

BIBLICAL LITERACY IN A SECULAR WORLD: SECONDARY STUDENTS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF THE INFLUENCE OF BIBLICAL PRACTICES ON  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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Doctor of Education

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by

Ashlei N. Evans

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is first dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is in Him that I live, breath, and have my being (Acts 17:28). Because of Him, I persevered and completed this task despite all the trials and tribulations that attempted to stop me from succeeding. He gave me the patience, endurance, wisdom, knowledge, strength, and favor needed to run and finish this race.

Next, I would also like to dedicate this to all my family, past, present, future, young and old. Being the first generation to pursue a higher level of education, has allowed me to set a higher standard for those in my family who were not afforded the opportunity to pursue education. Specifically, my late parents, Vicki and Freddie Evans Sr. who desired to accomplish many things in life, but time did not allow them to do so. Nonetheless, God used them to sow seeds that are now reaping a harvest through this accomplishment. I also dedicate this to my grandmother, Bertha Gordon, who sacrificed much to raise me after my mother's death. She did not know a lot about education, but she fostered my learning by surrounding me around the word of God whether it was by going to church or through the private school I attended for a short period of time.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to the body of Christ. Many individuals have given up on the effectiveness of the education system, but your prayers have not been forsaken. To the intercessors who pray for our education system, let this be a sign that God's word is still alive and working in the lives of many young and old. Because of your prayers, myself and others who will follow, have been given the opportunity to be the light, voice and ambassadors of change in education.

## ABSTRACT

Evans, Ashlei N., *Biblical literacy in a secular world: Secondary students' perceptions of the influence of Biblical practices on academic achievement*. Doctor of Education (Literacy), December 2017, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this journal-ready dissertation was to examine middle and high school students' perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability) and academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) according to gender, ethnicity, and participation in religiously affiliated activities. More specifically, the first purpose was to examine student perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability), as well as overall academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) among boys and girls in Grades 7-12. A second purpose was to investigate student perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability), as well as overall academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) among five ethnic/racial groups (i.e., Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and more than one ethnicity) of students in Grades 7-12. The third purpose was to explore students' perceptions of the impact the Bible has on their lives. Finally, a fourth purpose was to analyze student perceptions of the relationship between participation in religious affiliated out-of-school activities and academic success, as well as decision-making among students in Grades 7-12.

## **Method**

A correlational research design was used to conduct this quantitative study. Cross sectional survey research was conducted to collect data regarding the participants' demographics (e.g. gender and ethnicity), perceptions, Biblical literacy practices, and participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities. Chi-square tests were run using SPSS to determine Biblical literacy practices, academic performance, and academic success as a function of gender, ethnicity, and participation in religiously affiliated activities.

## **Findings**

Regarding gender, the findings reveal a greater number of girls engage in reading the Bible and participate in religiously affiliated activities in-and-outside of school than boys. More girls indicated they perceive reading the Bible is beneficial to academic performance and academic success more than boys. As it pertains to ethnicity, a statistically significant higher percentage of Black students noted the importance of reading the Bible and its impact on their behavior than other ethnic groups. Asian students had statistically significantly lower percentages when referring to whether the Bible increases their reading ability, its impact on their motivation to succeed, and how they make decisions. In relation to participation in religiously affiliated out- of-school activities and the impact on their personal lives and relationships, there were no statistically significant differences between the grade levels and gender; however, a statistically significant difference was indicated among Black, White, and Hispanic students. Findings with regard to gender are similar to previous research wherein girls are more engaged in reading and perform higher in reading achievement than boys. However,

the findings regarding ethnicity varied. A consistent finding among boys and girls, as well as all ethnic groups was their perception that reading the Bible improves their reading ability. Research conducted reveals that students believe their Biblical literacy practices significantly influences their reading ability, behavior, motivation, decision-making, and personal life.

**KEY WORDS:** Literacy, Biblical literacy, Ethnicity/race, gender, Academic success, Academic performance, Religious activities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I must acknowledge Jesus for giving me the faith, grace, confidence, and direction as I embarked on this journey. There was a point in my life when I was ready to leave education, but He gave me the strength to “rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and constant in prayer” (Romans 12:12). My relationship with Him is the driving force behind everything I do and I am honored to have been chosen by Him to complete this task.

My family, which incorporates both blood and spiritual members. You all have been so understanding and encouraging throughout this whole process. Although some of you never quite understood why this process took so long, many of you continuously prayed for and with me. After being in school for 25 years of my life, as reminded by my brother, it is safe to say that we have reached the final chapter!! I appreciate you all and I hope you will see this as an accomplishment for us all.

All those involved in my educational journey must be honored as well. My whole life has led up to this moment, so I want to thank the leaders and educators who taught me at Ward Elementary, Greene Elementary, Ambassador Christian Academy, Thomas Middle School, Lamar High School, and the University of Houston. The skills you taught me helped me to get to where I am.

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educator for working beyond their challenges to see that students receive the best education possible. I am also grateful for the students who encouraged me as I drew closer and closer to the finish line. Dr. Evans has finally made it!!!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Perhaps one of the oldest and greatest pieces of literature ever written is the Bible. Because of its religious affiliation, educators struggle with understanding how to use the Bible as literature without offending students, parents, and those who are vocal about keeping the Bible out of school; as well as violating the 1st and 14th Amendments. The potential controversy, which may occur by including the Bible in classrooms, is reason for many educators to exclude it as a means of promoting literacy. Due to these concerns, the academic significance of the Bible has been disregarded as an instructional tool to support literacy development. Conversely, many children attend Christian-based schools where the Bible is included in their daily instructional practices.

Research has determined a correlation between students who read the Bible and their academic achievement (Ek, 2008; Glanville, Sikkink, & Hernandez, 2008; Jeynes 2003, 2009, 2010). Although the Bible has a connection with Christianity, its contents go beyond religion and influence various aspects of the Western culture. The Bible links society with scriptures engraved on historical markers and intertwined through significant political and public events. According to Ryken (2014), the Bible has influenced various aspects of the Western culture. He noted multiple historical traditions, monuments, and landmarks influenced by the Bible or which incorporated some aspect of the Bible. For instance, the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia is inscribed with the Bible verse, Leviticus 25:10, which reads, “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.” Additionally, he reiterated how the presidents of the United States take an oath of office at their inauguration and place their left hand on the Bible. When Martin Luther

King Jr. gave his, “I Have a Dream” speech, he quoted the scripture, Amos 5:24, “We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.” Ryken (2014) also mentioned that when American pioneers traveled they often carried their Bible and works by William Shakespeare. Within Ryken’s article, he quoted former Yale University professor of theology, George Lindbeck. Linkbeck (1989) said the following:

Its stories, images, conceptual patterns, and turns of phrase permeated the culture from top to bottom. This was true even for illiterates and those who did not go to church, for knowledge of the Bible was transmitted not only directly by its reading, hearing, and ritual enactment, but also indirectly by an interwoven net of intellectual, literary, artistic, folkloric, and proverbial traditions... There was a time when every educated person, no matter how professedly unbelieving or secular, knew the actual text from Genesis to Revelation... (p. 38)

Educators, students, and parents need to know the role the Bible has played in Western culture and the effect it can have when used as a learning tool academically.

### **Research Philosophical Stance and Problem Statement**

Biblical literacy has played an extensive role in promoting literacy; therefore, it might support academic achievement (Glanville, Sikkink, & Hernandez, 2008; Jeynes, 2009, 2010). For some students, Biblical literacy is a significant part of their lives outside of school; however, it is often excluded from their day-to-day literacy studies in school (Skerrett, 2013). In this study, the researcher examined students’ perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy and academic performance and reading ability with a focus on gender and ethnicity, as well as evaluating the perceptions of the relationship

between religious affiliated activities and academic success and their personal lives. I applied the post positivism stance for my study. The post positivism stance is widely used by researchers seeking to understand “the effects or outcomes of a certain human action, behavior, experience, or intervention” (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016, p. 53). Much of the literature reviewed included more quantitative findings, which strengthened this study by supporting or refuting theories connected to this study. Because this study analyzed the perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy and academic performance, reading ability, academic success, and decision-making, the post positivism theory was the best way for me to objectively research this topic, analyze data, and report the findings from an unbiased perspective. Upon completing this study, I was able to determine students’ perceptions of Biblical literacy as a factor in student achievement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this journal-ready dissertation was to examine middle and high school students’ perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices, academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability), and academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) according to gender, ethnicity, and participation in religiously affiliated activities. More specifically, the first purpose was to examine student perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability), as well as overall academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) among boys and girls in Grades 7-12. A second purpose was to investigate student perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability), as well as overall academic success

(i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) among five different ethnic/racial groups (i.e., Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and more than one ethnicity) of students in Grades 7-12. The third purpose was to explore students' perceptions of the impact the Bible has on their lives. Finally, a fourth purpose was to analyze student perceptions of the relationship between participation in religious affiliated out-of-school activities and academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making), as well as the impact it has on the personal life of students in Grades 7-12.

### **Significance of the Study**

Biblical literacy has affected the lives of Christians for thousands of years. Unfortunately, researchers are just now beginning to acknowledge its ability to influence the growth of literacy. The New London Group spent countless hours studying new literacies that integrated students' cultural backgrounds and out-of-school practices into the classroom (Skerrett, 2013). Because of the impact Biblical literacy has had on students outside of school, researchers have sought to identify relationships that may exist between religion and academic success (Glanville, Sikkink, & Hernandez, 2008; Jeynes, 2009, 2010). This study enhances the current research by providing the perceptions of middle and high school students as to the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices and academic performance, overall academic success, and connections between Biblical literacy and school literacy as a function of gender and ethnicity. Students' perceptions as to the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and the impact on their lives may provide substantial information as to the importance in acknowledging and including the Bible as literature in the classroom. Additionally, their

perceptions of the relationship between participation in religiously affiliated activities and academic success and their personal life were explored.

### **Literature Review Search Procedures**

Literature reviewed for this journal-ready dissertation with regard to Biblical literacy, out-of-school literacy practices, academic achievement, gender, and ethnicity/race for middle school students were examined. Keywords and phrases that were used in the search for relevant literature were: *gender, ethnicity, out-of-school literacy, Biblical literacy, academic achievement, and reading*. Searches were conducted through the EBSCO Host database for academic journals that contained scholarly peer reviewed articles. These journals include *ERIC, Social Sciences Full Text (H.W. Wilson), Religion and Philosophy Collection, JSTOR, Humanities Source, Education Source, Humanities Full Text (H.W. Wilson), Academic Search Complete, and LexisNexis Academic*.

While conducting keyword searches, I did not limit the results by publication year. A keyword search for “Biblical literacy” generated 2,942 results and by including the words “academic achievement,” the search was reduced to 92. When “out-of-school literacy” was used for the keyword search, 1,708 articles were displayed; when the words “academic achievement” were added to the search, the number of articles was reduced to 210. A keyword search for “academic achievement” yielded 892,348 results. By including the word “gender”, the field narrowed to 214,053. When “Biblical literacy” was added, the results decreased to 13. When “ethnicity” replaced the word “gender” in the “academic achievement” keyword search, it yielded 120,129 results. By adding “Biblical literacy”, the results reduced to 11. When “out-of-school literacy” was added to

the “academic achievement” keyword search, it yielded 190 results. Once “Biblical literacy” was added, results decreased to zero.

When “reading” was used for the keyword search for articles, 15,026,383 articles were generated; adding “ethnicity” to this keyword search further reduced the number of articles to 364,388 and adding “Biblical literacy” further reduced the results to 159. A keyword search for “gender” yielded 9,418,863 articles. This field was reduced to 2,076,966 when “reading” was added to the search. After adding “Biblical literacy” to the search, the results decreased to 394. Next, “out-of-school literacy” was added to the “reading” keyword search and it yielded 1,264 results. When “Biblical literacy” was added, results reduced to one. Articles were reviewed based on the information regarding the relationship between Biblical literacy and academic achievement.

A keyword search was also conducted for “student perceptions” which generated 95,591 articles. This search was reduced once “reading” was added to the search yielding 19,504 articles. After adding “Bible,” the results decreased to 244 articles.

In addition to searching online databases, relevant references mentioned in studies with similar topics were also used. Information from various modes such as interviews and dissertations were also used when reviewing sources.

### **Theme Analysis**

In order to identify themes throughout the literature review research process, I used the theme analysis. I reviewed the abstract and summaries in order to distinguish the various themes found. As I reviewed the summaries and abstracts, I began finding common relationships amongst the articles and MODES identified. The themes that I consistently recognized were (a) Biblical literacy as a cultural growth marker; (b) Biblical

literacy as an out-of-school literacy; (c) the implementation of Biblical literacy in the classroom; and (d) Biblical literacy and student achievement.

Biblical literacy as a cultural growth marker categorized many of the articles that were qualitative studies showing how Biblical literacy affected communities (Hones and Cha, 1999; Hones, 2001; Reimer, 2008). This theme was recurrent concerning Biblical literacy shaping the culture and literacy development within a community. Biblical literacy as an out-of-school literacy focused on qualitative studies that brought awareness to how Biblical literacy practices outside of school affected students' literacy development in school (Alvermann et al., 1996; Mahar, 2003; Schultz and Hull, 2008; Skerrett, 2013; Steward, 2014). Many of these studies were ethnographic studies that showed how some students demonstrated higher levels of engagement and literacy development during church Bible studies and through reading the Bible at home. The next theme focused on studies that gave practical information pertaining to how Biblical literacy is used within schools today. It also connects to studies that examined various strategies on how Biblical literacy is taught effectively. The final theme identified focused mainly on quantitative studies that made connections between Biblical literacy and its impact on student achievement.

Overall, my theme analysis process involved finding similar relationships throughout the articles and MODES. Some were given multiple themes due to the content within the study, but many focused on at least one specific theme.

### **Biblical Literacy Then and Now**

Biblical literacy has influenced the lives of Christians for thousands of years. Unfortunately, according to Blanshard (1963) and Michaelsen (1970), as cited by Jeynes

(2009), there has been a decline in Biblical literacy research being conducted by earlier social scientists. The decline of research has been attributed to the United States' Supreme Court decisions to remove prayer and Bible reading from public schools (Jeynes, 2009). Fortunately, researchers are beginning to acknowledge its ability to impact the growth of literacy. The New London Group spent countless hours studying new literacies that integrated students' cultural backgrounds and out-of-school practices into the classroom (Skerrett, 2013). In recent years, there has been a revelation among researchers regarding the relationship between religion and literacy. Research has been conducted to identify whether there is a direct correlation between Biblical literacy, academic achievement, and behavior outcomes (Glanville, Sikkink, & Hernandez, 2008; Jeynes, 2009, 2010).

Biblical literacy has been attributed to being the source of wisdom, knowledge, and ways of living that is often demonstrated within certain cultures. Perkins (2011) defines Biblical literacy as follows:

'Biblical literacy' describes the ability and motivation of people to read the Bible with sufficient understanding so that they can explain its basic meaning, having sufficient knowledge and skill to use resources that enable them to discern the basic meaning of a Biblical text. It includes the ability to apply this discerned meaning, i.e. Biblical wisdom, to contemporary life (para. 1).

The Bible is ultimately used as a blueprint for living. Perkins' (2011) definition of Biblical literacy demonstrates how knowledge learned through the Bible often influences an individual's ways of living.

Today, high schools throughout the United States have been incorporating a program called the Bible Literacy Project. According to Bradley (2005), as cited by Jeynes (2009, p. 420), “This interest in Bible literacy has emerged, in large part, because of a move by some Americans to place Bible courses back in the public schools.” In the course, the Bible is taught as literature and included a textbook. CBNTV (2012) broadcasted a TV segment discussing the Bible Literacy Project. CBNTV reporters stated that, “The Non-partisan Interfaith Bible Literacy Project released the book, *The Bible and its Influence*.” The reporters further discussed how some of the supporters of this project believe it is “the answer to teachers’ complaints that today’s youth aren’t making commonly known cultural connections to the Bible” (CBNTV, 2012). Although, the presence of the Bible has been accepted in some schools; there are still many individuals who do not approve of its usage in schools and who are afraid that the Bible will not be taught with respect. Manzo (2007) released an article further detailing the Bible’s usage from the past to present. Readers are referred to Tables 1.1 and 1.2 for specific information on how the Bible has been used.

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Insert Table 1.1 here

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Insert Table 1.2 here

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### **Biblical Literacy as a Cultural Growth Marker**

As stated by Hones and Cha (1999), “Before the rise of national school systems, the church was a primary site for literacy education” (p. 87). Because of the church’s

influence on literacy, Biblical literacy has affected literacy development of many cultures. Hones (2001) explored the role of Biblical literacy within the life of Hmong Americans. His narrative study focused on the community and family of an adult Hmong refugee (Hones, 2001). The study demonstrated how the Hmong culture evolved due to the knowledge gained through Biblical literacy. Hones' (2001) findings illuminated how conversion to Christianity through Biblical literacy altered the Hmong's religious perspective, thus changing their thoughts on the importance of literacy development. Through conversion to Christianity, many Hmong challenged themselves to become literate to maintain their relationship with God through reading the Bible for themselves. Not only did the Hmong gain a desire to enhance their literary skills, but they also became more conscious of the "social, economic, and political benefits" (Hones, 2001, p. 494) that accompanied literacy.

Reimer (2008) revealed how the Botswanan also came to know Biblical literacy through exposure to missionaries and how they used their newfound knowledge to define themselves. Because of the significance of Biblical literacy, the people of Botswana began to associate illiteracy with living in a state of darkness. Due to the negative associations attached to illiteracy, the Botswanan created adult learning communities where literacy development skills were taught through studying the Bible. Through their qualitative studies, both Hones (2001) and Reimer (2008) were able to witness the Hmong and the Botswanan transition to a state of awareness through becoming literate and understanding how their cultures could flourish through literacy. Results also reported how Biblical literacy led to moral reconstruction within the Hmong and Botswanan cultures. In both studies, Hones (2001) and Reimer (2008) witnessed how the

moral values of the Bible prompted the Hmong and Botswanan cultures to become more conscious of how they treated each other and to apply more importance on developing their literary skills so that their communities would become more developed.

### **Biblical Literacy and Gender**

Reading has typically been an area where the gender achievement gap is exhibited. For years, girls have outperformed boys when completing reading assessments (Chudowsky & Chudowsky, 2010). Dee (2005) attributed these differences to boys doing better with spatial and visual tasks while girls do better performing verbal tasks. Other attributions to the gender reading achievement gap also include students' level of motivation and engagement. Chudowsky & Chudowsky (2010) wrote a report on behalf of the Center on Education Policy. Their study examined trends from 2002-2008 throughout the United States and their findings revealed that the reading achievement gap between girls and boys has reduced throughout the years, but girls continue to outperform boys.

