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A Systematic Literature Review of Student Voice Educational Research in Juvenile Correctional Facilities

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about the effective use of evidence-based academic interventions in juvenile correctional facilities (JCF; Public Law 115-385). One consideration in identifying evidence-based practices is taking students' perspectives into account. This literature review analyzed peer-reviewed studies published in English between January 1975 and 2024 that focus on the academic experiences of students incarcerated in long-term JCF within the United States. Included studies focused on academics (e.g., literacy, writing, mathematics, history, or science), and incorporated student voice through direct data collection methods (e.g., interviews, surveys, focus groups) or involved students in the research process (e.g., planning, data collection, analysis, or writing). The review integrates findings that foreground the views and participation of incarcerated students in academic research, highlighting gaps and directing future inquiry into student-centered academic methods in juvenile justice settings. The characteristics of the studies and how researchers assessed and utilized the student voice data are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Systematic Literature Review; Student Voice; Intervention, Juvenile Justice

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INTRODUCTION

Annually, around 220,000 youth are incarcerated in long-term juvenile correctional facilities (JCF) in the United States (Sickmund et al., 2021). Long-term JCFs are residential treatment facilities for adjudicated youth who are incarcerated for a minimum of two months, with an average of five to six months (U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention & U.S. Department of Education, 2004). According to the United Nations (2021), these youth are marginalized given their minority status, disability classifications, mental health conditions, socioeconomic status, and sex.

For example, while 15% of the school-aged population is Black, about 42% of youth in JCF are Black (Puzzanchera et al., 2023). Similarly, Native American tribal youth are 3.7 times more likely to be incarcerated than their White peers. Additionally, a disproportionate number of youth in JCF have experienced poverty (Hawkins et al., 2019; Pyle et al., 2016) as compared to their non-incarcerated peers. The poverty rate of non-incarcerated youth was 16% compared to 57% for those in JCF (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2023).

Another important consideration is that 30% - 60% of youth in JCF have been diagnosed with a disability as compared to around 15% of youth in traditional schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The primary disabilities included Emotional Disturbances (ED; 48%) and Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD; 39%) (Quinn et al., 2005; Yan & Wilkerson, 2017). The prevalence rate of youth in JCF with SLD is like that in traditional schools, whereas the prevalence rate for those with ED is approximately six times higher in JCF than in traditional schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Youth in JCF also have significantly lower language skills compared to their non-offending peers (Chow et al., 2022). Around 60% of youth in JCF have a language disorder compared to 7% - 12% of youth in traditional schools.

Furthermore, there is an overrepresentation of youth in JCF with mental health diagnoses (Beaudry et al., 2021). Estimates have suggested that 60% - 75% of youth in JCF meet the criteria for having at least one psychiatric disorder (Beaudry et al., 2021; Fazel et al., 2008), with over 50% having a conduct disorder, a substance use disorder, and co-occurring psychiatric disorders (Abram et al., 2003). There is also an overrepresentation of males in JCF. Around 86% of youth in JCF are male compared to about 50% of their nonoffending peers (Sickmund et al., 2021). Finally, about half of the youth in JCF perform one or more grade levels below their non-adjudicated peers in literacy, with around 10% being either illiterate or minimally literate (Houchins et al., 2024; Steele et al., 2016; Yan & Wilkerson, 2017).

Given the multitude of marginalizations that youth in JCF have encountered, providing them with a quality education is essential to their JCF school and post-incarceration achievement. Increased educational achievement while incarcerated is associated with improved post-incarcerated outcomes such as better employment outcomes and reduced recidivism rates (Davis et al., 2014; Steele et al., 2016; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). While in JCF, students are to be provided with the same education as their non-adjudicated peers (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015; U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2014). Similarly, students in JCF with disabilities are to be provided with a Free Appropriate Public Education in the least restrictive environment (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA], 2004; Sickmund et al., 2021). Unfortunately, there is a lack of evidence-based academic research in JCF (Gagnon et al., 2022). This is specifically evident for literacy instruction research (Houchins et al., 2010; Houchins et al., 2018; Wexler et al., 2014). Moreover, JCF research conducted should be socially valid, given the unique JCF context (Houchins et al., 2024; McCray et al., 2018).

Social Validity and Student Voice

Considering the social validity of an academic intervention as part of the research process can improve its meaningfulness, relevance, practicality, and acceptability (Common & Lane, 2017; Snodgrass et al., 2018; Strain et al., 2012; Wolf, 1978). Student voice data may inform researchers about the social validity of an intervention. Student voice considers the perspectives, opinions, priorities, insights, and lived experiences of students as the

primary consumers of interventions (Gillett-Swan & Baroustis, 2023). Interviews, focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires are often used to collect student voice data (Common & Lane, 2017; Snodgrass et al., 2018; Strain et al., 2012). Including student voice data in research before, during, and/or after a study is conducted has the potential to better understand intervention feasibility and usability (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Kirshener & Pozzoboni, 2011), refine the goals, procedures, and outcomes of a study (Rowe et al., 2025), address the research-to-practice gap, identify actions needed to overcome educational barriers, and inform educational policies and practices (Schaefer et al., 2024; Snodgrass, 2018).

