Weathering the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Study Examining How the Lived Experience Affected English Learners

Mary Kathryn Maxwell

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WEATHERING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A STUDY EXAMINING HOW THE LIVED EXPERIENCE AFFECTED ENGLISH LEARNERS

By

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my husband, Tom, a supporter of all my interests, adventures, and endeavors, no matter how large or small. I would also like to thank my three remarkable young men, Michael, Christopher, and Jonathan, who have always been supportive and understanding when graduate school or work obligations pulled me away from spending time with them. All of you give me the strength to get out of bed each day to hopefully affect the world in a positive way.

Lastly, to my adorable Goldendoodles, Ellie and Lola, who have literally been by my side the entire time I have been in this program working toward this lifelong dream.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give special thanks to the leadership team for allowing me to conduct my research and cheering me along the way. I would also like to recognize the amazing staff members at Buckeye School District for sharing your heroic stories about how you supported students and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to recognize that you were able to continue to give to others even during such a challenging time in our history. You will remain an inspiration to me and remind me that there are millions of school staff making a difference in the lives of children every day, even in the darkest of times. You make Buckeye Schools and the world a better place. Thank you!

I would also like to thank the parents, staff, and students for sharing your stories about what challenges they faced during the pandemic so educators can learn from your stories and ensure if we need to pivot to remote learning, we have better support systems in place for English Learners. Thank you for sharing your stories with me.

I would also like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Kirylo, who was so patient with me as I stumbled through this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Linda Silvernail, Dr. Todd Lilly, and Dr. Terrance McAdoo for creating courses that positively influenced and challenged my personal beliefs about race, ethnicity, and gender to select a topic to better understand this marginalized group of students. I am a different person and a better educator because of you. I will be forever indebted.
Lastly, to my dear friend, Lisa, for always cheering me along over the last decade and showing me the importance of leading with grace and humility. You lead in the service of others and recognize leadership is not about you but about creating the conditions and opportunities for others to be their very best each and every day. Your commitment to Buckeye School District and the local community deserves special recognition. A simple thank you is not enough, but it will need to suffice for now.
ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted many students, especially English learners who require specialized instruction and additional support to develop English language proficiency. This study examines how the pandemic created barriers that caused a decline in the academic achievement and engagement in the learning process of sixth through eighth grade English learners in an urban district in Ohio. In this mixed-methods study, using an explanatory sequential research design, quantitative data were collected through an online Likert survey while qualitative data were gathered from semi-structured interviews, artifacts, and researcher field notes. A total of 21 participants completed the survey and interviews. The merged results developed into four themes showing the greatest barriers influencing English learners during the pandemic, including mental health, learning environment, technology, and communication. These barriers affected the lived experience of English learners and influenced their engagement in school and, thus, their academic success post-pandemic. The findings highlight the need for added support during remote learning to engage English learners and to close the achievement gap.

Keywords: English learner, COVID-19 pandemic, barriers, mental health, learning environment
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19................................................................. coronavirus disease
EL................................................................. English learner
ERT ........................................................... emergency remote teaching
ESL ............................................................ English as a second language
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, we have witnessed unprecedented times in educational history where opportunities to access learning frequently changed monthly, weekly, or sometimes daily. Almost overnight, schools across the United States were thrust into a unique experience which forced students, parents, teachers, and administrators to create remote learning opportunities for students. The timeline of change had never been so abrupt and challenging for all students but even more challenging for English learners (EL) and their families. As a result of COVID-19, the shift to distance education, alongside other challenges faced by students during the pandemic, affected student learning (Bailey et al., 2021). In addition to the change in instructional format, the pandemic resulted in families experiencing job loss (Kochhar, 2020), food insecurity (Bitler et al., 2020; Petrilli, 2020), and psychological distress related to fear of sickness and isolation (John Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2020) all of which affected student engagement and learning (Huck & Zhang, 2021; Martin et al., 2022).

sectors of the country. On March 10, 2020, after the first three coronavirus cases in Ohio were diagnosed, Governor Mike DeWine declared a state of emergency (Health Policy Institute of Ohio, n.d., para. 1). Subsequently, the imminent threat of coronavirus spread quickly. As a resident of Ohio, I lived and worked in a district on the west side of Cleveland, which responded to Governor DeWine's order that all K-12 schools close from March 16 to Friday, April 3, 2020 (Office of the Governor State of Ohio, 2020). The order was extended through the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

That unexpected announcement forced all K-12 schools in Ohio to interrupt face-to-face teaching and transition to remote instruction during the spring of 2020 and portions of the 2020-2021 school year. As a result, the pandemic dramatically influenced the daily operation of all educational institutions; however, in particular, the closure of schools in urban settings impacted the most underserved students (Nadeem et al., 2022). Herold (2021) estimated that by June 30, 2020, the closure impacted 55.1 million students in 124,000 public and private schools, including approximately 1.7 million students in Ohio.

Educators will never forget when social distancing changed the landscape of education. Schools across the United States, as the case was in Ohio, quickly pivoted to remote learning, with varying structures, resources, and expectations for teachers and students. Despite these closures, schools remained essential community hubs, with principals, teachers, school psychologists, and other school personnel supporting families during the pandemic (Herold, 2020). The harm of COVID-19 to children went beyond just contracting the virus and getting sick. As the pediatrician Rachel Pearson (2020) asserted, “I should also worry about children losing their parents or grandparents, missing
meals, and falling behind in school” (para. 9). In contrast, others, mostly in urban districts with more than 75% low-income students, relied on other avenues to try to engage students in the learning process by utilizing personal phone calls, snail mail, text messages, or printed material to be picked up at a later time (Herold, 2020).

Teachers were forced to deliver instruction through new digital platforms during the pandemic. Most educators would agree that they were unprepared for this quick, significant shift in lesson delivery and did not have adequate transition time to prepare. Subsequently, this forced shift proved traumatic for many staff, students, and parents (Nazerian, 2020). However, because of their proximal link to students, the rapid pivot provided teachers a critical window into the impact of the pandemic on students and families.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, digital technologies in education supported the teaching process, increased student engagement, and, hopefully, academic achievement (Office for Civil Rights, 2021). The pandemic, however, changed how technology was used in classrooms across the United States (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The shift toward using digital technology as the principal mode to deliver instruction versus using technology as a support for instruction was overwhelming for many, including parents and students. In conditions of isolation, quarantines, and lockdowns, instructional technology became the primary means of learner-teacher connection and communication (Gadusova et al., 2021). It remains to be seen how effective remote learning was for most students, keeping in mind the lack of teacher experience teaching virtually and that significant gaps in access to technology exist in many low-income communities (Herold, 2020). Additionally, working parents struggled to educate and care for their children
Harris, 2020) due to professional commitments. Thus, the challenge of educating students during the pandemic required an adjustment for everyone.

Homeschooling during a shutdown proved difficult for most students but was exacerbated for students identified as ELs, who stood to lose the most. Larazin and Sugarman (2020), contributing authors from the Migration Policy Institute, stated that the COVID-19 pandemic affected nearly every aspect of education, and it was expected that ELs had suffered disproportionate impacts.

In recent decades, in public schools across the United States, the percentage of ELs has grown. More than 40 million people in the United States, 13.7% of the population, were born in other countries (Budiman, 2020). Five million schoolchildren are classified as ELs, meaning they lack fluency, and even more come from homes where their parents or guardians speak a different language, do not have access to technology for every child, and may count on older siblings to take care of their siblings (Sugarman et al., 2020). The English learner population is diverse, often overlooked, and underserved (Menken, 2012). There are vast differences in culture, socioeconomic background, and language. However, ELs have some characteristics in common; generally speaking, they struggle to develop proficiency in English. This significant barrier impacts every aspect of a child’s school experience (Sugarman et al., 2020).

Since the pandemic reached the three-year mark in March 2023, it is not easy to know the long-term impact on children’s mental health, especially ELs. Increased stress levels, poverty, and grief come to those children unfortunate enough to have more barriers or obstacles to learning (Sugarman et al., 2020). ELs may have issues with
attendance, understanding “how-to-do school,” lack family support, and may become disengaged because they feel overwhelmed and unmotivated.

In Ohio, the pandemic significantly impacted many K-12 students, but the scope of its effect on vulnerable and oppressed populations continues to emerge. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) (n.d.c, para. 1) estimates the total population of ELs at 60,000. As districts prepare to recover from the fallout of the pandemic, the focus on ELs should be front and center. Districts must identify barriers and much-needed additional support services now that social distancing, masking, and remote learning are no longer required.

During the pandemic, personal skills like logging into various remote online platforms and instructional resources were not significantly developed (Herold, 2020). As a result of multiple setbacks, ELs faced significant declines in their English development after many months without consistent opportunities to listen, write, speak, and read in English, especially at the level of foundational English necessary to meet grade-level expectations. According to Sugarman et al. (2020), if schools operated remotely for more than a few months, students participating in distance learning could lose the equivalent of seven to 11 months of learning. Those who did not participate during school closures or hybrid days may be up to 14 months behind (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020).

1.1 Problem of Practice Statement

I am an educational consultant in an urban district in the Midwest United States that serves almost 6,000 students enrolled in 10 schools and serves students from kindergarten to grade 12. This urban district has five elementary, three middle, one high school, and select students enrolled in a county vocational school. The community has a
diverse population, including Hispanic, Black, non-Hispanic, multiracial, White, and Asian, with almost 60% of students identified as being economically disadvantaged. Three percent of students in the district are categorized as ELs. The school has a rich history of providing equitable education opportunities for all students.

While serving as an educational consultant, I was hired as interim director of human resources. I assisted the Assistant Superintendent in analyzing achievement data to identify instructional gaps for students needing additional academic support. I began examining historical assessment data to gather grade levels, subjects, and subgroups struggling more than others. I was asked to review pre- and post-pandemic data and interview teachers and administrators to determine what factors may have impacted student achievement and growth before, during, and after the pandemic. I wondered if ELs were consistently underperforming due to inequity and barriers compared to their peers in recent state and local assessments. I also gathered ELs’ data from the district’s universal benchmark assessment database. Based on initial data and conversations with teachers and administrators, I began to consider how vulnerable youth, like ELs, were impacted and the ways that various barriers they encountered during the pandemic affected their achievement.

The shift to remote or hybrid learning touched students, teachers, parents, and the entire local community. The uneven response by states and districts and the ongoing public health crisis likely widened already significant opportunity and achievement gaps for ELs. Each middle school developed a return-to-school plan during that time of intense uncertainty. But over two years later, students, families, and staff are still coping with the day-to-day effects of the pandemic.
My problem of practice, therefore, is based on feedback from staff members during the last three years of the pandemic. Based on that feedback, my goal was to determine the ways in which various barriers related to technology, limited English proficiency, lesson delivery, or student time management contributed to the continued lack of disengagement and motivation by ELs and hence affected their achievement.

In September 2022, the Ohio Department of Education released its annual Local Report Card to the public. The data showed signs of academic recovery, but districts also acknowledged some of the remaining challenges (Ohio Department of Education, n. d. b., para. 2). Buckeye School District compared pre-pandemic and post-pandemic state testing results between ELs and their peers and discovered that the subgroup either showed a decline or maintained their percentage-passage rate post-pandemic.

Apple Tree Middle School (pseudonym) is identified as a schoolwide Title I building. The student population is 689. Out of the total school population, 61.6% of the students are “economically disadvantaged;” 3.1% are ELs; 21.5% are Black, non-Hispanic; 42.9% are White; 15.9% are Hispanic; and 19.4% are classified as multiracial. Statistics show that 96% of teachers are White, and 75% are female.

Maple Tree Middle School (pseudonym) is identified as a schoolwide Title I building. The student population is 624. Out of the total school population, 45.9% of the students are “economically disadvantaged;” less than .5% are ELs; 18.2% are Black, non-Hispanic; 53.8% are White; 11.5% are Hispanic; and 16% are classified as multiracial. Statistics show that 94% of teachers are White, and 69% are female. The school has a rich history of providing equitable education opportunities for all students.
Oak Middle School (pseudonym) is identified as a schoolwide Title I building. The student population is 354. Out of the total school population, 99.7% of the students are “economically disadvantaged;” 4.4% are ELs; 23.5% are Black, non-Hispanic; 43.7% are White; 18% are Hispanic; and 14.1% are classified as multiracial. Statistics show that 87% of teachers are White, and 60% are female. That school also is thought to provide all of its students with fair and equal education opportunities.

Most ELs in each of the schools have consistently scored well below native English-speaking students, as measured by standardized assessments in English Language Arts (Ohio State Report Card Data, 2022). An analysis of state report card data reveals the 67.9% of all students are proficient in English Language Arts, while only 47.4% of ELs are similarly adept. In Apple, Maple, and Oak Tree Middle Schools, ELs perform 15.5%, 10%, and 33%, respectively, lower in English Language Arts state language arts assessments than their native-speaking peers. Examining student achievement data collected after the pandemic can provide educators with relevant support strategies to address educational gaps in English proficiency. The data provide a window into the problem in order to guide and address the problem of practice.

1.2 Research Questions

This study focused on the online challenges and obstacles encountered by ELs in middle school during the COVID-19 pandemic, what schools can plan for after the pandemic ends, and its impact on students’ academic and personal needs.

- Why was there a decline in the achievement level of sixth to eighth grade English learners (EL) participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio?
• Were there barriers that affected the engagement level of sixth to eighth grade English learners (EL) from participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons for the decline in the achievement level of sixth to eighth-grade ELs participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio. An additional goal involved determining if there were barriers that affected the engagement level of those students.

Ohio State Tests (OST) are designed to measure the degree to which students have achieved the academic learning standards defined by Ohio’s Learning Standards (Cambium Assessments, Inc., 2022). Districts use scores in a variety of ways. OST student scores can provide parents, teachers, and students feedback about academic performance and diagnoses of individual student strengths and weaknesses in each subject area, based on learning standards approved by the State Board of Education. Each OST is designed to measure a representative sample of the content domain defined by Ohio’s Learning Standards (Cambium Assessment, Inc., 2022).

Cambium Assessments, Inc. (2022) and the Ohio Department of Education, the OST “represents a structural model of student achievement in grade-level and course-specific content areas” (p. 10). Cambium Assessments, Incorporated calculates a state mean and standard deviation each year, claiming that “there is sufficient evidence to support the principle claims for the test scores” (p. 24). The state mathematical mean is
used to determine the performance level per grade level and subject which the Ohio Department of Education then uses to determine accountability.

The process of converting raw scores to scaled scores and corresponding performance levels is outlined in the annual technical report provided each fall by the Ohio Department of Education and their approved test vendor, Cambium Assessments, Incorporated. The Proficient performance standard, set at 700 by the Ohio Department of Education, indicates that students have met Ohio’s Learning Standards. After all test scores have been calculated, the testing vendor sets five performance levels: limited, basic, proficient, accomplished, and advanced, utilizing group means and standard error calculations to provide an index of reliability.

The scaled score changes each year and by grade level and subject area. It is important to note that the scaled score mathematical mean is calculated using complex statistics to determine the proficiency level for each assessment. For example, in Spring 2019, the average scaled mean of grade five English language arts was 720.18, and in Spring 2022, the same grade level test scaled score mean was 699.83. Therefore, this annual adjustment to the scaled scores and corresponding mean and performance level may cause confusion when interpreting annual OST scores.

The student sample size for this research was set by using a simple calculation to determine how each student scored in relation to the grade level and subject area scale score mean established by the testing vendor each year. This data showed if the student declined in the scale score mean in achievement level on state tests after the pandemic. Table 1.1 compares pre-pandemic (Spring 2019) to post-pandemic (Spring 2022) scale score mean state testing results in English language arts. All seven student participants
showed a decline in their performance, even though the grade level mean was lower than in previous years. The data reinforce the need to better understand ELs and how barriers impacted the larger EL population.

In addition to student voice, additional data were collected from parents and staff. To capture a specific “moment in time” at which the COVID-19 pandemic impacted seven ELs, additional participants, including parents and staff, were interviewed.

Table 1.1 Student Participants’ Declining Performance on English Language Arts State Assessments Pre- and Post-Pandemic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participant Number and Pseudo-name</th>
<th>2021-2022 Building</th>
<th>2021-2022 Grade Level</th>
<th>2019 OST ELA Scaled Score (Pre-pandemic) Below Grade Level Mean</th>
<th>2022 OST ELA Scaled Score (Post-pandemic) Below Grade Level Mean</th>
<th>Pre- and post-Pandemic Decline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Lucia</td>
<td>Apple Tree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-122.5</td>
<td>-54.72</td>
<td>-67.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Isabella</td>
<td>Oak Tree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-28.5</td>
<td>-19.72</td>
<td>-8.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Ana</td>
<td>Oak Tree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-67.5</td>
<td>-57.72</td>
<td>-9.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Mateo</td>
<td>Apple Tree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-67.18</td>
<td>-49.83</td>
<td>-17.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Diego</td>
<td>Oak Tree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-56.16</td>
<td>-27.85</td>
<td>-28.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Gabriella</td>
<td>Apple Tree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-38.5</td>
<td>-17.72</td>
<td>-20.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - Carlos</td>
<td>Apple Tree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-108.18</td>
<td>-48.83</td>
<td>-59.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This research aimed to examine the impact of barriers during the spring of 2019 to spring of 2022 pandemic on school ELs and the resulting decline in academic achievement. Emergency remote teaching (ERT) is defined as “the unplanned and sudden shift from the traditional form of education into a remote one following the state of emergency in different countries due to the outbreak of COVID-19 crisis in terms of course design and evaluation tools” (Affouneh et al., 2020, p. 1). Smith and Schlaack (2021) noted that ERT is often used synchronously with the term, distance learning (students learning at a distance). The course design, assessment, and teaching strategies
used during face-to-face teaching shifted, forcing educators to learn and use existing and emerging technologies (Khalif et al., 2021). These technologies reshaped the teaching and learning process.

Axelson and Flick (2010) defined student engagement as “how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes, their institutions, and each other” (p. 38). Today, educators are focused on utilizing instructional strategies and practices to increase that engagement, which can be affected in ways that are both cognitive and emotional (Alexson & Flick, 2010). This study explored how student engagement was influenced by physiological, emotional, social, and educational barriers impacting their academic progress and achievement.

Drawing from the work of Kuh (2003), Axelson and Flick (2010), Fredericks et al. (2004), Dean and Jolly (2012), and Sternberg (2011), disengagement can take many forms, including lack of participation and effort, misbehavior, and failure to make an investment in learning the academic content. I define disengagement as a failure to consciously participate in learning opportunities impacting cognitive processes and, thus, academic achievement.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study’s frameworks are based on multicultural awareness, culturally relevant pedagogy, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, Dweck’s theory on motivation, personality, and other important humanistic theories. Critical to each framework is a definite awareness and understanding of how students’ cultural ways impact their approach, methodology, and attitude toward learning and how physiological needs influence readiness to learn. After educators’ experience improvement in cultural
awareness and understanding of mental and physiological needs better, they can frame the educational experience to match the needs of ELs. All aspects of the educational experience, from the learning environment to utilizing culturally relevant practices within instructional strategies and finding additional support services to help close educational gaps are critical to student achievement and, thus, success in the classroom.

Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs examined how physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization influenced a child’s readiness to learn. Drawing from Maslow’s hierarchy was critical in approaching distance learning during the pandemic and remains at the center today. The sudden plunge into remote learning created Gladwell’s (2002) tipping point, when an idea or social behavior crosses a threshold and spreads like wildfire. The quick pivot to remote online learning became a tipping point for students, parents, and school staff.

Maslow’s (1970) “hierarchy of needs” is a well-known theory of motivation that ranks the needs of an individual according to the perceived importance, typically visualized in a pyramid, with the essential needs at the base and the least critical at the peak of the pyramid (Gobel, 1970). Maslow (1968) theorized that humans are motivated to attain the essential needs (base) before working toward the peak. During the pandemic, certain vulnerable groups, such as children, particularly ELs, did not fail; rather, the family, schools, and social structures failed. This failure to meet their basic needs affected how ELs navigated the many barriers they experienced during the pandemic. Children faced with school closures, remote learning, and lockdown experienced hopelessness and powerlessness (Shoib et al., 2022). As the pandemic continued, the
world fell to its knees, and ELs and their families struggled to meet their basic needs, creating additional gaps in achievement.

In addition to Maslow’s (1970) five core needs forming the basis of behavioral motivation, ELs faced challenges in the classroom. Just as humans have physical needs for food and water to maintain physiological functioning, they also have to maintain a functioning psyche (Hull, 1943). Dweck (2017) addressed the requirements for well-being and long-term psychological health and development that play a functional role in shaping motivation and behavior. Dweck (2002, 2007) showed that one of the most important sources of motivation is an individual’s motivation to enhance their intellectual skills. Dweck and Elliot (1983) suggested that, under normal conditions, most students do well in school but, in times of difficult challenges, seeking mastery of new material is difficult.

Examining external and internal factors, biological needs, and engagement influence student motivation and, thus, student achievement is critical in this action research study. Student engagement in learning opportunities plays a critical role in achievement; individual differences in academic achievement result from differences in a number of factors, including motivation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Vu et al., 2021).

Humanistic theories, as applied to learning, are considered constructivist in nature and emphasize cognitive and affective processes (Schunk, 2020) and address people’s capabilities and the potential choices they make. Maslow’s work and other theories or models, like the models of motivation, help us better understand how students’ motivation can influence how and what they learn (Schunk, 2020). Action researchers need to understand the connection between motivation and achievement. Examining the
contemporary model of achievement motivation provides a complex picture of how achievement behavior is predicted by expectancy and value components (Eccles et al., 1993; Elliot & Dweck, 2005). That model illustrates how, over time, certain external and internal factors, like culture, gender, family, and more, can influence motivation and achievement. Later, Carol Dweck studied human motivation and postulated how growth mindsets impact success. Dweck’s model of achievement goals as related to perceptions of ability shows the relationships between individual differences in achievement and goal tendencies (as cited in Schunk, 2020). Thus, motivation and achievement may be considered meta-concepts with well-researched theoretical constructs and encompass a myriad of theories examining the ways in which internal and external factors influence psychological processes over time.

Beyond the continued physiological and psychological changes during the pandemic, ELs also faced social and cultural adjustments in school. The persistent and growing disparity between Eurocentric and bicultural children's academic achievement is often associated with the traditional educational practices that have perpetuated inequities in American public schools for centuries (Darder, 2016). The relationship between culture and power and related policies and practices in American society must be examined and changed to allow for equitable student access (Banks, 2015).

Antonia Darder’s (2016) theory of bicultural pedagogy emphasized the importance of understanding the policies and practices that demand schools move beyond celebrating multiculturalism toward a culture that accepts ELs by implementing cultural democracy, leaning heavily on equal access to quality instruction in the classroom. These practices can significantly help students and parents who might not have the language
skills to define their oppression. Cultural democracy requires changes within an institution and begins examining the power continuum from traditional to culturally democratic (Darder, 2016).