In terms of how Biblical literacy might impact this dilemma, there is a chance that the Bible as literature could capture the attention of students. Many of the topics covered in the Bible are relatable to both males and females. For instance, the Bible deals with love, war, betrayal, trust, sacrifice, family, competition, relationships, money and many other topics that can be applied to what students observe or experience today. In addition, more and more Bibles have been created to capture the attention of different types of learners. For example, Sergio Cariello illustrated a graphic novel version of the Bible called *The Action Bible: God's Redemptive Story*. Dee, (2005) reports most boys are visual learners and may enjoy reading a graphic novel because it is visually appealing.

*The Action Bible* has been expanded to an English Standard Version Study Bible, curriculum, a handbook with a dictionary of people, places, and things, and daily devotional. Similarly, many Bibles have also begun to include maps of locations and travel routes, as well as illustrations of the characters to enhance comprehension of the Bible.

With the more engaging and reader friendly Bibles published in recent years, the Bible could be used to motivate boys to read more and in turn increase their performance on reading assessments. Very few studies examine connections between Biblical literacy, gender, and reading achievement. This study may determine whether reading the Bible affects the gender reading achievement gap.

### **Biblical Literacy and Ethnicity/Race**

Ethnicity has played a pivotal role in education. One would think students of all ethnicities receive the same level of learning, but unfortunately, the racial achievement gap has existed for years (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Blacks and Hispanics tend to perform lower than American Indians, Whites, and Pacific Islanders (American Psychological Association, 2012; Texas Education Agency, 2016a).

According to Jeynes (2003), much of the drastic differentiations between the reading performances of various ethnicities exist due to the students' parental structure and level of religiosity. Jeynes' (2003) study compared Black and Hispanic students from homes where religion was seen as an important foundation to other Black and Hispanic families from homes where religion was not a significant factor. The questions he sought to answer were, "Do Black and Hispanic children from more traditional backgrounds differ from the overall population of White children in academic achievement?" and "Do

Black and Hispanic children from more traditional backgrounds (defined here as being from intact, religious families) differ from their less religious counterparts in academic achievement?" (Jeynes, 2003, pp. 46-47). The results of his study indicated that Black and Hispanic students from intact, religious homes performed just as well as White students and outperformed Black and Hispanic students who came from less religious or divided homes. Jeynes (2003) attributes the closing of the achievement gap to the family structure and level of religion. He goes on to discuss how religious commitment leads students to apply themselves and work harder to excel academically.

Although Jeynes' study briefly touched the topic of religious commitment, one is left wondering if religious literacy practices alone have the power to enhance students' levels of reading achievement. Seeing that religion has no color, this study will raise awareness as to the effect religious literacy practices, such as reading the Bible, has on academic achievement across ethnicities.

### **Biblical Literacy and Out-of-School Literacy Practices**

Out-of-school literacy practices are any type of literacy practice that is not directly connected to an academic curriculum, and in-school literacy practices involve literacy practices that are recognized and consistently used within classroom settings (Stewart, 2014, p. 5). Because of the changing engagement level that is seen amongst today's youth, researchers (Alvermann et al., 1996; Mahar, 2003; Schultz and Hull, 2008) are finding that the division that once existed between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices, must be reconsidered. According to Schultz and Hull (2008), the challenge is identifying "how to bridge out-of-school and in-school worlds in ways that make discernable, positive differences in youth's present circumstances and social

futures” (p. 239).

In 1996, Alvermann et al. (1996) conducted a qualitative study on the perceptions of middle and high school students on discussions. While being interviewed (Alvermann & Moore, 2011), Alvermann mentioned this study and how it brought awareness to the importance of out-of-school and in-school literacy practices. When asked about her thoughts concerning the divide between out-of-school and in-school contexts, her response reflected the findings she discovered during her 1996 study. Alvermann stated, “...there were numerous instances in which students folded out-of-school literacies, such as Bible reading, into school-sanctioned textbook discussions” (Alvermann & Moore, 2011, p. 157). The feedback she received from students provided insight for the idea that in-school and out-of-school context should be embraced together.

As a seventh-grade language arts teacher, Mahar (2003) found that out-of-school literacy practices were an asset when trying to reach students. She noticed many of her students were interested in anime, so she used lunch periods to meet with students. During that time, she was taught about anime. She then began to apply in-school literacy practices to her instruction while allowing the students to use those skills on out-of-school literacy texts. Like Alvermann (2011), she realized there should not be a divide between in-school and out-of-school contexts. In the words of Schultz and Hull (2008), Mahar (2003), “suggests that by learning about adolescents’ worlds and popular cultures, teachers can become guides to helping them develop critical strategies for reading and assessing the truth of what they read” (p. 243).

With religious practices being an out-of-school literacy practice, it might be beneficial to identify how many students are involved in religious practices beyond the

classrooms and if students perceive participation in these activities as beneficial to their academic and personal success. This study may reveal whether or not religious practices are worth considering when integrating out-of-school and in-school literacy practices.

### **Influence of Biblical Literacy on Academic Achievement**

Jeynes (2009) conducted a quantitative study in two metropolitan areas where he examined the relationship between Biblical literacy and the academic achievement and school behavior of secondary students from Chicago and Los Angeles who attended a public school or Christian school. In order to determine students' level of Biblical knowledge, they were administered a Bible quiz to assess their ability to list the 66 books of the Bible in order and their last Bible course grade was retrieved. Additionally, students were asked to self-rate their level of Bible knowledge in comparison to their peers by placing themselves in percentile categories.

Jeynes' findings were different because he went beyond the implementation of Biblical literacy and identified how knowledge of the Bible can benefit students academically and socially. His study reflected that students within the high Bible literacy group had the highest-grade point average (GPA) of 3.31 with test and grade results of 72.7 percent (Jeynes, 2009). The medium Biblical literacy group had an average GPA of 3.09 with test and grade results of 66.4 percent (Jeynes, 2009). The low Bible literacy group had an average GPA of 2.91 with a test and grade ranking of 56.7 percent (Jeynes, 2009). The students with the highest Bible literacy level also had the best ratings of school behavior, but the difference was not statistically significant. When he compared the GPA and Bible assessment results to the public school and Christian school students, he found that the Christian school students scored higher in achievement and school

behavior than the public school students. This may have been a result of the Christian school students being totally immersed in a curriculum based on Biblical literacy. He did note that there was not a great difference between the behaviors. Jeynes (2009) identified the limited location of the study as being a limitation to the study. He challenged future researchers to implement this study in other areas so that the results could be considered reliable and consistent among diverse areas.

Jeynes followed his 2009 study with an in-depth meta-analysis of 11 studies that focused on the relationship between Biblical literacy, academic outcomes, and behavioral outcomes in urban areas (Jeynes, 2010). Jeynes' (2010) findings supported his previous results, finding that Biblical literacy does have a positive relationship with academic and behavioral outcomes. In his discussion, Jeynes (2010) determined that Biblical literacy seemed to produce a positive impact on the academic outcomes, which had a large effect size (.73), rather than the behavioral outcomes, which had a small effect size (.34).

Between both studies, Jeynes' (2009, 2010) findings revealed there is a relationship between Biblical literacy and academic achievement, but he has not specifically determined the cause. However, he considered one correlation to be attributed to the relationship between Biblical literacy and academic achievement was religious work ethic. He stated that, "many religious and less religious people believed that reading, studying, and applying the Bible encourages a person to maintain a certain work ethic that could influence their academic life" (Jeynes, 2009, p. 49). Other assumptions included the Bible's encouragement for believers to abstain from certain behaviors that could hinder academic achievement, the process of reading, studying, and applying the Bible could lead to intellectual benefits due to the level of reading ability

required to interpret the Bible, and the Bible reflecting a high level of educational knowledge (pp. 49-50).

Jeynes' (2009) research has shown how Biblical literacy could possibly be used to transform literacy development. Considering that religion is the only motivation for reading in some countries, implementation of Biblical literacy in education could lead to greater developments in literacy. Like Ek (2008) and Skerrett (2013), Jeynes (2009) highly recommend more educators consider more Bible courses or usage of Biblical literature due to the strong correlational evidence suggests students with backgrounds in Biblical literacy seem to excel more. We are in a day where multiple literacies transform how students learn, so out-of-school literacies such as Biblical literacy should be considered when looking to enhance literacy development.

### **Student Perceptions**

“Higher education researchers suggest that if we are to understand learning, a student's viewpoint is important” (Kuhn & Rundle-Thiele, 2009, p. 351). Kuhn and Rundle- Thiele (2009) conducted research analyzing students' perceptions of learning achievement as an additional measure to assess whether the students were learning and how effective their teaching styles were. By using students' perceptions, they were able to gain insight into how the students were processing the information taught during their course.

Seeden and Clark (2016) analyzed college students' perceptions of what motivated them to excel within the classroom. Their analysis established that student-teacher relationships, classroom climate, and relevance were all factors that motivated students. The findings of this study provided the teachers with insight regarding

instruction. It is common for college and university officials to administer evaluations that allow professors and other college and university officials to gain insight pertaining to the effectiveness of the course taken. The students are not only questioned about the professor's teaching style, but they also receive questions regarding the relevance and effectiveness of the material studied during the class. By administering these course evaluations, students are given a voice that helps college and university officials adjust their teaching style and the material presented to create beneficial, engaging learning environments.

Unfortunately, evaluations from the students are not administered in Grades K-12. A teacher may administer a reading inventory, but overall state assessment scores determine the effectiveness of one's teaching. Because of the lack of research regarding the student perceptions of students in Grades K-12, there may be essential information that educators are missing which in turn could be the answer to many questions that exist when recognizing problems in education. If the goal of education is to prepare students to excel academically, then one must create an opportunity for students to share what works and what does not work. Student perceptions analyzed in this study will grant educators much insight into the effectiveness of Biblical literacy and it may be the missing link between students who are efficient and productive versus those who struggle to excel.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Socioeconomic status, religion, and culture has often played a role in how students excelled academically. Having knowledge of the Bible is what often motivates students to do well in school (Jeynes, 2009; 2010). There are some students who may not be avid readers, but they love reading the Bible and hearing the stories. With more and

more exposure to literature, one may find there are many Biblical undertones. The more an individual reads the Bible the greater the possibility for them to make connections. For example, the powerful scripture Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” may inspire individuals to never give up on their goals and dreams. The parables and words of wisdom within the Bible often birth a love for literacy and leave individuals eager to succeed.

Learning is impacted by people’s social and cultural structures. There is one broad theory that covers two specific theories that would motivate this researcher. Structuralism “emphasizes that individuals are born into social/cultural structures that strongly influence what they will become and what they view as real, important, and good” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 421). This theory reminds teachers how many times they have had to look into a child’s background in order to determine why they may not be excelling in literacy. As teachers, we look into family history; socioeconomic status, culture, but mat not consider the role religion plays?

Within Structuralism, the Socio-Cultural and Social Learning Theories both embody similar characteristics. The socio-cultural theory, proposed by Bronfenbrenner, focuses on how the cultural, social, and historical aspect of a child’s life influences their learning. According to Bronfenbrenner, within this theory there are “four spheres of influence [that] affect human development: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem” (Tracey & Morrow, 2012, p.123). The microsystem sphere focuses on the child’s close relationships and major social settings. The mesosystem emphasizes the interaction between the child’s microsystems such as home and school. The exosystem are the outside factors that influence the child, but do not

interact with them. The final level is the macrosystem, which identifies patterns of interaction between the microsystem and mesosystem. The socio-cultural theory involves making literacy development connections to a child's community, family, and background. There are many social factors that affect a child's ability to build their literacy skills. Because of this, the second theory that focuses on how students learn must be considered.

Bandura proposed the social learning theory, which emphasized how people learn from observing others. He, too, has four stages of his theory, which include the following: the attentional phase, the retention phase, the reproduction phase, and the reinforcement phase (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). In the attentional phase, the person observes the model, which is the person from whom they are learning. The retention phase is a reflection moment that allows the observer to think about what they observed. The reproduction phase involves the observer repeating what they observed and the reinforcement phase is when the observer increases the behavior they have learned. Within Bandura's theory, he also discusses the role of self-efficacy; it reflects a person's belief that they can accomplish a certain goal.

These theories provide lenses to better determine how being in a community where Biblical literacy is practiced can help build students' literacy and character skills. The socio-cultural theory brings awareness to how Biblical literacy is used outside of a classroom and how it has enhanced literacy skills. While the social learning theory supports how people make connections to parables within the Bible that cultivate their behavior and confidence level, one might consider how much more effective Biblical literacy would be on students if they were to have the option to study Biblical literacy

within a school environment. Would classroom expectations finally be consistently met? Would students achieve better academically because of their high self-efficacy or will they be more inspired to read due to understanding that even through their challenges they can attain success?

The socio-cultural and social learning theory both demonstrate the power of influence. The main goal is to gain an understanding of how Biblical literacy can influence a child's academic achievement and character development. Although learning takes place in the classroom, we are in a time where outside factors influence learning more than what is taught in school. Thus, all outside factors that contribute to learning, such as Biblical literacy, should be investigated to determine whether the implementation of it as literature could make a difference.

### **Definition of Terms**

Terms that are important to the three research studies that were conducted in this journal-ready dissertation are provided for the reader below.

#### **Academic Achievement**

“Academic achievement refers to a person's success in education. It is based on how well the academic goals of students, teachers, or educational institutions are met. Success in meeting these goals is typically measured by grades and test scores. If these assessment tools show that academic achievement is good, the student, teacher, or institution will be considered successful” (Flair, 2013). According to Flair's (2013) definition, GPA and/or standardized testing measure academic achievement.

**Asian**

A person of Asian ethnicity has an origin in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam (Texas Education Agency Appendix F, 2016, p. 5).

**Biblical Literacy**

“Biblical Literacy” describes the ability and motivation of people to read the Bible with sufficient understanding so that they can explain its basic meaning, having sufficient knowledge and skill to use resources that enable them to discern the basic meaning of a Biblical text. It includes the ability to apply this discerned meaning, i.e. Biblical wisdom, to contemporary life (Perkins, 2011).

**Black**

A person of Black ethnicity is an individual who has origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (Texas Education Agency Appendix F, 2016, p. 5).

**Ethnicity/Race**

In 2009, the U. S. Department of Education issued new guidelines for the collection of data on race and ethnicity in all state and local education organizations allowing individuals to be identified in both ethnic and racial classifications and in more than one racial category if applicable. Students and staff are provided two choices for ethnicity: Hispanic/Latino or Not Hispanic/Latino. Five racial groups are provided as options and include American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White (Texas Education Agency Appendix F, 2016, p. 5).

### **Hispanic/ Latino**

A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (Texas Education Agency Appendix F, 2016, p. 5).

### **Literacy**

For the purpose of this study, literacy is defined as “the process of using reading, writing, and oral language to extract, construct, integrate, and critique meaning through interaction and involvement with multimodal texts in the context of socially situated practices” (Frankel, K. K., Becker, B. C., Rowe, M. W., & Pearson, P. D., 2016, p.7).

### **Private School**

A school that is not supported primarily by public funds. It must provide classroom instruction for one or more of Grades K–12 (or comparable ungraded levels) and have one or more teachers. Organizations or institutions that provide support for homeschooling but do not offer classroom instruction for students are not included. (National Center for Education Statistics & United States, 2014).

### **White**

A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (Texas Education Agency Appendix F, 2016b, p. 5).

### **Delimitations**

The first delimitation includes the purpose of the study, which was to explore students’ perceptions of Biblical literacy practices and experiences with regard to academic and personal success. While the scope of this topic could be quite extensive, there is little research about the perceptions of students in relation to Biblical literacy. A

second delimitation considered includes the locations in which the study was conducted. This study was conducted at two selected private schools in order to increase participant involvement and collect data that are more extensive. The third delimitation refers to the participants chosen. Only participants attending private Christian based schools in Grades 7-12 were asked to participate in this study. The final delimitation is associated with the ethnicity of the participants. The ethnicities that were considered for this study were limited to Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and more than one ethnicity. Conducting the study in private schools, offered more opportunities to gain insight into students' perceptions about Biblical literacy and participation in religiously affiliated activities.

### **Limitations**

For the purpose of this journal-ready dissertation, a survey was administered to middle and high school students. Several limitations may have affected the findings of this study. This study was conducted at two selected private Christian-based schools in a southeast city in Texas. Because the curriculum includes study of the Bible at both schools, the findings of this study cannot be generalizable to public school or non-Christian based private school populations in which the curriculum does not include study of the Bible. Another limitation was collecting honest feedback from the participants completing the survey. The survey included both closed and open response questions. According to Farrell (2016), closed ended questions are easier to answer, but they could also limit the responses of the participant and create biased answers. On the contrary, open-ended questions leave more room for the participants to express themselves, but if it results in too much writing, the participant may withhold information. Further, the study included participants from only two private Christian

schools in the southeast area of Houston. Additionally, due to the timeframe of the study being conducted, many of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade participants were on a field trip at one of the schools on the day the survey was administered, which limited the response of individuals within that grade level. Lastly, the willingness of the participants to complete all items of the survey can be considered another limitation.

### **Assumptions**

For the purpose of this journal-ready dissertation, the assumption was made that the participants of this study would respond truthfully and in detail when responding to the survey questions. To address this, participants completed the survey within their Bible study classes as they were smaller in number and the students were familiar with the setting and the teacher who will administer the survey. Additionally, the students were assured that their anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained and they could withdraw at any time without fear of consequences. Lastly, students were made aware of the significance of their perceptions regarding Biblical literacy practices to contribute to current research.

### **Organization of the Study**

In this journal-ready dissertation, three research investigations were conducted. In the first journal-ready dissertation article, research questions examined student perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance and academic success with regard to gender. In the second journal-ready dissertation article, the research questions analyzed students' perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic success and performance as it relates to ethnicity. Lastly, the research question in the third journal-ready dissertation

article investigated students' perceptions of the relationship between participation in religiously affiliated activities and academic success and their personal lives.

This journal-ready dissertation is comprised of four chapters. Chapter I includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, delimitations, limitations, assumptions, and outline of the proposed journal-ready dissertation. Chapter II of this dissertation includes, the first journal-ready dissertation investigation involving student perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance, overall academic success, connections between Biblical literacy and in-school literacy as a function of gender. In Chapter III, the second journal-ready research investigation examines students' perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance, overall academic success, connections between Biblical literacy and in-school literacy as it pertains to ethnicity. Lastly, presented in Chapter IV is the third journal-ready research investigation, which analyzes students' perceptions of the relationship between religiously affiliated activities and academic success and decision-making. A separate method and analysis section is provided for each of the three studies.