The utilization of student voice in research ranges from no student participation to full student participation (Lansdown, 2018). There are three student voice categories or modes where student participation is included: consultative, collaborative, and youth-led (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018; Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006). A "consultative" mode involves collecting student voice data through adult-initiated, adult-led, and adult-managed research methods (Lansdown, 2018). A consultative mode allows for limited student control but requires researchers to explicitly design a study that adds value from students' perspectives, knowledge, and experiences. A "collaborative" mode necessitates student voice data to be collected through adult-initiated research methods in partnership with the student (Lansdown, 2018). This mode allows for increasing levels of self-directed action by youth over a period where participation in research involves the student and the researcher having a shared voice. A collaborative mode may enable students to advocate for certain educational rights, hold those in authority accountable, and strengthen their sense of efficacy, capacity, and self-confidence. A mode of "youth-led" entails having students identify the research topic (Lansdown, 2018). In a youth-led mode, adults serve as facilitators, with students leading the research process. Youth can identify the learning activity they believe is important or the research area they believe is needed. Since adults serve as facilitators rather than leaders, the youth control the process of learning activities, interventions, and the overall research project.

Previous Literature Reviews on Student Voice Participation in Educational Research

Three K–12 student voice systematic reviews have been conducted (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2024) that provide the field with student voice definitions and describe student voice in practice. These reviews show that research on student voice covers a wide range of ages and environments and mainly uses qualitative or mixed-methods approaches. Early syntheses reported that student participation in school decision-making is linked to positive social, civic, and relational outcomes (i.e., enhanced life skills, improved self-esteem, greater democratic engagement, and better student–adult relationships; Mager & Nowak, 2012). In contrast, these same studies reported weak and inconclusive findings on whether student voice affected academic achievement or the organizational aspects of schools, indicating a gap in the research.

Subsequent reviews shifted attention toward marginalized student populations in U.S. public schools, positioning student voice as a critical mechanism for empowerment, school improvement, and instructional change (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Schaefer et al., 2024). Gonzalez et al. (2017) suggested that student voice research at the elementary school level can create opportunities for racially and ethnically marginalized youth to influence educational practices and participate

meaningfully in reform efforts, particularly through qualitative documentation of students' perspectives. Schaefer et al. (2024) further refined the field by attending to developmental considerations in the middle grades and examining how student voice and agency are enacted within classrooms, schoolwide initiatives, and action-based projects.

Across both studies (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Schaefer et al., 2024), student voice most often functioned in consultative or transformative capacities rather than symbolic participation, corresponding to students' developmental stages with autonomy, identity exploration, and intellectual development. Collectively, these reviews suggest that while student voice research regularly demonstrates benefits related to engagement, agency, and school climate, there remains a need for more rigorous empirical evidence linking student voice to academic outcomes and sustained institutional change, particularly with underrepresented in nontraditional schools.

Rationale for Literature Review

This is the first known systematic literature review to focus on student voice research in JCF. As such, this systematic literature review makes a meaningful contribution to the field of student voice research (Kearley et al., 2021) for marginalized students in JCF (Sickmund et al., 2021), as incorporating student voices has the potential to enhance the research's meaningfulness, relevance, practicality, and acceptability (Common & Lane, 2017; Snodgrass et al., 2018; Strain et al., 2012; Wolf, 1978). Voices of students in JCF, as a marginalized population (United Nations, 2021), are needed in research to enhance the social validity of JCF research. Student voice research in JCF may shed light on the challenges and experiences of these students and enable more feasible, usable interventions (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Kirshener & Pozzoboni, 2011). Furthermore, researchers may use student voice to refine study goals and procedures (Rowe et al., 2025), address the research-to-practice gap, and inform educational policies and practices (Schaefer et al., 2024).

Including student voice as a part of the educational research process has shown to improve student engagement, increase student confidence in the subject being studied, and provide valuable information, such as barriers and supports to the intervention (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Mitra & Gross, 2009). This is particularly important for students in JCF as academic gains while incarcerated are associated with enhanced employment and lower rates of recidivism post-incarceration (Davis et al., 2014; Steele et al., 2016; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Despite the importance of student voice research (Kearley et al., 2021), the overrepresentation of marginalized youth within JCF (Sickmund et al., 2021), and the increased number of studies including student voices in educational research (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Mitra & Gross, 2009), no known systematic literature review focused on student voice research in JCF has been published. Thus, a literature review on student voice research in JCF is warranted. Three research questions were asked.

Research Questions

1. To what extent was student voice data included in peer-reviewed long-term JCF academic research?

2. How was student voice data collected in peer-reviewed studies of long-term JCF looking at academic intervention research?

