# THE TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS DURING DISTANCE LEARNING: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

By Cecilia Frazier Salzer

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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## Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the transformation of rural elementary classroom teachers who transitioned to distance learning with English learners (ELs) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley. The theory guiding this study was Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) served as the conceptual framework for examining how EL teachers transformed their perspectives, assumptions, feelings, and judgments while conducting distance learning. The research question guiding this study was: What transformation did teachers experience while providing distance learning instruction to rural elementary English learners during the COVID-19 pandemic? The design was based on Moustakas' methods for transcendental phenomenology, which involves epoché, transcendental phenomenological reduction, and Imaginative Variation. Thirteen participants were selected through purposeful snowball sampling. The setting was rural elementary schools in a county located in the California Central Valley. Data was obtained through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Data analyses and organization were conducted through the methods and procedures of phenomenal research. Findings revealed that teachers were transformed while they provided distance learning but reverted to their old ways when they returned to the classroom. Implications include offering a course that contains technology-based instruction for ELs, professional development for emergency lesson plans and online applications geared toward ELs, administrative support for teacher collaboration, and having a growth mindset that helps teachers overcome fears and challenges.

*Keywords*: distance learning, COVID-19, English learners, rural, emergency remote learning, TPACK, transformation

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. My husband, John, was a steadfast supporter throughout this lifelong endeavor. His prayers and encouragement sustained me. My children, John, Matthew, and Dianne, got me started on the road to education. I am still learning through them.

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Finally, I am very grateful to God who gave me the strength and motivation to finish. May the fruits of this research glorify Him.

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## List of Abbreviations

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA)

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

Digital Competence (DC)

Digital Informal Learning (DIL)

Distance Education (DE)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)

English Language (EL)

English Language Development (ELD)

English Language Learner (ELL)

English Language Performance Assessments in California (ELPAC)

Fluent English Proficient (FEP)

Linguistically Responsive Teaching (LRT)

Local Educational Agency (LEA)

Non-Pharmaceutical Intervention (NPI)

Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP)

Urbanized Area (UA)

Technology Pedagogy and Content Knowledge (TPACK)

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the transformation of rural elementary classroom teachers who transitioned to distance learning with English learners (ELs) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley. This chapter provides background information on school closures, past practices and emergency plans for school closures, and the transition to distance learning. The ramifications for academic learning, social-emotional needs, and language learning, with particular emphasis on the added challenges of English language development (ELD) instruction, were presented. The problem is that rural elementary classroom English language teachers were forced to conduct emergency remote teaching through distance learning because of the COVID-19 crisis, regardless of whether they had technology skills, an understanding of online pedagogy, and knowledge of best practices. This research provides insight into how teachers overcame challenges and transformed their instruction which positively or negatively impacted learning in emergency remote learning. This chapter also includes the purpose and significance of the study, research questions, and definitions.

## Background

Beginning in March 2020, schools worldwide rapidly transitioned to emergency remote teaching (ERT) or distance learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dhawan, 2020; Peterson et al., 2020). School closure was a solution to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus among students. School dismissal depended upon the triggers involving the diagnosis of a given threshold number of symptomatic school children within a community defined by the guidelines of the state, county, and local levels (Germanna et al., 2019). Hence, the rate and

responses of schools across the United States (US) varied at state, county, and local educational agency (LEA) levels.

Because long-term closures would impact instruction and learning, schools turned to online and distance learning to lessen disruptions in education (García & Weiss, 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Middleton, 2020; Onyema et al., 2020). Transitioning to online and distance learning had its challenges (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Jain et al., 2021; Kaden, 2020; Marstaller, 2020; Minkos & Gelbar, 2021; Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Sangeeta & Tandon, 2021; Scharber et al., 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020; Vu et al., 2020; Zhang, 2013). Initially, with outdated manuals and constant changes in technology, web-based applications, and online classroom platforms, many educators were not prepared with the skill and experience necessary to engage in online instruction (Falloon, 2020; Hill et al., 2020; Jain et al., 2021; Parolin & Lee, 2021; Trust & Whalen, 2020). A wide range of technology use and skill levels became evident with the COVID-19 outbreak as educators turned to distance learning for remote instruction (Dhawan, 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020).

While all sectors in education were affected (K-12 and higher education, professional and vocational), those who felt the highest impact were students from vulnerable families, learning impaired, and marginalized students (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Beaton et al., 2021; González & Bonal, 2021; Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Liggett, 2010; Masten et al., 2015; United States Department of Education, 2020). One particular marginalized population was English language learners (ELLs) in rural areas (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Catalano et al., 2021; Coady, 2020; Lee & Hawkins, 2015; Liggett, 2010). The number of ELLs in public schools has grown in the United States. By the fall of 2017, the percentage of ELLs in public schools ranged from 0.8 percent in West Virginia to 19.2 percent in California (Hussar et al., 2020). According to the National

Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019), there were approximately five million ELLs in K-12 public schools, most in urban areas. Recent data indicate that around 600,000 ELLs attend rural schools (Hussar et al., 2020), which is not insignificant (Coady, 2020). However, the research community still needs to examine this subfield of English language education in just the cultural backgrounds, languages, and learning needs of rural areas (Coady, 2020).

## Historical Context

Schools all over the United States rapidly transitioned to distance learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Basilaia & Kavavadze, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Peterson et al., 2020). The last time state education departments and school districts considered emergency contingency plans, social distancing, policies, and instructional plans for a likely pandemic school closure was in 2009 with the H1N1 virus (Klaiman et al., 2009; Uscher-Pines et al., 2018). The last school closure before that was during the 1918-1919 Spanish Flu pandemic (Ager et al., 2020; Markel et al., 2007). This phenomenon of the rapid transition to distance learning was also experienced by educators worldwide (UNESCO, 2020). During the initial school closures, literature was focused on higher education, especially professional training in the medical field (Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020). With China at the forefront of this issue, the country's handling of its educational needs served as an initial model for the world to follow (Huang et al., 2020). Educational leaders examined how China dealt with the lack of preparation for online learning, challenges arising from teacher/student isolation due to online learning, and new and effective pedagogical approaches to motivate and engage students (Huang et al., 2020).

### *Emergency Remote Teaching Nationwide*

US schools closed by late March 2020 and remained closed through April 24, 2020 (Malkas & Christensen, 2020). While 48 states ordered or recommended schools to stay closed

for the remainder of the school year, local authorities in Wyoming and Montana could choose to reopen after the initial closure (Malkas & Christensen, 2020; Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, 2020; The Hunt Institute, 2021; Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, 2020). Districts geared up for emergency remote learning as they submitted required plans for continuous learning. Twenty-one states, including the District of Columbia, did not require plans since those states provided material, resources, website support, or guidelines to assist educators and families with remote learning (The Hunt Institute, 2021). The District of Columbia provided distance learning packets for the duration of the 2020 school year.