A primary goal of multicultural education is to reform current practices in educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, gender, and social-class groups will experience educational equality (Banks, 2015). Multicultural education theorists have formulated five dimensions of multicultural education. Each dimension addresses changes in curriculum and instructional materials, teaching practices, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of all school staff, as well as revisiting the school or district's goals, norms, and culture (Banks, 2015).

Multicultural education is a way of thinking about curriculum and culture within a school using a critical lens to examine various ethnic, racial, and cultural group contexts. Four specific dimensions of multicultural education may impact ELs more than others – equity pedagogy, content integration, empowering school culture and established organizational support structures. These elements can influence ELs’ educational experience and provide equitable access.

Content integration deals with how teachers use appropriate examples and content from various cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts in their content area (Banks, 2015). During the pandemic, ELs may not have been provided with examples related to their own culture. As to the second dimension, Banks (2015) discussed the importance of modifying teaching strategies to facilitate students' academic achievement from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, language, and gender groups (cited by Gay, 2010). ELs will improve their academic achievement with high-quality experts in content, pedagogy, and
child development (Dreeben & Gamoran, 1986). The third dimension involves restructuring the culture within schools so that diverse, racial, ethnic, or gender students will experience equality and equitable access to quality instruction. School staff must examine the culture and determine how it fosters or hinders educational equity for all (Banks, 2015). The last dimension focuses on how the hierarchy of needs impacts student motivation and disengagement.

The concept of culturally relevant pedagogy, initially proposed by Gloria Ladson-Billings in 1995, is an approach focused on providing an educational experience for minority students that recognizes education in the United States was built upon Eurocentric practices and consequently seeks opportunities to embed aspects of other minority cultural norms. Culturally relevant pedagogy is comprised of three components: cultural competence, sociopolitical consciousness, and academic achievement. Ladson-Billings (2014) later added to the three original pedagogical pillars an understanding that systems are constantly changing and the need for educators to assist students in developing the ability to sustain such an evolutionary mindset.

**1.5 Researcher Positionality**

In the last few decades, research conducted about educators’ beliefs on race and ethnicity has created certain perceptions that impact their approach to pedagogical decisions in the classroom, and I have had to recognize the need to be abundantly aware of my positionality in the research. This research is relevant and critical to my understanding of improving educational opportunities for ELs to reduce the achievement gap. It is essential to consider the aspects of my position in society and of the lives of ELs in American public schools.
Society recognizes me as a White, cisgender, heterosexual female from the Midwest. I am a retired Associate Superintendent working as an educational consultant in a public school where 53.1% of the students are diverse. Therefore, my positionality in this research is complicated. I am considered an outsider to this research phenomenon since I have not directly experienced what it is like to be an English language learner in an American public school.

As an educational consultant in a school where I am an outside researcher in the action research study, I relied on the interconnections of insiders within the school and various departments within the district. I kept my role as an outsider at the forefront of my mind when making research decisions and gathering data to ensure that my positionality did not impact the research in a matter that would alter the evidence. It is important to note that my role as a dual outsider made me entirely dependent on collaboration with insiders. The collaboration contributes to knowledge development and may lead to organizational transformations (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The study related to the question “How is knowledge created?” and the strong interconnection between knowledge and power. Therefore, engaging research participants – sharing control with them – redefined the knowledge production process and outcomes consistent with the quality standards of action research and its goals of ‘participation and democracy’ (Reason, 2006). Herr and Anderson (2015) acknowledged that this position as an outsider in collaboration with insiders represents the most democratic approach to research in an ideal world.
1.6 Overview of Methodology

This study’s research methodology was based on a mixed-methods design. Action research is designed to provide valuable information to educators to help improve practices within the environment being studied (Herr & Anderson, 2015). My research employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The instruments consisted of Likert surveys, semi-structured interview records from participants, artifacts, and the researcher’s field notes. The purpose of this action research study was to support improvements within the school environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). With an action research framework, the researcher can affect change by improving practice. To develop a “plan of action to improve what is already happening,” quality action research should be relevant to the local setting (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 5) with the goal of helping to create new knowledge and to provide valuable information to the researcher and participants. Herr and Anderson (2015) recommended that researchers develop sound and appropriate research methodology to meet validity criteria. For this action research study, I utilized several data collection instruments to understand better potential barriers experienced during the pandemic, to prepare for future ERT events, and to develop a list of additional supports which could help vulnerable youth such as ELs be more successful in the classroom.

Explanatory sequential mixed-methods research “employs both quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies, methods, and analyses” (Efron & Ravid, 2020, p. 51), which allows the different data tools to complement one another to help the researcher better answer the proposed questions. When choosing a mixed-method design, the researcher must ensure that one paradigm does not dominate the study (Efron &
Ravid, 2020). When quantitative and qualitative data are prioritized equally, the researcher must triangulate the data. Triangulation helps the researcher develop themes from the data collection process through converging data and perspectives from participants to strengthen the validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The advantages of the explanatory design include a straightforward structure to implement and the flexibility to adjust the second phase based on what is learned in the initial quantitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In addition, the explanatory sequential design allows the researcher to analyze data separately before the point of integration (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After the quantitative and qualitative data sets are analyzed, a third form of interpretation helps the researcher explain how the qualitative findings clarify the quantitative results.

Various measures ensured the trustworthiness and validity in this mixed-methods study. The study included student, parent, and staff participants in an urban district in Ohio. Seven students, and four parents, in addition to nine staff members, were given Likert-scale surveys inquiring about barriers that impacted their engagement during virtual learning. After the initial meeting and quantitative data collection, additional semi-structured interviews of each participant occurred to gather additional insight into which barriers impacted student engagement and, thus, achievement during the pandemic. The use of artifacts, field notes, and transcribed recordings during the data collection process ensured the study's trustworthiness by providing an opportunity for the researcher to check any subjectivity (Efron & Ravid, 2020). All of these measures allowed the researcher to gather a range of data that contribute to validity and trustworthiness.
The study was conducted over a 12-week period between February and March 2023 in an urban school district in Ohio.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Even before the pandemic, many students learning English struggled to participate in the classroom compared to native-speaking students as they confronted the twofold challenge of mastering grade-level content while continuing to learn English. For many, the rapid shift to learning from home amid the challenges of the pandemic made that struggle even more difficult. This study holds significance within the research environment due to the increase in ELs within the local community, state, and nation. Increasing English learner populations require school districts to support this diverse group of students and during the pandemic, “borne the brunt of America’s job losses and are overrepresented in professions that are considered essential to the country’s response and recovery” (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2021, p. 22). This research adds to the body of knowledge to determine what works and how school staff can act upon it (Efron & Ravid, 2020).

Action research was used for this study because knowledge is needed now for future remote teaching scenarios. The knowledge provided through data collection and life experiences told by individuals in their own words provided a broader educational context. The use of narrative data from participants allowed the researcher to capture past experiences and share them with educators to better prepare for future pandemics. That, in turn, will influence the context of their practice.
1.8 Summary of Findings

The recent pandemic was undeniably unique, with many influences related to student achievement that are difficult to quantify, including its direct impact. Nonetheless, given the scale of my data and what we know from past research, we can make plausible assumptions about the potential effects of COVID-19 on ELs based on information gathered during the study.

Although school systems adapted as quickly as possible to close gaps in access to technology, strengthen instruction, and enhance family communication and engagement, disruptions to in-person learning bordered on catastrophic for English learners due to the challenges in accessing and engaging with remote learning and numerous limitations in delivering language services online.

This study illustrates how existing inequities in educating ELs were worsened during the pandemic. As the disparities became evident, four themes arose, highlighting specific barriers to accessing technology and poor communication with students and families and how these barriers impacted students’ ability to engage in remote learning, impacting their mental health.

1.9 Limitations of Study

Two possible limitations of this study involve the time between the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the data collection phase; that interval may have affected the participants’ perspectives. It is possible that the participants did not recall specific details about that period or additional barriers they faced during that time. Another possible limitation is the researcher's reliance on a Spanish translator to interpret the Likert survey and interview questions for students and parents. The additional steps to
gather data, interpret, and analyze both phases of the data collection phases required additional time to schedule multiple meetings and transcribe the interview responses in Spanish and English. However, although these may be seen as limitations in this study, they did allow the researcher to gather a robust amount of data with which to answer both research questions.

1.10 Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter Two presents the literature review, documenting the research that grounds and informs this action research study. Chapter Three shares the research design and the specific methodological approach employed in the study. In Chapter Four, the data collected in the study are analyzed, and the results are presented. To conclude this dissertation, Chapter Five discusses the findings and implications for my practice and further study.

1.11 Glossary of Terms


culturally relevant teaching: a term Ladson-Billings (1995) defined as the “pedagogy of opposition (1992c) not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual empowerment” (p. 160).

emergency remote learning: teaching modality carried out partially or online due to circumstances of crisis (such as natural disasters, wars, or health emergencies). It
constitutes a temporary change in instruction until the crisis or emergency has ended (Huertas-Abril et al., 2021).

**English learner or English language learner or limited-English-proficient:** a national-origin-minority student who is limited-English-proficient. This term is often preferred over limited-English-proficient (LEP) as it highlights accomplishments rather than deficits (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para. 7).

**Eurocentric pedagogy:** the hegemony of those who hold both military and economic power resulting in the most elite power in a culture (Dei, 2008).

**English proficiency:** the degree to which the student exhibits control over the use of language, including the measurement of expressive and receptive language skills in the areas of phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics and including the areas of pragmatics or language use within various domains or social circumstances. Proficiency in a language is judged independently and does not imply a lack of proficiency in another language (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para. 8).

**English as a second language (ESL):** a program of techniques, methodology, and unique curriculum designed to teach ELL students English language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, study skills, content vocabulary, and cultural orientation. ESL instruction is usually in English with little use of native language (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para. 7).

**Multicultural education:** any form of teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Bennett, 2019, p. 572).
student disengagement: a term for failure to participate, consciously or not, in learning opportunities impacting cognitive processes and, thus, academic achievement.

student engagement: a term that shows “how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes” (Axelson & Flick, 2010, p. 38). For this study, student engagement involved active participation in learning opportunities in person or during emergency remote learning (ERT).
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review will begin with a discussion of theoretical perspectives about English learners (EL), emergency remote learning, culturally relevant teaching, and humanistic and cognitive theories. Examples from the literature include physical and psychological needs, motivation and student achievement, and historical perspectives to gain a better understanding of the English learner subgroup and possible variables which may impact their motivation, thus their achievement, to engage in learning opportunities during the pandemic. Finally, and while the research is relatively new, this review will present the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students with limited English proficiency during a specific period.

In the next section, the discussion will focus on the ways in which federal, state, and local policies impact how students are identified as ELs, the effect of emergency remote teaching (ERT) on students, multicultural awareness and the impact of culturally relevant teaching, the influence of physiological and mental needs on student motivation, and how possible barriers may have impacted student achievement during online learning from Spring 2020 to Spring 2022. Finally, this review concludes with a summary of the relevant research and literature and how they relate to this action research.
2.1 Historical Perspective

Federal Laws and Legislation

Understanding how the educational system, guided by federal laws and legislation, addresses the learning rights of ELs is critical in understanding how ELs are being oppressed by a lack of a clear vision from the United States Department of Education down to State departments. As a result, school districts interpret “top-down” policies from the federal and state levels differently.

It has now been almost 55 years since the passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and the unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974, based on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. While reform has been slow, the dilemma of segregation and integration has been present since the implementation of school desegregation triggered by *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Over the course of five decades, the federal role in education has changed, and understanding any contextual changes is necessary to appreciate the present-day role of federal laws in public schools across the United States (Hakuta, 2020; O’Day & Smith, 2019).

Each state interprets federal laws differently and differs in terms of how established policies influence segregation and integration in the education of ELs in the United States (Office of Civil Rights, 2015, 2016). From an advocacy perspective, the earliest period of the implementation of bilingual education was successful (Hakuta, 2020). The term “bilingual” was encoded in federal legislation as a rare instance of national language policy, and federal grants were restricted to those programs that used students’ native language (Garcia et al., 2008). Furthermore, the Office for Civil Rights
developed a set of proposed remedies to violations of Lau in which a bilingual instructional approach was required.

In the early seventies, the states, led by Massachusetts and California, set their own bilingual laws (Roos, 2004). However, pushback from conservative politicians was almost immediate, leading to the bilingual versus English-only policy debate. As a result, an alliance of strange bedfellows, i.e., liberal de-segregationists, developed. They saw establishing bilingual education as a noble intention, but ultimately, separatists saw the use of non-English languages in public school systems as un-American (Crawford, 2004; Hakuta, 2020). In 1968, the U.S. Department of Education generated policies (Roos, 2004) that caused changes in the grant funding under the Bilingual Education Act that moved away from native language programs (Baker et al., 1981). The debates caused state and local programming reductions for time children could spend in bilingual classrooms to minimize the harm of segregation from those that were mainstream (Hakuta, 2011). Effectively, these trends ensured that federal assistance would remain deficit-focused on language remediation (Hakuta, 2011, 2020). Roos (2004) explained the pressure from federal policy changes in bilingual programming. After Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, the progress made under Lau was dismantled, and the bilingual mandate was replaced by the 1981 Castañeda framework (Hakuta, 2020).

The Castañeda framework, based on a Fifth Circuit Court interpretation of an “appropriate” educational approach for ELs, centered on (a) sound educational theory, (b) implementation of a consistent program based on the theory, and (c) evaluation of outcomes after a period of time had passed. These standards were embraced by the Office for Civil Rights and the Department of Justice and continue to frame the review of civil
rights complaints by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). One positive interpretation of the broad acceptance of the Castañeda standards is the inclusion of “sound educational theory” as a cornerstone for the educational program, followed by implementation and evaluation (Hakuta, 2020). This framework proved valuable (Hakuta & Pompa, 2017) and ultimately led to research on English language proficiency growth expectations, as has been the case with state plans in the most recent iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), referred to as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015).

The standards-based approach shifted the action from federal legislation to state policies, which solidified in the subsequent reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. This reauthorization is, in many ways, a “win” for English learner inclusion. Now student growth and attainment in English language proficiency, which had formerly been a separate part of Title III, is included in Title I accountability, along with disaggregated results on the academic assessments (Office of Civil Rights, 2015). The Castañeda framework provides a significant opening for research-based practices and policies (Hakuta, 2020). The dilemma is ultimately changing state and federal policies to offer a more progressive system to accommodate these constraints and opportunities.

2.2 State Laws and Local Requirements

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, Ohio requires schools to annually identify English learners, assess their English language proficiency, and provide reasonable accommodations on state assessments that include long-term goals and measures of progress (ODE, n.d.c., para. 4). As part of Ohio’s strategic plan for education, Each
Child, Our Future, puts the whole child at the center (ODE, n.d.d., para. 1), suggesting the “whole child approach broadens district and school focus beyond academics to include meeting students’ social-emotional, physical and safety needs” (para. 1).

ELs are the fastest growing student population in Ohio, nearing 60,000 students (ODE, n.d.c., para. 1). To provide accessible instruction to ELs, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires all states and districts to implement uniform entrance, reclassification, and monitoring procedures. To better meet the needs of ELs, state and federal laws require funding that can only be used for services to support ELs (ODE, n.d.c., para. 2).

School districts must have procedures in place to accurately and timely identify potential EL students. Federal law requires schools to administer a Language Usage Survey to all students enrolled. Under section 3113(b)(2) of the ESEA, each SEA receiving a Title III, Part A State formula grant must establish and implement standardized statewide entrance and exit procedures for English learners after conducting timely and meaningful consultation with local educational agencies (LEAs) representing the geographic diversity of the State (Department of Education, 2016). All districts in Ohio are required to undertake “statewide” procedures to identify all students who may be ELs within 30 days of enrollment in a school in the State. As a result, students are given the Ohio English Language Proficiency Screener (OELPS) to possible ELs in kindergarten through twelfth grade. After testing, school districts must communicate results to parents and, if identified, design a support services plan (ODE, 2022). Parents have the right to opt out of support services.
Districts are expected to monitor individual student progress regularly and communicate their progress toward meeting academic and English language proficiency (ELP) standards each year (ODE, 2022). Local districts are expected to establish monitoring systems that include periodic benchmarks to measure progress over time, determine when students are not making appropriate progress, and provide additional support to enable English learners to reach English proficiency and gain grade-level content knowledge (ODE, 2022). Many districts utilize a multi-tiered system of support called Response to Intervention (RTI). A robust RTI framework can provide additional systems of support for ELs in areas of assessment, screening, intervention, monitoring, and social-emotional needs (Brown & Sanford, 2011). Teachers need tools to help them monitor EL academic progress in EL programs and content knowledge that allows support staff and teachers to provide targeted instruction. Local districts must assess using quality benchmarks and formative assessments to help inform instruction and support services for ELs English development throughout the year (Bunch et al., 2009).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Students who repeatedly fail to achieve can be devastated by those setbacks and become fearful of new challenges (Dweck, 1999, 2006). Finding out what creates a barrier to student learning may help improve self-efficacy and motivation and how schools can provide support services to minimize obstacles and increase student achievement. However, before addressing barriers, it is important to understand that biological functions elicit different responses; more importantly, external and internal factors impact students' readiness to learn, leading to different outcomes.
Humans have physical needs for food and water to maintain physiological functioning (Hull, 1943), as well as psychological needs that must be fulfilled to maintain the functioning of their psyche (Sheldon, 2011). There is a long history of researchers finding that the most basic human needs must be met before psychological needs can be addressed (Dweck, 2016). The primary biological functions and engagement in learning opportunities can be influenced by external and internal factors like culture, personal beliefs, teachers, and family members. The disparities in the complex relationship between external and internal factors on biological needs and engagement can affect student achievement. The section below illustrates how various theories are interrelated and speak to students’ biological needs and engagement in learning and, as a result, influence student academic achievement and their perceived success.

2.4 Understanding Motivation Through Humanistic Theories

Early views on motivation primarily focused on instincts, like energy requirements, and having survival value for organisms, while others centered on homeostasis and body balance (Schunk, 2020). Homeostasis is needed for an organism to maintain optimal levels of physiological states (Hull, 1943). Although physiological needs may influence human behavior and, as a result, human motivation, humanistic theories, like Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Dweck’s work on motivation, personality, and development, must be taken into consideration.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Starting in the 1940s, Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, along with Carl Rogers, introduced a new approach to humanistic psychology (Pichère & Cadiat, 2015). In 1943, Maslow wrote A Theory of Human Motivation, which outlines a
hierarchy of needs in the higher levels of need associated with greater well-being (Schroeder-Strong, 2022). According to Maslow (1943), humans are motivated by needs that are hierarchically organized by priority; if those needs are not met, summoning the motivation to do anything other than survive is impossible. Maslow (1943) wrote, “For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food. He dreams of food, he thinks about food, he emotes only about food, he perceives only food, and he wants only food” (p. 374). It is unrealistic to expect students to show interest in learning if their physiological or safety deficiencies have not been met (Dweck, 2006; Schunk, 2020). For this reason, grasping this theory can help teachers understand students and create environments conducive to learning with a clear focus on the whole child first.

Maslow (1970) studied the structure of human needs and identified five levels of those needs: physiological, safety, need for recognition, esteem, and self-actualization. Later, these levels were categorized into a pyramid now called Maslow’s pyramid (Pichère & Cadiat, 2015). Maslow (1968, 1970) believed that human actions are unified by being directed toward goal attainment (Schunk, 2020).

The first level of the pyramid (base) focuses on the human body’s physiological needs, like eating, sleeping, and breathing, each related to an individual’s survival. Next, are safety needs, like protection from the environmental condition through housing. These levels are followed by those related to love, affection or social relations, or the need to belong.

The fourth level of the pyramid is comprised of the need for recognition and refers to requirements related to status, power, and money within society. Finally, the
fifth level, referred to as the need for personal accomplishment (top of the pyramid), examines how an individual personality or desires. O’Connor and Yballe (2007) stated that, “In Maslow’s view, self-actualization is not an endpoint, but rather an ongoing process that involves dozens of little growth choices that entail risk and require courage” (p. 742). At the highest level is the need for self-actualization or self-fulfillment, which manifests itself as the desire to become everything one can (Schunk, 2020). Essentially, behavior is not motivated by a deficiency but rather a desire for personal growth.

Healthy people have sufficiently gratified their basic needs for safety, belongingness, love, respect, and self-esteem so that they are motivated primarily by trends to self-actualization, as a fuller knowledge of, and acceptance of, the person’s own intrinsic nature, as an unceasing trend toward unity, integration, or synergy within the person. (Maslow, 1968, p. 25, as cited in Schunk, 2020, p. 367)

Although self-actualization can be manifested in various ways (Schunk, 2020), most people never reach this level. In fact, Gobel (1970) predicted that less than two percent of the population would reach self-actualization.

In the context of the classroom, a student’s motivation, i.e., their readiness to engage and learn, is determined by the level of needs that are met. The physical needs of a social group's sleep, nutrition, hydration, safety, and belonging heavily influence motivation (Dweck, 2017).

In addition to the hierarchical model of human needs that drives motivation, Maslow’s theory also explains that a hierarchical reversal of needs and satisfaction can occur (Gill, 2012). It is important to note that aspirations and motivations may become permanently lowered in individuals in a chronically devastating condition, such as extreme hunger or chronic abuse (Akpan & Kennedy, 2020). Thus, psychological needs can be broadly conceptualized as innate, universal psychosocial requirements for well-
being, and long-term mental health play a significant role in shaping motivation and behavior (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1970; Sheldon, 2011).

While Maslow’s theory has been studied for many decades, it has its critics. Leonard Geller (1982) states that the theory of self-actualization are radically mistaken.

**Growth Mindset and Theory of Motivation, Personality, and Development**

Maslow’s theory of human motivation has generated prolonged interest and support since its inception and is one of the most referenced theories of human motivation. More recently, Carol Dweck, a Stanford psychology professor, has researched and written several books and articles about the role of motivation and self-theories (Robins, 2012). Dweck’s (2016) research shows that our mindset and our thoughts have significant implications for our lives. In her view, either we have a fixed mindset – in which we view our intelligence and personal characteristics as static, or one might say “carved in stone” (p. 6) – or we can have a fixed mindset with the ability to view our characteristics or qualities as malleable thus allowing us to grow intellectually. People with a fixed mindset value learning and “thrive in the face of difficulty” (Dweck, 2012, p. 201).

Whether it is ultimately our growth mindset or intelligence quotient (IQ) seems to matter very little. What matters the most is how we think of ourselves and our beliefs about capabilities and limitations (Dweck, 2016). The Blackwell et al. (2007) study showed how two adolescent students can have the same IQ, but the students’ mindsets determine how they respond to challenges. Their beliefs about their intellectual abilities and limitations lead to students measuring their ability or lack of ability, which results in the student either giving up (fixed) or pushing through (growth). The reality is that
“mindsets are just beliefs” (Dweck, 2016, p. 16) leads us toward a fixed or a growth mindset.

Motivation is intimately linked with learning and can influence students' learning (Schunk, 2020). The close connection between motivation and learning must include aspects of how the hierarchy of needs influences how we function. Dweck (2015) focuses on how students want, think, feel, and do prior to tackling or performing a learning task. Dweck (2015) posits that growth is innately within us. She states, “infants begin to learn in utero, and after birth, they display their endless quest for growth” (p. 242).