3. What modes of student participation were used in studies that collected student voice data in peer-reviewed long-term JCF academic research?

METHODS

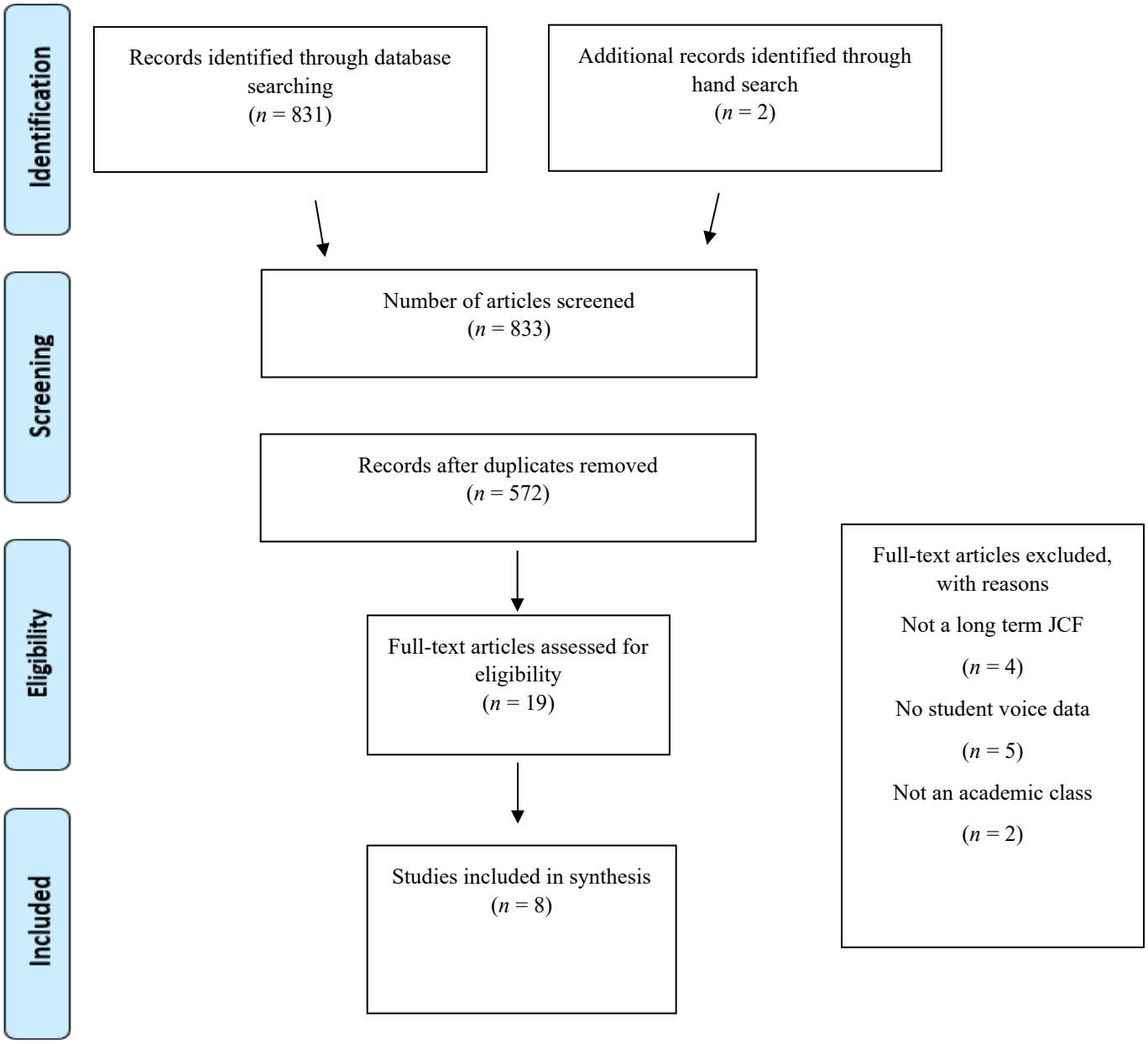
Search Procedures

The date range for this study included published studies from January 1975 through April 2024. The start date was selected due to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2006), originally the Education of Handicapped Children Act (1975), which was the first federal law to ensure all students with disabilities had a right to a free and appropriate education, thus changing the research landscape for students with disabilities. Student voice was defined as students' thoughts, perspectives, and ideas about their experiences and research processes (Gillett-Swan & Baroustis, 2021). Defining student voice as students' self-reported thoughts, perspectives, and experiences of research processes would guide a literature review toward studies that center on student agency and participation. This focus narrows search terms and prioritized participatory methodologies and excluded research that lacked direct student input. Our search procedures are described in Figure 1 (PRISMA; Moher et al., 2009).