Table 1.1

*Use of Bible in Public Schools Timeline*

Time Period	Usage
Colonial era to 19th century	The primary purpose of schooling, in addition to learning the three R's, is to teach the lessons of the Bible. By the latter decades of the 1800s, Bible "wars" erupt between Protestants and Catholics over which version of the Scriptures will be used for the recitations that mark the school day. State supreme courts in Ohio (1872) and Wisconsin (1890) strike down mandatory Bible reading
1963	On the heels of several court cases on religion in schools, the U.S. Supreme Court rules in <i>Abington Township School District v. Schempp</i> that a Pennsylvania law requiring daily recitations of Bible verses and the Lord's Prayer in public school classrooms is unconstitutional. In an 8-1 decision, the court says the Bible may be studied for its literary and historical merits, but may not be used for daily religious exercises in public schools.
1989	A coalition of religious and educational organizations issues guidelines for teaching about religion in public schools, recommending an approach that is academic, not devotional; emphasizes the study of religion, not its practice; exposes students to a diversity of religious views, but does not impose or encourage particular beliefs; and intends to inform students about different beliefs, not have them conform.
1999	The Bible Literacy Project and the First Amendment Center issue a guide to teaching about the Bible in public schools. The guide is endorsed by prominent religious and educational organizations, as well as free-speech groups. Supporters recommend finding middle ground between a traditional "sacred text" approach still evident in some school lessons and a view of public schools as "religion-free zones."

Sources: Biblical Literacy Project Inc.; First Amendment Center; Education Week. From "The bible makes a comeback" by K.K. Manzo, 2007, *Education Week*, 26(37), 25-27. Reprinted with permission.

Table 1.2

*Guidelines for Using the Bible*

Category	Explanation
Texts	The Bible may be used as the primary text, but should be combined with other materials. Use of one particular version of the Bible—Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish—may suggest one is better than another. Students should understand and be exposed to the different translations.
Teachers	Religious groups may not teach religious courses on school grounds during the school day. Teachers of the academic-themed courses on the Bible should be selected based on their scholastic qualifications, not their beliefs. They should be hired according to the same standards as other teachers. Teachers should receive training on teaching about the Bible, or have taken college-level courses.
Approach	The Bible should be taught from an academic, not devotional, standpoint. “Supernatural occurrences” and divine acts described in the Bible should not be presented as historical fact. In literature courses about the Bible, students should learn about the themes, symbols, narratives, and characters in the text. The Biblical references in classic and contemporary literature can also be explored. History courses can cover the origins of Judaism and Christianity, the differences between religions, the Biblical basis of the nation’s founding ideals and documents, and the historical arguments of both secular and sacred scholars.
Control	Schools may accept funding from private groups to support Bible electives as long as they can guide the content and instruction. Local school officials should maintain control over the content and materials used in such classes.

Source: “The Bible & the Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide,” The First Amendment Center. From “The bible makes a comeback” by K.K. Manzo, 2007, *Education Week*, 26(37), 25-27. Copyright 1970 by Copyright Holder R. Michaelsen (1970). *Piety in the public school*. London, UK: Macmillan. Reprinted with permission.

## CHAPTER II

### BIBLICAL LITERACY IN A SECULAR WORLD: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BIBLICAL LITERACY PRACTICES AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND READING ABILITY AMONG BOYS AND GIRLS

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This journal ready dissertation follows the style and format of *Journal of Research on  
Christian Education (JRCE)*.

### **Abstract**

In this study student perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices and academic performance, overall academic success, and connections perceived between reading the Bible and reading in school as a function of gender were examined by analyzing their survey responses. Chi-square tests were run on the students' survey data using SPSS. In most analyses, statistically significant differences, with small effect sizes (Cohen, 1988), were apparent in their response to the importance of reading the Bible in school, its impact on their future goals, and its impact on their motivation to succeed. Analysis also revealed that girls place more value on reading the Bible than boys. The results were very similar to literature showing girls tend to excel at a higher level than boys in reading (Clinton, et al., 2014; Schwabe, McElvany, and Trendtel, 2015). Findings also revealed both boys and girls believed reading the Bible positively impacted their reading ability. Overall, the results of this study were reflective of the socio-cultural and social learning theories (Tracy & Morrow, 2012) emphasizing how social and cultural factors, such as religion, can influence various aspects of an individual's life.

**Keywords:** Literacy, Biblical literacy, gender, academic success, academic performance, religious activities. Grades 7-12

BIBLICAL LITERACY IN A SECULAR WORLD: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
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PERFORMANCE AND READING ABILITY AMONG BOYS AND GIRLS

Girls are usually assumed to excel at a higher level when it comes to reading (Clinton, et al., 2014; Schwabe, McElvany, and Trendtel, 2015). With this assumption comes the concern of what can be done about this gender gap regarding reading comprehension. Could it be the interest level of the material being read or is it the format in which the test is administered? Whatever the case may be, researchers have been conducting much research to identify the relationships between gender and reading comprehension. Schwabe, McElvany, and Trendtel (2015) conducted a quantitative study looking into whether or not the level of intrinsic motivation and format of the test items impacts boys' and girls' performance on reading comprehension tests. Their study involved examining German reading assessments that included both multiple choice and constructed response questions that were previously administered to 10-year-old and 15-year-old students. Students were also given a brief survey to assess their levels of intrinsic motivation in terms of reading. Their results showed that the girls outperformed the boys and demonstrated high levels of intrinsic motivation within both age groups.

According to Clinton et al. (2014) "gender differences in performance on reading comprehension assessments seem to be due to the comprehension activities rather than the decoding activities associated with reading" (p. 357). They conducted a study with 256 4<sup>th</sup> grade boys and girls, assessing their ability to make inferences while reading. In order to do this, participants went through the think aloud process, which required them to read text aloud and then answer questions, which allowed the researchers to gain an

understanding of how the participants were processing what they just read. The questions also demonstrated the participants' ability to make connections with previously read texts. Using ANOVA for their statistical analysis, researchers found that the girls did make more reinstatement inferences than the boys.

A common trend among these studies includes girls outperforming boys on reading assessments. The reasoning behind the girls performing better than boys may be a lack of interest in the material. The engagement piece plays a major role in learning and the techniques in schools are not always engaging to the students. What if the materials often dismissed from learning were the very things that could enhance a male students' reading achievement level? Jeynes (2009) conducted a study examining the effects of Biblical literacy on academic achievement and behavior. One of his research questions focused on analyzing findings for differences among gender. After administering a survey revealing the students' level of knowledge of Biblical literacy, Jeynes divided the students into three groups: low Bible literacy group, middle Bible literacy group, and high Bible literacy group. His findings revealed that in each group the female students demonstrated higher GPAs than the male students. Jeynes (2009) did state that more research would need to be conducted to investigate why Biblical literacy might benefit boys more than girls. He also mentioned how studying the Bible might help boys with self-discipline leading them to focus more while in the classroom. With Jeynes' findings in mind, the Bible as literature might help close the gender achievement gap identified in various studies. As a result of this study, a correlation between male and female participants' interest in Biblical literacy and their reading achievement could reveal a need to incorporate material from the Bible on reading assessments.

## **Literacy and Reading Skills**

To begin, the complexity of the word *literacy* and what it means to be literate involves a broad spectrum of definitions. The acquisition of reading skills is inextricably linked to education and has economic, cultural, social, and political benefits. Literacy is a foundational life skill recognized by many as a human right (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2016). For purposes of this study, literacy is defined as “the process of using reading, writing, and oral language to extract, construct, integrate, and critique meaning through interaction and involvement with multimodal texts in the context of socially situated practices” (Frankel, K. K., Becker, B. C., Rowe, M. W., & Pearson, P. D., 2016, p.7). Literacy involves reading, writing, and listening in social settings. When reading, much of how information is interpreted is based upon the social, cultural, and historical roots of the one reading.

Frankel, Becker, Rowe, & Pearson (2016) further define the meaning of literacy through the following five principles: (1) literacy is a constructive, integrative, and critical process situated in social practices; (2) fluent reading is shaped by language processes and contexts; (3) literacy is strategic and disciplinary; (4) literacy entails motivation and engagement; and (5) literacy is a continuously developing set of practices. Each principle brings awareness to literacy embodying multiple skills that are influenced by how the reading interacts with the text. Overall, the skills needed to read effectively are impacted by the history of the reader and may change over time as the reader develops.

## **Gender and Reading Achievement**

The reading achievement gap between males and females has been consistent

around the world. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) created and administered a survey called *Literacy Skills for the World of Tomorrow* (2003). They surveyed 4,500-10,000 students in each of the 43 participating countries to assess reading, mathematical, and scientific literacy. Overall, Finland demonstrated the highest reading literacy while Peru had the lowest performance scores. In regards to gender, every country reported females outperformed males “with an overall difference of 32 points or almost half of one proficiency level” (ISA, UIS, & OECD, 2003, p.11). There were some males that outperformed females, but they were males who were more engaged in reading. This led researchers to believe that the gender gap in reading literacy is a result of a lack of engagement that often hinders males’ ability to comprehend what they are reading.

The National Literacy Trust (Clark and Burke, 2012) in the United Kingdom, also found that boys were performing lower than girls and they associated this dilemma with three factors: (a) the home and family environment where girls are provided more reading material to read, (b) the school environment where teachers do not have engaging texts to read, and (c) male gender identities where learning and reading is not valued. These results are somewhat similar to previous studies. Considering educators have no control over what is done at home, there are opportunities to change the statistic by looking into the interest of male students.

## **Student Perceptions**

Considering student perceptions provides educators with insight into the desires and concerns of their students. Student perceptions create opportunities for educators to tailor their instruction to the needs of the students. The Glossary of Education Reform (2013) uses the term student voice, which has been used as a “school- or instructional-improvement strategy” (para. 2). Student voice incorporates the perspectives of students allowing school officials to make decisions with greater consideration for how the students actually feel. By doing this, students are more motivated, engaged, and involved in their learning.

Cheatle and Bullerjahn (2015) conducted a study focusing on student perceptions of the writing center at their university. Prior to conducting the study, they recognized that the majority of the students using their services were first year undergraduate students. They found many students believed the writing center was for first year undergraduate students and international students. Their findings brought awareness to the importance of effectively marketing the writing center and bringing more attention to the fact that it is for all college students regardless of their current major or level of study. By surveying the students of their campus, they were able to understand why their services were not being used to its full potential.

By considering the perceptions of students, educators are given information showing them what helps or hinders students’ ability to succeed academically and in life. This study allows students to demonstrate how Biblical literacy practices affects them academically, which will challenge educators to consider the importance of using the Bible as literature.

**Statement of the Problem**

As indicated in the review of the literature, there is a gender achievement gap between boys and girls and their reading performance (Clinton et al., 2014; Jeynes, 2009; Schwabe, McElvany, and Trendtel, 2015; and OECD/UNESCO, 2003). Some researchers have suggested that this is a result of boys lacking intrinsic motivation and being disengaged from reading. If boys demonstrate a substantial interest in Biblical literacy, there could possibly be an opportunity for boys to improve their academic performance and reading ability.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine student perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability) and academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making). The students' responses to a survey regarding demographics, Biblical literacy practices, and participation in religiously affiliated activities were used to gain knowledge of their perceptions. Data were analyzed to determine student perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability), overall academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making), and connections perceived between reading the Bible and reading in school as a function of gender.

**Significance of the Study**

Studies have shown that the gender achievement gap has narrowed over the years, but it still has not closed (OECD/UNESCO, 2003). Some of the reasons are attributed to the different ways in which boys learn compared to girls and the idea that boys are not

engaged enough to focus on what is read in schools (Brozo et al., 2014; Clinton et al., 2014; Jeynes, 2009; Schwabe, McElvany, and Trendtel, 2015). Biblical literacy has been linked to playing a significant role in the effort a student applies to their work due to the moral instruction provided in the Bible (Jeynes, 2009). Because of the influence the Bible has had on western culture as a whole (Ryken, 2014), conducting this study might give insight in regards to whether or not Biblical literacy could be used to help close the gender achievement gap.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this empirical investigation:

(a) What are the differences in students' perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability) among boys and girls in Grades 7-12? (b) What are the differences in students' perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical Literacy practices and academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) among boys and girls in Grades 7-12? and (c) What is the relationship between students' perceptions with regard to reading the Bible and what they read in school among boys and girls in Grades 7-12?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

For this study, the research design presented is the correlational design, which is a non-experimental form of research that involves using correlational statistics to describe and measure the relationship between variables or sets of, scores (Creswell, 2012). In order to retrieve data, cross sectional survey research was conducted to collect data

regarding the participants' demographics (e.g. gender and ethnicity), Biblical literacy practices, and participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities. The survey was administered during the participants' Bible class. I, the researcher, read the instructions to participants. Upon completion of the study, the data were analyzed using SPSS to identify any patterns between the student perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance and academic success as a function of gender.

### **Participants**

Participants were selected using convenience sampling which includes individuals “who are available, volunteer, or can be easily recruited in the sample” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p.263). Although Johnson and Christensen (2014) suggest convenience sampling is not the best way to choose participants, they have acknowledged that most researchers use this selection process due to “practical constraints” (p. 264). In the case of this study, convenience sampling provided an opportunity to gain a wider range of participants.

A total of 208 middle and high school students in Grades 7-12 between the ages of 12-18 years participated in this study. The students attended diverse private schools located in a southeast city in Texas. Many of the students represent various denominations of Christianity and all involve reading the Bible. A denominational delineation of the participants is included in Table 2.1. In order to maintain anonymity, students were not asked to provide their names; however, for the purpose of this study, the participants identified their gender when completing a survey.

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Insert Table 2.1 here

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### **Instrumentation**

In order to retrieve data, a cross-sectional survey, developed by the researcher, was administered to the participants. Cross-sectional research includes “data that is collected at a single point in time” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p.403). The survey administered included both closed and open-ended items, as there are advantages for using both to collect participants’ responses. Closed items allowed for specific responses to items needed for data collection and analyses, whereas open-ended responses provided participants an opportunity to share their own thinking. Responses to open-ended questions demonstrated the thoughts and beliefs of the participant through impromptu reaction to the question at the time of the survey. Closed items were reactive and open-ended items were beneficial because they did not prompt a specific reaction.

Responses to the closed survey items were quantified through a nominal level of measurement; however, the open-ended responses were quantified through a system of coding. Specifically, all open-ended responses were read thoroughly several times by the researcher. Through in-depth reading of responses, patterns, common terms, and topics were explored. As common themes emerged, categories were developed as a means of sorting the descriptive data. The categories for coding were both comprehensive and mutually exclusive (Saldaña, 2015). Comprehensive means the researcher looks broadly at all possible categories and mutually exclusive means the categories did not overlap. The coding categories were narrowed to subthemes and quantified by number of

responses including the theme. Lastly, narrative responses most prevalent to the themes were included to illustrate and support the findings.

To establish reliability of coding the open-ended responses, a second coder independently reviewed the responses, themes, and categories. Intercoder reliability was based on a high level of agreement among the coders and the open discussion to look through different lenses to determine final themes (Patton, 2005). Additionally, validity was addressed through specific themes that were not too broad or overlapping. The themes were consistent and supported the content of the responses. The questions focused on the participants' demographics (e.g., gender and ethnicity), Biblical literacy practices, and participating in religiously affiliated activities.

### **Data Analysis**

Data utilized in this quantitative study were collected through surveys completed by students who had parental permission to participate in this study. A data file was created in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 24 (SPSS) and all data were imported for analyses. Closed items on the survey were coded nominally as in a Likert scale for analysis. Additionally, open-ended responses were coded according to themes and each category was quantified based on the number of times the theme was noted in the survey responses. Further, specific open-ended responses were selected to provide support of the themes identified. All analyses included data specific to the survey responses as a function of gender for comparison purposes. Descriptive statistics for each of the variables were calculated. To determine if there was a correlation between academic performance and Biblical literacy practices as a function of gender, a chi-square statistical analysis was conducted. Assumptions for running a chi-square test were

met based on the categorical nature of the data, specifically, Likert scale responses on the survey and quantifying the open-ended responses. The alpha level of .05 was used to determine the level of statistical significance.

### **Method and Procedures for Data Collection**

The following steps were taken to collect data and ensure the anonymity of the participants:

1. Upon approval from the private schools and IRB, I met with the principals to establish a timeline for me to distribute parental permission forms, collect them, read and collect signed assent forms, then administer the paper survey.
2. I distributed parent permission forms for students to take home and explained to students the purpose of the cover letter and permission form.
3. Students were asked to submit their signed parental permission forms to a locked drop box that only I had access to and not to give it to a teacher or other school personnel.
4. The students were given a one-week timeframe to return their forms.
5. I returned on a designated date, which was set forth by administration, to retrieve the locked boxes.
6. I used a class roster, provided by the principal, with only the students' names, to crosscheck those who had permission to participate. This ensured only those students received the assent form and nonparticipating students received an alternate paper with an activity to complete.

7. For students eligible to participate, I read the assent form to participating students before administration of the paper survey then collected the assent form.
8. I distributed the paper surveys to students who had parental permission and gave their consent to participate in the study.
9. I read the directions to the students and asked them to complete the paper survey.
10. For students who were not participating, I provided a crossword puzzle activity reviewing significant events and people in the Bible.
11. Upon survey completion, I collected the surveys from each student to be analyzed, I manually input the participants' responses into SPSS, descriptive statistics were reported, and data was analyzed in relation to the students' responses.

### **Results**

Chi-square tests were performed to identify differences in students' perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability), and academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making), among boys and girls in Grades 7-12. The assumptions for using Pearson chi-square analysis were met due to the variables analyzed being categorical. A total of 90 boys and 117 girls completed the survey. Out of 208 participants, only, 204 and 207 participants responded to questions related to the impact Bible reading has on grades, test scores, and reading ability, so there is a variation among the response totals due to some participants not responding to all the questions presented

in the survey. A crosstabulation was run with the independent variable being gender and the dependent variable being the students' responses.

### **Results for Secondary Students' Perceptions of Biblical Literacy Practices and Academic Performance**

Participants' perceptions of the impact of Biblical literacy on their academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability), included a total of 90 boys and 117 girls. The chi-square test conducted to reveal differences among the boys' and girls' perceptions were not statistically significant: impact on grades,  $\chi^2(1, N = 206) = 1.701, p = .192$ ; test scores,  $\chi^2(1, N = 204) = .07, p = .786$ ; and reading ability,  $\chi^2(1, N = 207) = 1.448, p = .229$ . Regarding the impact of Bible reading on grades, 43.8% of boys agreed that Bible reading helps improve grades and 56.2% disagreed. Conversely, 53% of the girls agreed that Bible reading helps improve grades and 47.0% girl students disagreed. As far as impact of Bible reading on test scores, 35.2% of boy participants agreed reading the Bible improved test scores and 64.8% did not. Similarly, the girls reported 37.1% agreed and 62.9% disagreed.