Furthermore, students get where they are going. Barring disabilities, they virtually all walk, and they virtually all talk. In light of this, “it is sad, even ironic, that when schools take these same children in hand to deliberately teach them, the growth slows dramatically for many” (Dweck, 2015, p. 242). Therefore, students enter the classroom with different expectations and motivations to learn. Bergey et al. (2018) believe motivation and personal beliefs predict achievement over time and across difficult transitions.

**Attribution Theory of Achievement**

Classical achievement motivation theory has generated much research but rarely manifests itself across different achievement domains (Schunk, 2020). Students typically show greater motivation to perform better in some classrooms than others (Usher & Kober, 2013). Because the achievement motive varies with the domain, how well a global trait predicts achievement behavior in specific situations is questionable (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996) proposed integrating classical theory and goal theory.
The search for achievement elicits many questions. Studies by Weiner (Weiner & Schneider, 1971; Weiner, 2005) and colleagues provided a solid empirical research base for developing an attribution theory of achievement (Schunk, 2020). This section discusses aspects of Werner’s theory relevant to motivation in the learning process.

**The Influential Work of Weiner and Schneider**

Weiner and Schneider (1971) postulated that students attribute their academic success and failures primarily to ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. These casual factors did not imply that these are the only attributions students use to explain their success but are commonly used by students to describe the causes of their achievement outcomes (Weiner & Schneider, 1971). Drawing on other works, Weiner and Schneider (1971) identified causes along two dimensions: (a) internal or external to an individual and (b) relatively stable or unstable over time. In 1985, Weiner added a third causal dimension: controllable or uncontrollable by an individual (Weiner, 2005). The causal attributions that children make for success and failure have been associated with later motivation and ability perceptions, which have the potential to impact engagement in learning opportunities. Looking beyond causal attribution, some research studies indicate that attributions may vary due to gender and ethnic background (Graham, 2009; Graham & Taylor, 2002; Schunk, 2020). Few studies have examined the relationships among diverse racial and ethnic subgroups (Tsujimoto et al., 2018). Therefore, how children perceive their experience of success and failure has implications for how and whether they choose to engage in similar tasks later (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020).

Attribution theory has significantly impacted motivation theory, research, and practice; yet, goal theory is gaining speed (Schunk, 2020). Goal theory emphasizes that
different types of goals can influence behavior in achievement situations. One distinction is between learning and performance goal orientations (Dweck, 1999, 2002; Elliot & Dweck, 2005). A learning goal refers to what knowledge, skill, or behavior students can acquire. From a related perspective, Dweck (2006) proposed that students who pursue learning goals are apt to hold a growth mindset, reflecting the belief that one’s qualities and abilities can be developed through effort. Thus, students pursuing performance goals may hold a fixed mindset, reflecting that one’s qualities and abilities are limited and cannot change much (Dweck, 2006).

Goal orientations play a critical role in self-regulated learning because they provide a framework within which learners interpret and react to events (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Students who develop and maintain high self-efficacy for learning have higher expectations for success, greater control over learning, and more intrinsic interest in learning (Schunk, 2020). As students adopt learning goals when they believe they can improve their ability through more effort (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Meece, 1994). Achievement goals affect students’ task performance and effort (Dweck, 2006).

Using a social-cognitive framework in which external variables (e.g., teachers, family, peers, culture) interact with internal variables (i.e., cognition, needs, affect, personal beliefs, and characteristics) affect students’ perceptions of motivation and, thus, engagement in learning opportunities. When students are motivated, they engage behaviorally (i.e., putting forth effort), cognitively (e.g., learning new content), and affectively (i.e., feeling excited about learning) in a learning activity. Motivation is defined as a set of interrelated beliefs and emotions that influence and direct behavior (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Student engagement can lead to individual outcomes, affect
external and internal factors, and eventually impact student achievement. Figure 2.1 shows how student motivation can affect engagement and learning outcomes (Jones, 2018).

![Figure 2.1 A Simplified Version of MUSIC Model of Motivation](image)

*Figure 2.1 A Simplified Version of MUSIC Model of Motivation*

*Note.* Jones, 2018, p. 13.

There are several benefits accrued by connecting humanistic theories to show the interrelatedness between physical, physiological, and mental theories and processes. The complexity of the human mind and body connection and how it reacts to external and internal factors can impact a student’s motivation and engagement. The interrelatedness between theories is central to understanding how barriers impact ELs’ motivation, engagement, and achievement and had to be considered in this action research.

**Engagement Model**

Student engagement is an essential factor in learning, retention, and performance. In one of the earliest definitions of engagement, Kahn (1990) described engagement “as the harnessing or organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement,
people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Kahn’s (1990) definition focused on one’s self being motivated and engaged in set tasks. Meyer (2014) believed students needed to “learn how to learn” when engaging in tasks and juggling external and internal factors. This supports the work of Deci (1971), which showed that even when tangible rewards were offered, the degree of engagement did not change (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Research has shown that implicit theories about learning, thinking, and ability can provide information as to how students engage in learning, their achievement, and their views about what leads to success in and outside the classroom (Dweck, 1999, 2006; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Thus, individual differences in academic achievement result from differences in motivation for learning (Eccles et al., 1993; Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Vu et al., 2021). Figure 2.2 illustrates how an array of humanistic theories and models help us better understand academic motivation, how it is stimulated, and how engagement is related. Many theories differ in focus and substance yet share a commonality. The figure below illustrates how basic biological needs, engagement in learning opportunities, external and internal variables, and the quality of instruction influence student achievement.

The simplified motivation-achievement cycle, a summary model of motivation-achievement interactions, captures some commonalities within well-known theories of academic motivation, engagement, and achievement.
Therefore, students who are motivated and engaged in the learning process tend to perform better academically and are better behaved than unmotivated and unengaged peers (Fredericks et al., 2004).

2.5 Multicultural Education

The movement of people across national boundaries is as old as the nation-state itself (Banks, 2012). However, the exodus of diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups has been especially notable over the last century (NCES, 2022). As a result, public schools in the United States are faced with the challenge of helping ELs assimilate into new learning environments or, for some, their first time in school. The rise of multicultural policy and practices first developed in Canada in 1971, leading to a definition of multicultural education as “an approach to school reform designed to actualize educational equality for students from diverse groups will have equal opportunities to learn” (Banks, 2012, p. 13). Multicultural education’s major goal is to restructure schools so that all students acquire the same knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function within society and the world (Banks, 2012; Gay, 2010).
Banks (2004) developed the Dimensions of Multicultural Education to help educational practitioners and scholars to conceptualize and develop practices, theories, and research in the field. Bennett (2019) noted that this approach to teaching and learning involved the movement toward equity in schools and classrooms (equity pedagogy), the transformation of the curriculum (curriculum reform), the process of becoming competent in multiculturalism (multicultural competence), and the commitment to address societal injustices (social justice). Multicultural education has ideological undertones based on the democratic ideas that are lacking in many parts of the world.

After years of research, Banks (2012) finalized the five dimensions of multicultural education as follows: (a) content integration, (b) the knowledge construction process, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) an equity pedagogy, and (e) an empowering school culture and school structure. Figure 2.3 provides details of these dimensions.
2.6 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Given society's cultural and racial complexities, teachers play a critical role in implementing culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), a commonly used phrase in the education canon (Scherff & Spector, 2011, p. 15). In 1994, Gloria Ladson-Billings published *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children* and from academia to local communities, her book started a firestorm of conversations. In that book, Ladson-Billings (1995) discussed the theoretical premises of CRP and posited that a culturally relevant pedagogy “is designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of student-teacher relationships, the curriculum, schooling, and society” (p. 483).
The criticality of Ladson-Billing’s CRT sought to disrupt the status quo, i.e., the existence of specific structures within our culture and, thus, classrooms. The culturally relevant pedagogy espoused by Ladson-Billings (1995) requires educators to examine what they do or not do concerning a social order replete with inequities extending into the classroom. As Ladson-Billings (2009, p. 19) conceived, fostering cultural competence moves beyond school culture and uses student culture as the central premise to transcend the adverse effects of the dominant culture. The negative effects may be brought about by not seeing one’s culture, history, or background represented in the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Many marginalized groups face challenges to the culturally relevant pedagogical tenet of academic excellence. The perception that ELs are unable to achieve is expected in the United States (Garcia, 2015; Szymanski & Lynch, 2020). ELs differ substantially in their level of English proficiency but all are included in a label that covers students who speak little to no English to those who are advanced and almost proficient (Wright, 2019). How teachers view ELs affects the way in which they organize teaching and learning opportunities in their classrooms and how administrators structure programs in their schools and districts. Ruiz (1984) made an important distinction between language as a problem versus language as a resource and the devaluation of students’ home languages and cultures when enrolling in school. Gay (2010) suggested that immigrant children face the most significant challenges because they escape poverty and persecution to improve their quality of life but often suffer deep affective losses of supportive networks and familial connections. Adjusting to new culture of living, language, culture,
and educational system can cause stress, anxiety, vulnerability, loneliness, and insecurity, causing adverse effects on school achievement (Gay, 2010, pp. 18-19; Morse, 2005).

Most educators agree that social inequities go beyond multicultural education and culturally sustaining pedagogies. However, few school programs help ELs build a positive sociocultural identity allowing them to navigate the new world in which they are living (Wright, 2019). According to Bell (1997), the ultimate goal of social justice is to combat oppression by enabling all groups to have equitable access to the same resources to be able to participate fully in society. Thus, a critically responsive pedagogy should not simply become a method of teaching but a catalyst for social justice, allowing the voices of marginalized populations to be heard.

2.7 Understanding the English Learner Population

Genesee et al. (2005) and NCES (2022) discussed the continual rise in the number of students from non-English speaking backgrounds, which comprise the fastest growing segment of the U.S. student population. Genesee et al. (2005) also stated that the English learner population was approximately 8% of total enrollment in 2002; now, the NCES (2022) believes the population is closer to 10.4%. These students speak over 400 different languages (NCES, 2022).

Immigrant and U.S.-born ELs have diverse backgrounds and environmental circumstances; some students must overcome experiences such as racism, segregation, xenophobia, discrimination, poverty, personal trauma associated with immigration, educational disadvantages, unequal health care and access to social services, and political disenfranchisement, leading to significant physical and psychological stressors (Ceja,
2021). More research is needed to understand better the needs of this multifaceted population that will soon be a larger population within our public school system.

The United States is facing an unprecedented challenge in serving immigrant youth (Morse, 2005), who, as mentioned, are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. child population (Woods & Hanson, 2016). The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimates the population of unauthorized immigrants to have been roughly 11.4 million as of 2018 (Rouse et al., 2021). The percentage of public school students in the United States who were ELs was higher in the fall of 2019, with approximately 5.1 million students, versus the fall of 2010, with 4.5 million students (NCES, 2022). The percentage of English learner students constituted an average of 14.8% of total public school enrollment in urban, 10.0% in suburban, 7.0% in towns, and 4.4% in rural areas (NCES, 2022). Generally, a higher percentage of public school students are in lower grades, Kindergarten to fifth grade, than upper-grade levels (NCES, 2022).

**Poverty and Academic Achievement**

Berliner (2009, 2013) noted consistent research findings that high poverty rates are strongly associated with lower levels of educational achievement. “Sadly,” he stated, compared with “all other wealthy nations, the USA has the largest income gap between its wealthy and poor citizen” (2013, p. 1). Reardon (2011) analyzed decades of income and achievement data trends, finding that the income gap has widened and, correspondingly, the achievement gap.

In the United States, the 2020 Census Bureau data explored characteristics of immigrants versus U.S.-born parents in two age bands: birth to four and five to 10-year-olds (Hofstetter & McHugh, 2021). The breakdown of data reflects how poverty and its
associated challenges can not only hinder assimilation into society but also negatively affect children’s healthy development, readiness for learning, and educational success. Roughly half (50%) of immigrants with children ages birth to 10 were below the Federal Poverty Level. In contrast, only 35% of those children had U.S.-born parents. In Ohio, the range was slightly better; 42-46% of children of immigrants, ages birth to ten, met the Federal Poverty Level, actually higher than for children with native-born parents.

As these demographics reveal, ELs may not only struggle to learn the language but may also have factors that may impact their motivation and academic achievement. As Wright (2019) observed, “the majority of ELLs are ethnic minorities from low-income families” (p. 13). Historically, the United States has done an inadequate job of providing equitable educational opportunities to poor and minority students (Banks, 2012). Today, despite political discussions about high standards, accountability, and policies that claim to close the gap, the academic achievement gap between poor, minority ELs and their middle- to upper-class white students has widened (Wright, 2019).

Identification, Services, and Classroom Supports for EL

Federal law requires that schools provide ELs with opportunities to develop English proficiency and access the core curriculum, while state laws govern specific ways to identify and support students. Local districts are given a great deal of latitude in their development of support services; hence, the design of English learner services varies according to the philosophy of the administration and staff. Local districts and schools create a continuum of cultural assimilation for each student based on their English proficiency level (Bennett, 2019).
The federal law, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and state, Ohio Revised Code 3317.016, require districts to identify and provide equitable educational opportunities that support the whole child to all students identified through a language survey as ELs attending public schools. Districts' obligation and responsibility is to support families and ELs (ODE, n.d.c., para. 4). This aligns with the provision of meaningful parent and family notifications which require schools to follow specific steps to identify students as ELs.

During enrollment into a district, schools must identify students who are ELs within 30 days (ODE, n.d.c., para. 5). As part of the enrollment process, parents or guardians answer specific questions as part of a home language usage survey to better understand and serve students and families with limited English proficiency. Per the Ohio Department of Education, if a parent or guardian answers one out of four questions using another language other than English, their child will be required to take the Ohio English Language Proficiency Screener (OELPS). The OELPS assessment tool is used to classify students as ELs (ODE, n.d.c., para. 5). The assessment tool gauges listening, speaking, reading, and writing development.

After a child is identified as an English learner, the district must notify parents or guardians no later than 30 calendar days after their enrollment or within two weeks of placement into an English as a second language (ESL) service program (ODE, 2022). Parents can refuse services; if they choose to do so, their children still are identified as ELs but will not receive any support services.

A critical component of a school system’s English learner service program is its teaching staff about the unique needs of such a diverse group (Hopkins et al., 2015).
Research proves the need for all teachers to be prepared to work with ELs (Bennett, 2019; Hopkins et al., 2015; Scherff & Spector, 2011; Wright, 2019), using various instructional strategies to align with national and state content standards in language proficiency.

The U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, and Department of Justice (2015) have outlined educationally sound English learner programs aligning to educational theories under Castañeda's first prong. The majority of districts in Ohio use two: ESL or Structured English Immersion (SEI). The Buckeye District in Ohio utilizes the ESL program in all 10 buildings. The program is based on specific techniques, methodology, and unique curriculum explicitly designed to teach ELs about the English language, including vocabulary acquisition, access to core subjects, and to develop English proficiency in all four domains (i.e., reading, speaking, listening, and writing).

Students may be placed in various settings to ensure they are developing English language proficiency both in and outside the classroom. All teachers are language teachers (Wright, 2019). When teachers know their students well and understand the sociocultural contexts of their classrooms, school, and community, they draw on their usage of language to inform their instruction (Bennett, 2019; Wright, 2019). Teachers who provide appropriate instruction by creating culturally relevant activities and meaningful learning opportunities to help motivate and engage their students will see ELs make adequate progress (Muñiz & New America, 2019).

**Rethinking EL Supports**

The need for culturally responsive teaching is more pressing than ever before, especially considering the increase in ELs in the United States, particularly in Ohio. The
teaching workforce remains overwhelmingly white, female, and middle-class, teaching students of different races, ethnicities, socio-economic statuses, languages, and cultures. Teachers are the drivers of change in schools (Banks, 2012; Wright, 2019), but even the most well-planned ESL program will be ineffective without the proper training and support. Research has shown that we need a significant investment in developing culturally responsive educators (Muñiz & New America, 2019).

While the process of developing national or state CRT standards is widely contested, some districts in Ohio have been developing policies and practices to improve and advance educational equity. Ohio’s Whole Child Framework advises its teachers to “expect that all students will achieve their full potential” (ODE, 2020, para. 1). The Buckeye School District has a long history of addressing racism and training staff on microaggressions and bias. The district empowers teachers to develop their curriculum using culturally relevant competencies to be responsive to the economic, social, cultural, linguistic, family, and community factors that influence their students learning.

Muñiz and New America (2019) said, “by opening the ‘black box’ of culturally responsive teaching, this report offers a springboard for ongoing dialogue about the skills, knowledge, and mindsets all teachers need to work effectively with today’s learners” (p. 35). They recommended that the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), which spearheads a multi-state initiative to support the development of a diverse and culturally responsive workforce, calls for states to develop standards for educators to follow.

2.8 Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic Disruption on English Learners

The ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the world in inconceivable ways. The field of education is no exception, having dealt with
impenetrable barriers to learning during the spring of 2020 and dramatic disruption until the spring of 2022. Studies addressing the effects of COVID-19 on K-12 students' academic achievement have been released throughout the last year. The studies and corresponding finger-pointing by politicians illustrate the lack of in-person instruction and other possible variables (Carr, 2022; Peetz, 2022; Petrilli, 2022). The historic drop in academic performance during the pandemic impacted millions of students. However, Ray Hart, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, said the data indicate a “wake-up call” that the local, state and federal governments need to make significant, long-term investments in public education (Peetz, 2022).

Before the pandemic, ELs performed below their peers in academic performance and outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para. 2). The data story and analyses of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in reading and mathematics have shown minimal increases in the percentages of ELs reaching proficiency in grade 4 and grade 8 mathematics between 2009 to 2017 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para. 10). Likewise, between January and March 2022, the NAEP assessment was administered to grade four and eight students across the country. As expected, the average NAEP scores for students in Ohio have dropped between three to five points since 2019 (Churchill, 2022; George, 2022; NAEP, 2022).

In Ohio, data from state assessments are crucial factors serving as a barometer to determine if students are performing at expected grade-level content. While the NAEP data look concerning, so does the decline in state assessments were more dramatic in certain grade levels and subjects than expected, indicating a more significant impact from the pandemic (O.D.E., 2022). Churchill (2022) examined the statewide performance
index (PI) for all students taking state exams. Figure 2.4 illustrates how performance index scores, overall and by student group, changed from Spring 2019 to Spring 2022 test results. Most notably, the -9.5 change in the English learner subgroup. This subgroup had the largest decline in the composite performance index pre- and post-pandemic.

Figure 2.4 Change in Performance Index Scores and Percent of the Decline in Achievement of All Students And Specific Subgroups in Ohio During Spring 2019 (Pre-Pandemic) and Spring 2022 (Post-Pandemic)

Note. The performance index is a measure of achievement that combines results on all state exams and awards extra credit in the calculation when students perform at higher levels (ODE, 2022).
Table 2.1. Change in Performance Index Scores and Percent of the Decline in Achievement of All Students And Specific Subgroups in Ohio during Spring 2019 (Pre-Pandemic) and Spring 2022 (Post-Pandemic)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ohio Department of Education Performance Index Subgroup</th>
<th>Change in PI (Pre-and Post-Pandemic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Learner</td>
<td>-9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>-7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>-7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Disadvantage</td>
<td>-7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>-7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>-6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>-5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>-4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.9 The Impact of Emergency Remote Teaching on English Learners

Hodges et al. (2020) coined the term emergency remote teaching (ERT), which is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternative mode due to a crisis. They recognized this as teaching which takes place synchronously and asynchronously to replace face-to-face or in-person instruction. Hodges et al. (2020) referred to this as pandemic pedagogy.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought enormous disruptions to K-12 school systems across the United States (Lazarin, 2022). Now, following three years of disruptions during the pandemic, five million ELs have experienced disproportionate impacts because of language and literacy gaps, at-home learning, as well as a long list of systematic inequalities. Instruction and learning opportunities varied during the last few years because of parent choice or school closures. Students enrolled in urban settings suffered the most, particularly students of color, low-income, and ELs. As Lazarin (2022)
stated, “from well-documented digital access gaps to widespread reports of students missing or disengaged since March 2020, and it is evident that English learners (ELs) have endured some of the pandemic’s gravest impacts” (p. 3).

During the 2020-2021 school year, the Buckeye School District used a face-to-face, two-day synchronous, and one-day asynchronous learning model with significant periods of all asynchronous learning due to staff illness and local health department required school closures. As a result, face-to-face instruction did not resemble pre-pandemic instruction due to space restrictions imposed by the local health department. Instead, some students were kept home on certain days for illness or other unknown reasons.

During the 2021-2022 school year, instruction looked similar to what was done pre-pandemic, with social distancing and long-term school closures before and after holidays. The limited opportunities for pre-pandemic schooling were met with unsureness from parents, who were reluctant to send their children back to school because of health and safety concerns regardless of the district’s efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

**Barriers During ERT**

Over the last few years, the overwhelming preference for remote learning came with significant shortcomings, especially for ELs (Lazarin, 2022). Many ELs were effectively derailed from participating in remote learning because of inequitable access to the internet and literacy gaps (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020). In addition to digital access, many ELs faced challenging learning environments at home, food insecurity from family job loss, and unstable child-care arrangements, not to mention the fear of getting ill or
losing a loved one from the virus (Lazarin, 2022; Lazarin & Sugarman, 2020). Moreover, few teachers were adequately prepared to teach during. A shortage of digital resources appropriate for ELs and an inability to effectively engage and communicate with students and parents compounded the problem (Lazarin & Sugarman, 2020).

The pandemic, emergency remote learning, hybrid learning, and disengagement in learning opportunities have affected ELs. Although chronic absenteeism is not common among that group, school districts across the United States and in Ohio have reported lower attendance rates than pre-pandemic. In 2020-2021, Ohio saw a 16% increase in chronic absenteeism compared to pre-pandemic 7% (ODE, 2021). With decreased school engagement, ELs have struggled to adapt and showed decreases in learning compared to their peers (ODE, 2022).

Notably, data on the social and emotional well-being of ELs are challenging to find but generally speaking, during the pandemic and dramatic changes to their everyday life, all students seem to have higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The effects appear to be more common among girls of color.

The COVID-19 pandemic upended the education of students across the world. Regardless of the efforts to support students and their families during uncertain times, the disruptions to in-person learning had a disproportionate impact on English learners due to challenges in accessing and engaging in remote learning opportunities and limitations in delivering language support services online. It is difficult to fully grasp the degree to which external and internal factors have influenced English learners’ physiological and psychological states, impacting their motivation to learn and, thus, achieve.
CHAPTER THREE

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Problem of Practice

During emergency remote teaching (ERT) during the COVID-19 pandemic, I heard concerns from staff about a marked decline in engagement during remote learning of our English learner subgroup. I wondered if English learners (EL) were consistently underperforming due to inequity and barriers compared to their peers in recent state and local assessments. Based on initial data and conversations with teachers and administrators, I began to contemplate how vulnerable youth, like ELs, were impacted and how various barriers, like access to technology, language proficiency, lesson delivery or others, impacted their engagement and achievement.