Digital Database Search. The first author searched five electronic databases (i.e., Academic Search Complete, APA PsycINFO, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC), and Education Source) using the Boolean search terms: (*"juvenile justice"* OR *"juvenile correction*"* OR *"incarcerat*"* OR *"juvenile correction* facilit*"*) AND *("student*"* OR "*juvenile*" OR "*youth*" OR "*pupil"* OR *"child*"* OR *"learner"* OR *"K-12"*) AND *("voice"* OR *"social validity"* OR *"participant*"* OR *"opinion"* OR *"viewpoint"* OR *"perspective"* OR *"acceptability"* OR *"satisfaction"* OR *"single-case"* OR *"single-subject" OR "student-lead"*) AND *("academic"* OR *"reading"* OR *"literacy"* OR *"math*"* OR *"social studies"* OR *"writ*"* OR *"science*" OR *"educat*"* OR *"instruct*"*). These databases were searched because they often contain relevant empirical research on JCF. *Single-case* and *social validity* were included because single-case studies typically include a social validity component that often considers participant voice but may not be captured in a keyword or abstract search.

The first author independently reviewed the titles, abstracts, and methods sections of the studies identified in the database search to determine whether each study was to be included for full-text review. Studies were included that (a) were published in English in a peer-reviewed journal between January 1975 to April 2024; (b) included K - 12 participants incarcerated in long-term residential JCF in the United States exclusively to enhance the homogeneity and relevance of the findings for youth in long-term JCF; (c) examined academics only (i.e., all aspects of literacy, writing, mathematics, history, or science) given increased academic performance while in JCF is associated with better post-incarceration outcomes; and (d) provided student voice data (e.g., surveys, questionnaires, focus

Figure 1. *PRISMA Search Procedures*



groups, or interviews) or a description of the involvement of students in the research process (e.g., planning, goal-setting, procedure implementation, data collection, analysis of results, or writing of research article). Studies were excluded that (a) were published in a language other than English; (b) included only youth in short-term JCF; (c) included only youth in traditional K – 12 schools; (d) examined behavior, transition, life/technical skills, or mental health; (e) exclusively provided student voice data collected from someone other than the student (e.g., teacher interviews, parent surveys), or (f) reported in dissertations, theses, or reports. Duplicate studies were removed.

The first author trained a second researcher to review the titles, abstracts, and methods sections of the studies to determine whether each article was to be excluded or included for full-text review, based on the inclusion/exclusion and operational definitions. During article selection training, the first author modeled the screening of two articles that met the inclusion criteria and two that did not with a second researcher. Then, both researchers screened two articles together using the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Finally, a second researcher independently reviewed a random selection of 10 articles from the returned articles and achieved 100% agreement on the inclusion and exclusion before proceeding with the remaining returned articles from the search. All disagreements were discussed considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria and the operational definitions. Both researchers discussed and agreed on whether the article was included or excluded. An Excel sheet was provided, with all articles including title, author, publication year, method section, and abstract uploaded to help organize the screening process. Each inclusion criterion was listed in the Excel sheet, and a box with dropdown options of "yes," "no," or "unsure" was provided for the researcher. Interrater agreement (IRR) was 100%.

Hand Search. In addition to the electronic database search, a hand search was conducted of the following journals: *Journal of Applied Juvenile Justice Services, Journal of Correctional Education, Residential Treatment of Children and Youth, Behavior Disorders, Exceptional Children, Journal of Learning Disabilities, Journal of Special Education,* and *Remedial and Special Education*. These journals were selected for their consistent publication of empirical research on educational practices and outcomes in juvenile correctional facilities (JCFs). Per PRISMA guidelines, each hand search was conducted for the last 2 years (2022 - 2024), and an additional year was added if any studies were found that met the inclusion criteria (Moher et al., 2009). Online-first articles were included in the hand search. The first author reviewed the title, abstract, and methods section of each article to establish whether it was included. A second researcher independently conducted the same hand search. IRR was 100% for the included articles before moving to full-text review. There were no disagreements regarding inclusion or exclusion based on the criteria. Both researchers agreed on whether the articles were included or excluded. All studies located from the hand search that met the inclusion criteria were added to the total articles included for full-text review.

Both researchers independently read the full text of each article identified in the database, conducted hand searches, and determined their inclusion based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. There was one discrepancy. The authors reviewed the discrepancy separately. Authors independently wrote a rationale for the decision and provided supporting evidence from the article by highlighting relevant passages. The article was then discussed with the other author until a consensus was reached. The written rationale included evidence from each inclusion criterion (i.e., see a - d written out below). The decision was to include the article in question.

Studies meeting the inclusion criteria were coded using an adapted protocol based on the *What Works Clearinghouse* (2022) standards. An adapted protocol was organized around the first three research questions by collecting the following: (a) participant information (i.e., age, grade, and disability classification); (b) research design (e.g., qualitative, mixed methods); (c) academic area (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, science); (d) student voice data measurement tools (e.g., survey, interview, focus group, questionnaire); (e) information and description regarding how student voice was included, described, assessed, and analyzed in the results or discussion; and (f) the mode of student participation in the research (Lansdown, 2018). Each reported item was grouped by research question.