Importantly, with regard to participants' perception of Bible reading as a means to increase their read ability, a high percentage of both boys (86.7%) and girls (80.3%) agreed that reading the Bible does improve reading, whereas 13.3% of boys and 19.7% of girls disagreed. However, within two categories of academic performance, a greater percentage of girls perceive their grades (53%) and test scores (37.1%) are affected by their Biblical literacy practices. Reading ability was revealed as an important factor with the highest percentage of boys (86.7%) and girls (80.3%), stating that reading the Bible

improves their reading abilities. Presented in Table 2.2 are the percentages for each of the academic performance categories for boys and girls.

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Insert Table 2.2 here

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### **Results for Secondary Students' Perceptions of Biblical Literacy Practices and Academic Success**

The students' perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic success produced statistically significant differences between boys and girls with regard to motivation to succeed and impact on future goals. A statistically significant difference was revealed in relation to the students' motivation to succeed,  $\chi^2(1, N = 206) = 4.10, p = .043$ . The effect size for this finding according to Cramer's  $V = .14$  was small (Cohen, 1988). The boys' response was lower with 84.3% recognizing the impact reading the Bible has on their motivation to succeed whereas 15.7% did not agree. The girls' responses surpassed the boys' responses with 90.6% of the girls stating that reading the Bible influences their motivation to succeed and 9.4% did not agree.

The chi-square test revealed statistical significance regarding their future goals,  $\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 6.44, p = .011$ . According to Cohen's (1988) criteria, Cramer's  $V = .18$  was a small effect. A substantial difference between the responses of boys and girls was noted. Of the 205 students who responded to this question, 57.3% boys stated that Bible reading impacts their future goals and 42.7% disagreed. However, among the girls, 74.1% stated that reading the Bible affected their future goals while 25.9% disagreed.

Statistically significant differences were not revealed for the impact of reading the Bible on attendance,  $\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 1.614, p = .204$ ; behavior,  $\chi^2(1, N = 206) = .112, p = .748$ ; and, decision-making  $\chi^2(1, N = 206) = 1.899, p = .168$ .

However, important similarities in responses between boys and girls were noted. For instance, boys (79.5%) and girls (71.8%) indicated Bible reading does not have an effect on attendance. Further, only 20.5% of the boys and 28.2% of the girls feel reading the Bible impacts their school attendance. Regarding behavior, both genders expressed their behavior is impacted by reading the Bible. Among girls, 92.3% agreed that reading the Bible impacted their behavior and 7.7% disagreed, whereas 91.0% of the boys agreed and 9.0% disagreed. In relation to the impact of Bible reading on decision-making, it was consistent among genders. Boys reported 84.3% agreeing that their decision-making is affected and 15.7% disagreed. Whereas 90.6% of the girls agreed making decisions is affected and 9.4% disagreed.

Overall, girls consistently demonstrated higher percentages as it relates to the impact Bible reading has on their academic success. Attendance being one of lower areas indicated and behavior and decision-making reflecting the highest areas they believe are impacted by reading the Bible. Delineated in Table 2.3 are the descriptive statistics by percentage of survey responses of secondary students for Biblical literacy practices and academic success by gender.

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Insert Table 2.3 here

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### **Results for Secondary Students' Perceptions of the Relationship between Reading the Bible and Reading in School**

In order to answer this question, students were asked how important they perceive reading the Bible in school is; as well as connections they make between what they read in school and what they have read in the Bible. The findings for how important reading the Bible in school was deemed as statistically significant,  $\chi^2(3, N = 207) = 10.59, p = .014$ . The difference represented a Cramer's  $V$  of .23, a small effect size (Cohen, 1988). Findings revealed 53.0% of the girls and 31.1% of the boys stated reading the Bible in school was very important. Additionally, girls (28.2%) compared to boys (44.4%) found it to be somewhat important and only 5.1% of the girls and 8.9% of the boys stating Bible reading in school isn't a factor. Girls perceive reading the Bible in school to be more important than boys; while the collective percentage of boys believe reading the Bible in school is not as important. Reference to the students' responses are noted in Table 2.4.

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Insert Table 2.4 here

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When responding to the open-ended question identifying connections between information read in the Bible and other readings completed in school, students identified the metaphorical connections between the content of the Bible and other texts they have read in school. Several students referenced that some ideas in the Bible counter theories presented in secular texts, but there is still some aspect of the Bible included in their readings. Further examples of the students' responses will be presented below.

## Discussion

Religion and its impact on the students' perceptions is reflective of the socio-cultural and social learning theory (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Both theories are depicted in the findings of this study wherein the students' religious background has impacted different areas of their academic performance and academic success. Based upon the participants' responses on the Likert scale for questions related to their perception on how they were impacted by reading the Bible, I was able to use their open-ended responses draw more in-depth conclusions. The responses were also chosen in relation to their gender and they gave a first-hand view of how students believe Bible reading has impacted their academic achievement.

I examined all of the participants' open-ended responses and recorded the most common themes as it pertained to the questions asked. For academic performance, a common phrase noted regarding grades and test scores was 'no direct connection to reading the Bible'; however, they perceive their Biblical literacy practices serve as a motivator. Enhanced reading ability reflected the most consistent theme identified in response to Biblical literacy. For instance, many students referred to increased vocabulary, challenging texts, and improvement in reading overall.

Themes surrounding academic success included teaching, direction, encouragement, devotion to Christ, and identity as it relates to their purpose in life. With regard to behavior, motivation, goals, and decision-making, students made many references to Biblical literacy serving as a motivating factor and guide. Reading the Bible challenged the students to relate what they read to their lives. As far as the relationship between texts read in school and the Bible, students found many literary themes and

allusions of the Bible consistent in texts they read in school. They recognized many Biblical references were embedded in different aspects of Western culture.

### **Discussion on Results of Secondary Students' Perceptions of Biblical Literacy Practices and Academic Performance**

When relating Bible reading and academic performance, the students' responses showed that girls felt the Bible had a greater impact on their grades, test scores, and reading ability than boys. A common theme recognized for those who disagreed was not seeing a direct connection, and for those who did see a connection, reading the Bible served as a reminder to do their best. For instance, one participant stated they believe reading the Bible helps improve their grades in school because "it reminds you on how to go about instances in life. This can apply to any situation. Just as God asks us to do our work unto Him and not man, we should do our assignments to the best of our ability to glorify God." Another participant who did not see the connection stated, "I feel that having God on your side helps you, but everything you do in school doesn't exactly have something to do with the Bible." Although a direct correlation between reading the Bible and their grades was not consistent, they did consistently recognize that the teachings of the Bible drives them to do what is necessary to obtain better grades.

Regarding test scores, a consistent response included that reading the Bible alone does not help improve test scores, while others believe that reading the Bible is a motivator to study and try your best, which leads to performing better on tests. For instance, one participant who disagreed noted, "Unless your class is Bible then there is no correlation." Another student who agreed that reading the Bible helps them improve their test scores stated, "It could because the Bible helps us believe that we can do all things."

The results of the participants' perception of the impact of Bible reading on their academic performance showed that both boys and girls believe their reading ability is heavily impacted. When reviewing their open-ended responses, there were very few explanations from those who stated reading the Bible did not increase their reading ability. One participant stated, "I only read the Bible for tests." In contrast, those who did believe Bible reading increases their reading ability referred to the fact that it is a literary work, the vocabulary, and the complexity of the content were reasons why it helps them learn, which in turn improves their reading ability. For example, a participant stated that, "The Bible uses words we don't use that often and it opens your vocabulary." Seeing that the participants were able to make a connection between reading and its ability to enhance their reading ability brings awareness to the importance of Bible reading and enhancing reading skills.

In addition, it is important to recognize that boys agreed that reading the Bible affected their reading ability in some capacity. The survey presented to the participants gave them the opportunity to share their favorite stories and many of the boys listed David defeating Goliath, Moses delivering the Israelites, Job being tested by Satan and maintaining faith in God even though he lost everything, and Jonah being swallowed in the belly of a whale until he was obedient to God's request. All of these stories are full of action, which often engages boys. By being more engaged, it may be inferred that boys might put forth more of an effort to read intentionally, allowing their reading skills to improve.

## **Discussion on Results of Secondary Students' Perceptions of Biblical Literacy Practices and Academic Success**

While analyzing the responses regarding academic success, it became very evident that girls recognized that there was a higher impact in each area. Nonetheless, every area was not largely impacted. For instance, most students do not believe attendance is impacted by reading the Bible. The rationale for the relationship either included there being no correlation, or reading the Bible gives them the strength to get up and go to school.

Many students perceive their behavior is influenced by reading the Bible. A few justifications for reading the Bible affecting their behavior included a participant saying the Bible, "teaches how to act and ways one should behave." One participant specifically referenced a part of the Bible that is often used when referring to direction by saying, "When reading in Psalms or Proverbs, it is very soothing to my soul or even the crucifixion story makes me very humble and realize that my current emotion is temporary, but God is forever." Those who did not perceive a correlation did not provide an explanation as to why they do not believe their behavior is not impacted Bible reading.

Motivation was the first area that showed a statistically significant difference in the students' responses. For the students who did not agree with Bible reading as impacting their motivation to succeed, they did not provide an explanation for their belief. Those who did make a connection between Bible reading and motivation connected it to purpose, encouragement, and expectations. A participant stated, "It gives me more purpose and assures me that I have one even though sometimes I get lost I know that God will protect me."

Goals was another area that showed a statistically significant difference. Participants who believed their Biblical literacy practices influenced their future goals revealed that it inspired their career goals, level of church involvement in college, or it inspired them to achieve their goals. A participant stated, “It made me realize what paths I need to take in order to accomplish them.” Students who did not agree were not aware of the connection between Bible reading and their goals. One participant said, “It is not the factor of choosing future career for me.”

The last area of academic success focused on the impact Bible reading had on decision-making. The data showed a tremendous similarity among the boys and girls revealing they both consider the Bible when making decisions. When explaining their position on whether reading the Bible affects their decision-making, those who were impacted expressed the moral factor and desire to please Jesus as being their guide for making decisions. A participant wrote that, “The Bible helped me think about the other sides of situations and who gets affected by what I do.” Participants who disagreed did not provide an explanation regarding their belief that reading the Bible does not affect their decision-making.

### **Discussion on Results of Secondary Students’ Perceptions of the Relationship between Reading the Bible and Reading in School**

Acknowledging the level of importance placed on reading the Bible in school, reflected that girls found it to be more important than boys. The findings always revealed that the participants were able to make some connections to what they read in school and other texts they read in school. One participant expressed the connection they noticed by stating,

“They don’t always line up. There is a secular view and there is a Godly view. But because we started off as a fairly religious nation, we can still see Christian remnants left in our history, stories, and in the sciences.”

This statement is very reflective of the researcher, Ryken (2014) who mentioned the Bible’s impact on Western culture. Other participants made connections between history discussed and texts such as *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Another participant stated, “Many stories have a Biblical origin” while another participant believes that “Sometimes a book will reference or use some of the themes of the Bible.” Overall, most students perceive aspects of the Bible to be evident in other texts they read in school.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, students’ perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance and academic success as a function of gender were investigated. Subsequently, the findings of this study brought awareness to the perceptions of boys and girls regarding the impact Biblical literacy has on their academic performance, academic success, and what they read in school. As noted in the literature review, a gender achievement gap exists, which may be attributed to most male students not being engaged in what they are reading (Clinton et al., 2014; Jeynes, 2009; Schwabe, McElvany, and Trendtel, 2015; and OECD/UNESCO, 2003). The findings of this study revealed that even in the perceptions of the impact of Bible reading there is a gender gap. Most boys did not recognize connections between reading the Bible and its impact on their academic performance and academic success. In fact, more girls considered reading the Bible to be an important factor compared to the boys. This was similar to findings

shared by The National Literacy Trust (Clark and Burke, 2012), in which the boys who performed lower than girls typically did not value reading. In this case, the girls were more impacted by reading the Bible, which could be a result of them valuing the reading of the Bible more than boys. By collecting the perceptions of students, educators may assume that engagement of Biblical literacy instruction has the same emphasis as engagement in literacy overall. A lack of engagement hinders the students' ability to recognize the relevance and significance of the text, which in turns prevents them from comprehending what they are reading.

Not only did the students' responses reveal an academic impact, but also brought light to the impact on behavior. Synonymous with Jeynes' (2009, 2010) research, much of the findings in this study showed that Biblical literacy does affect academic and behavioral outcomes of students. The students' explanations as to why different areas were impacted aligned with Ek (2008), Skerrett (2013), and Jeynes (2009) who all found Biblical literacy to be beneficial to academic achievement.

The findings of this study should challenge educators to reconsider the use of the Bible in schools. It is evident that when properly implemented it plays a defining role in the lives of students today. Knowing that it impacts students academically and behaviorally is more of a reason to identify different ways in which the Bible can be used as literature.

### **Future Research**

When conducting future research, researchers should consider expanding the range of students by including more private schools in various geographical areas. Additionally, it may be worthy to explore the Biblical literacy practices of public school

students who attend church or religiously affiliated activities on a regular basis to determine their perceptions of the impact it may have on their academic performance and success. Seeing that environment can affect a students' learning (Tracy & Morrow, 2012), investigating whether the students' ability to apply the teachings of the Bible is affected by their environment would be helpful.

It was evident that there is a pattern among boys not being as engaged in reading as girls; it would be opportune for research to be done surveying the perception of boys on what types of texts engage them. This study should question whether different genres, topics, cultural relevance, or formatting play a role. The boys emphasizing action stories of the Bible may encourage educators to provide texts related to these stories. Future researchers should also consider whether the instructional strategies used in schools might need to be differentiated based on gender. It is also recommended that future researchers observe Sunday schools and study how they present the content of the Bible. Similar to Skerrett's (2013) study, there may be different strategies used that help boys retain the content better than when they are in school.

Overall, this study is only the beginning of a multitude of research needing to be conducted on this topic. Although religion is seen as a controversial topic when paired with education, it does seem to affect the future leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, the field of education should do what is necessary to see that students are receiving relevant instruction that builds them academically, socially, and behaviorally.

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Table 2.1

*Descriptive Statistics for Christian Denomination of Participants by Gender*

Identify with Christian Denomination	Boys		Girls	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Baptist	18	24	23	21.9
Catholic	7	9.3	14	13.3
Methodist	12	16.0	11	10.5
Presbyterian	2	2.7	2	1.9
Church of Christ	9	12.0	21	20.0
Non-Denominational	22	29.3	25	23.8
Other	5	6.7	9	8.6

Table 2.2

*Descriptive Statistics by Percentage of Survey Responses of Secondary Students for*

*Biblical Literacy Practices and Academic Performance by Gender*

Impact on Academic Performanc e	Boys				Girls			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Grades	39	43.8	50	56.2	62	53.0	55	47.0
Test Scores	31	35.2	57	64.8	43	37.1	73	62.9
Reading Ability	78	86.7	12	13.3	94	80.3	23	19.7

Table 2.3

*Descriptive Statistics by Percentage of Survey Responses of Secondary Students for  
Biblical Literacy Practices and Academic Success by Gender*

Impact on Academic Success	Boys				Girls			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Attendance	18	20.5	70	79.5	33	28.2	84	71.8
Behavior	81	91.0	8	9.0	108	92.3	9	7.7
Motivation	57	64.0	32	36.0	90	76.9	27	23.1
Goals	51	57.3	38	42.7	86	74.1	30	25.9
Decision- Making	75	84.3	14	15.7	106	90.6	11	9.4

Table 2.4

*Participant Responses to Survey Question on Importance of Bible Reading in School*

*by Gender*

Importance of Bible Reading in School	Boys		Girls	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Very Important	28	31.1	62	53.0
Somewhat Important	40	44.4	33	28.2
Not Really Important	14	15.6	16	13.7
Not a Factor	8	8.9	6	5.1

### CHAPTER III

BIBLICAL LITERACY IN A SECULAR WORLD: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
BIBLICAL LITERACY PRACTICES AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE AND READING ABILITY AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS

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This journal ready dissertation follows the style and format of *Journal of Research on  
Christian Education (JRCE)*.

### **Abstract**

In this study student perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices and academic performance, overall academic success, and connections perceived between reading the Bible and reading in school as a function of ethnicity were examined by analyzing their responses from a survey. Chi-square tests were run on the students' survey responses using SPSS. In most analyses, statistically significant differences, with small effect sizes (Cohen, 1988), were evident, specifically in their response to the importance of reading the Bible in school, increasing their reading ability, helping with their behavior, impacting their motivation to succeed, and their decision-making. Analyses also revealed that Asian students tend to find the least connection between reading the Bible and its impact on their academic performance and academic success. Although the results do not reflect the findings demonstrated in the literature exposing the ethnic achievement gap, they do raise awareness that religion does play an important role in the lives among ethnic groups.

**Keywords:** Literacy, Biblical literacy, ethnicity/race, academic success, academic performance, religious activities, Grades 7-12

BIBLICAL LITERACY IN A SECULAR WORLD: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
BIBLICAL LITERACY PRACTICES AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE AND READING ABILITY AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS

According to the 2014-15 and 2015-2016 Texas Academic performance reports (Texas Education Agency, 2016a), there is a consistent reading achievement gap between ethnicities. Throughout Grades 3-8, Black students underperformed other ethnic groups. The Hispanic population scored slightly higher than the Black population. White students performed higher than both Hispanic and Black students, with Asian students consistently outperforming all ethnic groups.

The data collected by the Texas Education Agency is comparable to the findings retrieved by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). This organization tracked the performance of 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students from 1992, 2011, and 2013. The results of their analysis revealed the gap between Black and White students was closing, but still exists. The Asian population began to notably outperform all racial groups around 2011 leaving White, Hispanic, and Black students trailing behind.

As previously noted, Jeynes' (2003) also recognized the racial disparities amongst Black and Hispanic students. In terms of closing the racial achievement gap, he considered their parental structure and religiosity. Jeynes (2009) also conducted a study that sought to identify whether or not there was a direct correlation between students' level of Biblical literacy and their academic achievement. When analyzing data for racial differences he found that there were "no statistically significant effects emerged in the benefit accrued by White and non-White students" (p.431). Although his study did not

reveal a specific correlation between reading achievement and Biblical literacy through data analysis, this study will explore students' perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy and academic performance and reading ability among four ethnic groups.

### **Literacy and Reading Skills**

To begin, the complexity of the word *literacy* and what it means to be literate involves a broad spectrum of definitions. The acquisition of reading skills is inextricably linked to education and has economic, cultural, social, and political benefits. Literacy is a foundational life skill recognized by many as a human right (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2016). For purposes of this study, literacy is defined as “the process of using reading, writing, and oral language to extract, construct, integrate, and critique meaning through interaction and involvement with multimodal texts in the context of socially situated practices” (Frankel, K. K., Becker, B. C., Rowe, M. W., & Pearson, P. D., 2016, p.7). Literacy involves reading, writing, and listening in social settings. When reading, much of how information is interpreted is based upon the social, cultural, and historical roots of the one reading.