***California's Transition to Distance Learning***

In preparation for a possible pandemic, the California Department of Education published a Pandemic Flu Checklist for Local Educational Agencies in California in 2006, then revised editions in 2011 and 2014, and again in March 2020 (California Department of Education, 2006, 2011, 2020). In compliance with state emergency plans, LEAs were apprised of managing the flu/virus transmission. However, like many educators nationwide, many California educators were unprepared for the sudden transition to full-on distance learning (Hill et al., 2020; Jain et al., 2021). California Department of Education (2021) subsequently published information and resources on guidance for distance learning to LEAs and school districts. Unlike the checklist and emergency plan, which were organized and managed at the state and county levels, distance learning, remote instruction, technology integration, and training were at the discretion of LEAs. Hence, there was significant variation in educators' readiness to use technology for instruction and to support learners remotely (Basilaia & Kavavadze, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020, 2021).

**Emergency Remote Teaching.** California Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency on March 4, 2020 (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020a, 2020b). On March 13, the governor issued an executive order to provide LEAs (school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools) state funding during the period of closure to support distance learning and independent study (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020c, 2020d). Funding was also extended to meals in non-congregate settings at schools and non-school sites and for continued pay to its employees (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020c, 2020d). Students with disabilities received public education consistent with their individualized educational plan (IEP) as well as meeting the requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and California law (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020d). On March 18, the governor announced that standardized testing was suspended for the 2019-20 school year, focusing on the safety and well-being of children and staff during a national emergency (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020e).

Many pre-COVID households were not prepared for their students to engage in distance learning. According to a parent survey, approximately one in five California students lacked high-speed Internet or a computing device at home (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020f). Fifty percent of low-income and 42% of families of color lacked a laptop, Chromebook, or tablet necessary for distance learning. To support distance learning and bridge the digital divide, the governor announced a partnership with private companies (such as T-Mobile, Apple, Amazon, Verizon, Hewlett Packard, and Lenovo), businesses (such as Microsoft, Zoom, Box, AT&T), and philanthropists (such as Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative, Jack Dorsey via#startsmall, and Ann & John Doerr). This partnership procured a commitment to provide internet access for hundreds of thousands of households along with laptops, Chromebooks, and tablets for over 70,000 students

(Office of Governor Newsom, 2020e). The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) also partnered with the California Department of Education to distribute $25 million to help school districts assist families by providing hotspots and internet services for student households for distance learning (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020f). Rural, small, and medium-sized districts were prioritized. The CPUC made an additional $5 million available from the California Advanced Services Fund to help cover the costs of computing and hotspot devices. Priority was given to low-income communities, communities with high percentages of residents with limited English proficiency, and communities with high percentages of residents with limited education attainment (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020f).

**Transition to Distance Learning.** In July 2020, Governor Newsom outlined California's pandemic plan for schools, emphasizing the safety of students and staff and providing quality instruction, whether in-person or through distance learning (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020g). Based on the epidemiological data, it was estimated that over 90% of students began the 2020-21 year with distance learning. In August, the governor announced that the funds for $5.3 billion were made available to California schools to support distance learning and academic achievement and to mitigate learning loss related to COVID-19 school closures (California Department of Education, 2021b; Edsource, 2021; Office of Governor Newsom, 2020h). To promote quality instruction through distance learning, among the new statewide requirements enacted included "access to devices and connectivity for all kids, daily live interaction with teachers and other students, challenging assignments equivalent to in-person classes, and adapted lessons for English-language learners and special education students" (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020g).

The state recognized that the pandemic had an inequitable impact on communities with a digital divide for technology access necessary for distance learning. Hence, over 8% of the funds prioritized students with the greatest need, including low-income students, students with disabilities, foster youth, homeless students, and English learners" (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020h). Although progress had been made to bridge the digital divide, inequities existed, especially for rural communities with limited broadband infrastructure. The order directed state agencies to pursue highspeed Internet (100 Mbps download speed) and "accelerate mapping and data collection, funding, deployment and adoption of high-speed Internet" (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020h)

**End to Distance Learning.** At the beginning of May 2021, over half of California public school students remained in distance learning (Willis & Fensterwald, 2021). Much of this was due to hard-hit communities. Higher infection rates also affected negotiations in districts with strong unions. As a result, districts in hard-hit areas like San Bernardino Unified and Santa Ana Unified remained in total distance learning for the rest of the 2020-2021 year, while Fremont Unified in the Bay Area could not agree to return. Others, like San Francisco Unified and West Contra Costa Unified, were slow to open due to the lack of teachers volunteering to return to campuses (Willis & Fensterwald, 2021).

On June 8, 2021, Governor Newsom announced that 99% of schools submitted plans to fully reopen in the fall of 2021 (Hoeven, 2020; Office of Governor Newsom, 2020i). Most schools opened safely as scheduled, while others remained on course despite challenges brought on by the new Delta variant (CDPH, 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2021). Students wanting to continue remote learning had the option of enrolling in independent study programs because the state distance learning statute expired on June 30, 2021 (California Department of Education,

2021c; Johnson et al., 2008). The Assembly Bill (AB) 130 and Amendments in AB167 of September 10, 2021, state that Independent Study (IS) "is also the vehicle to be used for ongoing student learning when students must be home for short periods—whether for a quarantine associated with the COVID-19 pandemic or because of the effects of a natural disaster, such as a fire" (California Department of Education, 2021c). Participation in IS for less than 15 days would be referred to as "short-term" IS. (California Department of Education, 2021c). Other than IS, there were no contingency plans to continue or revive distance learning in case of student quarantines.

## Social Context

School closures deeply affected 55 million K-12 students transitioning from face-to-face to remote learning (García & Weiss, 2020). However, nationwide, ELLs and their families were disproportionately affected by the sudden transition to distant learning. Sayer and Braun (2021) assert this was because socioeconomically marginalized families, including many immigrants, lacked preparation and resources for remote learning. There were also communication challenges for multilingual families. Finally, school online resources and remote learning were set up for content-area learning, not necessarily to support students' English acquisition (Sayer & Braun, 2021). Because California has many ELs, instruction, resources, and support are integrated into its local, district, and state public school system, beginning with teacher preparation.

### *English Language Proficiency Standards*

Two professional organizations provide support and resources for English teachers: Teachers of English Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) International Association and World-Class Instructional Design Assessments (WIDA). Although the goals of both organizations are similar, their histories differ. TESOL was founded in 1966 as an all-inclusive

professional organization that would bring together teachers and administrators of all educational levels (TESOL International Association, 2022a). It developed its first TESOL PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards in 1997 (see Appendix A). The No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (NCLB) required all states to develop English language proficiency standards. Using the 1997 standards as a foundation, the TESOL PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards were revised in 2006 to tie ESL content standards specifically to core curriculum content areas as well as provide an organizational structure in compliance with federal legislation (see Appendix B; TESOL International Association, 2022b).