3.2 Research Questions

- Why was there a decline in the achievement level of sixth to eighth grade English learners (EL) participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio?
- Were there barriers that affected the engagement level of sixth to eighth grade English learners (EL) from participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio?
3.3 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine why there was a decline in the achievement level, on state assessments, of ELs participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio. Moreover, its goal was to investigate if there were barriers that affected the engagement level of middle-level ELs participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio. Specifically, I sought to determine how barriers like stress levels, poverty, access to devices and the internet, instructional strategies used during remote learning, and how barriers influenced decisions to join remote lessons. My findings provide ideas about support services educators may provide during remote learning and as students transition back to in-person instruction.

3.4 Action Research Design

This action research design incorporated a mixed-methods approach to gathering data related to the impact of barriers related to technology, language, childcare, and economic and food security that contributed to the unsystematic transition back to school and the continued disengagement of ELs. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach took measures to generate knowledge and to apply the knowledge gained to future remote learning opportunities. Efron and Ravid (2020) stated that, “the two-phase research addresses different questions within the research problem” (p. 52) and employs methods separately, simultaneously, or sequentially without mixing. Knowledge is only reasonable to the curious mind, but transformations can occur when knowledge can create effectual change. Additionally, action research requires the continual refinement of methods, data collection, and interpretation based on the knowledge gained in earlier
cycles (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, in the case of this study, action research offers opportunities for positive change within the classroom, school building, or within any educational organization.

Action research with a focus on generating knowledge rather than receivers and enactors of knowledge is often produced through the lens of constructivism (Efron & Ravid, 2020). From an outsider's perspective, constructivist action researchers can help educators, through the participatory action research process, reflect on practices and incorporate change (Mertler, 2020). In education, stakeholders talk about providing equal and fair educational opportunities to all students, regardless of their upbringing, social class, the native language spoken, gender identification, and so on (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016). To be sure, fair and equitable opportunities are necessary for children to grow up and become productive members of society, and action research can serve as a process for the advocacy of social justice within educational milieus.

Those undertaking action research are allowed some flexibility throughout the process. Related to this study, Herr and Anderson (2015) noted that “the evolutionary nature of action research means there are multiple, ongoing decisions to be made, and faculty need to make their piece with both allowing the research to unfold while continuing to monitor and guide it” (p. 84). This flexibility allows the action researcher to grow as a practitioner.

The data collection instruments consisted of a survey of participants using a Likert-scale rating, informal interview records, and the researcher’s field notes. The data collection methods contributed to understanding the impact of barriers during the
pandemic impacting ELs. A Google form was utilized to collect the Likert-scale data to ensure it was secure while protecting the participants’ identities and was translated into Spanish for student and parent participants as needed. The survey or ex facto research assisted the researcher’s investigation of the relationship between what happened during a situation or specific period of time (Efron & Ravid, 2020). There was no planned intervention because the study was aimed at examining the past.

Field notes from interviews were gathered and noted via analysis of the audio recordings; these anecdotal records of participant experiences proved to be beneficial. The narrative data collected from interviews were considered valid for directing the study, with the interview questions reflecting individual information that supported and elaborated on the quantitative data collected from the survey. As Efron and Ravid (2020) pointed out, “the use of narrative research complements the desire to recapture the past experiences” (p. 47). In this study, participants' experiences, memories, or perceptions provided important information about possible barriers that influenced students and, as a result, created a more significant academic achievement gap.

The embedded-design mixed-method study ensures that the trustworthiness and validity of qualitative and quantitative approaches are different and relies on the informal interview responses more than the survey results. Essentially, the survey is the starting point for conversations about possible barriers and what we can learn for the future.

3.5 Data Collection

The timeline for the procedures of this action research included three phases: Phase I: Participant Selection, Phase II: Data Collection, and Phase III: Data Analysis. Table 3.1 provides an overview of each research phase.
Table 3.1 Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Research Phase</th>
<th>Goal/Objective</th>
<th>Type of Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: Participant Selection</td>
<td>To educate participants and ensure they are willing to participate.</td>
<td>Qualitative data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II: Data Collection</td>
<td>To identify and examine possible barriers – to access to technology, language proficiency, access to technology, support systems.</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III: Data Analysis</td>
<td>Transcription of interviews. Conduct inductive and deductive analysis of interviews, artifacts, and field notes. Conduct descriptive statistical analysis of survey data.</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

During the implementation phase of this research, data sets were collected from students, parents, and staff in an urban district in Ohio. The guiding research question for collecting data was identifying possible barriers impacting ELs’ disengagement during the pandemic at Apple Tree and Oak Tree Middle Schools. The specific data collection instruments are described in the following sections.

**Quantitative Data**

**Likert Scale Survey**

A Likert scale is a psychometric response scale used in questionnaires to obtain participants’ preferences or degree of agreement with a statement or set of statements (Aasa, 2016; Flakerud, 2012). Likert scales are non-comparative scaling techniques and only measure one trait to determine the level of agreement with a given statement by way of an ordinal scale. Scales can range from four to seven points (Vagias, 2006). The
student and parent Likert survey utilized the Clemson International Institute for Tourism & Research Development scale), examining if participants considered something to be a barrier. The staff survey used a five-point scale examining a level of awareness about their students and possible barriers. The student and staff surveys were translated into Spanish upon request.

**Likert Surveys**

Participants completed a four-scale Likert survey (see Appendices E and F) that looked to ascertain possible barriers impacting engagement during the pandemic during the 2020 to 2022 school years. Each survey addressed potential barriers provided by school staff at the onset of the pandemic.

**Quantitative Data Collection Using Likert Survey Scale**

**Participant Likert Scale Used to Identify Potential Barriers**

1. Not a barrier,
2. Somewhat of a barrier,
3. Moderate barrier, and
4. Extreme barrier

**List of Possible Barriers Influencing Disengagement — Student**

1. Access to device,
2. Access to internet service,
3. Language barrier (limited language proficiency),
4. Adequate Support from School,
5. Virtual lesson delivery,
6. Impact on personal life,
7. Culturally relevant pedagogy and inclusion,
8. Personal time management, and
9. Personal responsibilities impacting schoolwork.

List of Possible Barriers Influencing Disengagement — Parent

1. Access to device,
2. Access to internet service,
3. Language barrier (limited language proficiency),
4. Adequate support from school,
5. Virtual lesson delivery,
6. Impact on personal life,
7. Culturally relevant pedagogy and inclusion,
8. Personal time management,
9. Personal responsibilities impacting schoolwork, and
10. Ability to help my child.

List of Possible Barriers Influencing Student Disengagement — Staff

1. Access to device,
2. Access to internet service,
3. Language barrier (limited language proficiency),
4. Adequate support from school,
5. Virtual lesson delivery,
6. Impact on personal life,
7. Culturally relevant pedagogy and inclusion,
8. Personal time management, and
9. Personal responsibilities impacting schoolwork.

Qualitative Data

Semi-Structured Interviews

As Mertler (2020) noted, “When gathering truly qualitative data, interviews are probably the best conducted following semi-structured or open-ended formats” (p. 134). The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask several base questions, with the option of follow-up questions depending on the response.

Researcher Field Notes

Efron and Ravid (2020) recommended taking notes during an interview to allow the researcher to capture the essence of the responses, note body language and changes in tone, and jot down ideas and follow-up questions. After the interviews were completed, the researcher listened to the interview recordings to identify themes from ideas or barriers presented. Each interview was transcribed to provide an accurate and authentic account of the participant's words.

An interpreter was available during student and parent interviews to reduce potential anxiety caused by trying to respond in English versus their native language, Spanish.

Artifacts

The last data collection utilized in this research project was comprised of report cards, staff emails and newsletters, and student behavior logs. According to Efron and Ravid (2020), “artifacts are physical documents and records that allow the teacher researcher to construct a layered and contextual understanding of their topics” (p. 129).
For this study, the researcher used a variety of official documents, such as student report cards, including teacher comments, staff emails, student behavior logs, and newsletters to families.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

After the researcher reviewed the Likert survey results, a flow chart (see Appendix G) was developed with possible open-ended questions for the top two barriers. This helped to maintain consistency and structure within the interviews.

*Observations/Field Notes*

As I observed the student and parent participants when they were completing the Likert survey or speaking to the translator, I documented field notes in my journal (See Appendix L). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stressed the importance of detail and descriptions when taking field notes, stating that “enough detail should be given that readers feel as if they are there, seeing what the observer sees” (p. 151).

My field notes provided insight into the level of language proficiency and the tone of the conversation between the translator and the participant.

*Artifacts*

The third type of qualitative data collected in this study were various artifacts like student report cards and behavior logs, staff emails, school newsletters, and district communication to families during the pandemic. The artifacts helped add depth to the study by offering a lens for examining student biological factors, like response to stressors, influence academic progress, how the schools and staff members communicated or responded to parental concerns (e.g., how to use instructional technology or how to access translation services).
3.7 Setting and Time Frame of Study

Pseudonyms were used when referencing each school and district. This research was conducted in an urban district in Ohio and data collection occurred over a 12-week period in the spring of 2023.

Setting

The settings of the study included three middle school buildings within the Buckeye School District, an urban district located in a suburb near Cleveland, Ohio, serving almost 6,000 K-12 students enrolled in kindergarten to grade 12. The district and all three middle schools have a diverse population in terms of race and class living within the community and local area. Each middle school has a diverse population, including Hispanic, Black, non-Hispanic, multiracial, White, and Asian, with almost 60% of students identified as economically disadvantaged. Within the district, 3% of students are categorized as ELs.

During the 2021-2022 school year, the Buckeye School District finalized a K-8 five-year facility plan. In the fall of 2021, Apple Tree and Oak Middle School moved into their new facility. Maple Tree moved into their new school during the previous school year. Each middle school enrolls students in fifth through eighth grade and offers a full range of academic courses, from fine arts to STEM, as part of the Project Lead the Way curriculum.

Apple Tree Middle School (pseudonym) is identified as a schoolwide Title I building. The student population is 689. Out of the total school population, 61.6% of the students are “economically disadvantaged;” 3.1% are ELs; 21.5% are Black, non-
Hispanic; 42.9% are White; 15.9% are Hispanic; and 19.4% are classified as multiracial.

Statistics show that 96% of teachers are White, and 75% are female.

Maple Tree Middle School (pseudonym) is also identified as a schoolwide Title I building. The student population is 624. Out of the total school population, 45.9% of the students are “economically disadvantaged;” fewer than .5% are ELs; 18.2% are Black, non-Hispanic; 53.8% are White; 11.5% are Hispanic; and 16% are classified as multiracial. Statistics show that 94% of teachers are White, and 69% are female. The school has a rich history of providing equitable education opportunities for all students.

Oak Middle School (pseudonym) is identified as a schoolwide Title I building. The student population is 354. Out of the total school population, 99.7% of the students are “economically disadvantaged;” 4.4% are ELs; 23.5% are Black, non-Hispanic; 43.7% are White; 18% are Hispanic; and 14.1% are classified as multiracial. Statistics show that 87% of teachers are White and 60% are female. Over time, that school has been proven to provide all students with equal education opportunities.

Time Frame of Study

The time frame for the data collection phases was nine weeks, from February to March 2023, in two middle schools or other locations or virtually, as requested by participants. In the last phase, the analysis of data took three weeks to complete. A total number of 12 weeks were spent collecting and analyzing data.

All participation forms and communication via the translator were completed in early-February 2023. The researcher collected data through Likert surveys in English or Spanish, artifacts, field notes, and interviews with participants. Table 3.2 illustrates the phases and data collection dates.
### Table 3.2 Action Research Phases, Data Collection, and Analysis Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Research Phase</th>
<th>Data Collection Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase One: Identification of Participants</td>
<td>Nine weeks - February 1 to March 28, 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The initial meeting, phone call, or pre-interview to explain the purpose of the research study and completion of participant release. Parents received a translated copy of the forms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Two: Data Collection</td>
<td>Nine weeks - February 1 to March 28, 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert scale survey and semi-structured interviews to accommodate participant schedules.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The researcher begins taking field notes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of artifacts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription of interviews.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Three: Data Analysis</td>
<td>Three Weeks – March 28 to April 3, 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.8 Research Design

In this section, the specific sample of participants, procedure, data analysis, and steps taken to ensure validity are provided. Because this is a mixed-method research study of sequential explanatory design, content for both quantitative and qualitative research are discussed, with the information for each phase delineated by subheadings.

**Participants**

A total of seven students, four from Apple Tree, and three from Oak Tree Middle School, were invited to participate. Five parents and nine staff members, including two core teachers, three TESOL teachers, one school counselor, one English Learner Coordinator, one Community Engagement Liaison, and one El Centro Coordinator/Translator also took part in the study. Because this was an action research study, it was important that the student and parent participants had a translator available.
during interviews and assisting with the interpretation of the surveys and field notes.

Tables 3.3, 3.5, and 3.6 provide demographic details about participants.

The participants of the research study are those who were affected by the issue under investigation (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Their perceptions provided valuable information to help answer my research questions.

The student participants of this research study were selected from a larger student population of ELs in the district. The sample selection is based on the relevancy of their decline on the English Language Arts state assessments from Spring 2019 (pre-pandemic) to Spring 2022 (post-pandemic). The stratified sample proportionally represents the population's demographic subgroup. Table 3.4 provides the pre- and post-pandemic scaled scores.

After selecting the student participants, the parent participants were invited to provide their perspectives. Staff participants were selected based on convenience and connection to the student sample size.

Table 3.3. Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Assigned Middle School during the 2021-22 School Year</th>
<th>Native Language of English learner</th>
<th>Grade Level in 2018-2019 (Pre-pandemic year)</th>
<th>Grade Level in 2021-2022 (Post-pandemic year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td>Apple Tree</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>Oak Tree</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Oak Tree</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mateo</td>
<td>Apple Tree</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>Oak Tree</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriella</td>
<td>Apple Tree</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Apple Tree</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student 1, Lucia, is a 14-year-old female student who enjoys art and mathematics. In her free time, she likes to play basketball, learn new things, and read. She receives support in mathematics and reading through her Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Student 2, Isabella, is a 14-year-old female student that enjoys helping her mother during her free time, and her favorite subject in school is mathematics. She has an IEP to help her meet her reading and mathematics goals.

Student 3, Ana, is a 13-year-old girl who likes playing volleyball and basketball and watching television to learn about history.

Student 4, Mateo, is a 16-year-old male student who enjoys spending time with friends and watching television. He has an IEP to support his reading and mathematics goals.

Student 5, Diego, is a 14-year-old male student who enjoys learning about science but dislikes mathematics.

Student 6, Gabriella, is a 12-year-old female student that enjoys spending time with her sister and friends.

Student 7, Carlos, is a 14-year-old male student who hopes to work in the trade field when he is older. His favorite subject is algebra. He came to the United States after Hurricane Maria affected Puerto Rico.

Table 3.4. Student Participants’ Ohio State Test English Language Arts Scores in Spring 2019 and Spring 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELA Performance Level and Scaled Score (Mean for content and grade level)</th>
<th>ELA Performance Level and Scaled Score (Mean for content and grade level)</th>
<th>ELA Difference Between Mean Spring 2019 and Spring 2022 (Decline in achievement)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2019</td>
<td>Spring 2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited-593 (715.5)</td>
<td>Limited-649 (703.72)</td>
<td>-67.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic-687 (715.5)</td>
<td>Basic-684 (703.72)</td>
<td>-8.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited-648 (715.5)</td>
<td>Limited-646 (703.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited – 653 (720.18)</td>
<td>Limited – 650 (699.83)</td>
<td>-17.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic – 658 (714.16)</td>
<td>Basic-682-(709.85)</td>
<td>-28.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic-677 (715.5)</td>
<td>Basic-686 (703.72)</td>
<td>-20.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited – 612 (720.18)</td>
<td>Limited-651 (699.83)</td>
<td>-59.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5. Parent Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Relationship to Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roni</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parent 1, Roni, enjoys being a mother and takes pride in raising her two beautiful girls. She works in a local factory. She moved from Puerto Rico to the local community to be closer to her brother.

Parent 2, Mia, has two boys, a four- and a 16-year-old. She is a stay-at-home mother and moved to the area from Puerto Rico.

Parent 3, Julia, has four children, including twins who are 14 years old. Her oldest child attends college, and she has a nine-year-old daughter. She moved to the area after Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. She works for a hotel and spends her free time taking care of her children and extended family.

Parent 4, Savannah, has six children, including twins. She has lived in the area for five years and moved here from Puerto Rico. She is a cleaner at a school in the evenings.

Parent 5, Paula, has three children. She has two daughters and a son in the Marines. She is very busy juggling two jobs to help support her children. During the day, she provides home care to those in need and, in the evening, works as a cashier at a
department store. She lived in Puerto Rico for many years prior to moving to the local area.

Table 3.6. Staff Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Role or Title</th>
<th>Current Assigned Building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>English as Second Language Coordinator</td>
<td>Central Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>TESOL Teacher</td>
<td>Pine Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>TESOL Teacher</td>
<td>Oak Tree Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Oak Tree Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>English Language Arts and Social Studies Teacher</td>
<td>Oak Tree Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>English Language Arts and Social Studies Teacher</td>
<td>Apple Tree Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>CEL – Community Engagement Liaison</td>
<td>Apple Tree Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>El Centro Coordinator and Translator</td>
<td>District (multiple buildings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>Apple Tree Middle School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff 1, Cindy, is a district administrator who oversees the English Language Learner department to ensure all students are supported in order to be successful. She worked as an EL teacher and principal before moving into the central office. She was an English Learner in elementary school.

Staff 2, Paul, is currently serving as a TESOL teacher in an elementary school. He has traveled the world and taught in Alaska and Japan before teaching in Buckeye Schools.

Staff 3, Emily, is a TESOL teacher at Oak Tree Middles School after spending time as a science and social studies teacher in an inner-city school system.

Staff 4, Sarah, is a social worker. She spent her early years working in private practice before working at Oak Tree Middle School. Her areas of expertise include
supporting students dealing with trauma and grief, drug addiction, and referring students for outpatient psychiatric services.

Staff 6, Jessica, an English Language Arts and Social Studies Teacher with 23 years of experience. She has taught various grade levels and subjects but enjoys her current assignment the most.

Staff 7, Ashley, a 25-year veteran teacher who has taught every grade level from second to seventh grade. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends.

Staff 8, Melissa, is a social worker who, in partnership with El Centro Community Center and Buckeye Schools, supports students and families through translation services or helps them find community resources if needed. She attends every IEP meeting to ensure parents understand the goals established each year. She supports staff and students in all seven buildings and spends one day each week at El Centro.

Staff 9, Julie, is a TESOL teacher at Oak Tree Middle School. She is passionate about supporting her students and works with a regional refugee center to help them transition into school. She worked in the business field prior to becoming a teacher. This is her sixth year working at the Buckeye School District.

Samantha, Staff 10, is a school counselor at Apple Tree Middle School. She worked in other buildings, including the preschool and high school, before moving to support middle school students.

**Procedures**

This action research study focused on exploring potential barriers ELs faced during the 2020-2021 school year. The participants were asked to complete surveys to direct semi-structured interview questions. The purpose of this explanatory action
research design was to provide a participatory social justice perspective aimed at involving participants in the research and bringing an awareness to addressing the needs of underrepresented student populations. The research was also intended to generate useful evidence that would assist educators in their development of plans to support ELs to close the gap during remote learning and after a period of remote learning.

The explanatory sequential design provided an opportunity to learn about how specific barriers impacted ELs during the pandemic. The first phase, the collection of quantitative data using Likert surveys, allowed the participants and researcher an opportunity to collaborate and gather the first set of evidence. The second phase, qualitative data collection using interviews and document reviews, allowed me to dig deeper into how each identified barrier impacted each participant. Both phases were straightforward and provided meaningful data and evidence to answer each research question.

The analysis phase allowed me to integrate the data in this explanatory sequential study by connecting the results from the quantitative phase to help guide the qualitative phase. This plan included specific questions to probe what each participant thought were the most challenging barriers. As a result, their responses and the document review gave me the ability to better explain the quantitative results. After the results were finalized, I integrated both sets of connected data and drew integrated conclusions to form distinct themes.

**Ethical Considerations**

Protecting participants from harm is the responsibility of the researcher (Efron & Ravid, 2020; Mertler, 2020). Because student participants in this research were under the
age of eighteen, parental permission was required (Appendices B & C). All other participants were given a traditional consent form. An informed consent form was provided to all parents or guardians prior to data collection. An opportunity was provided for parents and guardians to ask questions via virtual meeting with the interpreter and researcher during which it was made clear that participation in the study was voluntary.

In an effort to keep the identity of participants anonymous, pseudonyms to protect the identities and locations of the district, schools, and participants were used. Data will be kept confidential, as it is critical that participants do not recognize information (Mertler, 2020). Participant numbers were assigned, and only the researcher will have access to the results.

**Data Analysis**

In this study, the story evidence is broad, with several methodological techniques available (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Consequently, it is the responsibility of the researcher to collect and evaluate data in such a way that the mixed-methods research reflects a valid analytical notion. After completing the data collection phase, quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed. The data was imported into Dedoose, a data analytic tool used to help researchers evaluate survey data, assist with coding, and link other media to increase efficiency and provide visualizations of data.

The quantitative data sets were reviewed, and descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean for each identified barrier. In addition, visual representations, such as pie graphs, were generated to explain what percentage of respondents answered each Likert survey statement. This first step in the analysis phase involved reviewing survey data. All responses of a rating of three (moderate barrier) or four (extreme barrier) were
recorded, prompting the semi-structured interview questions in the second qualitative phase.

The next and most complex phase in the process, the qualitative analysis of each interview, was conducted in three stages, as shown in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1 Semi-Structured Interview Analysis Stage Diagram

An analysis of participant interviews was completed to allow the researcher to discover new understandings and allow for codes to emerge that were vital to the study. After numerous reviews of the extensive interview data, several codes emerged, after which the researcher conducted subsequent cycles of coding, searching for lines or phrases that might have been missed. This was a large undertaking, considering the number of participants (n=21). Codes were grouped together based on similarities and the process was repeated multiple times in order for categories to emerge from the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). From these groupings, themes that were aligned with the research questions emerged. Evidence of the themes that emerged along with supporting artifacts, and field notes, were organized in the data analytics software. This additional information will provide more evidence to identify all of the barriers ELs faced during the pandemic.
Rigor and Trustworthiness

This study used both quantitative and qualitative data. The rigor and trustworthiness of the data collected in this study were established through (a) thick descriptions, (b) peer debriefings, and (c) triangulation of data.

Rich, Thick Descriptions From Participants

In this study, a large, purposefully selected sample was chosen to research the impact of the pandemic on ELs to examine why students were not engaging in online learning. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasized the importance of using rich, thick descriptions to convey findings that may transport the reader in a way that will give the reader an element of shared experiences (p. 200). By providing sufficient detail in regard to the setting and participants in this study, the readers can reflect on the results of the study and evaluate how to apply the research to a different setting and with other participants (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In this study, thick descriptions were provided through the use of quotes from interviews with participants and through select artifacts. The use of rich, thick descriptions improves validity.