Frankel, Becker, Rowe, & Pearson (2016) further define the meaning of literacy through the following five principles: (1) literacy is a constructive, integrative, and critical process situated in social practices; (2) fluent reading is shaped by language processes and contexts; (3) literacy is strategic and disciplinary; (4) literacy entails motivation and engagement; and (5) literacy is a continuously developing set of practices. Each principle brings awareness to literacy embodying multiple skills that are influenced by how the reading interacts with the text. Overall, the skills needed to read effectively

are impacted by the history of the reader and may change over time as the reader develops.

### **Ethnicity and Reading Achievement**

The American Psychological Association (APA) Presidential Task Force on Educational Disparities (2012) analyzed research and attributed the achievement gaps amongst ethnicities based on the following differences: “(a) differential or biased treatment of ethnic and racial minority students within the educational system, (b) differences in socioeconomic status, and (c) different responses to educational systems or different sets of educational needs” (p. 11). APA’s findings also revealed that the reading achievement levels of the Black and Hispanic population were indeed lower than their White and Asian counterparts. For instance, White and Asian children reading below level were consistent between 4th through 12th grades. On the contrary, a greater percentage of Black and Hispanic students were noted as reading below level, 50-54% in 4th grade with a slight decrease to 40-46% in the 12th grade, in comparison to White and Asian students (American Psychological Association , 2012). The findings reported by the American Psychological Association (2012) demonstrate that there continues to be an ethnicity achievement gap that has narrowed some yet ceases to close. Because of the many external factors that might contribute to the existence of the gap, it might be necessary to use external resources to close the ethnicity achievement gap.

### **Student Perceptions**

Student perceptions create an opportunity for students to let their voice be heard. The Glossary of Education Reform (2013) uses the term student voice, which has been used as a “school- or instructional-improvement strategy” (para. 2). Student voice

incorporates the perspectives of students allowing school officials to make decisions with greater consideration for how the students actually feel. By doing this, students are more motivated, engaged, and involved in their learning.

Student perceptions provide educators with the opportunity to enhance their instruction so it is student centered and geared towards their learning needs. Cheatle and Bullerjahn (2015) conducted a study focusing on student perceptions of the writing center at their university. Prior to conducting the study, they recognized that the majority of the students using their services were first year undergraduate students. They found that many students believed the writing center was for first year undergraduate students and international students. Their findings brought awareness to the importance of effectively marketing the writing center and bringing more attention to the fact that it is for all college students regardless of their current major or level of study. By surveying the students of their campus, they were able to understand why their services were not being used to its full potential.

By gaining student perceptions, students are given the chance to be engaged. The needs of the students are considered when educators are planning. Focusing on student perceptions allows educators to consider the interests of students when planning instruction, which will help students, recognize the relevance of the text and be more focused when learning.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Over the past few years, it has become more and more evident that the ethnicity achievement gap continues to exist. Researchers (American Psychological Association, 2012; Jeynes, 2003; and Musu-Gillette et al., 2016) have recognized the stagnant gap

between Black and Hispanic students and White and Asian students. With various ethnicities comes various cultural upbringings. Jeynes (2003), considered the role of religion within the lives of minorities such as Black and Hispanic students, but he did not retrieve information that could determine whether religion plays a significant role in their lives. Understanding how religion might affect a member of a certain ethnicity academically could provide insight as to why some ethnicities perform better on reading achievement test than others.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which differences are present in students' perceptions of Biblical literacy practices among five different ethnic/racial groups (i.e., Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and more than one ethnicity) of middle and high school students based on Biblical literacy practices and experiences. The students' responses to a survey regarding demographics, Biblical literacy practices, and religiously affiliated out-of-school activities were used to gain their perceptions. Data were analyzed to determine the existence of any significant or consistent student perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability) and overall academic success as a function of ethnicity.

### **Significance of the Study**

Researchers (Jeynes, 2003; and Musu-Gillette et al., 2016) have recognized the achievement gap that continues to exist between ethnicities. They noted reasons for this gap narrowing, but not closing include variables such as: (a) family structure, (b) religiosity, and (c) varying socioeconomic status, and (d) differential treatment towards

the different ethnic groups. By conducting this study, information pertaining to students' perceptions of the role of religion could further identify whether religiosity has influenced the academic performance and reading ability of students among different ethnicities.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this empirical investigation:

(a) What are the differences in students' perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability) among Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and students of more than one ethnicity in Grades 7-12? (b) What are the differences in students' perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical Literacy practices and academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) among Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and students of more than one ethnicity in Grades 7-12? and (c) What is the relationship between students' perceptions with regard to reading the Bible and what they read in school among Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and students of more than one ethnicity in Grades 7-12?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

For this study, the research design presented is the correlational design, which is a non-experimental form of research that involves using correlational statistics to describe and measure the relationship between variables or sets of, scores (Creswell, 2012). In order to retrieve data, cross sectional survey research was conducted to collect data regarding the participants' demographics (e.g. gender and ethnicity), Biblical literacy

practices, and participation in religiously affiliated activities. The survey was administered during one of their Bible classes. The instructions were read by me as the researcher. Upon completion of the study, the data were analyzed and chi-square tests were run using SPSS to identify any patterns between the students' perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance and reading ability as a function of ethnicity.

### **Participants**

Participants were selected using convenience sampling which includes using individuals “who are available, volunteer, or can be easily recruited in the sample” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p.263). Although Johnson and Christensen (2014) suggest convenience sampling is not the best way to choose participants, they have acknowledged that most researchers use this selection process due to “practical constraints” (p. 264). In the case of this study, convenience sampling provided an opportunity to gain a wider range of participants.

A total of 208 middle and high school students in Grades 7-12 between the ages of 12-18 years participated in this study. The students attended diverse private schools located in a southeast city in Texas. Many of the students represent various denominations of Christianity that all involve reading the Bible. Presented in Table 3.1 are the denominational affiliations of the participants. In order to maintain anonymity, students were asked not to provide their names when completing the survey. For the purpose of this study, the participants identified their ethnicity when completing a survey.

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Insert Table 3.1 here

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## **Instrumentation**

In order to retrieve data, a cross-sectional survey, developed by the researcher, was administered to the participants. Cross-sectional research includes “data that is collected at a single point in time” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p.403). The survey administered included both closed and open-ended items as there were advantages for using both to collect participants’ responses. Closed items allowed for specific responses to items needed for data collection and analyses, whereas open-ended responses provided participants an opportunity to share their own thinking. Responses to open-ended questions demonstrated the thoughts and beliefs of the participant through impromptu reaction to the question at the time of the survey. Closed items were reactive and open-ended items were beneficial because they did not prompt a specific reaction.

Responses to the closed survey items were quantified through a nominal level of measurement; however, the open-ended responses were quantified through a system of coding. Specifically, the researcher read all open-ended responses several times. Through in-depth reading of responses, patterns, common terms, and topics were explored. As common themes emerged, categories were developed as a means of sorting the descriptive data. The categories for coding were both comprehensive and mutually exclusive (Saldaña, 2015). Comprehensive means the researcher looks broadly at all possible categories and mutually exclusive means the categories will not overlap. The coding categories were narrowed to subthemes and quantified by number of responses including the theme. Lastly, narrative responses most prevalent to the themes were included to illustrate and support the findings.

To establish reliability of coding the open-ended responses, a second coder independently reviewed the responses, themes, and categories. Intercoder reliability was based on a high level of agreement among the coders and the open discussion to look through different lenses to determine final themes (Patton, 2005). Additionally, validity was addressed through specific themes that were not too broad or overlapping. The themes were consistent and supported the content of the responses. The questions focused on the participants' demographics (e.g., gender and ethnicity), Biblical literacy practices, and participation in religiously affiliated activities.

### **Data Analysis**

Data utilized in this quantitative study were collected through surveys completed by students who had parental permission to participate in this study. A data file was created in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 24 (SPSS) and all data were imported for analyses. Closed items on the survey were coded nominally as in a Likert scale for analysis. Additionally, open-ended responses were coded according to themes and each category was quantified based on the number of times the theme was noted in the survey responses. Further, specific open-ended responses were selected to provide support of the themes identified. All analyses included data specific to the survey responses as reported by different ethnic groups for comparison purposes. Descriptive statistics for each of the variables were calculated. To determine if there was a correlation between academic performance and Biblical literacy practices as a function of ethnicity a chi-square statistical analysis was conducted. Assumptions for running a chi-square test were met based on the categorical nature of the data, specifically, Likert scale responses

on the survey and quantifying the open-ended responses. The alpha level of .05 was used to determine the level of statistical significance.

### **Method and Procedures for Data Collection**

The following steps were taken to collect data and ensure the anonymity of the participants:

1. Upon approval from the private schools and IRB, I met with the principals to establish a timeline for me to distribute parental permission forms, collect them, read and collect signed assent forms, then administer the paper survey.
2. I distributed parent permission forms for students to take home and explained to students the purpose of the cover letter and permission form.
3. Students were asked to submit their signed parental permission forms to a locked drop box that only I had access to and not to give it to a teacher or other school personnel.
4. The students were given a one-week timeframe to return their forms.
5. I returned on a designated date, which was set forth by administration, to retrieve the locked boxes.
6. I used a class roster, provided by the principal, with only the students' names, to crosscheck those who had permission to participate. This ensured only those students received the assent form and nonparticipating students received an alternate paper with an activity to complete.
7. For students eligible to participate, I read the assent form to participating students before administration of the paper survey then collected the assent form.

8. I distributed the paper surveys to students who had parental permission and gave their consent to participate in the study.
9. I read the directions to the students and asked them to complete the paper survey.
10. For students who were not participating, I provided a crossword puzzle activity reviewing significant events and people in the Bible.
11. Upon survey completion, I collected the surveys from each student to be analyzed, I manually input the participants' responses into SPSS, descriptive statistics were reported, and data was analyzed in relation to the students' responses.

### **Results**

Chi-square tests were performed to identify differences in students' perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices and academic performance (i.e. grades, test scores, reading ability), and academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals decision-making), among Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and students of more than one ethnicity in Grades 7-12. The variables examined were all categorical which met the assumptions for using Pearson chi-square analysis. A total of 30 Asian, 41 Black, 19 Hispanic, 95 White, and 23 participants of more than one race completed the survey. Due to a significant quantity of participants of more than one ethnicity, it was important to include their responses, as this group is underrepresented in the research. Between 205 and 208 participants responded to the questions pertaining to the impact Bible reading has on grades, test scores, and reading ability, so there is a variation among the response totals due to some participants not responding to all the questions presented

in the survey. A crosstabulation was run with the independent variable being ethnicity and the dependent variable being the students' responses.

### **Results for Secondary Students' Perceptions of Biblical Literacy Practices and Academic Performance**

When analyzing the results for statistical significance for students' perceptions of the relationship between their Biblical literacy practices and academic performance there was a statistically significant difference in the area of reading ability,  $\chi^2(4, N = 208) = 14.190, p = .007$ . The difference represented a Cramer's *V* of .261, which according to Cohen's (1988) criteria, was a small effect size. Statistically significant differences were not revealed for grades,  $\chi^2(4, N = 207) = 2.793, p = .593$  and test scores,  $\chi^2(4, N = 205) = 1.015, p = .907$ .

Each group, with the exception of Asian participants, responded positively in regards to reading the Bible impacting their reading ability. In fact, Asian students had the lowest percentage of "yes" responses at 60%. Black participants had the highest percentage of "yes" responses with 90% agreeing that reading the Bible affected their reading ability. In addition, more than 80% of Hispanic, White, and participants of more than one ethnicity responded that Bible reading increased their reading ability.

There appeared to be significant patterns evident among the different ethnic groups. In the area of grades, more than half of the respondents in each ethnic group stated that the Bible affected their grades. For instance, 14 Asian, 24 Black, 9 Hispanic, 42 White students, and 13 students of more than one ethnicity indicated reading the Bible affected their grades. Among students who did not agree, a greater number of Black

students indicated that reading the Bible did not affect their grades than other ethnic groups.

Regarding test scores, few students in each group perceive reading the Bible impacts their test scores, specifically 11 Asian, 17 Black, 6 Hispanic, 32 White students, and 8 students of more than one ethnicity. Black participants had the highest percentage of responses that Bible reading impacts their test scores (42.5%). Readers are referred to Table 3.2 for findings on the students' perceptions of the impact of Bible reading on academic performance by ethnicity.

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Insert Table 3.2 here

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### **Results for Secondary Students' Perceptions of Biblical Literacy Practices and Academic Success**

Upon reviewing the students' responses to questions related to their perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic success, there appeared to be statistically significant differences in the areas of behavior, motivation, and decision-making. The chi-square tests revealed that behavior resulted in a statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2(4, N = 207) = 18.176^a, p = .001$ , with a small size effect of Cramer's  $V = .296$  (Cohen, 1988). All of the Black participants responded "yes" to Bible reading helping their behavior (40) with Hispanic (17), White (89), and more than one ethnicity (22) participants indicating the same response. Asian, specifically, 22 (73.3%) state they feel Bible reading influences their behavior; however, this group also had the highest percentage of participants to disagree (26.7%).

Motivation is also an area that demonstrated a statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2(4, N = 207) = 18.176^a, p = .001$ , with a small size effect of Cramer's  $V = .278$  (Cohen, 1988). Consistent with the results on behavior, Asian students had the lowest "yes" response at 53.3%, whereas Black participants had the highest number of "yes" responses at 92.7%. Hispanic (13), White (68), and participants of more than one ethnicity (13) shared they feel the Bible has an effect on their motivation.

Decision-making was the final area which demonstrated a statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2(4, N = 207) = 17.133^a, p = .002$ , with a small size effect of Cramer's  $V = .288$  (Cohen, 1988). In this case, participants of more than one ethnicity yielded the highest percentage of "yes" responses to Bible reading influencing their decision-making at 100%. Hispanic, Black, and White students followed close behind, with Asian participants noting the lowest percentage of "yes" responses of 66.7%. Nonetheless, each ethnic group believes Bible reading impacts their decision-making.

A statistically significant difference among groups was noted for attendance,  $\chi^2(4, N = 155) = 5.510, p = .239$ , with a small size effect of Cramer's  $V = .164$  (Cohen, 1988). Statistically significant differences were not revealed for future goals,  $\chi^2(4, N = 206) = 4.618, p = .329$ . However, significant patterns in the areas of attendance and goals were indicated. In the area of attendance, each ethnic group had a higher "no" response count in regards to the impact Bible reading has on attendance. Interestingly, Asian participants had the lowest percentage of "no" responses while Black and White participants had the highest percentages of "yes" responses. It is evident that attendance is not an area the students believe is impacted by their Bible reading.

Although there were no statistically significant differences pertaining to Bible reading and its impact on the participants' future goals, each ethnic group had higher "yes" responses regarding the impact Bible reading has on their goals than "no" responses. For instance, the following ethnicities stated that reading the Bible influences their goals: Asian (16), Black (31), Hispanic (12), White (63), and more than one ethnicity (16). Among the participants' responses, Black students had the highest percentage of "yes" responses (77.5%) and Asian students had the lowest percentage of "yes" responses (53.3%).

Overall, Black participants showed higher "yes" responses as it pertained to Bible reading impacting their academic success. On the contrary, Asian participants consistently showed that Bible reading did not affect their academic success. Overall, attendance was an area that each ethnic group believes is not impacted by reading the Bible. Behavior, motivation, and decision-making were distinct areas wherein all ethnicities believe Bible reading impacts these areas of their academic success. Depicted in Table 3.3 are the descriptive statistics for survey responses of secondary students with regard to Biblical literacy practices and academic success by ethnicity.

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Insert Table 3.3 here

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### **Results for Secondary Students' Perceptions of the Relationship between Reading the Bible and Reading in School**

In order to effectively answer this question, students were asked how important reading the Bible in school is, as well as to make connections between what they read in school and what they have read in the Bible. The findings for importance of reading the

Bible in school was deemed as statistically significant,  $\chi^2(12, N = 208) = 34.681, p = .001$ . The difference represented a Cramer's  $V$  of .236, a small effect size (Cohen, 1988). Most of the participants believe reading the Bible in school is important with 164 participants stating that reading the Bible in school is very or somewhat important and only 44 participants disagreeing. Among all ethnic groups, Black participants noted the highest percentage for reading the Bible in school as being important with a percentage of 87.8%. Other ethnic groups indicated reading the Bible in school as important as well, with Asian participants at the lowest percentage of 46.7%. Refer to Table 3.4 for descriptive statistics of student responses by ethnicity.

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Insert Table 3.4 here

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The open-ended question regarding the connections participants made to what they have read in school and what they have read in the Bible revealed many similarities between the two. The participants recognized common themes, specifically in their English and history texts. There were quite a few allusions to the Bible found in their other texts. Specific examples of the students' responses will be cited in the discussion section.

### **Discussion**

Socio-cultural and the social learning theory (Tracey & morrow, 2012) are both reflected in this study. The findings reveal that the students' religious background affected different areas of their academic performance and academic success. The participants perceive their Biblical literacy practices as significant influences on their reading ability and other areas related to their behavior. Responses examined in the Likert

scale data led to further examination with regard to the open-ended responses of the participants based upon their ethnicity. The open-ended responses provided greater insight regarding the perceptions of the participants.

To evaluate the responses, I identified common themes noted among participants. In relation to Biblical literacy practices and academic performance, a consistent theme among all ethnic groups was they perceive no link between reading the Bible and their grades and test scores. When referring to reading ability, the theme of text difficulty in the Bible was acknowledged as enhancing their reading ability. Many students perceive the Bible to be a challenging text, helping them gain a deeper level of understanding, which in turn affects their reading ability.

For open-ended responses concerning Biblical literacy practices and academic success, consideration for consequences and commitment to Christ were themes reflective of the students' perceptions. Students consider the lessons learned through reading the Bible when taking action or making decisions. Finally, a significant theme among the participants' open-ended responses related to texts read in school and the Bible. The participants believe that much of the literature they have read in school correlates with how the Bible describes the foundation of humankind and interaction among humans. Concrete examples of these themes are presented in the following sections.

### **Discussion on Results of Secondary Students' Perceptions of Biblical Literacy Practices and Academic Performance**

As it relates to academic performance, more participants recognized the impact reading the Bible had on their grades, test scores, and reading ability. For the most part,

Black participants demonstrated a higher-level connection between reading the Bible and their academic performance than other groups and far greater than Asian participants. A consistent theme among those who did not make a connection between Bible reading and those who did make a connection, centered on their ability to make a connection between the spiritual teachings of the Bible and applying it to their lives. Lastly, the Bible being a literary work with complex content and intense vocabulary served as reasons students presented to explain how reading the Bible increased their reading ability. A student stated, “Some stuff in the Bible has some complicated stuff that might help.” The complexity of the text challenges the students causing them to expand their reading levels. This was further supported by another student stating, “[Reading the Bible is] harder and older language, thus it could be considered a slightly higher than average reading level.” Ultimately, many participants recognized that any reading is beneficial to improving their reading ability.