In 2003, WIDA was established with a grant from the US Department of Education to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to develop English language proficiency standards and assessments (World-class Instructional Design and Assessments, 2022a). Initially, WIDA stood for the three states Wisconsin, Delaware, and Arkansas, which comprised the consortium (Today, 35 states hold membership with WIDA.). WIDA developed the 2004 WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards (see Appendix C), which also served as the basis for the English language proficiency test ACCESS for ELLs (World-class Instructional Design and Assessments, 2022b). WIDA's standards also met the provisions and federal legislation of NCLB for English language learners. The TESOL International Association's PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards of 2006 were also built on this. They augmented the WIDA Consortium's English Language Proficiency Standards for English language learners in kindergarten through grade 12 (TESOL International Association, 2022b). The ELD proficiency standards are integrated and aligned with Common Core State Standards (CCSS), regardless of whether the state uses the TESOL or WIDA English language proficiency standards.

### *English Language Programs*

English language development programs across the United States have been established for school-age, non-native English-speaking children. ELD programs vary by state and within districts using different approaches and models. The difference between ELD and broad-based ESL programs is that the primary goal of ELD for K-12 students is to achieve English proficiency for academic content learning. Brown (2001) explains the different models utilized across the United States (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*English Instructional Models*

| Model | Description |
|---|---|
| Submersion | This is a lack of treatment where non-native speakers are *submerged* in regular content classes with no specialized English language instruction. The assumption is that learners will *absorb* English as they focus on the content matter. Some schools may provide *pull-out* instruction for a designated time of special English language instruction. |
| Immersion | Students of similar proficiency levels and the same native language attend specially designed-content-area classes. The teacher is certified in regular content instruction and has some knowledge of the student's language and culture. This model is often used in English as a foreign language (EFL) rather than with ESL and serves as an enriching experience. |
| Sheltered Instruction | This specialized form of immersion caters to students of varying native language backgrounds. The teacher is certified in content or subject area and ELD methodology. ELD classes may be part of the curriculum. ELD-trained teachers may also combine content and ELD in each content area. |
| Mainstreaming | In some submersion programs, students may receive ELD instruction before being placed into content areas. Once the student is proficient in English, they are mainstreamed into a regular classroom with a regular curriculum. |
| Transitional Bilingual Programs | There are three forms of bilingual education currently being practiced. Most students receive instruction where their first and second languages are combined. In transitional programs, students learn content area subject matter in their native language combined with an ELD component. Teacher input and proficiency assessments determine when they can transition to all English classes. This program allows students to scaffold early cognitive concepts in their native language and then cross to English. The problem is that student are more often mainstreamed before their academic and linguistic skills have been sufficiently developed. |
| Maintenance Bilingual Programs | Students continue to learn a portion of the content area in their native language throughout their school years. Students in this program can develop their native language and build confidence and expertise in the subject matter. However, this can also discourage the mastery of English. Another problem is the cost of staffing maintenance classes. |
| Enrichment Bilingual Programs | In the third form of bilingual educational programs, the students take selected content areas in a foreign language while the rest of the education is in English. The purpose of this |

program is for "students to *enrich* themselves by broadening their cultural and linguistic horizons" (Brown, 2001, p. 122).

### *Sheltered Instructional Strategies*

Stephen Krashen originally coined the phrase *sheltered* instruction during the 1980s with his work on comprehensible input (Burger, 1989). He was highly inspired by the success of Canadian immersion programs (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). By modifying subject matter through comprehensible language input, teachers could use sheltered instruction to help non-native speakers learn English by accessing academic content (Krashen, 1982, 1996a). Krashen viewed sheltered instruction as "a bridge between instruction in the first language and the mainstream" (Krashen, 1996, p. 56). He viewed comprehensible subject matter teaching as language because it provides comprehensible input (Krashen, 1991). The strategies make content more accessible and comprehensible while promoting English language development. For many regions, sheltered instruction became known as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). Because there was no agreement on a sheltered instructional model, a lack of focus on language development, and ineffective implementation, sheltered classes were not always successful (Echevarria & Graves, 2007). Other models have been developed based on research and teacher input. The following describes various models for sheltered instruction, which are all research-based, grade-level, and academically content-centered.

**Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE).** SDAIE is a specially designed instructional approach to increase the comprehensibility of the English language in content areas such as math or social studies (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2021, Definitions on Types of Instruction section). The origins of SDAIE began with the *Lau v. Nichols* 1974 case, which involved the failure of San Francisco schools to provide adequate

instruction to non-English speaking Chinese students (US Department of Education, 2020). SDAIE is generally used in California. The key to SDAIE is the primary language. Literacy in the first language can help to develop literacy in the second language (Cummins, 2005). The idea is that literacy-related tasks are more accessible to develop in the first language. When students learn how their primary language skills can be used in problem-solving and thinking, they can similarly apply this to a second language (Genzuk, 2011; Krashen & Biber, 1988). Students do not have to re-learn the content area in the second language, just the vocabulary, since the standard underlying proficiency related to literacy can be used in all languages the student knows (Cummins, 1994; Genzuk, 2011).

Language learning is not the goal of SDAIE; it is the byproduct (Genzuk, 2011). The primary objective is to provide comprehensible input by delivering instruction with as much linguistic scaffolding and modifications as possible. Three key components should be considered when planning for students with limited English proficiency: (a) students should have access to content area materials and resources in their primary language; (b) primary language instructional support staff should be available to help students connect to the content; (c) if possible, students should be clustered by linguistic and academic needs to maximize instruction (Genzuk, 2011). Genzuk (2011) also describes the following SDAIE techniques used to assist in providing comprehensible input:

- Increase wait time.
- Respond to the student's message; do not correct errors (Expansion).
- Simplify teacher language.
- Do not force oral production.
- Use visuals and manipulatives.

- Devise lessons with sensory activities.
- Pair or group students with native speakers.
- Adapt the materials to the student's language level while maintaining content integrity without watering it down.
- Increase your knowledge by learning the language and culture of the students.

  Build on the student's prior knowledge.
- Support the student's home language and culture by sharing and using it in the classroom.

Students succeed with SDAIE when they can negotiate thoughts and knowledge with enough English through non-watered-down, relevant content. SDAIE teachers should be sensitive to the student's language needs and learning styles. Hence, "the term sheltered has been eliminated from much of the literature and replaced with SDAIE [in California] to preserve the intent of rigorous core curriculum instruction (Genzuk, 2011, p. 21).

**Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD).** Project GLAD was developed and implemented with the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE), California. It is used from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The Orange County Department of Education Project GLAD provides evidence-based practices that help design classrooms and lessons for English learners (Orange County Department of Education, n.d.). GLAD provides a unique blend of academic language literacy, integrating research from many fields and organizing strategies and classroom implications into a process (O'Donovan, 2008). In this model, both languages (students' home language and English) complement each other through integrated themes. An ample amount of oral language development and cross-cultural interaction is permitted. The training is also successful "because it values teacher's time, viewpoints, and expertise of the teacher as well as promoting collaboration and peer coaching" (O'Donovan, 2008, p. 2).

Training is designed for dual language and Spanish immersion education. The program is available 100% in Spanish and aligns with any language immersion program used within schools or districts.

**Structured Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP).** The SIOP model was created in the mid-1990s by Echevarria et al. (2004, 2008). SIOP has become an effective instructional model to help English language learners learn academic content while addressing their linguistic needs (Center for Applied Linguistics, n.d.). This model guides teachers in utilizing effective practices systematically and provides a tool for reflecting on and improving their instruction (Echevarria & Graves, 2007). There are 30 features centered around eight interrelated components: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application/ lesson delivery, and review and assessment. SIOP lessons also come with supplementary materials and student-centered activities. Another characteristic is "the extent to which the text is adapted to meet students' language and learning needs while still reflecting high expectations" (Echevarria & Graves, 2007, p. 62). New keywords and vocabulary are highlighted. Vocabulary development is essential for developing oral English proficiency for academic achievement. Vocabulary needs to be closely related to the subject matter (Echevarria & Graves, 2007).

**Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA).** The goals of CALLA are similar to the previous models, primarily that students will learn academic content and language and become independent learners. It was created by Chamot and O'Malley (1994) and is based on cognitive theory, relying on content to determine what academic language should be taught and learning strategies to implement. CALLA can be used in various settings: ESL, EFL, bilingual, foreign language, and general education classrooms (Chamot & Robbins, 2005). It

focuses on three main learning strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective. CALLA also relies heavily on scaffolding and instructional support when introducing concepts and skills, gradually releasing support as students gain proficiency, knowledge, and skills (Colorado Department of Education, 2002). This model can be grade-level and topic-specific, like CALLA math or science at a secondary level (Chamot, 1995).

Chamot and Robbins (2005) explain the five phases for delivering instruction in CALLA. The first preparation phase involves reviewing objectives, activating prior knowledge, introducing vocabulary, and motivating students. In the second phase of the *presentation*, the teacher presents new information through various means, models the process, explains learning strategies, and connects to students' prior knowledge. During the third phase of *practice*, students practice new concepts and skills through authentic tasks with hands-on and cooperative learning activities. In the fourth evaluation phase, students self-reflect and evaluate others while assessing their learning strategies. In the final phase of *expansion*, students apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills to real-life situations by connecting language and content and language knowledge.

***California English Language Instruction***

California teachers meet the minimum requirements for teaching ELs when entering the classroom. That is because of the many K-12 English learners within the public school system. A total of 6,002,523 students were enrolled for kindergarten through grade 12 in the fall of 2020 (California Department of Education, 2022a). Of that 2,115,915, approximately 35% of students were English learners or reclassified fluent English proficient (California Department of Education, 2022a). To accommodate a large number of ELs, all California teachers are required to have an English authorization or CLAD (Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic

Development) certification, which includes training in English Language Development (ELD) and Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE; California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2021).

ELD instruction is designed to teach the practical and efficient acquisition of listening, speaking, reading, and writing at the appropriate level of language proficiency of the identified ELs and within a language acquisition program (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2021, Definitions on Types of Instruction section; California Department of Education, 2022b). ELD is further divided into designated and integrated ELD instruction. Designated ELD instruction is protected during the regular school day, focusing on the state-adopted ELD standards. ELs learn critical English language skills necessary for academic content in English (California Department of Education, 2022b; Collins et al., 2015). Integrated ELD instruction combines the California ELD standards with the state-adopted academic content standards. (California Department of Education, 2022b; Collins et al., 2015).

**Goals and Support for English Learners** The CDE has set goals to help close the achievement gap between ELs and their native English-speaking counterparts:

- Ensure that English learners acquire full proficiency in English as rapidly and effectively as possible and attain parity with native speakers of English.
- Ensure that English learners, within a reasonable period, achieve the same rigorous grade-level academic standards expected of all students (California Department of Education, 2022).

All ELs are given “designated and integrated English language development (ELD) instruction targeted to their English proficiency level and appropriate academic instruction in language acquisition program” (California Department of Education, 2022b, Facts about English Learners

in California) to meet these goals. Language acquisition programs may include but are not limited to dual-language immersion, transitional or developmental Programs, or structured English immersion.

***Differences and Shifts in Terminology***

SDAIE is not ELD. SDAIE is a strategy used during integrated ELD instruction. *ESL (English as a Second Language)* and *sheltered instruction* are no longer used in California. They have been replaced with ELD (English Language Development) and SDAIE (Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English), respectively. The change occurred to "differentiate the teaching of language through content (ELD) from the teaching of content through language that second language students can understand" (Genzuk, 2011, p. 8). Before The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), non-native English students were referred to as bilingual or ESL; the term ELL (English language learner) was adopted by NCLB (Fleischer, 2017). The change reflected a shift from home language recognition to being bilingual. ELL continues to be used throughout the US and in the literature. EL (English Learner) is the California Department of Education's preferred term. Within the past 20 years, California has shifted its terminology from LEP (Limited English Proficiency) to ELL and recently to EL (Fleischer, 2017). This study will use EL when referring to California-specific literature and ELL for all others.

***Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Impact on Education***

Isolated distance learning forced educators, administrative, community, and public health leaders to consider the social ramifications and long-term effects on academics, social-emotional needs, and behavior (Minkos & Gelbar, 2021). The negative side effects of prolonged school closures and restricted quarantines contributed to higher anxiety as well as having an impact on sedentary behaviors (Dunton et al., 2020; Garcia de Avila et al., 2020). Moreover, school

closures and isolation raised concerns for the mental health and well-being of students in all areas and, in particular, poverty-stricken areas (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Cowie & Myers, 2021; García & Weiss, 2020; Morgan et al., 2019).

Although teachers expressed their anxieties regarding the challenges of online and technology-based learning (Klapproth et al., 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020), they also raised questions and concerns over the academic, psychological, social-emotional needs as they prepared and engaged in the unpredictable combinations of distance learning, blended learning, and in-class learning (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Minkos & Gelbar, 2021). Moreover, the anxieties and challenges of special populations – students with disabilities and English language learners – were further compounded not only by changes in social and learning environments due to COVID-19 but also because of issues related to their existing learning needs (Russell, 2020; Saline, 2021).