Peer Debriefings

Peer debriefings occurred with my dissertation chair and a friend who has his master’s degree in data science. During the peer debriefing meetings, both my dissertation chair and the expert in data science reviewed and critiqued the analysis and interpretation of the data I had collected. Having both experts ask questions and make observations about the data sets provided numerous opportunities for the refinement of the data. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) explained the value of peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account. This strategy adds validity to the account.
Triangulation

To present research that is trustworthy, it is important that the researcher continually check their perceptions to ensure they are not misinformed and that what they are seeing and hearing are actually what they are seeing and hearing (Mertler, 2020). Using a mixed-method design enhances the validity of the data.

After data collection, the quantitative data were triangulated with the qualitative data. An analysis of the themes from the audio recordings and field notes were reviewed with the interpreter to control any bias in the research.

Triangulation is the process of comparing and analyzing different data sources and is conducted in order to establish the trustworthiness of the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Herr & Anderson, 2015). In this study, the triangulation of data was achieved by comparing the quantitative and qualitative data for consistency among the data sources, as well as reviewing field notes and artifacts. Although each data set provided its own unique set of information, the qualitative data set was the most compelling; the themes that emerged provided the insight to answer the research questions and as well as clarity concerning the findings and results of individual data sets.

3.9 Plan for Sharing and Communicating Findings

The results of this study will be used to increase awareness about inequities of marginalized student populations, like ELs, and help administrators and policymakers better prepare if we have to quickly pivot to remote learning in the future. Findings will be shared with district leaders at Buckeye School District.
The data in this study were analyzed for themes and assertions regarding the personal experiences of students, parents, and staff. Therefore, any sharing of the data attained by this study was done with regards to the participant’s anonymity and confidentiality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Herr & Anderson, 2015). All data sets associated with individual students were utilized to support the themes and assertions; however, all participant identities have and will continue to be kept confidential in the report by having pseudo-names assigned to each participant.

3.10 Summary

This chapter presented an explanation of the mixed-methods research study that was designed to explore the impact of remote learning and the barriers faced by middle school ELs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the research study was reviewed with each of the 21 participants. The collection of data and the methods of analysis for each research question were outlined. Chapters four and five will discuss the results of the analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data sets and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study examined how barriers during the COVID-19 pandemic affected English learners (EL) enrolled in an urban district in northeast Ohio. The sample of 21 individuals was comprised of students, parents, and school staff who participated in the study over the course of nine weeks from February 1, 2023, through March 28, 2023. Each participant completed a survey and answered informal interview questions based on their responses as to which barriers were most significant.

The problem of practice for this study focused on barriers related to technology, English proficiency, school support, and personal challenges that contributed to disengagement and motivation impacting their achievement. To investigate this problem and to answer my two research questions, a fixed mixed-methods design was used, specifically, an explanatory sequential design. This design utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods. The following two questions served as the basis for this study:

1. Why was there a decline in the achievement level of sixth to eighth grade English learners (EL) participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio?

2. Were there barriers that affected the engagement level of sixth to eighth grade English learners (EL) from participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio?
4.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons for a decline in the achievement levels, based on state assessments, of ELs participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio. Moreover, the purpose of this study was to determine if there were barriers that affected the engagement level of EL students at Buckeye School District in Ohio.

Stages of an Action Research Cycle

The basic procedures in implementing this explanatory sequential mixed-methods design involved three major phases of the research cycle. The first and second phases focused on quantitative and qualitative data collection. The third was the analysis of data sets using Dedoose, an analytical software tool.

The design and implementation of the quantitative strand began with obtaining permission from each participant and then collecting closed-ended data using a Likert survey instrument in order to identify specific barriers. The next step was to review the design of qualitative data collection protocols to utilized during informal interviews for each group of participants. The qualitative strand used open-ended questions, artifacts, and field notes to gain an in-depth understanding of how each collected data set related to the central questions. The goal of establishing interview questions aligned with each major barrier provided consistency and helped guide the work. Appendix G provides the list of semi-structured interview questions for each group of participants. The semi-structured interview responses were recorded using the voice memo application on my iPhone to allow the audio files to be transcribed or interpreted by the translator. I analyzed the recordings many times to ensure all verbal responses were documented.
properly. I received the participants’ approval prior to recording these responses. In some cases, a brief second phone interview was used to clarify translated statements. In many cases, the translator helped interpret slang terms used in Spanish to English; this was helpful when analyzing the parent portion of the interviews and artifact review. The analysis of the qualitative data phase helped me identify emerging themes. It is important to note that a translator was able to aid participants during both the quantitative and qualitative phases.

In addition to quantitative and qualitative data sets, artifacts were gathered, including student report cards, attendance records, behavior logs, staff email exchanges, school newsletters sent to families, and researcher field notes from observations between the translator and students. Appendix K provides additional details about artifacts.

4.2 Data Collection Overview

Analysis of each data set was helpful in identifying, understanding, and interpreting patterns of meaning in data. The goal of data collection and thematic analysis was to explore the experiences and perspectives of participants in the study. After the data were aggregated, the process of thematic analysis involved reading the data several times, coding, and theme development. Thematic analysis of quantitative and qualitative data sets generated fourthemes. The thematic analysis provided an understanding of the personal experiences of each group of participants. See Appendices D and H through L for the data collection overview.

4.3 Quantitative Analysis

Mixed-methods data analysis consists of analytic techniques applied to both the quantitative and qualitative data sets, as well as the integration of both forms through
triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data in an explanatory mixed-method approach draws from the quantitative data to drive the qualitative data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Each finding suggested which barriers were more impactful and may have affected student academic performance.

**Descriptive Statistics**

In this study, the quantitative data were analyzed using charts to present and understand the distribution of participant responses. The data were collected using a Google Form to record the Likert survey responses. The purpose of the survey was to determine which barriers were rated as moderate or extreme for each participant. Next, I prepared for the semi-structured interview questions with students and staff. Due to the language barrier, a translator interpreted each survey question and semi-structured interview. I observed interactions between the parent and translator and recorded the results in my field notes. Appendix L provides additional details.

Using a Likert scale, each participant answered questions regarding whatever barriers negatively affected their lived experience.

**4.4 Results**

The results (total \( n=21 \), student=7, staff=9, parent=5) indicated that in each participant group, the barriers identified differed from the overall mean, as is detailed in Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1. For example, the average mean for parent respondents illustrates how personal life concerns, like food security, job loss, etc. influenced their children. In contrast, parents responded that access to a device was not an issue, which contrasted with what staff and students reported.
Table 4.1. Mean by Participant Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Mean (Student)</th>
<th>Mean (Staff)</th>
<th>Mean (Parent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal life concerns (food security, housing, or</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joblessness)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally relevant lessons and feeling part of the</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>virtual classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student personal responsibility</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson delivery</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student time management</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable internet access</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language proficiency</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate support by school</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to device</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1 Mean by Participant Group

In an effort to understand the overall barriers ELs faced during the pandemic, I found that two barriers were identified by all three participant groups. Table 4.2 and Figure 4.2 show the overall means for each barrier.
Table 4.2 The Overall Mean for Each Identified Barrier

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Overall Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal life concerns (food security, housing or joblessness)</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally relevant lessons and feeling part of the virtual classroom</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student personal responsibility</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson delivery</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student time management</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable internet access</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language proficiency</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate support by school</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to device</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2 The Overall Mean Score for Each

**Participant Barrier Data Set**

The quantitative analysis revealed that access to the device was not a barrier for most of the respondents, as seen in Figure 4.3, with 57% of the respondents saying that was not a problem.
Only three (14%) participants noted that inclusiveness was not a barrier to the learning of the sixth to eighth graders during the pandemic, as shown in Figure 4.4. Consequently, inclusion was a major contributor to the decline in the students’ grades. 48% noted that inclusion was a moderate barrier to the virtual learning of EL students.

Figure 4.4 Culturally Relevant Practices and Inclusiveness
Figure 4.5 shows that internet access was an extreme barrier for the majority of the participants. 33% of the respondents noted that a lack of access to the internet was an “extreme barrier” to the learning of the EL sixth to eighth graders.

Figure 4.5 Internet Access

English language proficiency hindered learning for most EL students; analysis of the data revealed that 15 (69%) of the respondents noted that language directly or indirectly hindered learning for sixth to eighth graders during the pandemic. Figure 4.6 illustrates the percentage of respondents that identified language as a barrier.

Figure 4.6 English Language Proficiency
Further exploration of the data revealed that only 5 of the 21 participants believed that virtual lessons were easy to understand. Thirty-eight percent highlighted that understanding the virtual lessons was a moderate barrier, as shown in Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.7 Lesson Delivery

The analysis revealed that only three (14%) of the participants had no problem with attending to their schoolwork during the pandemic, as shown in Figure 4.8. Attending to schoolwork was a barrier for most of the students.

Figure 4.8 Personal Responsibility
The majority of the participants noted time management as a contributory factor towards a decline in students’ grades during the pandemic. As shown in Figure 4.9, only 6 of the 21 participants said that students experienced no form of barrier in managing their time during the pandemic.

![Time Management](image)

**Figure 4.9 Time Management**

The pandemic impacted the personal life of the students, as shown in Figure 4.10. Only 2 of the 21 respondents noted that the pandemic had not impacted the personal lives of the sixth to eighth graders. 19 (91%) of the respondents expressed that the pandemic mildly or greatly impacted the personal life of sixth to eighth graders, thus affecting their academic performance.
The quantitative analysis revealed that only two participants believe that the school and teachers' support was adequate during the pandemic, as shown in Figure 4.11. Consequently, the school and teachers' support was inadequate for the majority of the sixth to eighth graders during the period of remote learning.
For the quantitative phase of data collection, the Likert survey results indicated that many barriers were identified by the participants. This phase provided the foundation for the qualitative phase. Moreover, it strengthens the mixed-methods sequential design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In summary, the results of participant surveys indicated all barriers impacted EL students in some form, but six rated above a 2.5 overall mean. It is clear that personal life concerns, the development of relevant lessons that made students feel included in their online learning environment as well as how lessons were delivered, student time management and personal responsibility, and, lastly, reliable internet access had a stronger negative effect than did access to a device, English proficiency, or support from the school. This information was used to gather more evidence and perspective from each participant.

4.5 Qualitative Analysis

In this study, the story evidence is broad, with several methodological techniques available (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Consequently, it was the responsibility of the researcher to collect and evaluate data in such a way that the qualitative research conducted reflected a valid analytical notion. The analysis was conducted using Dedoose, a mixed-method analysis software application; this comprised three stages, as shown in Figure 4.12 below.

Figure 4.12 Qualitative Analysis Stage Diagram
The first step involved reading, interpreting, and providing context to the text. Throughout this step, the obtained rich, descriptive text was reviewed multiple times to better understand what it contained. This step was done to gain a general overview from the interviews and to begin thinking about commonalities in statements. Data were analyzed to determine if the most frequently used terms or phrases matched research keywords since the common verbiage shows that the data are explicitly addressing the study's emphasis.

I used coding of student, parent, and staff interviews, artifacts, field notes, to collect qualitative data. A total of seven students, five parents, and nine staff members ($n=21$) were interviewed after completing the quantitative portion of the action plan.

In the second step, I utilized open coding in Dedoose (Herr & Anderson, 2015) as I went sentence by sentence. No codes were generated prior to this first round of coding. This approach allowed me to carefully review each response, while a second reading permitted a deeper meaning of the sentence to be conveyed. For example, a highlighted sentence may have been color-coded blue to indicate something like the word depressed or stressed. Overall, there were 67 codes initially, which was reduced to 17 after the final cycle of analysis. The narrative below provides an overview of each step in the coding process. Appendix I provides the initial codes.

After completing multiple rounds of coding, I synthesized the codes into the following categories, as seen in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Categorization of Statements and Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to practice language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction/socialize to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation/translator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I was able to use the software application, Dedoose, and corresponding data dashboard. That allowed me to consider the ways in which the categories aligned with themes which, in turn, provided evidence to support both research questions. The analytical platform helped me “see” the data. One platform created a word cloud of developing categories. Figure 4.14 illustrates the word cloud, which supplied key words to help me begin connecting my research questions to the qualitative data set.

Figure 4.14 Dedoose Word Cloud
The qualitative data consisted of transcribed pages from interviews, artifact collection, and observations outlined in field notes. All three sources built upon the quantitative phase data set. The integration of these phases helped in discovering emerging themes.

4.6 Theme Development

Multiple sources of data were collected to identify barriers and create a rich, in-depth narrative on how those barriers affected ELs. As a result, the participant surveys, interviews, artifacts, and field notes were used to triangulate the data. Data source triangulation is an effort to see if observations and reporting carry the same meaning when found in different circumstances (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During the analysis phase, it was clear there were similar perspectives or themes emerging.

Final Categories Developing Into Emerging Themes

After careful analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data sets, I was able to evaluate the statistical results before exploring participants’ views in-depth. While the quantitative phase provided valuable information and helped guide me to the second phase, the qualitative portion of this study steered me in the last phase, thematic analysis. I was able to take 17 categories to create subthemes. As these subthemes emerged, they began to evolve into major themes from which four clear themes emerged. Each theme reinforced my understanding of the research problem and corresponding research questions. Table 4.4 illustrates how all the 17 categories ultimately comprised four major themes.
Table 4.4 Final Themes Aligned to Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Final Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>Felt lonely/depressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjusting to hard task/difficult issue to deal with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stressed or anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worried about adult issues, like food, jobs, and housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worried about getting sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>Distraction/cannot concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changes in grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need more support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needed help from parent or teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too much online/screen time or dislike of online school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staffing concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Opportunity to practice language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social interaction/socialize to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translation/translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Access to device/devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliable hotspot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to use technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes

The first major theme examined how mental health concerns and the learning environment were part of the lived experience affecting how ELs disengaged in online learning. The next two themes aligned with the delivery of instruction using online resources and lesson delivery. Overall, of the four major themes, two aligned with each research question.

Mental Health

The mental health issues experienced by the children, parents, and staff during the pandemic were quite evident. There were multiple factors influencing the mental health of students and, in particular, ELs. These included factors like feelings of loneliness, dealing with difficult tasks, using technology, being unable to socialize, worries about
adult issues, e.g., housing, food security, or the loss of a family income, and stress caused by uncertainty. A number of participants commented about how anxious or stressed they were. For example, Samantha, a staff member, stated during her interview, “Families struggled with job loss and not having food or being too scared to go to the food store for food.” Another staff member, Julie, commented, “Students were worried and stressed.” Mia, a parent, mentioned, “I was concerned I would get COVID from work.”

During that period, feelings of stress and anxiety were normal for millions of people all over the world. In particular, certain ethnic groups had greater concerns over getting gravely ill. The mortality rates were higher for certain ethnic-racial minorities and migrant backgrounds (New York Times, 2021). Among the pediatric fatalities, more than 33% of the deaths in ages 12-15 years occurred in Hispanic/Latinx populations (CDC, n.d., para. 3). Health disparities among marginalized populations can be due to a variety of conditions, including the inability to social distance because of multigenerational households, working in close contact at work or school, lack of access to healthcare, impoverishment, and poor nutrition (David, 2013; Peterson et al., 2021).

The fear of getting sick and dying weighed heavily on the minds of ELs and their families. They also worried about food security, housing, and joblessness for their family. As a result, their state of mental health was affected, increasing their stress levels and feelings of loneliness.

All of these factors impacted their attitude toward online learning and their engagement in lessons and task completion.
Learning Environment

Research has identified a divide in internet access and technology among low-income and immigrant students, groups that are associated with the English learner population (Peterson et al., 2021). These gaps in access disrupted student attendance and learning. Schools worked diligently to help students get access but limited staff and minimal help from overwhelmed parents or teachers exacerbated the problem. Moreover, the lack of support and disdain for online learning influenced student engagement in their school work. Students, parents, and staff worked hard to address the technology issues, but students were easily distracted when working at home. For example, Gabriela, a student, mentioned during her interview, “I couldn’t focus. My phone was a distraction.” Like Gabriela, Diego stated, “I couldn’t pay attention. My grades dropped.” Two staff members shared that students were distracted because their homes were not conducive to online learning. Jessica commented during her interview, “My students were babysitting their siblings because their parents were essential employees.” Likewise, Samantha discussed the struggles her students had navigating online learning and expectations. She mentioned, “My students didn’t understand a lot of the online lessons and didn’t have the support at home.” The interviews and artifacts indicated that the learning environment did not improve attendance or engagement. As a result, their grades dropped, and their mental health suffered.

Communication

There is an intricate relationship between language proficiency, engagement, academic achievement, and socioemotional factors (Krashen, 1981). There has been a great deal of discussion on how remote learning may widen the achievement gaps and
increase mental health challenges for all students, yet the ELs faced more obstacles because they needed instructional materials and directions translated and lacked the appropriate support from overwhelmed staff members. For example, Roni, a staff member, commented during her interview, “We needed additional services, like a Spanish translator.” Cindy, another staff member, mentioned during her interview, “There was only so much EL support that they could receive, being at home.” In addition, artifacts, like school newsletters and staff presentations provided additional evidence that parents were requesting assistance and how they could contact the school for help. Those artifacts can be found in Appendix K.

ELs were faced with learning online, which posed a risk because they rely on daily social interactions with peers in English to maintain and enhance their language and literacy skills. A key to learning English is through interactions with others in both structured and unstructured settings. Because ELs usually speak their native languages when at home, they have fewer opportunities to practice speaking, reading, and writing English. Paul, a TESOL teacher, stated, “Language development starts with the social language first.” Remote learning and the use of face masks, disrupting communication, caused a drop in grades, poor behaviors, and mental health concerns. Poor or slower development of language proficiency can lead to an increase of internalizing symptoms (Yi et al., 2011), leading to loss or regression of language skills and increasing the number of stressors.

Language acquisition can occur through many modalities, including speaking, reading, and writing. During both online learning and live classes, ELs struggled to understand directions and assignments. Regular classroom teachers who were attempting
to survive planning and delivering instruction on a new platform were unable to pause classes to use Google Translate or the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) tool while bilingual staff were spread thin and were unable to attend multiple online sessions at the same time. Sakamoto (2018) explained the science behind the poor translation of materials may have unintended consequences when content is not properly interpreted. Moreover, the number of instructional materials, directions to use the hotspots or devices, and communication letters or newsletters not being translated created stress and frustration for students and parents.

Technology

During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, access to technology became a critical component of teaching and learning. Another significant disparity was access to devices and reliable internet services. Katz et al. (2017) indicated the vast majority of Hispanic families do not have internet service. Thus, many ELs relied on donated hotspots for internet service. Those hotspots were unreliable and made many students and parents feel “under-connected” due to inconsistent service or the number of devices they supported. Melissa, a staff member, mentioned, “The hotspots were limited. A family may not have had one hotspot which only supported two dives and they had five children at home.” Similarly, Savannah, a parent, discussed, “The hotspot would knock them off because three of them were trying to use it. It only supported two devices.” The concern over being under-connected worsened as EL families struggled to maintain employment. Both the lack of funds to pay for service and unreliable hotspots added to the stressful situation, leaving ELs feeling frustrated by trying to solve internet and device access. For example, Lucia, a student, stated during her interview, “The internet
didn’t work, and I was frustrated and angry. I would cry sometimes.” These emotions arising from trying to address hard or difficult tasks led to concerns over mental health, poor attendance, and lower grades.

Parents of ELs may experience specific challenges related to technology due to language barriers and the inability to troubleshoot connectivity issues. It is also important to note that most parents did not have the option of working from home because they were considered to essential workers, as well as working multiple jobs to support their children. Additionally, they had limited access to school staff because of their work schedules or lacked the ability to communicate with staff. The need for translation services to help families access internet services or devices was clear. Lastly, when their children did have access, parents may have lacked the ability to help scaffold their children’s learning when staff were not able to help.

4.7 Interpretation of Results of the Study

The purpose of this study was to answer two research questions focused on barriers ELs faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and how those impediments affected their engagement in the learning process. After reviewing both data sets, several themes became evident and I was able to begin integrating those themes with my research questions. The intent of the integration in an explanatory sequential design is to connect the phases of the study to provide an explanation of the results of the quantitative data collection. In my study, the Likert survey helped me identify which barriers had a bigger impact on ELs. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) referred to this as an integration connection or sequential integration approach. I found a strong connection between the
phases, which allowed me to continue to consider the relationship between the data and my research questions.

After much reflection, it became evident that poor learning environments at home caused added anxiety for students. The already heightened emotional state of mind for families, staff, and students influenced students’ mental health, causing a decline in the achievement of ELs during remote learning. While the learning environment and mental health status are more individualized factors influencing students’ engagement in learning opportunities, there were other factors, like poor communication and technology issues, which were out of both the families’ and the students’ control. These factors not only impacted students but they compounded their feelings of stress and anxiety. As a result, ELs sought more support from school staff to help them keep up or translate assignments or to problem solve technology issues that arose. Below, I discuss how each theme connects to my research questions.

4.8 Research Question One: The Effect of the Learning Environment and Mental Health

Mental health is an essential component of overall well-being (CDC, 2023). It has been widely accepted that the well-being of individuals is a mix of genetic, psychological, social, and lifestyle factors, as well as environmental exposure (Stoewen, 2022). This study examined how barriers impacted student engagement. During the analysis phase, it became clear that the learning environment influenced how students engaged in online learning. The shift from traditional classroom learning to remote learning disrupted the mental health of students, which consequently affected their interest and engagement in the online learning process.
The effects of remote learning on student behavior and engagement proved to be detrimental to the mental health of ELs. This indicates the shift to remote learning at home impacted their ability to engage in their online lessons. Moreover, participants reported difficulty adapting to the demands of virtual learning, which placed additional stress on many students and families. That, in turn, may have contributed to more anxiety and mental health concerns.

4.9 Research Question Two: The Need for School Supports

At the height of the pandemic, school staff were juggling many new responsibilities and adapting to delivering instruction through a new mode of delivery. Teachers and support staff were unable to provide the same robust academic curriculum used in the traditional classroom setting. ELs require an academic curriculum tailored to their specific language needs and the change to remote learning did not adequately meet parent and student expectations.

Many ELs’ struggle with access to reliable internet connectivity and learning devices caused academic gaps and feelings of frustration. This “migration” to remote learning caused anxiety and impacted how students actively engaged in their learning. Additionally, staff struggled to develop lesson to support ELs. To compound the issue, parents and students reported feelings of concern and resentment about poor communication and available translation services. The concerns may have been exacerbated by other factors not captured in this study. While some felt the school system did not adequately meet the needs of English learners, it is important to note the enormous effort on the part of educators to provide continuity of learning and support. Despite that, ELs faced setbacks in their English language development due to
inconsistent opportunities to listen, speak, write, and read in English – especially on the
level of English proficiency that is foundational to their academic success.