When considering grades, one participant emphasized that reading the Bible did not help improve their grades in school because, “I think that studying for a test helps improve my grades not reading a verse in the Bible which is helpful in other areas of my life.” A student who thought otherwise said their grades did improve, “however I wish schools would teach how to apply the scriptures in daily life rather than talk about the history part of it. But when one knows how to use it to their benefit they can perform much better.” In response to how test scores are affected, one participant stated that reading the Bible did not help increase their test scores because “the Bible, at least to me, is not means to increase any material thing. My test scores are solely based on the knowledge that God has bestowed upon me.”

On the contrary, another student said reading the Bible did help increase his or her test scores because, “it cannot technically make you better, but serves as a little boost, or by just saying a prayer gives comfort.” Both recognize the importance of reading the Bible, but they each make different connections regarding how it benefits them. These same participants also had differing ideas as it pertained to reading the Bible increasing their reading ability. One participant stated, “It’s another source of knowledge” while the other participant stated, “not particularly, maybe spiritually, but not academically.” Ultimately, students who made connections recognized how it helped them, but those who did not considered reading the Bible to be more of an isolated act to improve their character and lifestyle.

### **Discussion on Results of Secondary Students’ Perceptions of Biblical Literacy**

#### **Practices and Academic Success**

The areas of Academic Success embodied a similar pattern with Black, Hispanic, and Whites students feeling as if reading the Bible was more impactful than Asian students. The Bible being considered a guide to living was a consistent theme as it pertains to why most participants believe reading the Bible influenced them in the areas of behavior, motivation, and decision-making. In the area of attendance, most students believe there is no correlation between reading the Bible and attendance. One student stated that reading the Bible did help improve their attendance because they “try [their] best to actively try to learn.” Another student noted that “reading the Bible doesn’t affect whether or not [they] go to school.

When considering behavior, a student stated that the Bible helps because it “motivates [them] to make great decisions and live a Christ-like life.” When discussing

motivation, it was said that reading the Bible motivated them to succeed because, “it [taught them] that [they] have value and worth and [they] should do everything for God’s glory.” Other participants connected reading the Bible as being strength to persevere and not give up. In regards to goals, data analysis did not show a statistically significant difference; however, there were participants who recognized reading the Bible does play a role when considering goals. For instance, one participant stated that the Bible “reminded [them] to keep God in mind when making decisions about [their] future.” On the other hand, a student who did not believe reading the Bible influenced their future goals stated they “have always wanted to go to Harding University so [they] don’t think the Bible has helped [them] decide that.”

The final area of academic success focused on decision-making. A few participants mentioned that reading the Bible makes them think about the consequences of their decisions. For example, a student said, “it makes [them] think twice and about the outcomes [their] decisions will have.” Another student stated that, “Examples from the Bible that are similar to [their] own, help [them] get perspective on [their] own petty issues, and thus make a clearer choice or action.” Other students stated that reading the Bible makes them want to make decisions that please God. The idea that reading the Bible has the power to influence students’ decision-making raises awareness to what is being used in schools to teach students how to make better decisions.

Conclusively, reading the Bible for the most part impacted all ethnic groups in some capacity. Asian students stood out as being the ethnic group associating Bible reading with their academic success the least compared to the other ethnicities. For most,

reading the Bible affected their academic success by being a guide, source of inspiration, or revealer of their identity in regards to how God would want them to be in life.

### **Discussion on Results of Secondary Students' Perceptions of the Relationship between Reading the Bible and Reading in School**

With regards to the importance of reading the Bible in school, the results show that students found it to be the least important whereas Black students deemed it to be the most important and Hispanic and White students showed similar results. For the most part, students made connections to the Bible and other texts during their English and history classes. One participant pointed out many themes connecting what they have read in school to the Bible.

“There are obvious connections when it comes to the human condition/falling of man in non-humanistic literature such as the discussion of human weakness/ limited knowledge. All thematic studies, which occur in literature, appear in the Bible because the Bible gives the truth about human interaction/mannerism. Often, analogies/metaphorical usage of the Bible are present whether it be through names, stories, etc.”

The connections made by this participant are consistent with the thoughts of the researcher Ryken (2014) who recognized the role the Bible played in various aspects of Western culture. Overall, most students perceive aspects of the Bible to be evident in other texts they read in school.

### **Conclusion**

Students' perceptions of the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance and reading ability as a function of ethnicity were investigated in

this study. The students' survey responses regarding their Biblical literacy practices were analyzed to identify any correlations that exist between Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and students of more than one ethnicity. Consequently, the findings of this study brought awareness to the impact Biblical literacy has on academic performance and academic success. Mentioned previously in the literature review, there is an inconsistency in the achievement level among different ethnic groups (American Psychological Association, 2012; Jeynes, 2003; and Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Whereas Black and Hispanic students tend to perform lower than Asian and White students (American Psychological Association, 2012; Texas Education Agency, 2016a), this study revealed that Asian students were the group that least attributed their academic performance and academic success to Biblical literacy practices.

Jeynes (2003, 2009, 2010) who also recognized the significance of Biblical literacy and the ethnic achievement gap that exists did identify a connection between Black and Hispanic students who may be committed to their religion due to their cultural upbringing. Although this study did not focus on the participants' upbringing, much of the findings of this study gave insight into how the students feel their life is affected by their Biblical literacy practices. For the most part reading ability, behavior, motivation, and decision-making were the main areas that the students believe were impacted by them reading the Bible. This correlates with Jeynes (2009, 2010) research highlighting the impact Biblical literacy has on students' academic achievement and behavior.

By gaining insight regarding students' perceptions of Biblical literacy practices and whether or not it impacts their lives, I was able to confirm that the Bible is a guide for students similar to what Perkins (2011) suggested when he called the Bible a

blueprint. When considering the students' academic success, many of them found the Bible to play a major role in their behavior, motivation, and decision-making emphasizing how the Bible gives them direction.

The findings of this study should challenge educators to reconsider the use of the Bible in schools. It is evident that when properly implemented it plays a defining role in the lives of students today. Knowing that it influences students academically and behaviorally is more of a reason to identify different ways in which the Bible can be used as literature.

### **Future Research**

Considering the findings of this study are only based on two private schools in one geographical area, it would be beneficial to conduct this study among a wider range of students. Researchers should also investigate the role the environment plays on students' ability apply the teachings of the Bible. Students who read the Bible in a private school setting may have a different perception of the Bible than students who read the Bible in a public school setting.

Seeing that many of the Asian students did not attribute their academic performance and academic success to reading the Bible, researchers should conduct a more in-depth study about the background of the students. The cultural background of students may affect a students' ability to fully embrace the Bible as something more than just a text or spiritual guide. Future researchers should also consider whether application of the Bible is missing when the Bible is being taught. Lastly, more research should emphasize the perceptions of students of more than one ethnicity. Much data may be overlooked due to focusing on single ethnicities. Further research including students of

more than one ethnicity may provide greater insight regarding socio-cultural factors and Biblical literacy among this group.

Because of the extensive amount of research retrieved from this study, the topic of religion and education should be reexamined. If the goal is to provide holistic learning that enhances students as a whole person, then we must consider every aspect of the student when providing instruction. In order for students to be empowered academically, socially, and behaviorally, we must consider the elements that influence them in those areas and according to the findings of this study, religion plays a role.

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Table 3.1

*Descriptive Statistics for Christian Denomination of Participants by Ethnicity*

Identify with Christian Denomination	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	More than One Ethnicity
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
Baptist	2	11	4	22	2
Catholic	4	1	6	5	5
Methodist	0	8	0	13	2
Presbyterian	1	1	0	3	0
Church of Christ	3	5	2	15	5
Non- Denominational	7	9	5	20	6
Other	5	3	1	7	3

Table 3.2

*Descriptive Statistics by Count of Survey Responses of Secondary Students for Biblical**Literacy Practices and Academic Performance by Ethnicity*

Impact on Academic Performance	Asian		Black		Hispanic		White		More than One Ethnicity	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Grades	14	16	24	17	9	10	42	52	13	10
Test Scores	11	19	17	23	6	13	32	61	8	15
Reading Ability	18	12	37	4	17	2	82	13	19	4

Table 3.3

*Descriptive Statistics by Count of Survey Responses of Secondary Students for Biblical**Literacy Practices and Academic Success by Ethnicity*

Impact on Academic Success	Asian		Black		Hispanic		White		More than One Ethnicity	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Attendance	10	20	11	30	3	16	25	68	2	21
Behavior	22	8	40	0	17	2	89	6	22	1
Motivation	16	14	38	3	13	6	68	27	13	9
Goals	16	14	31	9	12	6	63	32	16	7
Decision- Making	20	10	36	4	18	1	85	10	23	0

Table 3.4

*Participant Responses to Survey Question on Importance of Bible Reading in School*

*by Ethnicity*

Importance of Bible Reading in School by Ethnicity	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	More than One Ethnicity
Very Important	9	25	8	42	7
Somewhat Important	5	11	6	39	12
Not Really Important	9	5	4	9	3
Not a Factor	7	0	1	5	1

**CHAPTER IV****BIBLICAL LITERACY IN A SECULAR WORLD: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
PARTICIPATION IN RELIGIOUSLY AFFILIATED OUT-OF-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES  
AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND PERSONAL LIFE**

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This journal ready dissertation follows the style and format of *Journal of Research on  
Christian Education (JRCE)*.

### **Abstract**

This study investigated secondary student's perceptions as to the relationship between their participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities on their academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) and personal lives examined to identify any differences that may exist among gender, ethnicity, and grade level. Chi-square tests were run on the students' survey responses using SPSS. Only one analysis, within ethnicity, showed a statistically significant difference in ethnicity, with a small effect size (Cohen, 1988), as it pertained to their participation in religiously affiliated out of school activities and the impact it has on their personal lives. Being that out-of-school literacy practices has been found to impact academic success (Amanti, 2005; Jeynes, 2009; and Schultz and Hull 2008), most participants stated that their activities have a greater impact on their personal lives.

**Keywords:** Literacy, Biblical literacy, ethnicity/race, gender, academic success, academic performance, religious out-of-school activities, Grades 7-12

BIBLICAL LITERACY IN A SECULAR WORLD: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATION IN RELIGIOUSLY AFFILIATED OUT-OF-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND PERSONAL LIFE

Kulick and Stroud's (1990) ethnographic study highlighted the impact of Biblical literacy as an out-of-school literacy in Gapun, which is a small village in Papua New Guinea. The people of Gapun attended classes in English where literacy development took place, but their literacy skills were only applied to Christianity and their relationships with each other because "there were few opportunities in the course of normal village life to read or write" (Kulick and Stroud, 1990, p. 288). Kulick and Stroud's (1990) findings demonstrated the strong connection between literacy and the church through the large amounts of Christian literature collected. Because of their study, Kulick and Stroud (1990), justified "the fact that literacy, like other technologies is culturally shaped," (p. 301); therefore, a connection must be made between what students practice out-of-school and in-school.

Ek (2008) and Skerrett (2013) both conducted qualitative studies which demonstrated how using Biblical literacy as an out-of-school literacy can be effective. Ek (2008) observed a high school ESL student, Edgar, in a church and school setting. She was able to see how the lack of connection made between school and Edgar's literary practices at church caused him to struggle in school. Through interviews and classroom observations, Skerrett (2013) noticed how the students were more receptive to learning and used higher levels of comprehension through their ability to make literary connections between secular texts and Biblical references included in those texts. Upon seeing the role of Biblical literacy and its effect, Ek (2008) and Skerrett (2013)

recommended secular schoolteachers to become more open-minded in terms of how students learn by considering their out-of-school practices. Ek (2008) states that teachers “must also keep in mind that community practices may not match those of school literacy practices, but that does not make them any less valuable” (p. 12). Skerrett (2013) suggests that the “silencing of religious discourses in school limits opportunities for the teaching and learning of literacy” (p. 248). Through their studies, Ek (2008) and Skerrett (2013) were able to see how religious literacy practices could be beneficial in helping students learn. Skerrett emphasized the importance of researching religious literacy from a social, cultural, and historical perspective and implied that any further research should focus on those perspectives.

In each of these studies, the connections made and literacy skills built through Biblical literacy engaged the students and awakened their desire to learn. Hopefully, this study will acknowledge Biblical literacy as an out-of-school literacy worth including as an in-school literacy.

### **Literacy and Reading Skills**

To begin, the complexity of the word *literacy* and what it means to be literate involves a broad spectrum of definitions. The acquisition of reading skills is inextricably linked to education and has economic, cultural, social, and political benefits. Literacy is a foundational life skill recognized by many as a human right (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2016). For purposes of this study, literacy is defined as “the process of using reading, writing, and oral language to extract, construct, integrate, and critique meaning through interaction and involvement with multimodal texts in the context of socially situated practices” (Frankel, K. K., Becker, B.

C., Rowe, M. W., & Pearson, P. D., 2016, p.7). Literacy involves reading, writing, and listening in social settings. When reading, much of how information is interpreted is based upon the social, cultural, and historical roots of the one reading.

Frankel, Becker, Rowe, & Pearson (2016) further define the meaning of literacy through the following five principles: (1) literacy is a constructive, integrative, and critical process situated in social practices; (2) fluent reading is shaped by language processes and contexts; (3) literacy is strategic and disciplinary; (4) literacy entails motivation and engagement; and (5) literacy is a continuously developing set of practices. Each principle brings awareness to literacy, embodying multiple skills that are influenced by how the reading interacts with the text. Overall, the skills needed to read effectively are impacted by the history of the reader and may change over time as the reader develops.

### **Out-of-School Literacy Practices and Literacy**

Implementation of out-of-school literacy practices is vital to students' ability to make connections when trying to learn new information (Amanti, 2005). Eakle's (2007) study, which focused on applying Biblical literacy in multiple spaces, reinforced students' being more receptive to learning through the integration of Biblical literacy. Eakle's ethnographic study involved him examining literacy practices within a Christian school in Mississippi. His study allowed him to observe how the students applied their Biblical knowledge to art at a museum, a movie, and rap music. His study evidenced how students used higher order thinking by making connections between Biblical literacy and academic lessons received beyond the classroom.

Dickie and McDonald's (2011) study also demonstrated how Biblical literacy as an out-of-school literacy furthered literacy development. Their qualitative study of family literacy and Biblical literacy revealed that Samoan family members would introduce the school's process of learning, but they would use the literacy skills learned at church to teach the children how to comprehend information (Dickie and McDonald, 2011). Both studies demonstrate the benefits of out-of-school learning as it relates to literacy.

### **Student Perceptions**

Understanding student perceptions gives access into the minds of students, allowing educators to understand how to more effectively teach them. The Glossary of Education Reform (2013) uses the term student voice, which has been used as a "school- or instructional-improvement strategy" (para. 2). Student voice incorporates the perspectives of students allowing school officials to make decisions with greater consideration for how the students actually feel. By doing this, students are more motivated, engaged, and involved in their learning.

Cheatle and Bullerjahn (2015) conducted a study focusing on student perceptions of the writing center at their university. Prior to conducting the study, they recognized that the majority of the students using their services were first year undergraduate students. They found that many students believed the writing center was for first year undergraduate students and international students. Their findings brought awareness to the importance of effectively marketing the writing center and bringing more attention to the fact that it is for all college students regardless of their current major or level of study. By surveying the students of their campus, they were able to understand why their services were not being used to its full potential.

In the same way, gaining the perceptions of students allows educators to become aware of what materials and instructional practices help or hinder students' ability to succeed academically and in life. Conducting this study will allow students to demonstrate how Biblical literacy practices affect them academically. This in turn, makes room for educators to consider the importance of use of using the Bible as literature.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Schultz and Hull (2008), the exclusion of out-of-school literacy practices from classroom instruction is doing a great disservice to students. They have found that incorporating out-of-school literacy and in-school literacy practices will allow students to make connections, which will enhance their learning. Amanti (2005) describes the information learned outside of school as funds of knowledge. She explains the importance of using out-of-school literacy practices by saying, "replicating what students have learned at home, but about using students' knowledge and prior experiences as a scaffold for new learning" (p. 135). One form of out-of-school literacy is Biblical literacy, but it is often excluded from being used within the classroom. According to Jeynes (2009), the Bible's moral significance to those who study it, has the ability to enhance students' academic achievement. Furthermore, its literary significance also has the potential to capture the attention of students and encourage them to learn new information simply because they are able to make a connection to information gained from reading the Bible.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore differences in middle and high school students' perceptions as to the relationship between their participation in religiously

affiliated out-of-school activities on their academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) and their personal lives. The students' responses to a survey regarding demographics, Biblical literacy practices, and religiously affiliated out-of-school activities were used to gain their perceptions. Data were analyzed to determine the existence of significant factors among students' perceptions as to the relationship between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance and overall academic success (i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) as a function of their involvement in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities.

### **Significance of the Study**

Acknowledging the significance of integrating out-of-school literacy practices and in-school literacy practices, it is imperative that all out-of-school literacy practices be considered. Researchers (e.g., Amanti, 2005; Jeynes, 2009; and Schultz and Hull, 2008) have all identified the benefits of incorporating students' out-of-school literacy practices with their in-school literacy practices. Because Biblical literacy is an out-of-school literacy practice that also embodies significance in-and-out-of-school, it would be conducive for educators to use it with reading instruction. This study will determine whether students perceive their religiously affiliated out-of-school activities as having an impact their academic success and relationships.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this empirical investigation:

- (a) What are the differences in students' perceptions of the relationship between participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities and academic success as a function of gender, ethnicity and grade level among students in Grades 7-12? and (b)

What are the differences in students' perceptions of the relationship between participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities and the impact on their personal lives as a function of gender, ethnicity, and grade level among students in Grades 7-12?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

For this study, the research design presented is the correlational design, which is a non-experimental form of research that involves using correlational statistics to describe and measure the relationship between variables or sets of, scores (Creswell, 2012). In order to retrieve data, cross sectional survey research was conducted to collect data regarding the participants' demographics (e.g. gender and ethnicity), Biblical literacy practices, and participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities. The survey was administered during one of their Bible classes. Instructions for the survey were read by me as the researcher. Upon completion of the study, the data were analyzed and tests were run using SPSS to identify any patterns between the student perceptions of the relationship between their participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school literacy practices and academic success and personal life.

### **Participants**

Participants were selected using convenience sampling which includes using individuals "who are available, volunteer, or can be easily recruited in the sample" (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p.263). Although Johnson and Christensen (2014) suggest convenience sampling is not the best way to choose participants, they have acknowledged that most researchers use this selection process due to "practical constraints" (p. 264). In

the case of this study, convenience sampling provided an opportunity to gain a wider range of participants.

