

Literature Review

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Literature Review

There is a history of educational disparities in inner-city public schools. A large number of them are serving students with the day-to-day impact of poverty, instability, and constrained access to educational resources. Such conditions influence the process of curriculum offering and teachers/leaders' reactions to student needs. The work heavily relies on leadership. Leaders shape the quality of teaching, curriculum integrity, and school atmosphere. The roles are more complicated and critical in high-poverty environments. Students in low-income communities show higher achievement gaps and lack steady access to high-quality instruction, so leadership is particularly significant to lead the curriculum decisions and enhance learning outcomes (Smith & Gümüş, 2022). Skilled leadership can assist schools to overcome the obstacles and establish learning conditions under which students are able to develop and achieve success amidst the systematic inequities.

The inner-city schools are also facing the problem of teacher turnover, lack of resources, and emotional strain that influence the morale of teachers and curriculum continuation. The lack of support from systems makes the teachers overwhelmed, and such instability undermines the curriculum implementation (Martin & Benedetti, 2025). The pressures must be addressed by leadership, and a culture where teachers can cooperate, develop, and feel appreciated should be developed (Harris et al., 2023). School improvement studies have shown that strong leadership is often the factor that demonstrates some difference between improving and failing schools.

Due to these issues, it is necessary to know about the intersection of leadership and curriculum in inner-city schools. The review will focus on studies on leadership practices, teacher empowerment, distributed leadership, professional learning, curriculum reform, and family-centered engagement. It also considers how theoretical constructs, including Dewey,

experience-based learning, Bandura, self-efficacy-focused learning, Vygotsky, sociocultural learning, and Skinner, reinforcement-centered learning, affect curriculum choices applied in a high-need context (Echezona & Ojukwu, 2023; Honicke et al., 2023; Ye & Shih, 2021). The aim of the review is to integrate existing and background literature to reveal how leadership can facilitate useful curriculum work and foster equality in inner-city public schools.

Theoretical Framework

A number of prominent learning theories inform the perception of leadership and curriculum in inner-city government schools. The theories demonstrate the way students learn, how teachers develop, and how leaders influence conditions that facilitate effective teaching. The focus of the review is five theorists, namely John Dewey, B. F. Skinner, Albert Bandura, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner (Echezona & Ojukwu, 2023; Honicke et al., 2023; Ye & Shih, 2021). Both provide ideas that have been used to explain effective leadership and curriculum work in high-poverty urban schools.

John Dewey held the view that learning must be related to experiences. He thought that students learn well when they play around with something that is related to their lives and community. The view facilitates the inner-city school curriculum work, which may often involve students of varying backgrounds and complicated social situations. The approach used by Dewey helps leaders to consider how to shape curriculum in a way that can be meaningful and responsive. Leadership practices based on his support of democratic participation, including teachers' voices and family involvement as well (Ye & Shih, 2021). The attitude will assist leaders in gaining trust and purpose in neighborhoods with a history of inequity.

B.F. Skinner concentrated on the behavior, reinforcement, and contribution of structured learning settings. In his theory, he argues that students prefer routines, clear expectations, and

instant feedback. The concepts apply to inner-city schools in which students can encounter instability beyond school. An ordered classroom may provide security and predictability (Echezona & Ojukwu, 2023). The work of Skinner also informs leaders because they assist teachers in developing routines that keep students active and effective. The reinforcement practice studies present the gain in the level of student performance, emphasizing the significance of efficient instructional systems (Echezona & Ojukwu, 2023). Leaders who encourage uniformity of instructional frameworks enhance curriculum delivery.

Albert Bandura brought in the concept of self-efficacy, a person believing that he or she can accomplish something. Bandura proposed that humans learn by means of modeling, interpersonal interaction, and positive reinforcement (Liu et al., 2023). His theory is particularly applicable to leadership in inner-city schools since teacher self-efficacy has a significant impact on the quality of instruction. Educators in low-income schools tend to be under pressure, and many of them wonder how they can accomplish the task. It has been demonstrated that through distributed leadership, teacher self-efficacy and wellbeing may be increased (Liu et al., 2023). When educators have a sense of support, they are more confident in their teaching methods. The theory by Bandura can be used to understand why leaders should develop collaborative cultures that enhance teacher confidence in their capabilities.

The sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky also highlights relationships. He assumed that learning occurs within socialization and mutual problem-solving. The requirement of scaffolding, guidance, and collaboration is shown by his idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (Zaretsky, 2021). The concept informs the practices of leadership that advance team-based curriculum work and professional learning communities. In inner-city schools, where teachers are in high demand, teamwork can reduce the burden and increase the quality of

instruction. The theory of Vygotsky is also in favor of culturally responsive teaching, as he considered culture to be the center of learning (Zaretsky, 2021). It is a reminder for leaders to create a curriculum that is representative of the identity and communities of students.

Jerome Bruner also extended the thoughts on student knowledge building. He proposed the spiral curriculum, scaffolding, and discovery learning. Bruner felt that students ought to reconsider things with time and delve into things with tutelage (Arsyad et al., 2024). Such concepts enhance in-depth learning, which is what most inner-city schools strive to reinforce. Continuous teacher education is also an important part of Bruner's theory (Arsyad et al., 2024). It is in their ability to give teachers the time, resources, and support to plan a curriculum that encourages inquiry and insight. His theory describes the way the work of leadership and curriculum must be coupled.

Collectively, the theorists assist in clarifying the importance of leadership in inner-city public schools. They demonstrate that learning is an active, social, structured, and belief-influenced process. Another point they make is the necessity of leadership that both supports teachers and emphasizes student life and equitable, responsive curriculum practices. The concepts dictate the analysis in the subsequent sections.

Challenges Shaping Leadership and Curriculum in Inner-City Schools

In inner-city schools, the situation of leadership and curriculum is hard. The schools experience long-term inequalities that influence the everyday experiences of teachers and students. Leaders are forced to address the problems and continue to attempt to promote robust teaching and a stable curriculum. The barriers are significant as they affect all decisions made by leaders.

The close correlation between socioeconomic status and student success is one of the most intractable problems. Poor neighborhoods typically send students to school with fewer materials and with barriers to learning. Smith and Gümüş (2022) discovered that socioeconomic gaps directly influenced achievement levels and caused significant variation to occur across schools. The holes in the gaps complicate the development of equitable and correlated curriculum frames by leaders (Smith & Gümüş, 2022). Leaders should strive to eliminate the inequalities without violating district expectations and state standards. The strain exerts a continuous strain on the decisions of the curriculum. Another big problem in inner-city schools is teacher turnover. Teachers resign due to stress, emotional needs, and support needs. Martin and Benedetti (2025) further elaborate that a high-poverty school has higher rates of teacher turnover in comparison with other schools. Such instability interferes with the curriculum implementation since new teachers require time to figure out the school routine and instructional expectations. It also introduces students to unequal experiences (Martin & Benedetti, 2025). Cycling in and out among teachers, leaders must devote more efforts to basic support than to curriculum aims.

Lack of resources is another challenge. The inner-city public schools tend to be low funded, outworn, and less well-provided. The conditions complicate curriculum planning in cases when leaders desire to implement new programs or enhance the quality of instruction. Harris et al. (2023) add to it and explain that poor-performing schools face an organizational strain because they are trying to please their students with resources that are barely enough. Leaders need to decide hard between time, materials, and staffing. Such choices influence the quality of teaching and the possibility of sticking to a stable curriculum (Kim et al., 2024). The same issues can be observed in small and rural schools that struggle with limited resources and lots of expectations. Research demonstrates that leaders in the environments have to perform

various roles and bear high workloads due to the absence of support personnel (Kim et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022). Though the contexts are not identical to inner-city schools, they are symptomatic of a shared issue: leaders must handle instructional, administrative, and community roles simultaneously. The analogy aids in demonstrating that leadership capacity and curriculum work in numerous environments are influenced by resource constraints. The inner-city leaders are even more burdened, as inner-city schools have more students per student and more complex social factors.

The obstacles demonstrate why curriculum leadership models in inner-city schools need innovative and equity-based models. Leaders cannot simply be guided by traditional approaches. They must create curriculum frameworks that are accommodating to student needs, teacher-supportive, and change-adaptive (Kim et al., 2024). They should also develop systems that can become stable despite high staff turnover or limited resources. The obstacles aid the comprehension of why effective and insightful leadership is required to enhance curriculum and teaching in urban inner-city schools.