After the electronic and hand searches, but before coding, the first author trained a second researcher to code each article using Google Forms. An additional researcher, familiar with the topic and study before training and coding, checked all coding items (Leko et al., 2021). During the training, the first author described the code sheet, modeled each step of the coding process for group, qualitative, mixed-method, multiple-method, and single-case designs using a sample study, and then supported the coder as they practiced coding three intervention studies. After the training, the second researcher independently coded a study to establish reliability. Coders reached an interrater reliability (IRR; Page et al., 2021) of 94.7%, calculated as the number of items in agreement divided by the total number of items (18/19) multiplied by 100%. After discussion of the one discrepancy, researchers repeated the process a second time, resulting in 100% agreement (i.e., consensus coding; Page et al., 2021). After achieving 100% agreement, each of the eight studies was independently coded by both researchers. The coders met to review each code sheet and to identify and resolve any discrepancies. There were two discrepancies, resulting in an IRR of 131/133, or 98.5%. One discrepancy was resolved after discussion between the two coders, and the other was resolved after consulting a researcher with more advanced methodological knowledge.

Data Analysis

The first research question asked about the extent to which student voice was included in peer-reviewed long-term JCF academic research. The number of studies that included student voice data between 1975 and April 2024 that meet the inclusion criteria were tallied and recorded. The following were recorded: (a) participant information (i.e., sex/gender, age, grade, disability identification); (b) research design; and (c) academic area (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, science).

The second research question aimed to determine how student voice data were collected in peer-reviewed long-term JCF academic research. To address this question, articles were coded and tallied to determine how researchers assessed student voice. This included reporting the data collection method(s) for each study (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys, questionnaires, or narrative descriptions of student involvement).

The third research question sought to determine the mode of student participation used in studies that collected student voice data from long-term JCF. Student participation in research activities was categorized into three modes: consultative, collaborative, or youth-led (Lansdown, 2018). Using Lansdown's (2018) definitions of modes of participation, each article was coded as consultative, collaborative, or youth-led. A tally was created and recorded. A mode of "consultative" was assigned if the collection of student voice data involved (a) adult initiated research methods; (b) an adult led and managed the research; (c) the results from the research lacked the possibility for youth to control outcomes; and (d) the research explicitly stated the added value that youth's perspectives, knowledge,

and experiences that might contribute to the study and/or incorporated the student voice data, results, or analysis into the discussion or implication section of the study. A mode of "collaborative" was assigned if the student voice data involved (a) adult initiated research methods; (b) the study had a partnership with youth; (c) the student voice data enabled youth to influence or challenge both process and outcome; and (d) the study allowed for increasing levels of self-directed actions by youth over a period of time. A mode of "youth-led" was assigned if the research topic (a) was identified by the youth themselves; (b) adults served as facilitators rather than leaders; and (c) the youth controlled the process and the outcomes. If an article collected student voice data but did not use the information in the discussion or implications sections or explicitly stated the importance of why student voice data was collected, then the study was coded as "did not utilize" or DNU.

RESULTS

Participants and Study Design

Research question 1 examined the extent to which student voice was included in peer-reviewed long-term JCF academic research. Table 1 displays the participant descriptions. Details on the participants' sexes/genders, ages, grades, and disability classifications, as well as the research design and academic focus of each study, were included. A total of eight studies published in peer-reviewed journals met the inclusion criteria. Across the eight included studies, there were 27 female students, 252 male students, 6 students who identified as transgender, two students who identified as nonbinary/gender queer, and one participant who did not have a sex or gender identification. Five (62.5%) identified students with a disability or receiving disability services. Three of the eight studies specified disability status (Pitzel et al., 2024; Reed et al., 2017; Wexler et al., 2018). Two studies listed general information about students receiving special education services (Drakeford, 2002; Sanders et al., 2021) but did not provide specifics. All but one study (87.5%, n = 7) reported the race of the student participants (McCray et al., 2018). The races reported included six studies reporting Black or African American students (Drakeford, 2002; Krezmien et al, 2023; Reed et al., 2017; Sanders et al., 2021; VanderPyl, 2019; Wexler et al., 2018), five studies reporting White or Caucasian students (Krezmien et al., 2023; Pitzel et al., 2024; Reed et al., 2017; Sanders et al., 2021; VanderPyl, 2019), and Krezmien et al. (2023) also included Asian students, American Indian students, Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander students, and LatinX students. Specifics about participant age were reported in four of the eight studies (Krezmien et al., 2023; Pitzel et al., 2024; Reed et al., 2017; VanderPyl, 2019; Wexler et al., 2018). One study (Drakeford, 2002) reported a mean age; one listed facility ages (McCray et al., 2018); and one did not list specific participant ages but included participants aged 10-17 (Sanders et al., 2021). Due to the variation in how age was reported, the mean participant age is not reported. The age range was 10 – 21 years old.