Middle and high school students, specifically, 208, in Grades 7-12 between the ages of 12-18 years participated in this study. The students attended diverse private schools located in a southeast city in Texas. Many of the students represent various denominations of Christianity that all involve reading the Bible. A denominational breakdown of the participants is included in Table 4.1. In order to maintain anonymity, students were asked not to provide their names when completing the survey. For the purpose of this study, the participants identified their gender, ethnicity, and grade level when completing a survey.

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Insert Table 4.1 here

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### **Instrumentation**

In order to retrieve data, a cross-sectional survey, developed by the researcher, was administered to the participants. Cross-sectional research includes “data that is collected at a single point in time” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p.403). The survey administered included both closed and open-ended items, as there are advantages for using both to collect participants’ responses. Closed items allowed for specific responses to items needed for data collection and analyses, whereas open-ended responses provided participants an opportunity to share their own thinking. Responses to open-ended questions demonstrated the thoughts and beliefs of the participant through impromptu reaction to the question at the time of the survey. Closed items were reactive and open-ended items were beneficial because they did not prompt a specific reaction.

Responses to the closed survey items were quantified through a nominal level of measurement; however, the open-ended responses were quantified through a system of coding. Specifically, all open-ended responses were read thoroughly several times by the researcher. Through in-depth reading of responses, patterns, common terms, and topics were explored. As common themes emerged, categories were developed as a means of sorting the descriptive data. The categories for coding were both comprehensive and mutually exclusive (Saldaña, 2015). Comprehensive means the researcher looks broadly at all possible categories and mutually exclusive means the categories will not overlap. The coding categories were narrowed to subthemes and quantified by number of responses including the theme. Lastly, narrative responses most prevalent to the themes were included to illustrate and support the findings.

To establish reliability of coding the open-ended responses, a second coder independently reviewed the responses, themes, and categories. Intercoder reliability was based on a high level of agreement among the coders and the open discussion to look through different lenses to determine final themes (Patton, 2005). Additionally, validity was addressed through specific themes that were not too broad or overlapping. The themes were consistent and supported the content of the responses. The questions focused on the participants' demographics (e.g., gender and ethnicity), Biblical literacy practices, and participating in religiously affiliated activities.

### **Data Analysis**

Data utilized in this quantitative study were collected through surveys completed by students who had parental permission to participate in this study. A data file was created in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 24 (SPSS) and all data were

imported for analyses. Responses to closed survey items were coded nominally as in a Likert scale for analysis. Additionally, open-ended responses were coded according to themes and each category was quantified based on the number of times the theme was noted in the survey responses. Further, specific open-ended responses were selected to provide support of the themes identified. Descriptive statistics for each of the variables were calculated. To determine if there was a correlation between academic students' perceptions of participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school practices and their academic and personal success, chi-square statistical analysis was conducted for the variables of gender, ethnicity, and grade level for comparison purposes. Assumptions for running a chi-square test were met based on the categorical nature of the data, specifically, Likert scale responses on the survey. The alpha level of .05 was used to determine the level of statistical significance.

### **Method and Procedures for Data Collection**

The following steps were taken to collect data and ensure the anonymity of the participants:

1. Upon approval from the private schools and IRB, I met with the principals to establish a timeline for me to distribute parental permission forms, collect them, read and collect signed assent forms, then administer the paper survey.
2. I distributed parent permission forms for students to take home and explained to students the purpose of the cover letter and permission form.
3. Students were asked to submit their signed parental permission forms to a locked drop box that only I had access to and not to give it to a teacher or other school personnel.

4. The students were given a one-week timeframe to return their forms.
5. I returned on a designated date, which was set forth by administration, to retrieve the locked boxes.
6. I used a class roster, provided by the principal, with only the students' names, to crosscheck those who had permission to participate. This ensured only those students received the assent form and nonparticipating students received an alternate paper with an activity to complete.
7. For students eligible to participate, I read the assent form to participating students before administration of the paper survey then collected the assent form.
8. I distributed the paper surveys to students who had parental permission and gave their consent to participate in the study.
9. I read the directions to the students and asked them to complete the paper survey.
10. For students who were not participating, I provided a crossword puzzle activity reviewing significant events and people in the Bible.
11. Upon survey completion, I collected the surveys from each student to be analyzed, I manually input the participants' responses into SPSS, descriptive statistics were reported, and data was analyzed in relation to the students' responses.

## **Results**

To identify differences in students' perceptions of the relationship between their participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities on their academic success

(i.e. attendance, behavior, motivation, goals, decision-making) and their personal lives as a function of gender, ethnicity, and grade level among students in Grades 7-12, chi-square tests were performed. The variables examined were all categorical which met the assumptions for using Pearson chi-square analysis. A crosstabulation was run with the independent variables being gender, ethnicity, and grade level, and the dependent variable being the students' responses.

Although participants in the overall survey included 90 boys and 117 girls, not all responded to the questions pertaining to the impact of participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities on academic success and personal life. Between 187 and 190 participants responded; thus there is a variation among the response totals. Regarding ethnicity, 30 Asian, 41 Black, 19 Hispanic, 95 White, 23 participants of more than one ethnicity responded to the items in the survey. Further, participants at each grade level included: 7th grade (45), 8th grade (10), 9th grade (27), 10th grade (26), 11th grade (26), and 12th grade (74).

Data from the survey revealed that 64 boys and 82 girls participate in out-of-school religiously affiliated activities. In addition, 15 Asian, 32 Black, 10 Hispanic, 75 White, 15 students of more than one ethnicity participates in religious extracurricular activities. Lastly, with regard to grade level, 35 seventh-graders, 7 eighth-graders, 24-ninth graders, 18 tenth-graders, 19 eleventh-graders, and 44 twelfth-graders participate in religiously affiliated out-of- school activities. Of those participants, they indicated some of the activities they are involved in include; church Bible studies, vacation Bible school during the summer, community outreach, mission trips, worship concerts, choir, and Sunday school.

### **Results of Impact of Participation in Religiously Affiliated Out-of-School Activities on Academic Success and Personal Life by Gender**

Responses related to the students' participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities based on gender indicated that there were no statistically significant differences for the impact on academic success,  $\chi^2(2, N = 187) = 1.290, p = .525$ . Correspondingly, there were no statistically significant differences for the impact on personal life,  $\chi^2(1, N = 189) = .066, p = .797$ . Findings revealed that boys and girls believe their personal life is impacted more than academic success by participation in religious activities outside of school. For instance, 42.7% of the boys noted that their involvement in activities impacted their academic success and 83.3% stated it influenced their personal life. The girls stated that 42.9% of their academic success was impacted while 81.9% of their personal life was affected. The responses for both boys and girls were similar for both survey items with almost double the responses indicating personal life as being affected the most by their participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities. Readers are referred to Table 4.2 for a visual representation of the students' responses.

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Insert Table 4.2 here

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### **Results of Impact of Participation in Religiously Affiliated Out-of-School Activities on Academic Success and Personal Life by Ethnicity**

When considering ethnicity, there were no statistically significant differences for the impact of participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities on their academic success,  $\chi^2(8, N = 188) = 5.301, p = .725$ . Most students considered the impact

on academic success to be less evident than their personal life. Each ethnic group had more “no” responses regarding the impact of religiously affiliated out-of-school activities on academic success.

On the contrary, the impact on their personal life showed a statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2(4, N = 190) = 9.567, p = .048$ . The effect size for this finding, Cramer’s  $V=.224$ , was small (Cohen, 1988). Most ethnicities were in the same percentage range when responding “yes” to the impact on their personal life; however, Asian participants showed a 20% lower “yes” response than the other ethnicities. Specifically, Asian (63%), Black, (89.5%), Hispanic (80%), White (86.5%), and students of more than one ethnicity (82.6%) responded as to the affect out-of-school religious based activities impact their personal lives. Black participants had the highest “yes” responses followed by White, students of more than one ethnicity, and Hispanic participants. A representation of students’ responses are presented in Table 4.3.

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Insert Table 4.3 here

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### **Results of Impact of Participation in Religiously Affiliated Out-of-School Activities on Academic Success and Personal Life by Grade Level**

Regarding grade level, there were no statistically significant differences between the impact of religiously affiliated out-of-school activities on academic success,  $\chi^2(10, N = 188) = 16.980, p = .075$ ; as well as for personal life,  $\chi^2(5, N = 190) = 5.779, p = .328$ . For academic success, the 7<sup>th</sup>-and-8<sup>th</sup> grade students had the highest “yes” responses with a percentage of 51.7% and 66.7%, respectively, indicating their academic success was impacted. Tenth-graders had a lower “yes” response of 27.3%. On the contrary, all the

grade levels had high “yes” responses when considering the impact of the activities on their personal life. Ninth-grade (92.3%) and tenth-grade (90.9%) students displayed the highest percentage “yes” responses as it pertains to the impact of their participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities on their personal life. Descriptive statistics are delineated in Table 4.4.

### **Discussion**

The participants in this study acknowledged religion influences different aspects of their life. This connects to the socio-cultural and social learning theory (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Because their social settings and practices outside of school affected their academic success and personal life, these two theories were reflected. Many of the explanations elaborating on students’ perceptions demonstrated how they were influenced by religiously affiliated out-of-school activities. I went through each survey and selected responses related to the questions asking them how participating in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities affected their academic success and personal lives. Each section of this discussion includes significant and in-depth quotes from the participants by gender, ethnicity, and grade level.

When analyzing the open-ended responses, I recognized recurring themes related to applying the principles of the Bible, prioritizing different aspect of students’ lives, relating to people, shifts in thinking, and growth. Boys and girls mentioned how the Bible challenges them to prioritize their academic success, as well as apply principles of the Bible to their everyday lives. When considering their personal lives, many referred to participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities playing a role in how they connect with people.

Participants in each ethnic group referred to a change in their thinking and perspective. Some referred to developing knowledge of their identity as a Christian, which prompts them to do their best in relation to academic success. Students' also perceive their relationships with family and peers as improving based on Biblical literacy practices. Lastly, themes for participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities, related to grade level, included participant responses indicating they experience personal growth and feel their relationships with peers improves. The subsequent sections include specific quotes from the participants based upon their responses to questions on this survey.

#### **Discussion on Results of Impact of Participation in Religiously Affiliated Out-of-School Activities on Academic Success and Personal Life by Gender**

For religiously affiliated out-of-school activities, gender did reveal a statistically significant difference. Many boys and girls alike believe their personal life was more impacted by their activity involvement than academic success. In spite of the results, both boys and girls recognize church activities help with their academic success. When explaining the impact of participating in church activities on academic success, one participant stated, "Church has helped [them] to set [their] priorities right and in order." Another participant said, "[they] learned more discipline and gained more trust in the Lord. After gaining these two, everything fell in line. [They] also gained more wisdom." These quotes further demonstrate how their out-of-school practices allowed them to make their academic success a priority. The knowledge gained while participating in their church activities challenged them to apply a level of work ethic that affected their academic success.

Regarding their personal life, most students stated they learned lessons that improved their life. For instance, a student wrote, “I learned many life lessons and ways to improve my faith which will in return improve me.” Some participants referenced their relationships were impacted whether it was their relationship with peers or Christ himself. One participant stated that going to church helped them with their relationship with their father. Relationships are a significant theme in regards to the teachings of the Bible. Because many churches emphasize the importance of loving one another equally, many of the participants may have been able to apply these same teachings to how they interact with others.

#### **Discussion on Results of Impact of Participation in Religiously Affiliated Out-of-School Activities on Academic Success and Personal Life by Ethnicity**

The impact on academic success and personal life for ethnicity was similar to that of gender. All ethnicities considered academic success to be less impacted than their personal life. For the impact on academic success, most referred to being more prepared for their Bible class, working in a manner that would honor God at all times, and being mentally prepared to go to school. A participant stated that, “going on the mission trip has influenced the way [they] view the world which is now positive. [They’ve] always been quite okay with the academic side, so with a positive attitude it makes [their] success in that area stronger”. The connection made by this participant reveals that their religiously affiliated out-of-school experience gave them a more positive mindset that allowed them to do better in school.

The effect on their personal life is where a statistically significant difference became apparent. Asian participants considered the participation to have less of an

impact on their personal life. When given the opportunity to elaborate on their response, very few answered the open-ended response, but one participant stated their personal life was impacted by participating in church activities because “that was where [they] became a Christian.” Becoming a Christian for many is a life changing experience that transforms every aspect of their lives. A participant stated “their involvement in church activities impacted their personal life by them becoming a Christian shows that involvement in the church taps into the life of people beyond knowledge to a more personal level.” Another participant emphasized how they better relate to people now and participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities “changed [them] to see the beauty of the world and to come to terms with [their] part and made [them] school mom and big ‘little’ sister to almost everyone.” Further, this participant establishes relationships with others are due to their participating in church activities.

### **Discussion on Results of Impact of Participation in Religiously Affiliated Out-of-School Activities on Academic Success and Personal Life by Grade Level**

When evaluating grade level, impact of participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities on academic success and personal life were very similar to that of gender and ethnicity. Academic success was considered to be less influenced compared to personal life. Most of the responses pertaining to how academic success was impacted connected to their desire to succeed whether it be in school or life. For instance, one participant stated that participating in church activities “improved [their] mood and helped [them] to do better in school.” A common theme that emerged is participating in church activities evokes a mindset to excel. One participant stated, “[They] think if you’re fine with your spiritual part, your mind will work better allowing you to

concentrate better. Then your grades will be good.” Having this mindset is what enhances the participants’ ability to put forth more effort to do well in various areas of their lives.”

Concerning personal life, many participants provided explanations related to their relationship with God and communicating with peers. A participant wrote, “It’s easier for me to not be influenced by peer pressure because I’m so strong with my foundation.”

Another student wrote, “I am respectful when talking to others and try to exemplify Jesus whenever interacting with someone. I ask God to help me keep Him first and base any relationship I have upon Him.” Their participation in church activities molded the way they value relationships with peers and God. Being involved within a community of Christians and fellowshiping with them creates a confidence. In the words of another participant, participating in church activities “helps you become a better person.” It may be inferred that their involvement in church activities influenced them as a person, which influenced other areas of their personal life.

The findings of this study overall demonstrate that more students across gender, ethnicity, and grade level believe that participating in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities impacts their personal life more than their academic success. Most of the responses among all three variables emphasized how their activities influenced their relationship with God and how they function and communicate with their peers.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, the questions regarding students’ perceptions of the relationship between participation in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities and academic success and their personal life were presented through a survey. The responses to the survey were analyzed to identify any relationships that exist between participation in

religiously affiliated out-of-school literacy activities, academic success, and their personal life. The findings of this study raised attention towards the impact of participating in religiously affiliated out-of-school literacy activities. Connecting the research findings discussed in the literature reviewed, Glanville, Sikkink, & Hernandez, (2008) and Jeynes, (2009, 2010), identified the impact of Biblical literacy on students outside of school, this study brought awareness to the idea that participation in out-of-school activities benefits the personal lives of students more.

In regards to academic success, the findings of this study were closely related to the studies of Ek (2008) and Skerrett (2013) where the participation within religiously affiliated out-of-school activities affected participants' ability to build skills and be motivated to learn. Likewise, many of the open-ended responses of this study showed that the participation in church activities did motivate them to do their best in school. As the results were examined, gender and grade level did not show significant impacts on academic success and personal life, but ethnicity revealed that Asian students did not consider participation to impact their personal life near as much as the other ethnicities. This could be a result of the cultural emphasis placed on religion.

Commensurate with other researchers (Alvermann et al., 1996; Mahar, 2003; Schultz and Hull, 2008), the findings of this study should challenge educators to look more in-depth at out-of-school religiously based activities in which students participate. It is evident in student responses these activities play a defining role in the lives of students today. As previously noted in literature reviewed, Jeynes (2009) recognized that the Bible harbors moral significance that motivates students to do better. Because of this,

implementation of religiously affiliated out-of-school activities may impact students' academic success in school.

### **Future Research**

To further validate the findings of this study, it is important to consider conducting future research in more environments. Although the findings of this study presented valuable information, there needs to be more research conducted in more private schools, as well as among students within public schools. Expanding research with regard to the geographical location and type of school may provide more in-depth research on the impact participating in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities has students.

Culture is another area that should more extensively investigated due to the consistent pattern of Asian students not making as many connections between religiously affiliated out-of-school literacy activities and their personal life, it would be advantageous for research to be done surveying the perception of students based on their cultural foundation. This study could bring awareness to the impact of culture and whether there are barriers pertaining to how the Bible should be applied. Amanti (2005) belief that out-of-school literacy supports knowledge that can be beneficial in the classroom and the findings of this study should challenge future researchers to investigate instructional strategies used in out-of-school activities.

Because students' lives affect their learning, considering their religious background when educating them is important. Based upon this study, religion and religiously based activities affects students in regards to their personal lives. This study opens the door for more religious affiliated out-of- school activities to be investigated.

The findings of this study provide an opportunity for educators to help students bridge their personal lives outside of school with experiences in school. In order for teachers to properly instruct students, they need to know about their students and understand them as individuals.

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Table 4.1

*Descriptive Statistics for Christian Denomination of Participants by Gender*

Identify with Christian Denomination	Boys		Girls	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Baptist	18	24	23	21.9
Catholic	7	9.3	14	13.3
Methodist	12	16.0	11	10.5
Presbyterian	2	2.7	2	1.9
Church of Christ	9	12.0	21	20.0
Non-Denominational	22	29.3	25	23.8
Other	5	6.7	9	8.6

Table 4.2

*Descriptive Statistics by Percentage of Survey Responses of Secondary Students for the Impact of Participation in Religiously Affiliated Out-of-School Activities on Academic Success and Personal Life by Gender*

Impact on Academic Success and Personal Life by Gender	Boys				Girls			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Academic Success	35	42.7	46	56.1	45	42.9	60	57.1
Personal Life	70	83.3	14	16.7	86	81.9	19	18.1

Table 4.3

*Responses of Secondary Students for the Impact of Participation in Religiously Affiliated Out-Of-School Activities on Academic Success and Personal Life by Ethnicity*

Impact of Participation in Religious Activities	Asian		Black		Hispanic		White		More than One Ethnicity	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Academic Success	11	16	17	19	7	8	38	50	7	14
Personal Life	17	10	34	4	12	3	77	12	17	4

Table 4.4

*Responses of Secondary Students for the Impact of Participation in Religiously Affiliated Out-Of-School Activities on Academic Success and Personal Life by Grade*

Impact of Participation in Religious Activities	Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Academic Success	24	18	6	3	12	12	6	16	9	14	23	44
Personal Life	32	10	8	1	24	2	20	2	21	3	52	15

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, connections among all results will be made among gender, ethnicity, and grade level. In reviewing the results of each study, not every area investigated revealed statistically significant results. Although, there were not as many statistically significant differences, there were significant results connected to research present by other researchers.