## Theoretical Context

This study sought to describe the essence of rural classroom EL teacher transformation as they conducted distance learning initiated by ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theoretical framework used to interpret rural EL teacher transformation was Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1991, 1997, 2000). Technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK; Koehler et al., 2007) provided the conceptual framework that explains the relationships between the knowledge constructs of TPACK and how they all inform teacher transformative learning.

### *Transformative Learning Theory*

The lens through which to interpret these findings was Mezirow's (1991, 1997, 2000) transformative learning theory. While using Knowles' (1960, 1975) self-directed learning and

Habermas' (1981) theory of communicative action as a basis, Mezirow included "critical reflection on experience [as the] key to transformative learning" (Merriam, 2004, p. 62). Not only did they reflect as they tried to understand and make meaning of their experiences, but they also observed a transformation in their learning. Transformative learning theory was ideal for this study because part of the transformative learning process is self-examination, a result when a person experiences a disorienting dilemma, which sets the transformation process in motion (Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 2000). The disorienting dilemma was the abrupt change from traditional brick-and-mortar classroom instruction to distance learning during COVID-19. Mezirow's learning theory helped explain how teachers as adult learners transformed their perspective in the context of challenges due to disorienting dilemmas such as changes in pedagogy and the instructional environment. The transformation of rural classroom elementary EL teachers was examined "in retrospect, where participants [reflected] back on their transformative experience … based on their participation in a shared learning event" (Taylor, 1997, p. 4).

Seminal works included Mezirow (1991, 1997, 2000) and Merriam (2004). Mezirow (1991) served as a framework for formulating educational theory and practice by examining how adults learn, how they make meaning of their learning experience, and how their perceptions are transformed by learning. Mezirow (1997) explains the relationship between transformative learning, autonomous thinking, and practical implications for adult learning. Finally, Mezirow's (2000) concepts examine core concepts of transformative learning. Merriam (2004) looks at the role of cognitive development in transformative learning theory.

***Technology, Pedagogy and Content Knowledge (TPACK)***

Teachers instruct in highly complex, dynamic classroom contexts, which require them to shift and change their understanding continuously (Harris et al., 2009; Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Effective teaching depends on rich, flexible, and integrated knowledge of content, subject matter, and pedagogy (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Shulman, 1986). Teachers must also integrate knowledge of student thinking and learning and, increasingly, knowledge of technology (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). They have to do more than learn technological applications; teachers must learn new techniques and skills as current technologies become obsolete (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The interaction of these various knowledge bases creates flexible knowledge needed to integrate technology successfully into teaching, both theoretically and practically (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge (TPACK) is a conceptual framework that explains the relationship and interaction of technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge constructs. TPACK helped to explain how teachers learned and transformed within the context of forced distance learning during COVID-19 (Greene & Jones, 2020). The seminal works for the TPACK framework were Shulman (1986), Mishra and Koehler (2006), and Koehler and Mishra (2009). Shulman's work of PCK (pre-digital technology Pedagogy Content Knowledge) focuses on the relationship and organization of content knowledge surrounding subject matter, pedagogy, and curriculum. Mishra and Koehler (2006) and Koehler and Mishra (2009) build on Shulman's research and integrate technology content knowledge, thus forming TPACK. The TPACK conceptual framework helped to understand how the various knowledge constructs affected teachers' ability to deliver instruction for distance learning.

## Problem Statement

The problem was that rural elementary classroom English language teachers were forced to conduct emergency remote teaching through distance learning because of the COVID-19

crisis, regardless of whether they had technology skills, understanding of online pedagogy, and knowledge of best practices or not (Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020; Dube, 2020; Tawfik et al., 2021; Tondeur et al., 2017). Many districts responded rapidly in transitioning to distance learning. However, teachers were challenged with their response and delivery of instruction due to new technologies, instructional apps, and platforms (Anderson & Hira, 2020; Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Kaden, 2020; Peterson et al., 2020). The lack of preparation and understanding of online methodologies further complicated teachers' instruction to students (Borup et al., 2020; Kalonde, 2017; Koehler et al., 2007, 2013; Pulham & Graham, 2018; Watts, 2016). Moreover, due to limited instructional time and materials, EL students did not necessarily have access to the gamut of scaffolding supports and resources necessary for English language learning (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017; Zhang, 2013; Zulaini et al., 2020).

This study was pertinent to technology use and engagement (Dunn & Kennedy, 2019). The trend for many US schools and school districts pre-COVID-19 was to invest in the necessary hardware, software, and infrastructure to provide technology-based instruction for twenty-first-century learning (Kalonde, 2017; Kay & Greenhill, 2010). The Common Core Standards, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards, and testing protocols require the integration of diverse learning technologies in classroom instruction (Kalonde, 2017). Consequently, the Internet is a necessary conduit for learning, and logistics must be considered. Rural areas would pose a problem for internet connectivity because they need numerous cell towers to provide adequate WIFI and the bandwidth needed to run some applications and online resources (International Telecommunication Union, 2012; Office of Educational Technology, 2017).

Additionally, synchronous online meetings were frequently dropped (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021). Limited assessments and data on student learning were questionable (Middleton, 2020). Thus, the problem this research addresses provided insight into how teachers overcame challenges and transformed their instruction in ways that positively or negatively impacted learning during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning, which resulted in a crisis-led change in conditions within a rural and marginalized setting (Dube, 2020; Liggett, 2010; Reich, 2019; Ukpokodu, 2008).

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the transformation of rural elementary classroom teachers who transitioned to distance learning with English learners (ELs) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley. At this stage of research, the factors influencing teachers' instructional experiences were defined as a transformation from their background knowledge and experiences, from interaction with colleagues and interaction with their students and virtual environment. The theory guiding this study was transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000), as it ascribed meaning to teachers' instructional practices and transformation through their experiences of modifying and adjusting pedagogies to meet the needs of distance learning ELLs within a rural setting. Technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK; Koehler et al., 2007) provided the conceptual framework that helped identify variables and concepts and synthesize related concepts to understand this phenomenon better (Imenda, 2014).