Leadership Approaches Supporting Curriculum and Instruction

Leadership defines the application of curriculum and the modes of instruction in inner-city state schools. Poor distribution of resources, teacher turnover, and complicated learners pressure the schools. Due to it, leaders should employ strategies that empower teachers, establish stability, and foster robust curriculum practices. The study provides four strategies that can be used to reinforce teaching and construct a healthy learning community.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership deals with the improvement of instruction and curriculum decisions. Leaders applying the method state clear objectives and help teachers with constant

conversation. The findings of Smith and Gümüş (2022) show that frequent leader-teacher dialogue can address the gap in equity. The discussions enable teachers to know what the students want and to modify teaching. They also establish common expectations of curriculum use. Instructional leadership also involves clear guidance. Leaders can guide teachers to know what is significant in the curriculum and how teaching will relate from one grade to another. Harris et al. (2023), add to it that effective instructional leaders oversee and provide feedback to their teachers so that they are consistent with school objectives. In inner-city schools, where turnover and instability are the norm, the candor makes the teachers feel supported (Harris et al., 2023). It also assists in bringing about unity between classrooms to ensure that students find consistency in their learning.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership decentralizes responsibilities in school. It enables teachers to become decision-makers and leaders. The strategy is beneficial to inner-city schools since leaders are frequently overworked and cannot handle all operational tasks by themselves. Sharing of leadership enables teachers to feel more connected to curriculum goals and invested in school improvement.

Liu et al. (2023) have found that shared leadership leads to improved teacher engagement and contributes to the implementation of a curriculum in a more impactful way. Teachers who participate in the decision-making process feel much more confident and willing to test such practices. Distributed leadership is also useful in creating shared knowledge in school. Teachers cooperate with exchange strategies and enhance curriculum usage throughout the classroom. The strategy is particularly useful in low-resource schools. Kim et al. (2024) further illustrated that leaders of small schools with limited resources must turn to distributed leadership to handle

excessive demand. The same is true in inner-city schools. Shared leadership also makes work more manageable, and teachers feel ownership of curriculum decisions.

Teacher Empowerment and Retention

Stable curriculum work requires teacher empowerment. Inner-city schoolteachers are likely to experience stress and burnout, a factor that makes them turn over. As teachers quit, the implementation of the curriculum becomes uneven. However, empowered teachers feel appreciated and are consequently more likely to remain.

Martin and Benedetti (2025) established that autonomy and trust-enhancing practices, when applied by leaders, help to retain teachers. Teachers are confident and committed when they have leaders who listen to them, coach, and assist in their professional development. Retention is important since consistent teachers enable schools to develop a long-term curriculum (Martin & Benedetti, 2025). Furthermore, empowerment is also supported by teaching communities. As Wang et al. (2022) discovered that teamwork enhances teacher knowledge of the curriculum and develops leadership competencies in staff. As teachers operate in positive communities, they build collective instructional expectations. By giving them time to work together and promote open dialogue, leaders build the communities.

Navigating Curriculum Reform

Leaders are challenged further by curriculum reform. Teachers must learn new practices due to new policies, programs, and expectations. Leaders need to assist teachers in getting to know the changes without overwhelming them. Reform also invites externalities, like consultants or district teams, who can also bring in new ideas or demands. Gunnulfsen and Abrahamsen (2025) concluded that leaders must balance such tensions. Effective reform requires trust and good relations. The educators should feel listened to and included (Gunnulfsen & Abrahamsen,

2025). The reforms become manageable when leaders promote teacher voice and localize reforms. Leithwood (2021) explains that it is because inner-city schools also experience the pressure of reform in a more pronounced way, owing to instability in staffing and gaps in resources. Leaders should fraternize between external demands and the reality that teachers face on a daily basis. The strains can be addressed with clarity of communication and good relationships, which can help the schools to maintain a consistent curriculum practice.

Curriculum Leadership Practices That Improve Instructional Quality

Curriculum leadership is instrumental in aiding teaching in inner-city public schools. Schools are associated with numerous problems, such as low resources, high turnover, and achievement gaps (Martin & Benedetti, 2025). Due to such facts, leaders need to employ practices that reinforce curriculum use and help teachers with day-to-day work. The study identifies four practices that can be used to enhance the quality of instruction. The practices include developing professional learning communities, sustaining deeper learning, making wise use of partnerships, and learning through research in other international schools (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). Combined, they demonstrate how leaders can support the learning of students and the success of teachers.