First, all of the studies aligned with the socio-cultural and social learning theory (Tracy & Morrow, 2012) presented as the theoretical framework for each study. In some capacity, each study demonstrated the Bible influenced participants. Regardless of gender, ethnicity, or grade level, the results showed that the students are impacted by reading the Bible or participating in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities. This was significantly revealed in the results surrounding the impact of reading the Bible and its affect on reading ability, behavior, motivation, and decision-making.

With the gender achievement gap (Clinton et al., 2014; Jeynes, 2009; Schwabe, McElvany, & Trendtel, 2015; OECD/UNESCO, 2003) and ethnic achievement gap (American Psychological Association, 2012; Jeynes, 2003; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016) narrowing, yet still existent, it was apparent that all participants, regardless of gender or ethnicity believe reading the Bible impacts their reading ability, behavior, motivation, and decision-making. These findings are also in alignment with other researchers' findings (Glanville, Sikkink, & Hernandez, 2008; Jeynes, 2009, 2010) showing a correlation between Biblical literacy, academic achievement, and behavior outcomes.

Acknowledging the cultural connection in learning and in life makes it important to consider the role culture plays in the perceptions of the participants. When discussing ethnicity, Asian participants consistently did not connect what they were reading in the Bible to their academic performance. Even when analyzing data for participating in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities, most Asian students were not impacted. In previous research (Texas Education Agency, 2016a), Asian students have outperformed all ethnicities, but this study showed that they may attribute their academic achievement to something beyond religion. In contrast, the Black and Hispanic ethnic groups that normally underperform in terms of academic achievement (Jeynes, 2003; Texas Education Agency, 2016a) were considered the most impacted by reading the Bible in all areas. This raises the question of whether culture or even denomination plays a role in how religion is connected to life.

### **Future Research**

Because of the findings of these studies, future researchers are urged to conduct this study in a wider range of areas such as more private schools, public schools, and beyond the Houston area. Also, surveying parents and teachers who have taught in public and private schools. Asking their perception may bring light on how they value Biblical literacy and whether or not they see a connection between Biblical literacy practices and academic performance and academic success.

Due to the focus of these studies being connected to Biblical literacy and literacy development, it will be important to retrieve information regarding actual reading levels and scores. Although it may be tedious, it will present more transformative research to

demonstrate the true impact Biblical literacy has on students' academic performance and academic success.

Seeing that the gender achievement gap (Clinton et al., 2014; Jeynes, 2009; Schwabe, McElvany, and Trendtel, 2015; and OECD/UNESCO, 2003) is still existent, future researchers should consider looking into the instructional strategies used. Surveying boys alone may present more data that could help boys make connections to what they are reading which in turn will enhance their academic achievement. Being able to recognize their interests may engage them and provide information that will better align instruction.

Lastly, further research should be investigated concerning the application of Biblical literature and whether this would affect students' academic performance or academic success. Many students consistently mentioned a lack of application being discussed when reading the Bible in school. Those who were not impacted by reading the Bible or participating in religiously affiliated out-of-school activities were not able to recognize a connection. Private Christian schools should consider gearing instruction beyond teaching the Bible and extending it to help students apply the Word. Considering the overall benefits of Biblical literacy practices, public schools should consider allowing the reading of the Bible an option for students. This will help students to bridge their religiously affiliated out-of-school activities with school, which may increase engagement, academic achievement, and behavior.

### **Final Thoughts**

Having recognized the impact Biblical literacy has on reading ability, behavior, motivation, decision-making, and personal life, implementing the reading of the Bible in

schools should be considered. Not only do the findings of these studies reflect this, but I can vouch for the impact reading the Bible has had on my life. I attended a Believer's Foundation class at one of my old churches and a Ghanaian pastor always told me that in order to relate to the Bible, I have to find myself in the Bible. My life has been a compilation of Joseph as he journeyed from the pit to the palace, David the man after God's own heart who went from being a shepherd to a king, Esther the orphan who became a Queen, Moses the outcast sent to deliver a nation, Paul who endured many tests yet remained faithful to the call upon his life, and most importantly Jesus who sacrificed his life to see that I am here today. I am sure there are many more I can relate to, but those are the people whose stories have inspired me the most in this season of my life.

As a child, I was always observant of other people. I would think about how socioeconomic status, religion, and culture played a role in my classmates' ability to excel academically. In my case, having knowledge of the Bible is what often motivated me to do well in school in spite of problems at home. Even my mother knew the role the Bible would play in my life. On June 7, 1992, I was baptized in church with my father and she gave me a Bible. Although, it was way too advanced for me then, it represented all that I stand for today. In 1996, my mother's health dwindled due to her suffering from breast cancer. In October of that year, she died. Prior to her death, I had moved to my second elementary school since she struggled to pay for our house due to my father leaving our home. Because my father was not with my mother and me when she died, I had to go through custody cases which ultimately resulted in my grandmother fulfilling my mother's dying wish for me to remain in my grandmother's care with visitation rights being granted to my father. After my grandmother gained full custody of me, I was

placed in a Christian private school during the middle of my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade school year. After being assessed, they found I was not at my appropriate reading level, but by the time I left, I was far ahead of my public school peers in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I was not much of a reader, but I loved reading the Bible and hearing the stories. As I was exposed to more and more literature, I noticed how there were many Biblical undertones. One book that was read to my whole class was Frank Peretti's *This Present Darkness*. It was a Christian based fiction novel and I saw God's word all through it. I eventually began to find myself in the Bible that led to me making connections to my life.

The foundation established at my private Christian school set the tone for me to maintain discipline in my studies. Going to church, fellowshiping with other Christians and studying the Bible is what helped me gain insight on how to apply the word of God to my everyday life. There was a confidence in Christ that was fostered by being connected to other Christians. From middle school, high school, to college, and even as an adult, the Bible is a reference that I use to find my identity. It drives every aspect of my life from the major I chose in school, the people I socialize with, the extra-curricular activities I participated in, to my passion for education. The Bible taught me how to relate to people. The teachings of love, grace, and mercy allowed me to forgive the wrongdoings of my father, other family members, and even friends. I am proud to say that even though I did not live with my dad, we formed a close relationship before he passed away. The year of 2013-2014 was an intense year because my dad and his two older brothers all passed away in their birth order. My dad knew I was pursuing my doctoral degree and he knew I would focus on the significance of Biblical literacy. Because I knew that he supported the vision I had, I stood on the word of God and did not

stop my doctoral program. My foundation in the word of God is what pushes me to believe beyond what I see and go after what I desire to see in life.

As a public school educator, I see many students who experience similar challenges and even talking with my students, many of them have a background in Biblical literacy, but they struggle to apply it to their lives in school. I have sponsored Christian organizations and heard students state they were growing scared to read their Bibles because they believed they would get in trouble or bullied at school. If school is supposed to be a safe place, then why are students afraid to be themselves in it? Embracing out-of-school literacy practices creates a safe environment for students. On many occasions, I would have a student secretly reading their Bible during silent reading and by me saying it was okay, I could see a weight lifted from them. In classroom discussions, many students make references to the Bible and how its teachings reflect what we are reading in class. Even when I had discipline issues with students, mentioning church or their knowledge of the Bible transformed their behavior. They knew the word of God, but they thought it was only relevant to church.

Biblical literacy birthed my love for literacy, molded my behavior, and guided me to reach this level of success. Similarly, to the responses received from the participants of this study, I, too, recognized that reading the Bible impacted my academic performance and academic success. Biblical literacy could be the missing piece to establishing safer, relevant learning environments for students. With love being the number one teaching of the Bible and the lack of it being displayed in society, reading the Bible could create loving citizens, that grow up to do things that improve our society rather than tear it down. Ultimately, my hope is that more individuals in the world be able

to experience the benefits of Biblical literacy just as myself and participants in these studies have encountered. As stated in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Because of the Bible, all of the above have been imparted in my life giving me the ability to create this good work before you.

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## APPENDIX A



Institutional Review Board  
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DATE: April 7, 2017

TO: Ashlei Evans [Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lory Haas]

FROM: Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: *Biblical Literacy in a Secular World: Secondary Students' Perceptions of the Influence of Biblical Practices on Academic Achievement [T/D]*

PROTOCOL #: 2017-02-32571

SUBMISSION TYPE: INITIAL REVIEW—RESPONSE TO MODIFICATIONS

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: April 5, 2017

EXPIRATION DATE: **April 5, 2018**

REVIEW TYPE: FULL BOARD

REVIEW CATEGORIES: **§46.111 Criteria for IRB approval of research (Subpart A)**  
**§46.404 Research not involving greater than minimal risk (Subpart D)**

Thank you for your submission of your **Response to Modifications** for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received **Full Board** Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure which are found on the Application Page to the SHSU IRB website.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records



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All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All Department of Health and Human Services and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. **Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of April 5, 2018. When you have completed the project, a Final Report must be submitted to ORSP in order to close the project file.**

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 936-294-4875 or [irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu). Please include your project title and protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Donna Desforges  
IRB Chair, PHSC  
PHSC-IRB

## APPENDIX B

### Biblical Literacy Survey

The purpose of this survey is to learn more about the literacy practices of middle and high school students both in and outside of school. Please take a moment to respond to the questions below. In this survey, there are no right or wrong answers. Your answers should be the ones that are right for you. Your responses are confidential. You are not required to complete this survey and you may submit the survey incomplete if you do not wish to participate. Your participation in this brief survey is greatly appreciated!

Are you 18 or older \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

If you are 18 or older please continue with the survey. If you are under 18 you must have a signed parent permission form to complete the survey.

Please mark the most appropriate response to each survey item.

#### Part 1: Background

##### 1. What is your grade level?

- 7th
- 8th
- 9th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12th

##### 2. Your gender

- Male
- Female

##### 3. Your ethnicity (Please choose only one.)

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic American
- White / Caucasian
- Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)

**4. Do you identify with a Christian denomination?**

- Yes
- No

**If you marked yes for question number 4, please continue to the next question. If you marked no for question number 4, please skip to question number 6.**

**5. Your Christian denomination (Please choose only one.)**

- Baptist
- Catholic
- Methodist
- Presbyterian
- Church of Christ
- Non-Denominational
- Other (please specify)

**Part 2: Educational Background****6. Have you ever attended a public school?**

- Yes
- No

**If you marked yes for question number 6, please continue to the next question. If you marked no for question number 6, please skip to question number 10.**

**7. What grades did you attend in public school?****8. How long have you been in private school?**

**9. Which do you prefer?**

- Public school
- Private school

Why?

**10. What are your future goals after high school?**

- 2-year College
- Technical School
- 4-year University
- Military
- Join workforce
- Not sure

Other (please specify)

**Part 3: Religious Based/Church Activities****11. Do you participate in religious based/church activities outside of school?**

Yes or  No

If yes, what activities are you involved in? Also include summer activities.

**12. If you are involved in a religious based/church activity, how often do you participate?**

- Daily
- 2-3 times per week.
- 2-3 times per month.
- 3-4 times per year.
- 1-2 times per year.

Other (please specify)

**13. Has participating in religious based/ church activities impacted your academic success?**

- Yes       No

**If so, how?**

**14. Has participating in religious based/ church activities impacted your personal life?**

- Yes       No

**If so, how?**

#### **Part 4: Biblical Literacy Practices**

**15. Do you read the Bible during school?**

- Yes  
 No

**16. If you read the Bible during school, how often do you read it?**

- Daily  
 2-3 times per week.  
 2-3 times per month.  
 3-4 times per year.  
 1-2 times per year.

Other (please specify)

**17. Do you read the Bible outside of school?**

- Yes
- No

**18. If you read the Bible outside of school, how often do you read it?**

- Daily
- 2-3 times per week.
- 2-3 times per month.
- 3-4 times per year.
- 1-2 times per year.
- Other (please specify)

**19. If you do read the Bible, where do you read it most often?**

- School
- Home
- Church
- Other (please specify)

**20. If you attended public school, did you read the Bible or discuss any Biblical stories?**

- Yes
- No

**Part 5: Impact of Biblical Literacy****21. How important do you feel reading the Bible in school is to your academic success?**

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not really important
- Not a factor

**22. Do you believe reading the Bible helps improve your grades in school?**

Yes       No

Please explain why?

--

**23. Do you believe reading the Bible helps improve your attendance in school?**

Yes       No

Please explain why?

--

**24. Do you believe reading the Bible helps increase your reading ability?**

Yes       No

Please explain why?

--

**25. Do you believe reading the Bible helps increase your test scores?**

Yes       No

Please explain why?

--

**26. Do you believe reading the Bible helps with your behavior?**

Yes       No

Please explain why.

**27. Has reading the Bible impacted your future goals?**

Yes       No

**If so, how?**

**28. Has reading the Bible impacted your life?**

Yes       No

**If so, how?**

**29. Has reading the Bible impacted your relationships with friends, family members, and other people?**

Yes       No

**If so, how?**

**30. Has reading the Bible impacted your motivation to succeed in life?**

Yes       No

**If so, how?**

**31. Has reading the Bible impacted the way you make decisions?**

Yes       No

**If so, how?**

**32. What connections have you made to what you read in school and what you've read in the Bible?**

**33. Please list your favorite Bible stories and explain why they are favorites.**

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their favorite Bible stories and explain why they are favorites.

## APPENDIX C

### Copyright Permission for Academic Achievement

\*\*\*\*\*

Kathy Brown <Kbrown@ebSCO.com>

12/6/16



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## APPENDIX D

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Title or numeric reference of the portion(s)	Use of Bible in Public Schools Timeline, Guidelines for Using the Bible

Title of the article or chapter the portion is from	The Bible Makes A Comeback
Editor of portion(s)	N/A
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## VITA

**ASHLEI N. EVANS**

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### **Education and Certification**

**Ed.D.**, Language, Literacy, & Special Populations, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX, Graduation: December 2017.

Dissertation: Biblical Literacy in a Secular World: Secondary Students' Perceptions of the Influence of Biblical Practices on Academic Achievement.

**M.Ed.**, Curriculum & Instruction- Teaching, University of Houston, Houston, TX, 2011.

**B.A.**, English Literature, Minor: Business Administration, University of Houston, Houston, TX, 2009.

Principal Certificate, Texas, In Progress.

Reading Specialist Certificate – EC-12, Texas.

English Language Arts & Reading Certificate – 4-8, Texas.

English as a Second Language Supplemental Certificate – EC-12, Texas.

### **Leadership Experience**

*Teacher Development Specialist - Secondary Curriculum & Development (ELA)*, Houston Independent School District, Houston, TX, 2017- Present.

- Designed and implemented the district's curriculum, oversees the development of formative assessments, develops and delivers district professional development.
- Worked with teachers and principals to review performance data and development plans and to identify teachers' strengths to prioritize the most pressing development needs to increase student achievement.
- Coached, modeled, and guided teachers to utilize new technologies in the classroom that will engage students and increase academic achievement.

*Spelling Bee Coordinator*-Cinco Ranch Junior High, Katy, TX, 2015 to present.

- Organized and facilitated Campus Spelling Bee.
- Administered Spelling Bee Qualifying Exam.
- Maintained communication between parents, faculty, and district representatives.

### **Teaching Experience**

*8<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts & Reading Teacher*, Cinco Ranch Junior High, Katy, TX, 2015 -2017.

- Implemented Reader's and Writer's Workshop instructional method.
- Served as a Campus Advisory Team Member and discussed campus updates with the school community (i.e., parents, teachers, and administrators).
- Assisted with implementation of Safe and Civil Schools initiative.
- Integrated technology into lessons using Smartboard and Mirroring 360.

*7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade English as a Second Language Teacher*, Ross Sterling Middle School, Humble, TX, 2013-2015.

- Designed lesson plans aligned with IB principles and ICLE Rigor Relevance Framework.
- Sponsored Christian Student Union.
- Administered Oral Language Proficiency Test, as well as verified and rated TELPAS samples.

*6<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> grade Reading Interventionist*, Ross Sterling Middle School, Humble, TX, 2012-2013.

- Designed lesson plans aligned with IB principles and ICLE Rigor Relevance Framework.
- Analyzed assessment data in to differentiate instruction.
- Document student progress and provided differentiated lessons using I-station.

*7<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts & Reading Teacher*, Patrick Henry Middle School, Houston, TX, 2012-2012.

- Assessed students' reading skills using TMSFA.
- Designed data driven lesson plans with differentiated instruction.
- Collaborated with teachers to provide best instructional practices.

*2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade English Language Arts and Reading Teacher*, Harvest Preparatory Academy, Houston, TX, 2011-2012.

- Designed lesson plans aligned with C-Scope and Keystone curriculum, integrated technology in lessons using Compass Learning and Reading A-Z, and managed classroom using Capturing Kids' Hearts.
- Assessed reading and math skills with TPRI and TEMI and analyzed assessment data to differentiate instruction.
- Served as a Shared Decision-Making Committee Member to help establish the climate of the school as a first-year campus.

### **Other Work Experience**

*Youth Development Worker*, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Houston- Hess Grant Project, Houston, TX, May 2013-August 2013.

- Developed, implemented, supervised, and evaluated children and daily activities in a traditional Club environment.
- Coordinated program services and cooperative learning activities for members and visitors that are both fun and instructional.
- Supervised members in the program area; ensures safety of members, positive values, and ethical behavior through quality in programs and appearance of the unit at all times.

*Tutor*, Sylvan Learning Center, Kingwood, TX, February 2013- October 2013.

- Tutored elementary level students in English Language Arts & Reading.

*Accounts Payable Clerk IA*, CDI Business Solutions- LyondellBasell, Houston, TX, April 2008-January 2011.

- Processed vendor inquiries via Disbursements Vendor Inquiry telephone or email account.
- Worked in SAP system to view invoices and check status of payment.
- Assisted with Ch. 11 bankruptcy Pre/Post Petition restructuring process.

*Center Production Coordinator*, FedEx Kinko's, Houston, TX, May 2007 – April 2008.

- Assisted customers with duplicating documents and using self-service computers, copiers, fax machines, and laminating machines.
- Prepared packages to be mailed through FedEx Ground and FedEx Express.
- Deposited revenue in bank.

*Secretary/Intern*, Pete Weston Law Firm, Houston, TX, August 2004 – May 2005.

- Communicated with clients regarding their legal cases and evidence supporting case.
- Handled confidential documents, such as bank statements, documents filed at court house, W-2 forms, bankruptcy documents, and company information.
- Performed general office assistance, including faxing confidential documents, making copies and preparing mail.

### **Presentations**

Evans, A. N., & Pryor, L. A. (2017, August). *Operating as one: What should true co-teaching look like?* Presentation at the Katy ISD Peer Professional Development Mini-Conference, Katy, TX.

### **Professional Affiliations**

International Literacy Association, 2016-present

### **Honors**

Houston's 40 Under 40 Most Influential Teacher Award- I10Media, Houston, TX, 2014.