: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The third section of the instrument contained eight non-structured items pertaining to the numerical average grade score in mathematics and reading of middle school students by ethnicity.

2.3 Validity and Reliability

For the purpose of validity, the instrument was given to a group of public school administrators, researchers, and statisticians on an individual basis. They were asked to examine the items (content) of the instrument. The primary reason for this was to determine whether or not the instrument items measured the cultural stereotypical beliefs of middle school teachers. Once the authorities agreed that the questionnaire was a valid instrument for use in this study, a pilot test of the instrument was conducted.

The researcher used the reliability of internal consistency. In order to determine the reliability of internal consistency for the instrument, the Alpha Reliability Coefficient was employed. The final tabulation of data from the study yielded internal consistency reliability coefficients for the following dimensions (subtest) of the investigative instrument and the test as a whole.

- I. Blaming the Victim .73
- II. Oppression .81
- III Pseudoscience .82
- IV. Temporal Changes .66
- V. Educability .77
- VI Heterodoxy .58
- VII Test as a Whole .74

3. Results

Two statistical hypotheses were formulated and tested in this investigation. Hypothesis one stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between the blaming the victim, oppression, pseudoscience, temporal change, educability, and heterodoxy components of middle school teachers' stereotypical beliefs and the reading scores of African-American male students. A standard multiple regression procedure was computed to determine the relationship between the six stereotypical beliefs of middle school teachers and the average reading scores of African-American, male, middle school students. As shown in table 1, a multiple correlation of .503 was computed between six stereotypical beliefs (blaming the victim, oppression, pseudoscience, temporal change, educability and heterodoxy) and the average achievement scores of African-American, male, middle school students.

The above six predictors accounted for 25.3% (adjusted = 20.3%) of the variance in reading scores of African-American, male, middle school students. The relationship between the blaming the victim, oppression, pseudoscience, temporal change, educability, heterodoxy scores and the average reading scores of African-American male middle school students was statistically significant at the .001 level ($F = 5.037$, $df = 6/89$, $p < .001$) Thus, hypothesis one was rejected. However, only the variable blaming the victim contributed independently to the average reading scores of African American male middle school students. The remaining five predictors did not contribute significantly to the reading scores of African-American male middle school students.

Table 1: Standard Regression Results Regarding the Six Predictors of Cultural Stereotypical Beliefs and Reading Academic Achievement Scores

<i>Model</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>
<i>Constant</i>	26.206	11.420			
<i>Blaming the Victim</i>	3.107	.634	.463	4.898	.000***
<i>Oppression</i>	-.249	.927	-.026	-.268	.789
<i>Pseudoscience</i>	1.227	1.007	.127	1.219	.226
<i>Temporal Change</i>	-.129	1.180	-.011	-.109	.913
<i>Educability</i>	.003	.313	.001	.011	.991
<i>Heterodoxy</i>	-.079	.366	-.021	-.217	.829

Note: R = .503; R Square = .253; Adjusted R Square = .203; SE = 18.64; F = 5.037 df = 6/89; p = .000***

***Significant at the .001 level

Moreover, hypothesis two stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between the blaming the victim, oppression, pseudoscience, temporal change, educability, heterodoxy components of middle school teachers' stereotypical beliefs and the mathematics scores of African-American, male, middle school students.

Reported in Table 2, are the regression results concerning the relationship between the six stereotypical beliefs and the average mathematics scores of African-American, male, middle school students. The regression model resulted in a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of .447. The stereotypical beliefs factors together accounted for 20% (adjusted = 14.6%) of the variance in mathematics scores. A statistically significant linear relationship was found to exist between the blaming the victim, oppression, pseudoscience, temporal change, educability, heterodoxy and the average mathematics scores (F = 3.711, df = 6/89, p < .01) of African American male, middle school students at the .01 level. Consequently, hypothesis two was rejected.

Moreover, the pseudoscience (t = 2.47) and temporal change (t = 2.16) components of stereotypical beliefs contributed significantly to the average mathematics scores of African-American male, middle school students.

Table 2: Standard Regression Results Regarding the Six Predictors of Cultural Stereotypical Beliefs and Mathematics Academic Achievement Scores

<i>Model</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>
<i>Constant</i>	34.124	7.112			
<i>Blaming the Victim</i>	.468	.395	.116	1.185	.239
<i>Oppression</i>	-.206	.577	.036	.357	.722
<i>Pseudoscience</i>	1.546	.627	.267	2.465	.016*
<i>Temporal Change</i>	1.586	.735	-.231	2.157	.034*
<i>Educability</i>	.082	.195	.040	.420	.675
<i>Heterodoxy</i>	-.070	.228	-.031	-.306	.761

Note: R = .477; R Square = .200; Adjusted R Square = .146; SE = 11.61; F = 3.711 df = 6/89; p = .002**

*Significant at the .05 level

**Significant at the .01 level

4. Discussion

The most significant findings of the present study is the significant relationship found between teachers' cultural stereotypical beliefs and their students' academic achievement. To be sure, a linear significantly relationship exists between teachers' cultural stereotypical beliefs and the reading and mathematics achievement scores of African-American male public school students. These findings are consistent with those of Oakes (1995), Valencia (1997, 2010), Ford and Grantham (2003). All of the above researchers opined that cultural stereotypical beliefs have a direct effect on the academic achievement of minority students.

Moreover, in the present study, the cultural stereotypical beliefs component of blaming the victim has a direct effect on the reading scores of African-American male students. These findings parallel those of Farkas (2003). Farkas, in his study, concludes that minority students could not succeed academically because a large number of teachers in the public school arena believed that the students are not capable of learning. Thus, these teachers are destined to blame the victim for low academic achievement. A plausible explanation for these findings might be that most teachers focused only on interventions to resolve differences in educational achievement rather than paying attention to the structural changes that need to be made to allow these students to be on equal footing with their non-minority counterparts.

Also, in the current findings, the perceived pseudoscience and temporal change scores of teachers were found to be significant predictors of mathematics scores of African-American male students. These findings are favorable to those of Alvidrez and Weinstein (1999), Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane (2004), Figlio (2004), Pohan and Auguilar (2001), and Love and Kruger (2005). These aforementioned researchers found that the perceptions of teachers which are influenced by the acceptability of symbolic racial stereotypes significantly impact the academic achievement of African-American students, particularly in math and science. A reasonable explanation for these findings might be that most of the teachers in the present study have accepted the weak assumptions associated with deficit thinking as scientific because they have survived in some educational circles over a period of time.

4.1 Implications

The relationship between cultural stereotypical beliefs and the academic achievement of African-American male students in reading and mathematics suggests that some form of policy intervention needs to be implemented by schools to bridge the gap between the traditional view and the multicultural view of the pedagogical process. Public school administrators must ensure that these interventions not only address classroom strategies to enhance the academic performance of minority students, particularly African-American male students but provide professional training for teachers who are not cognizant of diversity populations and environments.

4.2 Recommendations for Further Research

In order to extend the findings of this study, it is recommended that researchers conduct a study which would utilize a large global population. Such a study, if conducted, would provide additional data to explain better the effect of cultural stereotypical beliefs among teachers. Also, design a study that will develop prediction models that will be able to identify those teachers who might bring cultural stereotypical beliefs to the classroom. Finally, conduct a study to determine the impact that multicultural or diversity training would have on the perceptions of teachers toward cultural stereotypical beliefs.

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