Seven of the eight studies were published between 2017 and 2024. One study was published in 2002. Of the eight included studies, 50% (n = 4) were experimental single-case design studies, 12.5% (n = 1) were group design studies, 25% (n = 2) were qualitative studies, and 12.5% (n = 1) was a multiple-method study. Three of the studies that used single-case designs employed a multiple baseline design (Drakeford, 2002; Pitzel et al., 2024; Wexler et al., 2018), and one used an adapted alternating treatment design (Reed et al., 2017).

Table 1. *Participant and Study Characteristics*

Citation	Reported Ages (Years)	Sex/Gender of Participants	Methods Used to Examine Student Voice	Research Design	Academic Area of Study
Drakeford (2002)	Mean age = 17	Male only	Questionnaire	Single-Case Multiple Baseline	Literacy-Reading
Krezmien et al. (2023)	Mean age = 16.6; Range = 11–21	Male only	Surveys	Multiple Method	Science, Technology, Engineering and Math
McCray et al. (2018)	Range = 13–19	Male only	Focus Groups, Interviews	Qualitative-Grounded Theory	Literacy-Reading
Pitzel et al. (2024)	14, 15, 17	Female only	Interviews, Questionnaire, Writing Samples	Single Subject-Multiple Probe Across Participant	Literacy-Writing
Reed et al. (2017)	15, 16, 18	Male, female, transgender, nonbinary/genderqueer, and other	Questionnaire	Single-Case Adapted Alternating Treatment	Literacy-Reading and Science
Sanders et al. (2021)	Inclusion criteria = 10–17	Female only	Surveys	Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial-pretest/posttest	Literacy-Reading and Writing
Wexler et al. (2018)	16, 18	Male only	Surveys	Single-Case Multiple Baseline	Literacy-Reading
VanderPyl (2019)	Range = 10–18	Male only	Writing Samples	Qualitative-Content Analysis	Literacy-Writing

Note. Percentages of sex/gender representation across the eight studies were as follows: Male only = 75%, Female only = 12.5%, and Mixed gender identities = 12.5%.

Table 2

Methodological Characteristics and Modes of Student Voice Participation in JCF Studies

Category	Subcategory	Percentage	Number of Studies
Research Design	Quantitative Group Design	12.5%	1
	Qualitative Design	25.0%	2
	Multiple Method	12.5%	1
	Single-Case Design	50.0%	4
	Total	100%	8
Mode of Student Voice Participation	Consultative	100%	8
	Collaborative	0%	0
	Youth-Led	0%	0
	Did Not Utilize	0%	0
	Total	100%	8

Note. JCF = juvenile correctional facilities. Percentages are based on a total of eight studies reviewed.

Student Voice Data Collection

Research question 2 examined how student voice data were collected (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys, questionnaires, narrative descriptions of student involvement, and other methods). Of the eight studies that met the inclusion criteria for this systematic review, researchers used a variety of methods to collect student voice data. Three studies (37.5%) used a survey (Krezmien et al., 2023; Sanders et al., 2021; Wexler et al., 2018). Three studies (37.5%) used a questionnaire (Drakeford, 2002; Pitzel et al., 2024; Reed et al., 2017). Two studies (25%) interviewed students (McCray et al., 2018; Pitzel et al., 2024). One study (12.5%) gathered information through a student focus group (McCray et al., 2018), and one (12.5%) analyzed student writing samples (VanderPyl, 2019). McCray et al. (2018) collected student voice data through individual interviews and focus groups. Pitzel et al. (2024) solicited student voice data through individual interviews and questionnaires.

Mode of Student Voice Participation

Research question 3 examined how modes of student voice participation were used in studies that collected student voice data. When coding studies for student voice using Lansdown's (2018) modes of participation, all articles fell into the consultative category. Thus, all studies collected student voice (a) through adult initiated research methods; (b) an adult led and managed the research; (c) the results from the research are lacking the possibility for youth to control outcomes; (d) and the research explicitly states the added value that youth' perspectives, knowledge, and experiences may contribute to the study and/or incorporates the student voice data, results, or analysis into the discussion or implication section of the study. This consistent reliance on consultative approaches may reflect a broader structural limitation within juvenile correctional facility (JCF) research contexts, where institutional regulations, and adult-controlled decision-making processes constrain opportunities for youth to engage in more collaborative or youth-led forms of participation.

DISCUSSION

Including student voice in juvenile correctional facility (JCF) research yields documented insights into barriers and supports related to educational interventions (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2017). Prior studies demonstrate that student perspectives provide firsthand accounts of the conditions influencing intervention implementation and outcomes in correctional settings. Across the literature, student voice data has been used to identify structural, instructional, and relational factors that affect intervention feasibility and effectiveness (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2017). These findings show that incorporating student perspectives strengthens the relevance of research findings and informs the design of interventions aligned with students' lived experiences in JCFs.