The lack of appropriate school support, such as reliable devices and connectivity, scaffolded lessons, and translation services, was evidenced in the struggles of everyone involved – students, parents, and educators. While these barriers created unusual circumstances and feelings of frustration felt by every student and educator around the world, ELs faced additional barriers due to lack of support and poor communication.

4.10 Connecting the Theoretical Framework to Data

I chose to include both theoretical frameworks to provide the foundation for this study because of the focus on multicultural awareness, culturally relevant pedagogy, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, Dweck’s theory on motivation, personality, and other important humanistic theories. Each framework is critical to understanding how students’ cultural ways impact their approach and attitude toward learning and how physiological needs influence readiness to learn. All aspects of the educational experience, from the learning environment to using culturally relevant practices and finding additional support services to help close educational gaps, are critical to student achievement and, thus, success in the classroom.

In this study, I wanted to examine obstacles encountered by ELs in middle school during the pandemic and what schools can do to help close the achievement gap and prepare for the future in the event that, in future, we need to switch to remote learning for an extended period of time.

My first research question focused on why there was a decline in the achievement of ELs during the pandemic at Buckeye School District. The analysis suggested two clear
themes, concerns with mental health and an adequate learning environment, that emerged to support this question.

My second question aimed at identifying specific barriers and how they impacted engagement in online learning. Again, two themes emerged from my analysis. The first indicates deficiencies in communication and access to reliable technology hindered the motivation and engagement of ELs.

The simplified motivation-achievement cycle, a summary model of motivation-achievement interactions, captures some similarities within a number of prominent theories of academic motivation, engagement, and achievement to the research questions for this study. Figure 4.15 provides a visual example of the identified barriers that permeated the cycle influencing student achievement. This study reinforced the need for students to “learn how to learn” when engaging in tasks and juggling external and internal factors.

![Theoretical Framework: Relatedness Between Theories and Research Questions](image)

Figure 4.15 Connecting the Theoretical Framework to Research Questions

**4.11 Chapter Summary**

In this study, quantitative data analysis provided an overview of participant surveys and resulting barriers. This phase provided a list of the top six barriers. The
results of the Likert survey helped guide the qualitative interview questions and as well as generating the first part of theme development. The qualitative analysis provided results of interviews that offered important perceptions. In this phase, two other tools, artifacts, and researcher field notes, were used to gather evidence to support the emerging themes.

This chapter presented a review of the research questions and research design. In addition, this chapter provided a detailed description of the data collection procedures, and quantitative and qualitative data sets. Thus, this sequential explanatory mixed-method design helped me integrate data to see patterns or trends. The trends became categories and evolved into themes. As a result, data sets were integrated to help me complete a thematic analysis to better understand my problem of practice.

Thus, this study generated four clear themes aligned with my research questions. In addition, each theme supports the theoretical frameworks presented in the simplified motivation-achievement cycle, linking the study to supporting literature.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this explanatory mixed methods study was to examine the reasons for the decline in the achievement level of sixth to eighth-grade English learners (EL) participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio. My goal was to answer the following research questions: (1) Why was there a decline in the achievement level of sixth-eighth grade ELs participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio? and (2) Were there barriers that affected the engagement level of sixth-eighth grade ELs from participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio?

During the study, quantitative data were collected using an online Likert survey to determine which barriers impacted ELs. After the survey, qualitative data were collected and analyzed, the researcher interviewed 21 participants (students = 7, staff = 9, parents = 5) using semi-structured interviews, along with artifacts and field notes. Both data sets were analyzed, and four themes emerged. Thus, the resulting complementary data sets and themes helped me better understand my research problem. The triangulation process brought together the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methods.

This chapter combines the findings from this study and draws connections with existing research within the following discussion, implications, and limitations sections.
5.1 Discussion

To answer the research questions, quantitative and qualitative findings were combined during the thematic analysis phase of the study. These findings were then connected the grander body of previous research concerning the effects that barriers had on student engagement and academic achievement. Student engagement shows “how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes” (Axelson & Flick, 2010, p. 38). For this study, student engagement involved active participation in learning opportunities during emergency remote learning (ERT). This study’s findings and the connecting research are based on the need to develop specific supports to help students and families if a quick pivot to an extended period of remote learning is needed in the future. By integrating the four themes to answer the research questions, these recommendations will help school personnel proactively prepare for extended periods of remote learning. This preparation would help ELs and their families feel more supported, and, therefore, allow students to engage in online learning opportunities. The four themes related directly to both research questions that guided this study. The discussion of the findings and related research are organized according to the research question and corresponding themes.

Through the findings of this study, it was revealed that students were affected by their poor learning environment and concerns over personal issues. As a result, their mental health was suffered. In addition, issues with internet connectivity using hotspots or access to devices and limited support from school staff heightened levels of stress for ELs.
The first phase quantitative data collection from a Likert survey indicated all barriers impacted EL students in some way, but, as mentioned, six rated above a 2.5 overall mean, indicating certain barriers were more impactful than others. The identified barriers ranged from personal life concerns, the development of relevant lessons that made students feel included in their online learning environment as well as how lessons were delivered, student time management, and personal responsibility. Reliable internet access had a stronger negative effect than did access to a device, English proficiency, or support from the school. With that in mind, I was able to gather additional evidence and perspectives from each participant, artifact, and field notes.

During the qualitative data collection and analysis, the findings corroborated quantitative results, thus validating my assumptions about which barriers impacted ELs the most, affecting their engagement and achievement during the pandemic.

It is important to note that research on the impact of the pandemic on ELs is challenging to find. However, this study’s findings are consistent with those found in related literature in that research has shown that ELs struggle with remote learning, which in turn affects their socioemotional well-being (Hernandez et al., 2023; Marsh et al., 2022). However, the earlier research has focused on general education students and how school systems navigated the quick pivot to remote learning. One exception was Huang and Wang’s (2023) study centering on an overnight migration to a remote learning platform that significantly impacted learning opportunities and experiences for college students in China. Their research produced similar findings to this study in that students’ psychological needs affected engagement and academic achievement.
This discussion of the findings and related research is organized according to the research questions to help explain how themes provide evidence to answer my research questions.

**Research Question One: Why was there a decline in the achievement level of sixth to eighth grade English learners (EL) participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio?**

Through the findings of this study, it was revealed that students were easily distracted and could not concentrate, disliked learning online, had difficulty understanding lessons and assignments, and were unable to find time to work with their overwhelmed TESOL teacher. In addition to the frustrations with their learning environment, students began to feel lonely or depressed because they were having a difficult time adjusting to the transition to remote learning and personal stressors. The semi-structured interviews provided numerous data points indicating that personal concerns far outweighed academic issues. Students and parents were very vocal about how worried they were about getting sick because COVID-19 seemed to particularly impact the Hispanic population (Isensee, 2020). Students were thinking about adult issues, like loss of housing, job security, and food availability. All of these stressors affected their mental health. As a result, their grades dropped.

Two themes, learning environment and mental health, emerged, indicating students were impacted by a poor learning environment that was not advantageous to online learning, creating feelings of frustration, loneliness, and depression. I was able to integrate the mental health and learning environment themes, which indicated a decline in
academic achievement in their state English language arts assessment that underscored my findings.

This study’s findings are consistent with those found in related literature in that studies have shown that remote learning and mental health are factors that influence student achievement (Dweck & Elliot, 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Eccles et al., 1993; Kahn et al., 2017; Vu et al., 2021). However, those researchers focused on students’ overall academic success and not specifically on ELs, an underserved and under-researched subgroup.

**Research Question Two: Were there barriers that affected the engagement level of sixth to eighth grade English learners (EL) from participating in a remote education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic at Buckeye School District in Ohio?**

Through the findings of this research study, it was revealed that participants reported concerns over reliable internet hotspots, access to devices, a lack of access to a translator to assist with remote online learning, and feelings of frustration due to the lack of opportunities to practice their English skills with peers. The qualitative findings from the interviews and field notes revealed strong emotions about technology and a lack of communication to support their needs. As a result, two themes, technology and communication, emerged. Students were aggravated by unreliable internet access, device malfunction, or an inability to access online learning opportunities. Moreover, they did not receive the support they needed, such as translation services or help completing their homework. In many instances, parents were unable to assist their children because they were not proficient in English and were unable to communicate with the school to ask for help. In addition, my findings indicate students were unable to engage in learning
opportunities because they were unable to pay for internet services and relied on donated hotspots to access the internet. Further, ELs expected to receive normal support services from their TESOL teacher who was limited to meeting with the “neediest” ELs and hoping regular education teachers were helping students. Appendix K, an artifact, provided evidence that parents and students were requesting translation services and ways in which they could contact the school for help.

This study’s findings are connected with previous research related to technology issues and opportunities to be able to communicate with others to complete online assignments and develop their English proficiency skills (Kahn et al., 2017; Khlaif et al., 2021; Martin & Bollinger, 2022). Likewise, one additional study discussed how challenging it was for students in Turkey to learn English using remote learning practices when teachers struggled with transitioning from a traditional in-person approach to an online learning platform (Yüce, 2022, p.10). Again, there is a dearth in the literature of studies related to ELs and their lived experiences during the pandemic.

### 5.2 Summary

The pandemic brought to light significant challenges for families of ELs. As a result, ELs exhibited poor engagement in remote learning opportunities and poor academic performance due to various barriers they faced.

This study took place in an urban district in Ohio. The research was collected for nine weeks, from February to March 2023, in two middle schools or other locations or virtually, as requested by participants. Three weeks of analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from students, staff, and parents (n=21). A total of 12 weeks were spent collecting and analyzing data. An explanatory sequential mixed-method design used
quantitative and qualitative data sets to analyze the data utilized to develop themes to highlight barriers ELs faced during the pandemic. During the analysis phase, four clear themes emerged.

The study design helped me first identify which barriers were obstacles so I could dive deeper into the lived experience of ELs. The complementary data helped me answer my questions about what caused ELs to disengage in the learning process, affecting their academic achievement. As a result, I have a better understanding of my research problem and the next steps to prepare for a quick pivot to remote learning.

5.3 Implications of the Findings

The barriers that ELs faced during the pandemic and the resulting gaps will take years to overcome. This study is important for two reasons. The first is to better understand the barriers ELs face during the pandemic and how those barriers cause poor engagement and achievement levels. The second reason is to educate school leadership and school staff about planning ahead to address deficits in technology and mental health support systems if the need arises to switch to remote learning for an extended period of time in the future. Further, this study contributes to the knowledge about the importance of supporting ELs during remote learning. The study’s results lend themselves to both practice and additional research.

Implications for Practice: Professional Development Focused on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

ELs, a subgroup of students, are the fastest-growing population of students in the United States (Office of Civil Rights, 2021; Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020). Due to globalization, the movement of diverse religious, racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic
groups has been rapid this past century (NCES, 2022). Public schools have not been able to keep up with the challenges of helping ELs assimilate and develop language proficiency, in part due to a lack of culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995) discussed the theoretical premises of culturally relevant pedagogy and how systems have not fostered cultural competence in the classroom. Moreover, the perception that ELs cannot achieve (Garcia, 2015) is common. How teachers view ELs and how they organize lessons and support students are challenging without the added pressure of teaching remotely. Thus, teachers must develop cultural awareness to provide effective instruction to transform activities using a multicultural lens. I think enabling educators to be aware of cultural and individual needs will not only help ELs successfully engage in learning opportunities but, more importantly, motivate teachers to use new instructional approaches and resources. Therefore, developing a strategic approach to focus on professional practices aimed at supporting English language proficiency would be beneficial to both those learners and their families.

If we need to shift to an extended period of online learning, we need to move away from the pandemic pedagogy (Hodges et al., 2020) to create meaningful educational opportunities by facilitating student learning and engagement. Thus, a shift from a traditional pedagogical approach to equity pedagogy (Banks, 2015) or culturally relevant pedagogy would necessitate a change in instructional decision making needed when conceptualizing and conducting online coursework (Lawrence, 2020).

The undergirding of culturally relevant pedagogy is the premise that learning should be relevant and accessible to students. As the shifting demographics have changed, the need for educators to be equipped with skills and strategies drawn from
multicultural theory has increased. Banks (2015) and Ladson-Billings (1995) advocated for more inclusive and non-judgmental teaching practices to reach more students in a diverse classroom; such culturally relevant practices promote increased student engagement and achievement (Lawrence, 2020).

Developing effective teaching practices in an online setting may be challenging for many teachers because the methods of implementation are different. Some online learning researchers have noted that online teaching requires some additional skills (Lawrence, 2020). This study yielded four themes, two of which, communication and learning environment, which could be addressed by providing professional development on culturally relevant practices to ensure learning opportunities meet the unique needs of ELs. Together, developing online lessons that reflect culturally relevant practices would increase engagement in the learning process while closing the opportunity gap. Schools should provide quality professional development focused on pedagogical strategies to develop clear communication and a sense of community.

Two types of embedded professional development aimed at helping teachers create lessons to develop students’ vocabulary acquisition skills and how to make lessons more relatable are required. This would help teachers develop online learning opportunities aligned to the needs of ELs.

Another less extensive professional development opportunity would focus on how educators could use translation services. School administrators could demonstrate how to use translation services, or using an online translation tool, like Google Translate, may be helpful. While apps like Google Translate are useful, they are not always accurate for
words, e.g., school, which has multiple meanings. Therefore, translators would be able to read translated documents for accuracy.

Beyond professional development, improving communication and providing meaningful learning activities are important every day, but even more important when students are forced into extended periods of remote learning. Therefore, developing teaching practices focused on culturally relevant practices would provide elements to improve student readiness and interest in online lessons.

5.4 Implications for Practice

Meeting Student Needs

The primary biological functions and engagement in learning opportunities can be influenced by external and internal factors. The complex relationship between the impact of external and internal factors on biological needs and engagement can sway student achievement.

Using a social-cognitive framework in which external variables interact with internal variables affects students’ perceptions of motivation and, thus, engagement in learning opportunities. When students are motivated, they put forth effort to learning new content and feel excited about learning. As a result, motivation can influence student engagement, and can lead to individual outcomes, like student achievement.

In this study, one theme, mental health, rose to the top of barriers ELs faced. The uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic challenged school systems, educators, students, and families. The pandemic raised concerns for many students, but more so for ELs and their families, who worried, not just about health and job security, but also about access to basic needs, like housing, and food. This created feelings of anxiety and stress. Many
EL families experienced secondary adversities related to economic hardship and isolation.

This study provides evidence to support the need for a trauma-informed approach to help ELs and their families feel safe and supported during times of uncertainty. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d., para. 1) defines a trauma-informed system, such as a school, as a group wherein all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress. This traumatic awareness approach would help meet the needs of students and families and recommend more intensive support to address their traumatic stress response.

Schools need to create trauma-informed teams to promote the wellness of all students to ensure they feel safe and supported physically, socially, emotionally, and academically. Staff can do this by teaching social, emotional, and self-regulation skills, which are especially vital during extended periods of remote learning.

Educators have the unique position of being among the a few adults who “see” children during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic; as a result, they can play a critical role in helping students struggling with mental health issues. Therefore, creating, supporting, and sustaining a trauma-informed system of support can transform how we support students, especially ELs.

**Planning to Prevent Digital Divide**

During the pandemic, teachers and students were expected to teach and learn using synchronous learning, which is similar to face-to-face where lessons are delivered in real time albeit delivered via an online platform so students can join the class from anywhere. During the pandemic, students were learning from home in environments that
may not have been conducive to authentic engagement in learning opportunities. As a result, students faced many obstacles related to technology. This study provided numerous data points pointing to difficulty with donated hotspots, causing connectivity problems and an inability to “join” the class.

Technology was integral to student-teacher connection and communication, especially during remote learning in the spring of 2020. The lack of reliable technology and internet connectivity posed a challenge for many learners, but ELs, typically from low-income communities, experienced a digital divide, creating educational gaps (Peterson et al., 2021).

The use of reliable educational technologies needs to be at the forefront of planning for future, extended periods of remote learning. School boards and district administrators should develop long-term plans to determine how often devices should be replaced to create or maintain a 1:1 model. In addition, it is vital to build a partnership with an internet provider to ensure internet hotspots can handle more than two devices at a time. Districts need to plan ahead to ensure low-income, racial/ethnic minority, and non-English speaking households no longer have significant disparities in broadband internet and, in some cases, device access. This would eliminate the digital dive for ELs.

In conclusion, the findings of this study and implications for practice and research are important and justify further exploration and implementation of action steps.

5.6 Action Plan

In response to the four themes, or essential understandings, about barriers middle school ELs faced during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed by the data collection and analysis of this mixed method study, I developed short and mid-range action items for the
local school district to implement. As an educational consultant, I plan to review my findings and make recommendations, as well as offer my services to help Buckeye School District implement the action items. These action steps will address the identified themes and related findings from this study, building on the programs and supports already in place. Ongoing, embedded professional development should focus on culturally relevant pedagogy and trauma-informed practices, as well as a review of useable devices and partnerships with internet providers. All three steps will ensure ELs have the proper support in place now and if the district needs to pivot to an extended period of remote learning in the future.

Figure 5.1 Themes Transformed to Action Steps
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Professional Development

Prior to the current study, Buckeye School District developed a comprehensive plan and program to address diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in the classroom. The district was one of the first urban districts in northeast Ohio to assess how those programs and policies met the district’s long-term goals to reflect the culture of the community. They intentionally ensure that current policies and practices are working and that the leadership team, steering committee, and classified and certified staff are following those policies and recommended practices.

In response to the data analysis and findings, I would recommend job-embedded professional development provided throughout the spring of 2024 and the following academic school year. This long-term goal would draw from their own data and experiences to build equity teams in each building. The district task force would collaborate with each building-level team. The data would drive professional learning opportunities for staff. I would work with the task force and teams on a regular basis; together, we would design professional development to meet the needs based on the data and evidence for all 10 schools serving approximately 6,000 students. Again, this would align with the work established over a decade ago and revisited in September 2019.

Beyond the job-embedded professional development, staff would be able to participate in book study groups to gain a deeper understanding of ways to use instructional materials to engage with all students. Figure 5.2 shows some resources we will use and how they align to developing culturally relevant practices in the classroom.
In an effort to continue to develop these practices now, we would also discuss how to design online learning activities and practices for those times when the district switches to e-learning days rather than a traditional snow day.

![Figure 5.2. Developing Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Practices](image)

In summary, the professional development would build upon current practices to better prepare staff to meet the needs of all learners, especially ELs. This long-term commitment and multifaceted components have the potential to thrive when school is engaging and personally meaningful.

**Technology Audit and Five-Year Plan**

In the aftermath of COVID-19, organizations are more reliant on technology. As a result, districts should complete an IT audit. While the audit may be more complex now, an IT audit may create opportunities to address infrastructure and financial challenges.

I would propose that the superintendent and leadership team complete an audit of current available Chromebooks for each student. A quick audit and review would suffice; the practice of an audit is age-old, though the method of tracking devices has changed.
Now that the dust has settled a little from the pandemic, a quick audit and continued development with internet providers would help address educational equity barriers when using online learning models.

The district has a comprehensive five-year plan, but some devices were lost or broken both during and when students moved back and forth from remote learning to in-person or a hybrid model. The audit would identify buildings with missing devices and use federal funds to replenish the current allocation of Chromebooks across the district.

As funding streams return to pre-pandemic levels, districts need to realign priorities and continue to use the federal E-Rate program to reduce the cost of internet access in buildings and promote families to apply for the Affordable Connectivity Program (FCC, 2023) to ensure households can afford the broadband they need for work and school. Although this funding is not dedicated to educational use, the program supports student home access and students qualifying for free and reduced lunch programs are eligible for ACP benefits.

I plan to work with the Superintendent and Director of Communications to add this information to the building newsletters. The information would be translated into Spanish and Arabic, the two most common second languages of students.

This short-term goal and simple task would benefit students living in poverty. Although this may assist some students, there are still socioeconomic inequalities in students’ access to computers and internet (NCES, 2021). To me, this is more of a larger systemic issue than a local one.
Revision of Trauma-Informed Schools Framework

A complex constellation of factors, like fear of getting sick, concerns over food security, and losing jobs, can create feelings of loneliness and depression. For most students, especially ELs, COVID-19 brought about extra stressors and feelings of anxiousness. Prior to this study, the local district was unaware of how the mental health status of ELs changed. To better serve this group of students, schools are encouraged to implement trauma-informed practices to understand how the pandemic influenced students, their families, and the community.

The district began implementing a trauma-informed framework during the pandemic. The framework was implemented last year, and the steering committee meets on a regular basis to adjust staffing to accommodate student needs. However, one core area of developing a trauma-informed school system involves schools developing partnerships with students and families so they feel like they are full contributors, which can build trust and gain acceptance (NCTSN, 2018). I am proposing the district leadership team and committee members reach out to the community liaison to develop partnerships with the Hispanic community and immigrant families.

A critical aspect of developing partnerships is learning how to communicate effectively. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network explains how children who are exposed to traumatic events may experience a range of reactions, including feelings of depression. These reactions disrupt the learning process (NCTSN, 2018).

Beyond developing partnerships, I would offer to help the leadership team and committee members review the required core areas. I would recommend completing an analysis of how the current practices and policies are being followed and areas of
remediation. I would volunteer to help the district implement changes for the next school year and how practices can be adjusted if there is a shift to remote learning. The small adjustments will help the district establish a sustainable trauma-informed system to meet the overall mission of the district.

In summary, the action steps previously described will build upon current programs within the district and add a layer of accountability to ensure ELs have the supports they need to be successful students. Moreover, they would provide equitable education opportunities for all students.

5.7 Reflection on the Research Process

As elements of an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, data analysis and integration occur at more than one point during a study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). This integration allowed me to connect both phases to provide an opportunity to see the emerging themes. This design was straightforward and allowed me to implement both phases without many issues. However, one issue that I did have was with the scope of the study. I had 21 participants and relied on a translator to assist with each part of the study requiring translation. As a result, the study took 12 weeks to complete and required the participants to be available over an extended period of time. In hindsight, I should have considered reducing the number of participants in the qualitative collection phase.

Another aspect of the study that proved rather challenging was the selection of student participants. This study used pre- and post-pandemic achievement data from the state English language arts assessment. These data were the only standardized data I could use to identify potential students. Of course, the student selection helped guide the staff and parent participants.
The concern over the assessment data used to identify students required me to determine if students declined in their achievement levels pre- and post-pandemic. In an effort to ensure the right students were selected, I had to compare their performance on the ELA assessment by using the mean scaled score. Essentially, students who showed a decline were identified as participants. The initial list showed 32 EL students from three middle schools, but as I reviewed their enrollment from 2019 to 2022, the list dropped to eight students. This was expected due to the transient nature of this subgroup of students. One week before I started my data collection, one student moved back to Puerto Rico, leaving me with seven ELs to invite to participate in my study.

The last item that created some anxiety about the validity of the study was my reliance on the bilingual staff member to translate the interview responses for me. I was lucky the school administrators allowed her to work with me for weeks. Her relationship with each parent was an added benefit. She called each one and set up the interview dates and times to accommodate their work schedule. I do not know if I would have been able to communicate effectively to encourage the parents to participate in the study. Her efforts and ability to translate multiple documents and interviews were appreciated and added to my data collection.