## Significance of the Study

According to the fall 2018 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), California reported the highest percentage of EL students within its public schools (19.4%), followed by

Texas (18.7%) and New Mexico (15.8%). Roughly half (27) of California's 58 counties is considered rural (California State Association of Counties). Seven of those are located in the Central Valley. The other 12 Central Valley counties are considered suburban or urban but have areas that are considered rural by NCES's definition. National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.) showed that the majority (91%) of rural and small schools in California enrolled students in schools with less than 2,500 students. Smaller and rural schools could not access larger schools' funds and resources (Vincent, 2018). Although the state is making attempts to resolve discrepancies between small/rural, large/urban, and suburban schools, the equity gap for funding and other resources remains (Coady, 2020; Jiménez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). Many families in rural areas are impoverished and have a lower socioeconomic status (SES), which affects access to technology and WIFI. (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; International Telecommunication Union, 2012; Office of Educational Technology, 2017; Whitacre et al., 2014). Educating ELs in rural areas of California already had its challenges before COVID-19 due to diverse ruralities, achievement and cultural gaps between the schools and families, and lack of training for pre-service teachers (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; Good et al., 2010). The significance of this study is to show how teachers overcame these many challenges and the long-lasting impact on students and teachers, whether positive or negative, as a result of this transformation.

The role of a teacher is multi-faceted and goes beyond delivering instruction and imparting knowledge to students. Teachers must continue growing their pedagogical knowledge to help students learn. New knowledge needs to be accessed, processed, evaluated and transformed into knowledge for practice (Guerrero & Deligiannidi, 2017). As professionals, teachers become learners as they process and evaluate new knowledge relevant to their practice and regularly update their knowledge base (Guerrero & Deligiannidi, 2017). This study was

significant because it describes how rural classroom EL teachers were transformed by their own learning experiences of teaching via distance learning. Without using traditional classroom resources, classroom EL teachers had to rely on technology to deliver instruction and provide content materials for students. The results revealed how teachers incorporated various pedagogical knowledge and methods into their distance instruction. How teachers learned new technologies and web-based applications through the interactions of social discourse was also seen (Burr, 2015; Galban, 2014; Gergen, 1985). The results demonstrated how they applied critical and self-reflection, rational discourse (Mezirow, 1991), and self-directed learning (Manning, 2007). Finally, findings revealed how teachers changed their view of using technology, for better or worse, indicating a transformation of their perspective (Mezirow, 2000).

Some teachers' challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic included access, evaluation, learning, instructional design, and technology support (Allen et al., 2021; Inverness Institute, 2021; Trust & Whalen, 2021). Technologies which teachers used primarily supported traditional classroom communication, information delivery, and management practices. Many educators were inadequately prepared for remote learning. Teachers of marginalized students have additional challenges to which both the environment and social context contribute. Nevertheless, the literature was limited in studies on the instructional challenges for ELLs in rural areas during the pandemic. Sikhangezile and Modise (2020) examined remote learning in rural parts of Zimbabwe, the effects of social distancing, and the cultural and psychological effects. However, their study focused only on remote learning of rural students. All teachers experienced challenges, yet there is a gap in the literature on how to help teachers meet rural ELL needs (Back, 2020; Coady, 2020; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Lee & Hawkins, 2015; Shim, 2013). Current literature focuses on distance learning with ELLs in general K-12, both in the US and

internationally, and higher education or marginalized and lower SES populations (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Beaton et al., 2021). The findings of this study should contribute to helping teachers, LEAs, and teacher education institutions equip and support ELL teacher practices in rural areas.

## Research Questions

The COVID-19 crisis forced teachers into a situation where they have had to become learners themselves. Teachers had to negotiate further meaning through cooperative social activity, discourse, and debate in communities of practice through a self-regulatory process (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Habermas, 1981). They also needed to utilize self-directed learning, a process where adult learners plan, implement, and evaluate their learning experiences (Brookfield, 1994; Knowles, 1975). To examine this phenomenon, the central question of this study was: What transformation did rural EL teachers experience while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### Central Research Question

*What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

### Sub Question One

*How did rural elementary classroom EL teachers implement technology to communicate instructional content and support their pedagogy?*

### Sub Question Two

*What role did teacher collaboration play during distance learning (common planning time, PLC, critical friends' groups)?*

**Sub Question Three**

*What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience in their technological skills and practices?*

**Sub Question Four**

*What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience in their pedagogical practices to meet the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of their students?*

**Sub Question Five**

*How does a new perspective of instruction impact teachers' current practice of instructing ELs with technology?*

## Definitions

Critical terms regarding the experiences of the participants and phenomenon to increase understanding and provide uniformity throughout the study are provided below:

1. *Andragogy* – The process of engaging adults in the learning experience (Knowles, 1960).
2. *Asynchronou*s – Mode of online instruction that is not live with the instructor (Watts, 2016)
3. *A cluster of meanings* – Phenomenological process of clustering similar meaning units from participants' statements once repetitive and overlapping statements have been identified (Moustakas, 1994).
4. *Digital Competence* - Refers to the skill of using digital technologies effectively and the ability to analyze online information critically (Heidari et al., 2021).

5. *Digital Informal Learning* – A digitally enriched environment where students can expand their learning experience through digital technologies (Song & Lee, 2014; Ungerer, 2016).
6. *Emergency Remote Learning* – A temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to a crisis involving fully remote teaching for instruction to be delivered face-to-face. Instruction would return to the former when the crisis has abated (Hodges et al., 2020).
7. *English Language Development* (ELD) – A designated or integrated study for English language instruction (California Department of Education, n.d.-a)
8. *Epoché/bracketing* – The first step in phenomenological reduction is where the researcher purposefully refrains from judgment and abstains from or stays away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things (Moustakas, 1994).
9. *Equitable learning* – Learning experiences and opportunities to which everyone has equal access (Kaden, 2020; Peterson et al., 2020).
10. *Horizontalization* – Phenomenological reduction process, where the researcher gives equal value to all participants` statements. Nonrepetitive or overlapping statements are not considered meaning units (Moustakas, 1994).
11. *Imaginative variation* is taking the participant's different perspectives and integrating structures into essences of meaning (Moustakas, 1994).
12. *Intentionality is a p*henomenological concept connecting humans to the world surrounding us, like our relationship with objects. Intentionality does not necessarily mean an intended action but the application of the mental relationship to the world around us. By recording the descriptions of the relationships to the intentional world, the

researcher gains insight into how participants experience the world around them (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

13. *Principal City* – A city that contains the primary population and economic center of a metropolitan statistical area, which, in turn, is defined as one or more contiguous counties that have a *core* area with a large population nucleus and adjacent communities that are highly integrated economically or socially with the core (Geverdt, 2019; NCES, 2022).
14. *Rural* – Rural areas are designated by the Census Bureau as those that do not lie inside an urbanized area or urban cluster (Geverdt, 2019; NCES, 2022). Rural includes all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area.
15. *Self-directed learning i*s when an individual takes the initiative of diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, and evaluating learning outcomes without the help of another (Knowles, 1975).
16. *Synchronous* – Mode of online instruction where the instructor is live and face-to-face with students (Watts, 2016).
17. *Urban* – Territories designated by the Census Bureau encompass at least 2,500 people, where at least 1,500 reside outside the educational institution (Geverdt, 2019; NCES, 2022). Urban area refers to both urbanized areas and urban clusters.
18. *Urbanized area* – Territories containing 50,000 or more people.
19. *Urban clusters* – Territories with populations between 2,500 and 50,000 (Geverdt, 2019; NCES, 2022).