The first research question examined the extent to which student voice data were included in peer-reviewed, long-term JCF academic research. Most studies meeting the inclusion criteria were published between 2017 and 2024, indicating a recent increase in the inclusion of student voice in JCF academic research. This trend reflects a growing body of literature that centers on marginalized youth perspectives, addressing a longstanding gap in educational research (Gonzalez et al., 2017).

Analysis of participant demographics revealed several consistent patterns. While most studies reported demographic characteristics of youth participants, some provided limited or overly broad descriptions of age ranges and disability status. Studies that clearly reported demographic data were closely aligned with national JCF population trends. For example, male participants were disproportionately represented across studies. National data indicate that 83.3% of youth in JCFs identify as male (Puzzanchera et al., 2023), a pattern mirrored in this review: six of the eight studies included male-only samples (75%), one included female-only participants (12.5%), and one included participants identifying as male, female, transgender, and nonbinary/gender queer (12.5%). These findings demonstrate alignment between research samples and national JCF demographics while also highlighting limitations in the consistency and specificity of demographic reporting.

Literacy interventions were the dominant focus of the reviewed studies (n = 7; 87.5%), with one study addressing another academic area (12.5%). The emphasis on literacy corresponds with extensive evidence documenting significant reading deficits among incarcerated youth. National data show that while the average age of incarcerated youth is between 16 and 17 years, their average reading performance approximates a fourth-grade level, with approximately two-thirds performing below grade level (Houchins et al., 2024; Sickmund et al., 2021;). Prior research has consistently linked literacy instruction in JCFs to enhanced academic engagement and post-release outcomes (Houchins et al., 2018, 2024; Reed et al., 2017), supporting the concentration of literacy-focused interventions within the reviewed literature.

Half of the studies employed experimental single-case research designs, consistent with established expectations for social validity assessment in single-case methodology (Common & Lane, 2017; Snodgrass et al., 2018; Strain et al., 2012). Social validity is a recognized quality indicator in single-case research and is routinely assessed through participant input regarding intervention goals, procedures, and outcomes (Horner et al., 2005). Given the limited number of studies examining academic interventions in JCF settings, the prevalence of single-case designs suggests that student voice was often incorporated primarily to evaluate the acceptability, feasibility, and perceived relevance of interventions rather than to engage youth in shaping research priorities, intervention design, or educational decision-making processes. While group-design studies less frequently incorporated participants' perspectives, one mixed-methods study (Krezmien et al., 2023) used surveys to capture student perspectives alongside quantitative outcomes. Additionally, McCray et al. (2018) employed interviews and focus groups to identify student-reported barriers and facilitators related to a literacy intervention, illustrating the contribution of qualitative methods to comprehending student experiences.

The second research question focused on how student voice data were collected in peer-reviewed, long-term JCF academic research. Across studies, student voice data were collected using interviews, focus groups, surveys, questionnaires, and writing samples. These methods were used to capture students' perceptions of intervention acceptability, feasibility, and implementation. Surveys and Likert-style measures were commonly used to assess social validity and allowed for cross-participant and cross-study comparisons (Snodgrass et al., 2018). In contrast, qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups yielded detailed explanations of student experiences, including why and how interventions

influenced engagement and learning (Common & Lane, 2017; Snodgrass et al., 2018; Strain et al., 2012). The range of methods observed across studies demonstrates that student voice data collection approaches were selected in alignment with study goals and research design.

The third research question examined the modes of student participation used in studies that collected student voice data. All eight studies employed a consultative mode of participation, as defined by Lansdown (2018). In each case, student input was collected to inform analysis, interpretation, or implications without altering the intervention itself. This finding indicates that student voice was consistently used to contextualize results rather than to co-design or modify interventions.

Consultative participation allowed researchers to gather student perspectives within the highly structured environments characteristic of long-term JCFs, where schedules, rules, and instructional practices are institutionally defined. Across the reviewed studies, student voice was incorporated in ways that documented students' experiences and perceptions while maintaining existing program structures. These findings underscore the prevalence of consultative approaches to student voice in JCF research and point to a consistent pattern of adult-led research designs that include, but do not extend beyond, consultative student participation.

Implications for Research and Practice

While consultative approaches to student voice are represented in the literature, several studies suggest that more collaborative forms of engagement provide distinct insights into educational research conducted in juvenile correctional facilities (JCFs). For example, Gonzalez et al. (2017) documented how collaborative student voice approaches yielded more nuanced understandings of student-identified barriers to participation and implementation than adult-designed frameworks alone. Similarly, Houchins et al. (2018) report that involving incarcerated students in shaping research processes helped clarify contextual constraints within JCF classrooms that were not readily visible to external researchers. Across these studies, collaboration with students functioned less as a mechanism for empowerment and more as a methodological strategy that enhanced the relevance and feasibility of educational interventions by grounding them in student-identified needs and experiences.