In conclusion, while it was time-consuming to complete the data collection and analysis phases, the resulting data allowed me to identify trends and themes to better understand my problem of practice.

Limitations

Every research design has strengths and weaknesses. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) explained the intent of the explanatory sequential design was to utilize a
sequential model, or sequential triangulation, which allowed the researcher to return to the participants for the second round of data collection (p. 77).

The first limitation of this mixed methods design, in particular the qualitative phase, centers on the ways in which participants reflected on their lived experience during the first few months of the pandemic and how they had to deal with specific barriers. Thus, participant responses were based on human memory and may not reflect all aspects of their personal perspective at that moment in time.

The second limitation was my inability to speak Spanish, which forced me to rely on certain applications, like Google Translate, or staff members to review all documents and protocols to ensure accuracy. In addition, I was also reliant on a translator, one who had wonderful relationships with the local community, parents, and staff. However, it became clear that the data collection process for students and parents would require a great deal of time and energy. To ensure the data gathered were reflective of participants’ lived experiences, I recorded their responses in Spanish using a software tool, transcribed the translated information into my research journal, and then each evening, I would use Google Translate to transcribe the interview. In the end, it was helpful to be certain that the information provided by the translator aligned with what the software presented. This portion of the data collection phase took nine weeks to complete due to issues in scheduling two or more meetings with each participant.

In conclusion, both limitations were influenced by time but were manageable. The extended period of time for data collection was worth it because I was able to gather data about the perceived experiences of every participant.
5.8 Suggestions for Future Research

Further research into the barriers impacting ELs post-pandemic could be beneficial to school systems to better understand the inequities they face in the classroom and within their community. Additionally, research into developing additional support structures, like translation services, access to reliable internet services, and mental health changes during remote learning, could help educators better understand the role they play in supporting this underserved group of students.

5.9 Conclusion

This study illustrates how existing inequities in educating ELs were worsened during the pandemic. As the disparities became evident, four themes arose: (a) communication, (b) learning environment, (c) technology, and (d) mental health. Emphasizing the importance of the themes, three action steps were developed to provide equitable education opportunities for ELs.
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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

My name is Kathi Maxwell. I am a doctoral candidate in Curriculum Studies at the University of South Carolina Department of Education. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements for my Educational Practice and Innovation degree, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted English Learners. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey and meet with me in an informal interview about challenges or barriers that may have impacted students.

In particular, you will be asked questions about potential barriers your students faced regarding technology, access to the internet, online instruction, and other obstacles, like limited English proficiency, cultural barriers, and time management. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, in-person or virtually, and should last about 30 minutes. The session interview will be recorded using an iPhone app (audio recording) or Google Meet recording so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The recordings will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The study's results may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials.

Participation, non-participation, or withdrawal will not affect you in any way.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at maxwellkathi@elyriaschools.org or my faculty advisor, Dr. James Kirylo, at kiryloj@email.sc.edu. Please feel free to contact the University of South Carolina’s Office of Research Compliance (803) 777-6670 if they have any additional questions about your rights as a research subject.

I appreciate your consideration. Please contact me at the number listed below to discuss participating or to answer any clarifying questions.
With kind regards,

Kathi Maxwell

[Redacted]
APPENDIX B

CONSENT AND FORMS IN ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY OF South Carolina

ASSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT
(electronic version)

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ENGLISH LEARNERS

I am a researcher from the University of South Carolina. I am working on a study about how the pandemic impacted English Learner students, and I would like your help. I am interested in learning more about potential barriers impacting students during remote learning during the pandemic. Your parent/guardian has already said it is okay for you to be in the study, but it is up to you if you want to be in the study.

If you want to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:

• Answer some written questions about how certain barriers, like technology, impacted how your students engaged in online learning during the pandemic.
• Meet with me individually and talk about how technology or how personal reasons may have impacted your student’s engagement in lessons and what the school district could do to help students in the future. The talk will take about 30 minutes, and the survey should take about 10 minutes. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed on location. Meetings may be in-person or virtual depending on your preference.

Any information you share with me (or the study staff) will be private and confidential. No one except the study staff will know what your answers to the questions were. I will record the interviews so the information can be reviewed in detail.

You do not have to help with this study. Being in the study is not related to your regular class work and will not help or hurt you. You can also drop out of the study at any time, for any reason, and you will not be in any trouble, and no one will be mad at you.

Please ask any questions you would like about the study.

My participation has been explained to me, and all my questions have been answered. I am willing to participate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature of Participant</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
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</table>
CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT (electronic version)

Examining The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on English Learners

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY:
You are invited to take part in a research study being done by Kathi Maxwell. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education at the University of South Carolina. The University of South Carolina Department of Education is sponsoring this research study. The purpose of this study is to study how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted English Learners. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey and meet with me in an informal interview about challenges or barriers that may have impacted students. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are an English Learner or a parent of an English Learner, or a staff member supporting English Learners. This study is examining the impact of the pandemic on students who attend or attended [Redacted] Middle Schools. The study will have twenty-five subjects, including students, parents, and select staff members.

Below is a short summary of this study to help you decide if you want to be in this study. More details about this study are listed later in this form.

- The regulations require that each consent have a “concise summary” that provides information that a reasonable person would want to have to make an informed decision about whether to participate.
- The summary must include the following:
  - You will be asked questions about how the barriers of technology, access to the internet, online instruction, and other obstacles, like limited English proficiency, cultural barriers, and time management.
  - You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.
  - The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, including virtual options, and should last about 30 minutes. The session interview will be recorded using an iPhone app (audio recording) or via Google Meet recording so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The recordings will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The study’s results may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials.
The information provided during the research project will benefit all students, especially English Learners, in the future. The data will help school staff plan for future remote learning.

PROCEDURES:
If you agree to be in this study, you will:
1. Fill out the required paperwork via email and, if you agree to participate, complete a survey to identify potential barriers.
2. After I review your survey responses, I will meet in person, or virtually, with you to interview you about your responses. This interview will be recorded to be sure the study team has correct notes about the details you provide.

DURATION:
Being in the study involves one visit (in-person or virtually) over five to ten days. The study visit will last about twenty minutes.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:
In-person Individual Interview:
This portion of the research study will be held in a conference room and will be recorded.

OR

Virtual Individual Interview:
This portion of the research study will be held virtually, via Google Meet and will be recorded.

BENEFITS:
Taking part in this study may or may not benefit you in the future. However, the finding from this study may help people know more about what the district or other districts and schools can do to support English Learners if we have to switch to remote learning in the future.

COSTS:
There will be no costs to you for being in this study other than your time.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS:
You will not be paid for being in this study, and your participation is voluntary.

COLLECTION OF IDENTIFIABLE PRIVATE INFORMATION:
Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The study's results may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials.

Your information collected as part of the research study will not be used for future research studies.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS:
Information obtained about you during this research may be published, but you will not be identified. Information that is obtained concerning this research that can be identified with you will remain confidential to the extent possible within State and Federal law. All records in South Carolina are subject to subpoena by a court of law. The investigators
associated with this study, the sponsor, and the Institutional Review Board will have access to identifying information. Study information will be securely stored in locked files and on password-protected computers.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:
Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You are free not to take part or to stop taking part at any time. If you withdraw from this study, the information you already gave to the study team will be kept private. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please get in touch with me at [REDACTED] or my faculty advisor, Dr. James Kirylo, at kiryloj@email.sc.edu.

Concerns about your rights as a research subject are to be directed to Lisa Johnson, Associate Director, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, 1600 Hampton Street, Suite 414D, Columbia, SC 29208, phone: (803) 777-6670 or email: LisaJ@mailbox.sc.edu.

I agree to take part in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my records. If you wish to be in the study, you should sign below.

__________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant Date

Kathi Maxwell ___________________________ February 1, 2023
Signature of Qualified Person Obtaining Consent Date
ASSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT OVER 13 YEARS OLD
(electronic version)

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ENGLISH LEARNERS

I am a researcher from the University of South Carolina. I am working on a study about how the pandemic impacted English Learner students, and I would like your help. I am interested in learning more about potential barriers impacting students during remote learning during the pandemic. Your parent/guardian has already said it is okay for you to be in the study, but it is up to you if you want to be in the study.

If you want to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:

• Answer some written questions about how certain barriers, like technology, impacted how you engaged in online learning during the pandemic.
• Meet with me individually and talk about how technology or how personal reasons may have impacted your engagement in lessons and what the school district can do to help students in the future. The talk will take about 30 minutes, and the survey should take about 10 minutes. The meeting will take place in the school counseling office or other mutually agreed on location. Meetings may be in-person or virtual depending on your preference.

Any information you share with me (or the study staff) will be private. No one except the study staff and me will know what your answers to the questions were. I will record the interviews so the information can be reviewed in detail.

You do not have to help with this study. Being in the study is not related to your regular class work and will not help or hurt you. You can also drop out of the study at any time, for any reason, and you will not be in any trouble, and no one will be mad at you.

Please ask any questions you would like to about the study.

*For Minors 13-17 years of age:

My participation has been explained to me, and all my questions have been answered. I am willing to participate.

Print Name of Minor Age of Minor
Signature of Minor Date
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT LETTER, CONSENT, AND FORMS IN SPANISH

UNIVERSITY OF South Carolina

Carta de invitación para padres y estudiantes (versión en papel)

Mi nombre es Kathi Maxwell. Soy candidata a doctorado en Estudios Curriculares en el Departamento de Educación de la Universidad de Carolina del Sur. Estoy realizando un estudio de investigación como parte de los requisitos para mi título de Práctica e Innovación Educativa, y me gustaría invitarlos a participar.

Estoy estudiando cómo la pandemia de COVID-19 afectó a los estudiantes de inglés. Si decide participar, se le pedirá que complete una encuesta y se reúna conmigo en una entrevista informal sobre los desafíos o barreras que pueden haber afectado a los estudiantes durante la pandemia.

En particular, se le harán preguntas sobre tecnología, acceso a Internet, instrucción en línea y otros obstáculos, como dominio limitado del inglés, barreras culturales y administración del tiempo. Puede sentirse incómodo respondiendo algunas de las preguntas. No tiene que responder ninguna pregunta que no desee responder. La reunión se llevará a cabo en un lugar y una hora de mutuo acuerdo o virtualmente y debería durar unos 30 minutos. Las reuniones pueden ser presenciales o virtuales según su preferencia. La entrevista de la sesión se grabará con una aplicación de iPhone (grabación de audio) o a través de la grabación de Google Meet para que pueda transcribir con precisión lo que se discute. Las grabaciones solo serán revisadas por miembros del equipo de investigación y destruidas al finalizar el estudio.

La participación es confidencial. La información del estudio se mantendrá en un lugar seguro en la Universidad de Carolina del Sur. Los resultados del estudio pueden publicarse o presentarse en reuniones profesionales, pero no se revelará su identidad. Por lo tanto, no escriba su nombre u otra información de identificación en ninguno de los materiales de estudio.

La participación, la no participación o el retiro no afectarán sus calificaciones (o las de su hijo) de ninguna manera.
Estaré encantado de responder cualquier pregunta que tenga sobre el estudio. Puede comunicarse conmigo al o mi asesor de la facultad, el Dr. James Kirylo, en kiryloj@email.sc.edu. No dude en comunicarse con la Oficina de Cumplimiento de Investigaciones de la Universidad de Carolina del Sur (803) 777-6670 si tienen preguntas adicionales sobre sus derechos como sujeto de investigación.

Aprecio tu consideración. Si desea participar, por favor firmar el formulario adjunto, ydevuélvalo en el sobre con franqueo pagado.

Cuando haya terminado, comuníquese conmigo al número que figura a continuación para hablar sobre su participación.

Atentamente,
Kathi Maxwell

Kathi Maxwell
CONSENTIMIENTO PARA SER SUJETO DE INVESTIGACIÓN
MENORES DE 13 AÑOS (versión en papel)

EXAMINANDO EL IMPACTO DE LA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19 EN ESTUDIANTES DE INGLÉS

Soy investigador de la Universidad de Carolina del Sur. Estoy trabajando en un estudio sobre cómo la pandemia afectó a los estudiantes de inglés y me gustaría su ayuda. Estoy interesado en obtener más información sobre las posibles barreras que afectan a los estudiantes durante el aprendizaje remoto durante la pandemia. Tu padre/tutor ya ha dicho que está bien que participes en el estudio, pero depende de ti si quieres participar en el estudio.

Si desea participar en el estudio, se le pedirá que haga lo siguiente:
• Responda algunas preguntas escritas sobre cómo ciertas barreras, como la tecnología, afectaron su participación en el aprendizaje en línea durante la pandemia.
• Reúyase conmigo individualmente y hable sobre cómo la tecnología o las razones personales pueden haber afectado su participación en las lecciones y lo que el distrito escolar puede hacer para ayudar a los estudiantes en el futuro. La charla tomará alrededor de 30 minutos y la encuesta debería tomar alrededor de 10 minutos. La reunión tendrá lugar en la oficina de consejería de la escuela u otro lugar acordado mutuamente. Las reuniones pueden ser presenciales o virtuales según su preferencia.

Cualquier información que comparta conmigo (o con el personal del estudio) será privada. Nadie excepto el personal del estudio y yo sabremos cuáles son sus respuestas a las preguntas eran. Grabaré las entrevistas para que la información pueda ser revisada en detalle.

Usted no tiene que ayudar con este estudio. Estar en el estudio no está relacionado con su trabajo regular de clase y no lo ayudará ni lo perjudicará. También puede abandonar el estudio en cualquier momento, por cualquier motivo, y no tendrá ningún problema y nadie se enfadará con usted.

Por favor, haga cualquier pregunta que desee sobre el estudio.

*Para menores de 8 a 12 años:
Me han explicado mi participación y todas mis dudas han sido respondidas. Estoy dispuesto a participar.

Escriba el nombre del menor  Edad del menor

Firma del Menor  Fecha

Escriba el nombre del padre/tutor

Firma del padre / tutor  Fecha
CONSENTIMIENTO PARA SER SUJETO DE INVESTIGACIÓN
TUTOR (versión en papel)

EXAMINANDO EL IMPACTO DE LA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19 EN ESTUDIANTES DE INGLÉS

Soy investigador de la Universidad de Carolina del Sur. Estoy trabajando en un estudio sobre cómo la pandemia afectó a los estudiantes de inglés y me gustaría su ayuda. Estoy interesado en obtener más información sobre las posibles barreras que afectan a los estudiantes durante el aprendizaje remoto durante la pandemia. Tu padre/tutor ya ha dicho que está bien que participes en el estudio, pero depende de ti si quieres participar en el estudio.

Si desea participar en el estudio, se le pedirá que haga lo siguiente:

- Responda algunas preguntas escritas sobre cómo ciertas barreras, como la tecnología, afectaron la participación de su hijo en el aprendizaje en línea durante la pandemia.
- Reúñese conmigo individualmente y hable sobre cómo la tecnología o cómo las razones personales pueden haber afectado la participación de su hijo en las lecciones y lo que el distrito escolar podría hacer para ayudar a los estudiantes en el futuro. La charla tomará alrededor de 30 minutos y la encuesta debería tomar alrededor de 10 minutos. La reunión tendrá lugar en la oficina de consejería de la escuela u otro lugar acordado mutuamente. Las reuniones pueden ser presenciales o virtuales según su preferencia.

Cualquier información que comparta conmigo (o con el personal del estudio) será privada. Nadie excepto el personal del estudio y yo sabremos cuáles son sus respuestas a las las preguntas eran. Grabaré las entrevistas para que la información pueda ser revisada en detalle.

Usted no tiene que ayudar con este estudio. Participar en el estudio no está relacionado con el trabajo regular de clase de su hijo y no lo ayudará ni lo perjudicará. También puede abandonar el estudio en cualquier momento, por cualquier motivo, y no tendrá ningún problema y nadie se enfadará con usted.

Por favor, haga cualquier pregunta que desee sobre el estudio.

Me han explicado mi participación y todas mis dudas han sido respondidas. Estoy dispuesto a participar.
Imprimir nombre

Firma del Participante  Fecha
CONSENTIMIENTO PARA SER SUJETO DE INVESTIGACIÓN
(versión en papel)

Examinando el impacto de la pandemia de COVID-19 en los estudiantes de inglés

INFORMACIÓN CLAVE SOBRE ESTE ESTUDIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN:

Está invitado a participar en un estudio de investigación realizado por Kathi Maxwell. Soy candidata a doctorado en el Departamento de Educación de la Universidad de Carolina del Sur. El Departamento de Educación de la Universidad de Carolina del Sur patrocinan este estudio de investigación. El propósito de este estudio es estudiar cómo la pandemia de COVID-19 afectó a los estudiantes de inglés. Si decide participar, se le pedirá que complete una encuesta y se reúna conmigo en una entrevista informal sobre los desafíos o barreras que pueden haber impactado estudiantes. Se le pide que participe en este estudio porque es un aprendiz de inglés o padre de un aprendiz de inglés, o un miembro del personal que apoya a los aprendices de inglés. Este estudio se está realizando en Eastern Heights o madera media Escuelas u otros edificios estudiantes o padres prefieren reunirse, o virtualmente, y tendrá veintecinco asignaturas.

A continuación se muestra un breve resumen de este estudio para ayudarlo a decidir si desea participar en este estudio. Más detalles sobre este estudio se enumeran más adelante en este formulario.

- Las reglamentaciones exigen que cada consentimiento tenga un "resumen conciso" que brinde información que una persona razonable querría tener para tomar una decisión informada sobre su participación.
- El resumen debe incluir lo siguiente:
  - Se le harán preguntas sobre las barreras de la tecnología, el acceso a Internet, la instrucción en línea y otros obstáculos, como el dominio limitado del inglés, las barreras culturales y la gestión del tiempo.
  - Puede sentirse incómodo respondiendo algunas de las preguntas. No tiene que responder ninguna pregunta que no desee responder.
  - La reunión tendrá lugar en la oficina de consejería o una hora y lugar acordados mutuamente y debe durar unos 30 minutos. La entrevista de la sesión se grabará utilizando una aplicación de iPhone (grabación de audio) para que pueda transcribir con precisión lo que se discute. Las grabaciones solo serán revisadas por miembros del equipo de investigación y destruidas al finalizar el estudio.

La participación es confidencial. La información del estudio se mantendrá en un lugar seguro en la Universidad de Carolina del Sur. Los resultados del estudio pueden ser publicados o presentados en reuniones profesionales, pero su identidad será...
revelado. Por lo tanto, no escriba su nombre u otra información de identificación en ninguno de los materiales de estudio.

La información proporcionada durante el proyecto de investigación beneficiará a todos los estudiantes, especialmente a los estudiantes de inglés, en el futuro. Los datos ayudarán al personal de la escuela a planificar el futuro aprendizaje remoto.

PROCEDIMIENTOS:
Si acepta participar en este estudio, usted:

1. Reúname conmigo para completar la documentación requerida y, si acepta participar, complete una breve encuesta de Google para identificar posibles barreras. Esta parte de la investigación se llevará a cabo en un grupo pequeño o reuniones individuales dependiendo de la preferencia de los participantes.

2. Después de revisar sus respuestas a la encuesta, me reuniré con usted para entrevistarlo sobre sus respuestas. Esta entrevista se grabará para asegurarse de que el equipo del estudio tenga las notas correctas sobre los detalles que proporcione.

DURACIÓN:
Estar en el estudio implica dos visitas (en persona o virtualmente) durante cinco a diez días. Cada visita de estudio durará entre diez y veinte minutos.

RIESGOS/MOLESTIAS:

Grupo de enfoque:
Los demás miembros del grupo escucharán lo que usted diga y podrían contárselo a otros mientras usted responde la parte de la encuesta del estudio de investigación. El equipo de estudio no puede prometer que lo que diga se mantendrá en privado, pero le pedirá a usted y a todos los demás miembros del grupo que mantengan en privado lo que se comparte. Un traductor estará disponible si es necesario.

Entrevista individual:
Esta parte del estudio de investigación se llevará a cabo en una sala de conferencias y se grabará. Un traductor estará disponible si es necesario.

BENEFICIOS:
Participar en este estudio puede o no beneficiarlo en el futuro. Sin embargo, el hallazgo de este estudio puede ayudar a las personas a saber más acerca de lo quedistrito u otros distritos y escuelas podamos hacer para apoyar a los estudiantes de inglés si tenemos que cambiar al aprendizaje remoto en el futuro.

COSTOS:
No habrá costos para usted por participar en este estudio aparte de su tiempo.

PAGO A PARTICIPANTES:
No se le pagará por participar en este estudio y su participación es voluntaria.

RECOGIDA DE INFORMACIÓN PRIVADA IDENTIFICABLE:
La participación es confidencial. La información del estudio se mantendrá en un lugar seguro en la Universidad de Carolina del Sur. Los resultados del estudio pueden ser publicados o presentados en reuniones profesionales, pero su identidad será revelado. Por lo tanto, no escriba su nombre u otra información de identificación en ninguno de los materiales de estudio.

Su información recopilada como parte del estudio de investigación no se utilizará para futuros estudios de investigación.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD DE REGISTROS:
La información obtenida sobre usted durante esta investigación puede ser publicada, pero no será identificado. La información que se obtenga con respecto a esta investigación que se pueda identificar con usted se mantendrá confidencial en la medida de lo posible dentro de las leyes estatales y federales. Todos los registros en Carolina del Sur están sujetos a citación judicial. Los investigadores asociados con este estudio, el patrocinador y la Junta de Revisión Institucional tendrán acceso a la información de identificación. La información del estudio se almacenará de forma segura en archivos bloqueados y en computadoras protegidas con contraseña.

PARTICIPACION VOLUNTARIA:
La participación en este estudio de investigación es voluntaria. Usted es libre de no participar o de dejar de participar en cualquier momento. Si se retira de este estudio, la información que ya proporcionó a equipo del estudio se mantendrá privada. Si desea retirarse del estudio, comuníquese conmigo al 440.522.9816 o maxwellkathi@elyriaschools.org o mi asesor de la facultad, el Dr. James Kirylo, en kiryloj@email.sc.edu.

Las inquietudes sobre sus derechos como sujeto de investigación deben dirigirse a Lisa Johnson, Directora Asociada, Oficina de Cumplimiento de Investigación, Universidad de Carolina del Sur, 1600 Hampton Street, Suite 414D, Columbia, SC 29208, teléfono: (803) 777-6670 o correo electrónico: LisaJ@mailbox.sc.edu.

Acepto participar en este estudio. Me han dado una copia de este formulario para mis registros.

Si desea participar en el estudio, debe firmar a continuación.