Building Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities assist teachers in creating groups to pursue common curriculum objectives. They promote cooperation, contemplation, and solving problems together. When teachers communicate, they evaluate student needs, design lessons, and revise teaching. Such collaboration assists in developing a common vision of curriculum implementation. Wang et al. (2022) discovered that collaboration develops trust among teachers and enhances

leadership strengths among the staff. Trust facilitates easier experimentation by teachers and discussion of concerns.

Cooney (2021) further demonstrated how learning communities enabled educators to think rather than to teach. The teachers are able to review student work and determine what to modify in the curriculum. Such discussions curb disparities in classrooms. It is significant in inner-city schools where students tend to encounter patchy teaching (Cooney, 2021). Leaders can help the communities by allowing teachers to meet, having clear expectations, and facilitating open communication. Having teachers feel supported makes them have ownership of curriculum decisions and collaborative work.

Supporting Deeper Learning

More profound learning is about cognition, questioning, and valuable involvement. It helps students to think critically and apply ideas rather than memorize facts. The inner-city schools are more likely to have intrinsic learning as the aim because the latter improves motivation and self-esteem. However, when leaders add to learning with content coverage pressures, they must find a balance. According to Cooney (2021), leaders tend to address the tension through prioritization and investment in time to undergo careful teaching.

The work is guided by several theorists. The spiral curriculum developed by Bruner promotes repetition and learning. The focus of Dewey on real experiences reveals that learning is related to the lives of learners (Ye & Shih, 2021). Vygotsky emphasizes group interaction and assistance. The concepts assist leaders in promoting open-ended assignments, discussions, and learning (Zaretsky, 2021). Learning in depth in inner-city schools makes students feel valued as they can relate the curriculum to their lives. Leaders in the work assist teachers in going beyond shallow instruction.

External Partnerships and Resource Mobilization

Partnerships have been used in many inner-city schools to enhance the curriculum. Partnerships may provide training, materials, or professional assistance. According to Kim et al. (2024), leaders of small and resource-deprived schools rely on partners to gain access to tools that they do not have. It is applicable to inner-city schools, too, since they are constrained by similar hindrances.

Nevertheless, the partnerships should be consistent with the school's values and objectives. Gunnulfsen and Abrahamsen (2025) add to this by stating that external actors may exert pressure when their expectations are not aligned with the needs of teachers. Leaders should choose alliances that internally reinforce themselves and favor long-term teaching plans. Partnerships can increase capacity and add more curriculum to teachers when well aligned. When they are not aligned, they bring confusion and additional work.

Lessons from International School Management Research

Lessons learned in international studies can be used to explain leadership challenges in inner-city schools. Anand et al. (2023) discovered that leadership did not affect the curriculum directly but via systems and interpersonal relations. The observation applies since most inner-city schools have common factors that inhibit them, such as low funding and high workloads. Global studies emphasize stability. Leaders should establish explicit routines and expectations to permit teachers to concentrate on teaching (Gunnulfsen & Abrahamsen, 2025). They should also provide coaching, feedback, and reflection. Such aids assist teachers in comprehending the curriculum and applying it effectively. By developing effective systems, the leaders can develop more consistent teaching and improved learning conditions.

Family-Centered and Culturally Responsive Leadership

Family-responsive and culturally responsive leadership apply to curriculum development within the inner-city school districts. The marginalized communities have a long history of non-participation in school decision-making by many families (Álamo-Bolaños et al., 2024). Such experiences have produced mistrust and distance between schools and the communities they serve. Jutras (2025) discovered that most parents and caregivers do not feel heard as schools tend to be school-centric. It is the norm that bring the school agenda above lived family realities. Consequently, families could be reluctant to converse with teachers or provide their views regarding curriculum and teaching.