Several included studies frame collaborative student voice research through the lens of "students as partners" (Cates et al., 2018), stressing shared responsibility between youth and adults while maintaining structured support. Lansdown (2018) describes this partnership as a developmental process in which students gradually assume greater responsibility for decision-making as capacity is established. Within the reviewed literature, collaborative approaches were used to assess the feasibility and acceptability of interventions, refine research goals, adjust instructional methods, and document both anticipated and unanticipated outcomes of participation (Gillett-Swan & Baroustis, 2023; Gonzalez et al., 2017; Wolf, 1978). These studies indicate that collaboration served specific research functions rather than acting as a general pedagogical enhancement.

Youth-led research represents a more intensive application of student voice and is described in the literature as requiring students to define research questions, guide data collection, and influence outcomes, with adults acting as facilitators rather than directors (Lansdown, 2018). The reviewed studies acknowledge that this model poses challenges in highly regulated environments, such as long-term JCFs, where adult control and institutional oversight are central. However, the authors note that incremental incorporation of youth leadership, particularly during research planning or reflective phases—can reveal tensions between institutional

structures and student agency that would otherwise go unexamined. These findings suggest that youth-led or youth-directed approaches may function as a lens for interrogating institutional constraints as much as a model for research participation.

Across the included studies, student voice approaches are consistently linked to improved alignment between interventions and student experiences, rather than to generalized developmental outcomes. Gonzalez et al. (2017) show that youth participation in decision-making resulted in modifications to interventions that more accurately reflected students' daily realities, while the United Nations (2021) situates youth participation within broader frameworks of equitable knowledge production. Collectively, this body of research suggests that student voice—particularly in collaborative and youth-led forms—enhances research quality by surfacing perspectives typically absent from juvenile justice scholarship, thereby informing more contextually contextual educational practices.

Beyond literacy-focused interventions, the included studies suggest that collaborative and youth-led approaches to student voice have implications across multiple domains of educational and rehabilitative programming within JCFs. Findings indicate that student participation helped researchers identify misalignments between institutional priorities and youth perceptions in areas such as behavioral programming, transition planning, vocational preparation, and social–emotional learning (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Lansdown, 2018). In several cases, student input revealed that barriers to engagement were less related to content and more tied to instructional delivery, scheduling constraints, disciplinary practices, and the perceived relevance of programming to post-release goals. These insights suggest that student voice serves as a cross-cutting analytic tool, enabling researchers and practitioners to examine how institutional structures shape access, participation, and outcomes across educational and therapeutic interventions. As a result, collaborative research approaches may support more coherent program design by aligning academic, behavioral, and reentry-focused initiatives with youth-identified needs and constraints, thereby strengthening the internal validity and functional applicability of research conducted in juvenile correctional settings.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of this study should be considered with a few limitations in mind. First, the current systematic review examines research conducted in JCF that uses students' voices. Although additional student voice studies may have been conducted in similar alternative educational settings, the purpose of this review was to analyze studies specifically conducted in long-term JCF, thus creating a relatively small number of articles. Future research may consider highlighting additional settings with marginalized student voices, such as residential settings beyond long-term JCF, classrooms with students with disabilities, or underrepresented rural areas.

Second, the relation between collecting student voice and study outcomes was not examined. Therefore, it is unclear whether and how student input influenced the effectiveness, relevance, or implementation of the intervention being studied. Failing to analyze this connection limits our understanding of the impact of student voice on research findings and misses an opportunity to assess its value in shaping meaningful, student-centered practices. This review examined the method of collecting student voices and its use. While relationships between student voice collection and

study outcomes were beyond the scope of this review, subsequent research should examine these relationships. Future research is needed to explore student outcomes through varying configurations of student voice collection (e.g., the effects of a consultative mode of student voice use through interviews on literacy scores on a researcher-made assessment).

Finally, the purpose of this review was to explore student voice, academic educational research published in peer-reviewed journals. Therefore, additional non-academic (e.g., mental health, vocational skills) focused studies may include student voice but were not addressed in this review. Future research ought to consider additional areas that combine academic work with services such as transition, aftercare, mental health, and behavior.

CONCLUSION

Given the student voice research in general education (Gillett-Swan & Baroustis, 2023; Gonzales et al., 2017; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011), incorporating student voice into JCF research has the potential to strengthen the alignment of educational research with youths' lived experiences, priorities, and perspectives while increasing the contextual relevance of findings for educational practice and future intervention design. Findings from this review suggest that student voice methods may be feasible within JCF contexts and can provide opportunities to document how youth interpret and experience academic programming. As noted by the United Nations (2021), there is a need for greater representation of marginalized student voices in education. Expanding opportunities for youth participation in JCF research may contribute to more inclusive and responsive research practices and support the development of an evidence base that more fully reflects the educational experiences of historically marginalized populations (Gonzales et al., 2017).

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to report.

AUTHOR NOTE

The opinions expressed here are the authors' and do not necessarily represent those of IES or the U.S. Department of Education.

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