Firma del Estudiante __________________________ Fecha __________________________
Firma del padre/tutor (si corresponde) __________ Fecha __________________________

Kathi Maxwell __________________________ February 1, 2023
Signature of Qualified Person Obtaining Consent Date
### APPENDIX D

#### DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Research Phase</th>
<th>Goal/Objective</th>
<th>Type of Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase I (nine weeks):</strong></td>
<td>To educate participants and ensure they are willing to participate.</td>
<td>Qualitative data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial meeting and pre-interview to explain the purpose of research and completion of participant release.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The researcher begins taking field notes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase II (nine weeks):</strong></td>
<td>To identify and examine possible barriers – to access to technology, language proficiency, access to technology, support systems.</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert survey.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews. Recorded participant interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field notes and artifacts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase III (three weeks):</strong></td>
<td>Transcription of interviews. Conduct inductive and deductive analysis of interviews, artifacts, and field notes. Conduct descriptive statistical analysis of survey data.</td>
<td>Analysis of data sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT LIKERT SURVEYS IN ENGLISH

Student

To better understand how potential barriers impacted student engagement in virtual learning opportunities, I have designed the following survey. Please answer honestly so I can use your answers to improve how staff can support students if we must switch to emergency remote teaching again. Please enter the appropriate number on your Google form. Please select a 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each question.

Scale:
1-Not a barrier
2- Somewhat of a barrier
3-Moderate barrier
4- Extreme barrier

Student Survey Questions

1. I had access to a device during virtual learning opportunities.
2. I had reliable access to internet service.
3. I did not understand my assignments because English is not my native or home language.
4. I thought my teacher and school supported me during remote learning.
5. I thought the virtual lessons my teachers created were easy to understand.
6. The pandemic impacted my personal life. I was worried about adult things, like money and housing.
7. I felt the virtual lessons presented were relevant and made me feel like part of the virtual classroom.
8. I feel confident that I used my personal time wisely when engaged in virtual learning.
9. I took responsibility for my schoolwork during virtual learning during the pandemic.
PARENT

To better understand how potential barriers impacted student engagement in virtual learning opportunities, I have designed the following survey. Please answer honestly so I can use your answers to improve how staff can support students if we must switch to emergency remote teaching again. Please enter the appropriate number on your Google form. Please select a 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each question.

Scale:
1- Not a barrier
2- Somewhat of a barrier
3- Moderate barrier
4- Extreme barrier

Survey Questions (translated verbally into Spanish by interpreter)

1. My child had access to a device during virtual learning opportunities.
2. My child had reliable access to internet service.
3. When my child struggled with assignments, it was because English is not his/her native or home language.
4. I thought my child’s teacher and school supported my child during remote learning.
5. I thought the virtual lessons the teachers created were easy to understand.
6. The pandemic impacted my personal life (money, housing, job, and childcare).
7. I feel confident that the lessons were presented to my child in a student-friendly manner.
8. I feel confident that my child used their personal time wisely when engaged in remote learning.
9. I feel confident my child took responsibility for their virtual learning.
10. I was able to help my child understand school assignments.

STAFF

To better understand how potential barriers impacted student engagement in virtual learning opportunities, I have designed the following survey. Please answer honestly so I can use your answers to improve how staff can support students if we must switch to emergency remote teaching again. Please enter the appropriate number on your Google form. Please select a 1, 2, 3, or 4 for each question.
Survey Questions

1. My students had access to a device during remote learning opportunities.
2. My students had reliable access to internet service.
3. My students English language proficiency (English is not their home language) impacted my EL students.
4. My students had adequate support (academically, technology, or other) from the district during remote learning opportunities.
5. Most virtual lesson presentations were student-friendly.
6. The pandemic impacted my student's personal life (money, housing, job, childcare).
7. Virtual lessons presented were relevant and made English Learners feel like they were "part" of the virtual classroom.
8. English Learners used their personal time wisely when engaged in virtual learning opportunities.
9. English Learners used their personal time wisely when engaged in online lessons.
APPENDIX F

STUDENT AND PARENT LIKERT SURVEYS IN SPANISH

ALUMNO

Para comprender mejor cómo las barreras potenciales afectaron la participación de los estudiantes en las oportunidades de aprendizaje virtual, he diseñado la siguiente encuesta. Responda honestamente para que pueda usar sus respuestas para mejorar la forma en que el personal puede apoyar a los estudiantes si debemos cambiar nuevamente a la enseñanza remota de emergencia. Ingrese el número apropiado en su formulario de Google. Seleccione un 1, 2, 3 o 4 para cada pregunta.

Escala:
1- No es una barrera
2- Algo así como una barrera
3- Barrera moderada
4- Barrera extrema

Preguntas de la encuesta para estudiantes

1. Tuve acceso a un dispositivo durante las oportunidades de aprendizaje virtual.
2. Tenía acceso confiable al servicio de Internet.
3. No entendí mis tareas porque el inglés no es mi lengua materna ni mi lengua materna.
4. Pensé que mi maestro y mi escuela me apoyaron durante el aprendizaje remoto.
5. Pensé que las lecciones virtuales que crearon mis profesores eran fáciles de entender.
6. La pandemia afectó mi vida personal. Me preocupaban cosas de adultos, como el dinero y la vivienda.
7. Sentí que las lecciones virtuales presentadas eran relevantes y me hicieron sentir parte del aula virtual.
8. Estoy seguro de que utilicé mi tiempo personal de manera inteligente cuando participé en el aprendizaje virtual.
9. Asumí la responsabilidad de mi trabajo escolar durante el aprendizaje virtual durante la pandemia.
PADRE

Para comprender mejor cómo las barreras potenciales afectaron la participación de los estudiantes en las oportunidades de aprendizaje virtual, he diseñado la siguiente encuesta. Responda honestamente para que pueda usar sus respuestas para mejorar la forma en que el personal puede apoyar a los estudiantes si debemos cambiar nuevamente a la enseñanza remota de emergencia. Ingrese el número apropiado en su formulario de Google. Seleccione un 1, 2, 3 o 4 para cada pregunta.

**Escala:**
1- No es una barrera
2- Algo así como una barrera
3- Barrera moderada
4- Barrera extrema

**Preguntas de la encuesta** (traducido verbalmente al español por intérprete)

1. Mi hijo tuvo acceso a un dispositivo durante las oportunidades de aprendizaje virtual.
2. Mi hijo tenía acceso confiable al servicio de Internet.
3. Cuando mi hijo tenía dificultades con las tareas, era porque el inglés no es su lengua materna ni su lengua materna.
4. Pensé que el maestro y la escuela de mi hijo lo apoyaron durante el aprendizaje remoto.
5. Pensé que las lecciones virtuales que crearon los profesores eran fáciles de entender.
6. La pandemia afectó mi vida personal (dinero, vivienda, trabajo y cuidado de niños).
7. Estoy seguro de que las lecciones se le presentaron a mi hijo de una manera amigable para los estudiantes.
8. Estoy seguro de que mi hijo utilizó sabiamente su tiempo personal cuando participó en el aprendizaje remoto.
9. Estoy seguro de que mi hijo asumió la responsabilidad de su aprendizaje virtual.
10. Pude ayudar a mi hijo a comprender las tareas escolares.
APPENDIX G

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
PARENT Identifying Barriers Semi-structured Interview Questions

**Identifying Barriers (Parent)**

1. Access to Device
   - I understand your child had limited access to a device to complete their schoolwork. Tell me why this was an issue.

2. Internet Access
   - I understand your child had limited access to a device to complete their schoolwork. Tell me why this was an issue.

3. English Language Proficiency
   - I understand that you were concerned about your child's ability to speak English. Tell me about your feelings and how your teachers can help you.

4. Adequate Support from District
   - I understand you thought your child was not supported by the district. Can you explain what you would recommend if the district needs to implement remote learning for an extended period of time?

5. Virtual Lessons/Activities were easy to understand
   - I understand that what was difficult for your child learning online was not relevant and you didn't feel like part of your virtual classroom. What may have helped you during this time?

6. Personal Concerns
   - I understand that you had some personal concerns that may have impacted your family. Can you tell me what impacted your family the most?

7. Time Management
   - I understand that your child didn't engage in school lessons or activities because they were not motivated. Why do you think this occurred?

8. Individual Responsibility Help child
   - I understand that you felt like your child did not use their personal time wisely. Can you share why you think this occurred and what they could have done differently? Were you able to help your child?

Optional:

- When your child had access to a device or internet, what motivated them to log into their device and attend the virtual lessons?

Optional:

- What feelings did you have during this time?

Optional:

- What additional support do you think English Learners need now to support their academic goals?

Optional:

- What challenges did you face during this challenging time?

Optional:

- Was there anything the school could have helped you with during this time?

Optional:

- What challenges did they face that may have impacted their engagement in school lessons and activities?
STAFF Identifying Barriers Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Access to Device
   - I understand you believe some ELs had limited access to a device to complete their school work. Tell me why this was an issue.

2. Internet Access
   - I understand some ELs may have had limited access to reliable internet service to complete their school work. Tell me why this was an issue.

3. English Language Proficiency
   - I understand that you are concerned about your student’s ability to speak English. Tell me about what additional supports you needed.

4. Adequate Support from District
   - If your school or district has implemented distance learning, how satisfied are you with the supports created?

5. Virtual Lesson Delivery & Inclusivity
   - I understand that you felt like your lessons and activities were easy for all students, including ELs, to understand. Were you concerned about the rigor of the lessons or activities?

6. Impact on Students
   - I understand that you felt like your students may have been dealing with concerns over their health, family life, etc. Can you provide any additional information?

7. Do you think additional support do you think English Learners need to support their academic goals?

8. Time Management
   - I understand that you felt like your students, in particular ELs, didn’t use their time wisely. Can you tell me what sort of things may have impacted their interest in completing their assignments?

9. Individual Responsibility
   - I understand that you felt your students, especially ELs, did not take personal responsibility when they were engaging in remote learning. Can you share why you think this?

Additional Clarifying Questions

- What could students and families have done differently?
- What factors impacted your students the most, and what have you learned from ERT (emergency remote teaching)?
APPENDIX H

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION — LIKERT SURVEYS

Likert Survey via Google Forms

Each participant completed a Likert survey using a Google Form link sent via email, using a provided Chromebook, or translated orally to the participant.

During the data collection phase, all participants completed the Likert survey first, so follow-up interview questions were prepared. In many cases, a translator had to assist students and parents. She would read the survey question, and the students or parents would respond as best they could. For example, in one case, when a parent had very limited English proficiency, she would respond “si” in English, which means “yes,” for one indicating there wasn’t a barrier. In her case, when the parent began explaining in Spanish what her thoughts were, she would state the word moderate or extreme in Spanish.

In addition, the student and staff completed the Likert survey independently or with the translation for each prompt before the interview questions were asked. This allowed the researcher to prepare for the interviews. For parents, the process was different. It became evident very early on that language was a challenge. As a result, the researcher would read the prompt, and the translator would ask for the rating. Then the researcher would ask the semi-structured interview questions immediately if the parent indicated the barrier was moderate or extreme. The translator would respond in English to
allow the researcher to record notes for transcription purposes. In a few cases, the researcher and translator would call the parent back to clarify a comment.

Example of Student and Parent Google Likert Surveys in English and Spanish

**Visual Likert scale**

![Likert Scale Diagram](image)

**Example of Staff Google Likert Survey Question**

8. English Learners used their time wisely to complete assignments or engage in online lessons.

- [ ] 1-Not a barrier
- [ ] 2-Moderate barrier
- [ ] 3 - Somewhat of a barrier
- [ ] 4- Extreme barrier
APPENDIX I

DEDOOSE DASHBOARD AND CODEBOOK

Dedoose project dashboard

Frequency of codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication (SS) THEME</th>
<th>Technology (SS) THEME</th>
<th>Mental Health (SS) THEME</th>
<th>Learning Environment (SS) THEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Parent 01</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Parent 02</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Student 01</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Student 02</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Student 03</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Student 04</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Student 05</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Student 06</td>
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<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Student 07</td>
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<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Staff 01</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Staff 02</td>
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<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Staff 03</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Staff 04</td>
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<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research number: Staff 05</td>
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<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Totals | 0 0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 0 0 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Initial</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to devices was challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate internet access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate number of devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem of logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help was not guaranteed for the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhelpful parent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Inclusiveness was challenging in a virtual class</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boring lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cohesive ESL team was helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicated lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting students with similar backgrounds would have helped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to interact with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to pay attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and translation were a significant barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More parent'-teacher would have helped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers cannot give the needed attention to students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Internet access was a big barrier</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faulty hotspot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrating internet service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hotspot connectivity problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language barrier/hotspot operation barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow internet speed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The language was a challenge for EL student</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EL students faced many difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive workload on ESL teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra online classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-English and Spanish literate parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision for physical classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student loss of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switching to Spanish for instruction and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage of google translate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Lesson delivery was stressful for the teachers and frustrating for the students</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distracting experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressed teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers provided one-to-one support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers worked extremely hard/supportive and helpful teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiresome for the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translating was extremely stressful and time-consuming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Personal responsibility was difficult for the student during the pandemic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of access to needed support and assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited priority was placed on education by parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More parental involvement was needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking responsibility was difficult due to the language barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students did their best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiredness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The level of time management during the pandemic could have been better**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limited support from home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss of interest due to language barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple distractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students avoided virtual learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students lack IT skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiredness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being serious about school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual learning is slow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The pandemic significantly impacted the personal life of the students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeding challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to socialize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited family funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of interest in academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry and anxiety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The support level was undermined despite the great effort**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inadequate Spanish translators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate technological skills for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient EL teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited translation services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick IT implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school district was supportive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Third analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to practice language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction/socialize to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation/translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to device/devices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliable hotspot</th>
<th>Opportunity to practice language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to use technology</td>
<td>Social interaction/socialize to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt lonely/depressed</td>
<td>Translation/translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting to hard task/difficult issue to deal with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressed or anxious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried about adult issues, like food, jobs, and housing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried about getting sick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraction/cannot concentrate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in grades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need more support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed help from parent or teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much online/screen time or dislike of online school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing concerns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Final themes aligned to final categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Final categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td>Opportunity to practice language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social interaction/socialize to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translation/translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technology</strong></td>
<td>Access to device/devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliable hotspot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to use technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mental Health</strong></td>
<td>Felt lonely/depressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjusting to hard task/difficult issue to deal with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stressed or anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worried about adult issues, like food, jobs, and housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worried about getting sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Environment</strong></td>
<td>Distraction/cannot concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changes in grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need more support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needed help from parent or teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too much online/screen time or dislike of online school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staffing concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX J

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION — PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

Participant interviews were recorded when given verbal permission to record. All recorded interviews were transcribed into Google Docs and later copied into an Excel spreadsheet to be uploaded into the data analysis software tool. As a backup, the researcher took detailed notes during the interviews. Transcripts were reviewed twice to ensure ideas were recorded correctly. Due to the confidential nature of the responses, only pseudo-names will be used. In an effort to maintain some consistency during the interview process, the researcher generated three separate sets of informal interview questions for each barrier.

Student Interviews

Seven students participated in semi-structured interviews after completing the Likert survey to identify moderate or extreme barriers they faced during remote learning. All student interviews were done in person with a translator available if they needed the questions interpreted. Two students used the translator during the interview.

Parent Interviews

Five parents volunteered to participate in this research study. Each parent interview was slightly different from student interviews because of the clear language proficiency of each parent. Parents answered the survey questions, which were interpreted by the translator to the researcher. Next, depending on the response, the
researcher would ask an informal interview question which would be spoken in Spanish, and their response translated back into English for recording purposes. Qualitative data collection was concurrent with the quantitative portion due to communication issues and the availability of time from work for most parents. All parent interviews were held over the phone.

**Staff Interviews**

Nine staff members, ranging in positions from teacher to administrator. Each staff member was emailed the Likert survey to complete. After completion of the survey, an in-person or virtual meeting was set. Based on the response to identify specific barriers, semi-structured interview questions were asked to clarify why they indicated this was a barrier.

**Excerpts from interviews aligned to categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td>&quot;The internet didn’t work and I was frustrated and angry. I would cry sometimes.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>The hotspots were limited. A family may not have had one hotspot which supported two devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>hotspot but because there were three of them using it they would get knocked off all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>We didn’t have enough devices and some families had to share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>families struggled with job loss and not having food or being too scared to go to the store for food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>I was concerned I would get COVID from work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mateo</td>
<td>Man, my mom was stressed out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Students were worried and stressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>If I could have had help translating the assignments, it would have been better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roni</td>
<td>We needed additional services, like a Spanish translator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Language development starts with the social language first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>It was only so much EL support that they could receive being at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>Gabriela</td>
<td>I couldn't focus. My phone was a distraction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Some students didn’t understand a lot of the online lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>My students were babysitting their siblings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>I couldn't pay attention. My grades dropped.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX K

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION — ARTIFACTS AND STAFF COMMUNICATION

I gathered as many artifacts as possible to gather more information about participants’ experiences. The first set of artifacts was found on the school or district website or sent by staff. Each of the artifacts provides evidence to support certain categories or themes. For example, one newsletter provided information about a parent meeting to help parents learn more about using the district-provided devices or hotspots. The newsletter allowed me to think about what the staff members stated about how they offered parent events to support their students.

It is important to note that other artifacts like behavior logs, report cards, and attendance records were collected and analyzed, but due to the confidential nature of the information those items will not be provided.

District communication about services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Language Learners</th>
<th>Gifted</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Title 1 (elementary only)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-12 Services will be provided in a small group setting or within the regular classroom.</td>
<td>Key Services will continue to be provided by classroom teachers with support provided by a Gifted Intervention Specialist. Higher-level differentiation and enrichment opportunities will be offered based on classroom readiness virtually and/or in-person.</td>
<td>Decisions will be made in accordance with Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and take into consideration a student's IEP goals.</td>
<td>Students will be identified for Title I once benchmarking assessments are given. Students will work either individually or in small groups with their Title I teachers either virtually or in-person. Students may receive Title services in the Gen. Ed classroom, in small group rooms, and/or other designated areas in the building, along with virtually through Google Meet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports will be provided by TESOL certified teachers and tutors in both in-person and virtual models.</td>
<td>6-8: Services will continue to be provided throughuiten programs by the classroom teachers with Gifted Intervention Specialist support. Students will have access to compounded curriculums and enrichment opportunities virtually and/or in-person.</td>
<td>9-12: Services will continue to be provided by classroom teachers in Honors, AP, or CCP courses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translators and support staff will also assist in supporting English Learners.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**District communication to families about engagement and attendance**

**Attendance versus engagement:**
- Attendance will be recorded through set activities or check ins established from teacher.
- Engagement is the participation and completion of expected work assigned from the teacher.
- Students hours of participation will be determined through a combination of attendance check-ins, engagement, and the allotted time determined by the teacher for completion of assignments and tasks.

**Reporting student absences:**
- Absences should be reported to the building secretary the student is assigned to by the teacher on a weekly basis.

**Attendance:**
- Student attendance will be taken three days a week dependent on the teacher’s schedule.
- The teacher will designate three times a week when formal attendance will be taken and recorded.
- These days and times established by the teacher should remain consistent throughout the semester and be communicated with the students and parent.

- Attendance and participation will be taken through a combination of daily logins, student-teacher interaction, and assignment completion.
- If there is no evidence of student exposure, engagement or participation, the student will be marked absent that time period.

**Make-up work:**
- Students will be permitted to make-up any missed work within an allotted time frame for full credit.
- Please refer to the classroom teacher for specific make-up assignment procedures.

**School communication to staff about reaching out to parents**
I need to contact a parent and I don’t speak Spanish!

I know many teachers have reached out to me with translation help! Keep doing so (I’m not fluent in Spanish, but I can help out in a crunch)! Don’t forget that whenever we send home information, we have an obligation to ensure meaningful communication with Limited English Proficient (LEP) parents in a language they can understand and we must notify LEP parents of information about any program, service, or activity of the district.

Google translate works well for simple translations, like short messages home, but be cautious about using them for complicated documents or messages. We do have people in the district who can translate important information going home, but it takes time. If you want something translated, use the link here to make a request (one week is typical for turn around time).

If you need more ideas for effectively communicating with parents or guardians, check out my EL Technology Resources Google Slides for some more options. Thank you in advance for your patience and honest feedback!

School communication about helping EL students

How do I get help for my ELs?

By law, school districts must take “affirmative steps” to address language barriers so that EL students may participate meaningfully in schools’ educational programs. With that being said, we have multiple layers of support here at Hamilton. I am the EL teacher (TESOL endorsed teacher). Ms. Newton will be joining us again this year as the EL Tutor and Mrs. will also be helping out again as the EL Paraprofessional for ELs on IEPs. Not all ELs require the same level of support, so accommodations and modifications look different for each individual EL. I am happy to help you develop language goals for our ELs if you don’t know where to start.

When you have a free moment, please fill out the EL Support Survey so we have an idea how to best support you and our students. This survey also helps me understand what your level of TESOL knowledge and comfortably are when working with ELs.

School communication to teachers about translation services

When will I get EL support for my students?

If you need support right now, by all means, please let me know. Currently, I am checking in on students and preparing schedules to make sure each student receives appropriate support. If you notice an immediate need for support for an individual EL, please let me know by filling out the EL Support Survey. At the moment, I will be supporting ELs assigned to Cohort C and ELs participating in virtual learning. Ms. Newton and Mrs. will be supporting ELs who are present in the building (Note: plans are subject to change).

After we have begun our routines, I will create and share the EL Support Staff Schedules out to you all. But again, all of this information and staff schedules will always be available on my website throughout the year. Mrs. will begin on September 21st. And Mrs. will be here two days per week starting next week. I will do my best to fill any gaps while we continue refining our schedule.

Staff email exchange about attending virtual lessons.
District communication regarding parent event

Pre-and post-pandemic behavior log entries

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo-name</th>
<th>Behavior log entries 2018-2019 (Pre-pandemic year)</th>
<th>Behavior log entries 2021-2022 (Post-pandemic year)</th>
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</table>
APPENDIX L

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION — RESEARCHER FIELD NOTES

During each interview, a translator was available to assist students and parents. I was able to take notes about the interactions I observed between the translator and the Spanish-speaking participant. A total of seven participants asked to have the information translated. One student and all the parents needed the survey and interview translated completely. Another student only needed a few words translated to clarify the difference between moderate and extreme barriers.

*Field notes - students*
Field notes: Parent interviews
3/28 @ 3:30 Parent #4
- calm demeanor
- kncol
- explains couldn't help her daughter but older sister could - appreciate
- daughter was distracted
- animated about more help needed - communications
- teachers weren't updating Power School
- personal - voice was louder
- worked
  * switched schools b/c landlord sold house they were renting
  * more communication
  * would flow to get help
  * parent - complicated
3/30 @ 11:15  Parent S

+ quiet
+ knows (r)
- laughs after I discusses
  how much "fun" pandemic was
  - seems to open up

family: 4 children + parents in house
Kids:  internet was problem
  - too many people on hotspot
  - got checked off.

+ all dropped- anxiety

+ called twice
  1st: *started hearing about deaths*
  - scared
  - husband stopped working
    bc didn't want to bring home

2nd: classes in English (no tone change)
  - my kids are good
    + wanted teacher to help
  -