To overcome it, leaders need to stop school-centric practices and embrace family-centric initiatives. Kazim (2023) states that family-centric leadership acknowledges the fact that families possess rich information about their children. It promotes the integration of families in school planning and curriculum discussions by leaders (Jutras, 2025). The strategy fosters confidence since it conveys respect for family experiences. It also assists leaders in tailoring curricula that are more reflective of the cultures and lives of students. Families are more willing to take part when they feel that they are welcome, and it makes the school stronger.

Relational leadership is needed in a culturally responsive curriculum. Leaders should develop rapport with families, hear their issues, and respect their cultural heritage. The piece assists educators in looking deeper into the students (Jutras, 2025). It also ensures that the curriculum is not alienating student identity. Relational leadership is especially relevant in inner-city schools and an area of high cultural diversity where many students represent marginalized communities in history. Good relationships can make schools safe and conducive to every learner.

Community partnerships also assist leaders in developing culturally responsive curriculum. By working with local organizations, cultural groups, and families, leaders learn from the experiences of students. Such collaborations assist schools in shaping a curriculum that relates to the world of students (Jutras, 2025). They also enhance confidence between families and the school. The leaders develop meaningful, inclusive, and responsive learning environments through such practices.

Synthesis of Literature

The study indicates that leadership indirectly but strongly influences curriculum and instruction in inner-city public schools. Leaders influence the environment under which teachers operate. Their impact on beliefs, collaboration, and school culture further determines the use of curriculum in classrooms (Wilson Heenan et al., 2023). Such a tendency is found in all studies. Teachers experience support and value, and when they can be more engaged in the curriculum and more open to modifying instruction to fit the needs of their students.

One of the most significant findings is the connection between teacher self-efficacy and distributed leadership. Research indicates that an egalitarian leader makes teachers more susceptible and more linked to the school objectives (Liu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). The mix produces curriculum stability in the sense that the teachers are confident in the skills they have and in the decisions within their teams. The stability is crucial in the inner-city schools, where turnover is considerable, and demands are high. It assists students in enjoying more uniform classroom instruction.

The other lesson is the power of equitable leadership. Leaders must address structural barriers that arise as a result of the disparity of socioeconomic status. Smith and Gümüş (2022) assert that unbalanced transfer of SES influences interschool success. Equity-based leaders

would in turn respond by directing the curriculum, affirming teachers, and directing under-instructions with data. Such activities can minimize gaps and build additional access to quality learning.

Family-centered leadership and culturally responsive leadership are also critical. When leaders gain the trust of families and honor a student's cultural experience, they improve the significance of the curriculum (Jutras, 2025). Such a topicality enhances student involvement and a feeling of belonging. It also promotes a curriculum based on the lived experiences of students.

Leadership is central to the challenges and solutions in all studies. Good leaders overcome stress, mentor teachers, and develop structures that promote robust curriculum and teaching. They are the bridge between the challenging situations and the potential for better results.

Conclusion

It revolves around the leadership that shapes the quality of the inner-city public schools' curriculum. Such schools have thorny issues, which include socioeconomic imbalances, poverty, and teacher turnover. Due to their circumstances, curriculum leadership is no longer a strictly technical task. It turns into advocacy, support, and guidance. The literature also demonstrates that effective leadership may serve to normalize instruction and make learning environments favorable to students and teachers.

Several patterns were observed across the themes in the review. Instructional leadership assists instructors in remaining goal-oriented and curriculum-centered. Distributed leadership and teacher empowerment increase teacher confidence and pave the way to collective responsibility for curriculum work. Family-centered leadership is culturally responsive and

builds stronger trust, making the curriculum bearable for the students. The strategies demonstrate that leadership affects curriculum indirectly in terms of beliefs, relationships, and school culture.

Limited longitudinal studies examine the extent to which leadership practice affects curriculum and student outcomes in the long term. Research on some retention interventions among teachers remains in its infancy, particularly in inner-city settings where teacher turnover is high. The next gap is the absence of empirical studies that investigate culturally responsive curriculum leadership as practice. Further studies are required on how leaders can respect cultural identities and create effective classroom experiences.

The future leaders must focus on stability, cooperation, and fairness. They have to provide the teachers with an opportunity to collaborate, hear families, and teach with data. They should also guard time to study further and develop systems that decrease stress among employees. By adopting such priorities, leaders contribute to the establishment of schools that are conducive to student achievement and to ensuring fair, equal and consistent curriculum practices.

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