## Summary

Chapter One introduced the problem and purpose of this phenomenological study. The problem focused on how rural classroom teachers had to instruct ELs with academic, social-

emotional, and behavioral needs during forced distance learning through the COVID-19 crisis and the continued impact on their current practices. The historical background summarized school district and educator responses to emergency remote teaching and distance learning involving technology and online instruction, as well as what impact online instruction had on academic, social, emotional, and language learning. Transformative learning was used for the theoretical framework of this study, while TPACK provided the conceptual framework that explained the relationships between the knowledge constructs of TPACK. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the transformation of rural elementary classroom teachers who transitioned to distance learning with English learners (Els) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley.

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Overview

Within a concise period, educational institutions responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by closing schools and offering instruction through traditional and hybrid models of distance learning. During the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning contributed to many critical issues as teachers had to learn new technologies and platforms and prepare lessons for online delivery in a short period of time (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020). The field is gaining insight and information from several perspectives; however, empirical research still needs to be conducted on this phenomenon, particularly for rural EL instruction. While all areas of education were challenged and are worthy of investigation, limited research exists in the subfield of rural English learners (Coady, 2020). Therefore, this study focuses on teachers' experiences instructing rural elementary English learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter Two discusses the theoretical framework for this study and related research. Literature reviews on qualitative and quantitative studies on technology-based instruction are reviewed, observing data collection and methodological analyses. Adult learning theories are examined as they tie into how teachers as adult learners learn new technologies, apps, and pedagogies related to distance learning for English learners. The Related Literature section examines the challenges of COVID-19 and distance learning. The concerns related to teaching English learners while using technology are also reviewed. The reaction of the teachers and management of EL instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic are discussed. Education in rural and marginalized areas is reviewed, followed by modifications to curriculum and instruction required by technology delivery systems. Studies related to motivation, technology, digital competency, and learning gaps are also examined.

## Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this explanation is to provide a helpful heuristic for "sorting out what exists at a broad philosophical level (assumptions) and what operates at a more practical level (interpretive frameworks)" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.17). From the beginning, it is important for the reader to understand why various approaches and frameworks are being introduced since multiple frameworks without adequate explanation can be confusing. This section will define the methods and discuss the purpose of the combination of frameworks. Integrating approaches is not easy; however, combining approaches "actually serves to deepen the answer to the research question" (Patton, 2015, p. 161). By creating an integrated inquiry framework, the hope is to combine the strengths of different approaches (Patton, 2015).

The conceptualization of the research process begins with the purpose statement, which is to understand the transformation of rural elementary classroom EL teachers who transitioned to distance learning with English learners during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley. The assumptions are ontological, epistemological, and axiological. These assumptions are then applied to research through paradigms, theories, or interpretive frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Paradigms are a "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). "Theories of theoretical orientations, on the other hand, are found in the literature, and they provide a general explanation as to what the researcher hopes to find in a study or a lens through which to view the needs of participants and communities in a study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 17).

This study seeks to describe the essence of rural classroom EL teacher transformation as they conducted distance learning initiated by ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic. The assumptions are the multiple realities of the teacher’s distance learning experience, various

content knowledge required to instruct Els with technology, and the values and beliefs related to their pedagogy. The TPACK paradigm (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Mishra, 2019; Mishra & Warr, 2021) *guides the action* teacher instruction. This qualitative inquiry of phenomenology combines the interpretive frameworks of constructivism, social constructionism, and transformation (see Chapter 3). The theory or theoretical orientation based on literature is Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1991, 1997, 2000).

**Transformative Learning Theory**

Although teachers instruct learners of various ages, they themselves are learners. They learn pedagogy – theories and methods used in teaching – to apply to their instructional practice. When teachers are engaged in their own learning, the techniques and practices for them to learn as adults are called *andragogy*, "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). Unlike developmental learning, where new and foundational knowledge requires modeling, assistance, scaffolding, and explanation from an experienced individual, adult learning moves from dependency to self-direction, where experiences become a rich resource for learning (Knowles, 1980; McCray, 2016). During the distance learning period of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were faced with having to learn new pedagogies and web-based applications, which aligned with distance learning (Bakir & Phirangee, 2021; Peterson et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2020). The quick transition did not allow for preparation or in-depth professional development; hence, many teachers were left to learn on their own (Francom et al., 2021; Hodges et al., 2020). A glimpse of how teachers learned to provide distance learning instruction to their students will help them better understand their transformational experience and its impact on their practice today. The theoretical framework adopted to interpret this experience is Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory.

Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory is based on German philosopher Jürgen Habermas' (1981) theory of communicative action. Communicative learning involves arriving at an understanding of interpretational meaning through discourse by means of using clarifying assumptions and making the best judgments that are informed, rational, and objective (Mezirow, 1991). Communication promotes dialogue, which helps explain any conflicting interpretations by observing evidence, arguments, and different points of view.

The main goals of transformative learning are for adult learners to foster greater autonomy in thinking, which requires communicative competence (Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 2000), and to help individuals challenge current assumptions on which they act (Christie et al., 2015). Critical reflection and rational/reflective discourse are two key components of transformative learning. According to Merriam (2004),

> critical reflection and reflective discourse are two processes that are used to facilitate transformative learning. . . [Being] able to critically reflect and in particular, to critically self-reflect on our own assumptions as well as those of others, which involves a critique a premise upon which the learner has defined a problem, mandates an advanced level of thinking. (p. 61)

This advanced level of thinking comes with mature development. Qualitative changes, such as different dimensions of context awareness, focus, goal awareness, critical reflectivity, and greater integration of the cognitive aspects of learning, come with age (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (1991) views adult development as an adult’s progressively enhanced ability to validate prior learning through reflective discourse and to act upon the resulting insights “toward a more inclusive differentiated permeable (open to other points of view), and integrated meaning perspective through rational discourse” (p. 7).

Transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference or meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1997). According to Mezirow (1997), adult experiences encompass "associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses as the frame of references that define their world" (p. 6). The frame of reference involves cognitive, volitional, and emotional components. Transformative learning changes the way individuals think about themselves and their world. Adults learn together by analyzing similar experiences and reaching a common understanding until a new rationale, evidence, or argument takes its place. Hence, adults transform their frame of reference through critical reflection on the assumptions based on their interpretations, beliefs, and points of view (Mezirow, 1997).

Transformative learning also involves a shift of consciousness (Knowles et al., 2005; Teaching Excellence in Adult Learning, 2011) and transforms adult perspectives (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). The process of perspective transformation involves becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions constrain how we perceive, understand, and feel about the world (Merriam, 2004). It can be the experience of not knowing or the challenge of combining social solidarity with physical isolation, which produces the kind of disruptions referred to as a disorienting dilemma (Christie et al., 2015;  Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (1991) identified ten phases of perspective transformation:

- a disorienting dilemma
- self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
- a critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
- recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
- exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

- planning of a course of action
- acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
- provisional trying of new roles
- building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and
- a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's unique perspective (pp. 168-169)

When adults are faced with an experience of not knowing, coping with uncertainty, ambiguity, and alienation, a change in one’s assumptions occurs, which involves a fundamental reordering and redescription of how one thinks, feels, or acts (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). Furthermore, perspective transformation emphasizes the necessity of establishing critical awareness of how perspectives and guiding assumptions limit our ways of living and existing in the world (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). Critically reflective dialogue about assumptions allows teachers to transform those assumptions and acquire the ability to cope with ambiguity, uncertainty, and contingency (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020; Mezirow, 1991).

By nature of the profession, teachers reflect critically on their instructional practice. They engage in problem-solving through discourse with peers, colleagues, and mentors. Mezirow points out that discourse is learner-centered (Mezirow, 1991). Teachers had to become learners themselves as they took on self-directed practices of unfamiliar and new pedagogical learning out of necessity due to the conditions brought about by the pandemic. They have been challenged to discover and examine their own assumptions regarding distance learning. Transformative learning theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the disorienting dilemmas that thrust teachers towards rational or reflective discourse for critical assessment. The collective experience of sharing and engaging in critical reflection and rational/reflective discourse leads to

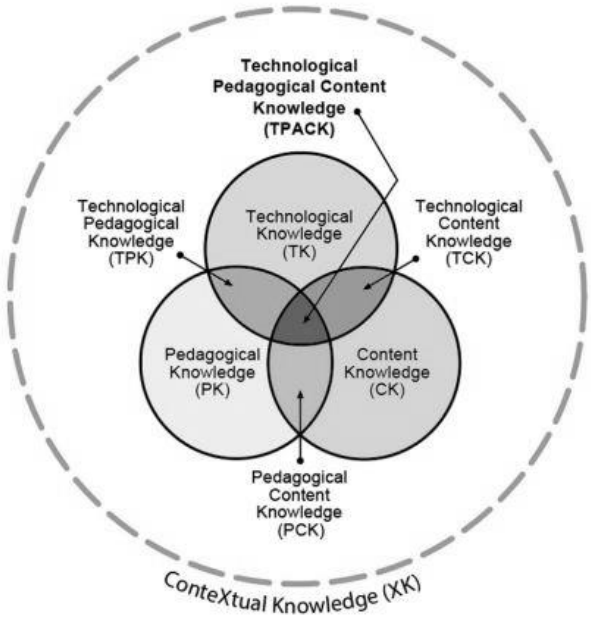
a clearer understanding. It allows them to arrive at a tentative best judgment to transform their own pedagogical processes of instructing rural EL students through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Technology, Pedagogy and Content Knowledge (TPACK)**

Technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge is a framework or an approach that brings together three forms of knowledge: content (CK), pedagogy (PK), and technology (TK), where TPACK is the intersection of all three concepts (see Figure 1). TPACK is based on Shulman's (1986) research on what knowledge is required for teaching. His ideas countered the philosophy of teacher preparation and training, which, at that time, focused on pedagogy and content knowledge in isolation, arguing that knowledge of subject matter and general pedagogical strategies alone were not sufficient enough for acquiring the knowledge of good teachers (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Shulman (1986) and his colleagues further challenged the cognitive psychology of learning, which focused almost exclusively on answering questions like "How do teachers decide what to teach, how to represent it, how to question students about it, and how to deal with problems of misunderstanding," (p. 7) strictly from the learner's perspective. He proposed a paradigm that focused on the questions "What are the sources of teacher knowledge? What does a teacher know and when did he or she come to know it? How is new knowledge acquired, old knowledge retrieved, and both combined to form a new knowledge base?" (Shulman, 1986, p. 7). Shulman contended that teachers think in complex ways about how particular content should be taught, stating that *pedagogical content knowledge* is "the content knowledge that deals with the teaching process, including 'the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others'" (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1021).

**Figure 1**

*Revised Version of TPACK Image*




*Note:* From "Considering Contextual Knowledge: The TPACK Diagram Gets an Upgrade," by P. Mishra, 2019, *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education.* (https://doi.org/10.1080/21532974.2019.1588611). Copyright 2019 by Punya Mishra. Reproduced with permission.

Technology has been integrated into K-12 instruction and continues to evolve (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). From teaching students 21st-century skills (Kay & Greenhill, 2010; Scarber et al., 2021) to The Common Core Standards, "students use technology, including the Internet…to interact and collaborate with others" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6). Technology knowledge cannot be context-free; "good teaching requires an understanding of how technology relates to the pedagogy and content" (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1026). Hence, skilled, meaningful, and effective teaching with technology require an understanding of how

technology is used to represent concepts and the pedagogical techniques that use technology to teach content. Teachers must also know why concepts are easy or difficult to learn and how technology can help remedy some of the challenges students face. Finally, educators need to be familiar with students' prior knowledge and theories of epistemology. The knowledge of how technologies can be used to scaffold existing understanding can lead to developing new epistemologies or strengthening old ones" (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Like Shulman's (1986) explanation of the necessity of integrating content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, technological knowledge must also be integrated. This forms the basis of TPACK.

Although the idea of TPACK is not new, and many scholars have discussed the constructs, Mishra and Koehler (2006) composed the framework in their seminal research. TPACK is referred to as a framework or an approach rather than a theory:

> Developing theory for educational technology is complicated because it requires a detailed understanding of complex relationships that are contextually bound. Moreover, it is not easy to study cause and effect when teachers, classrooms, politics, and curriculum goals vary from case to case. (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1018)

Each discipline has its uses and understanding of theories, frameworks, models, and approaches. The TPACK framework has developed and evolved since 2009, strongly influencing research, scholarship, teacher practice, and professional development (Mishra, 2019). It has gone in various directions to include different content areas (Harris et al., 2009; Larkin et al., 2012; Lee, 2008; Shin, 2021); English and second language learning (Greene & Jones, 2020; Paneru, 2018; Tai & Chuang, 2012; Tseng et al., 2019); and particularly in the areas of pre-service teacher education, (Brush & Saye, 2009; Sancar-Tokmak & Yanpar-Yelken, 2015; Santos & Castros, 2021; Tondeur et al., 2016).

The TPACK framework has also been revised by its seminal authors. Mishra (2019) changed the framework to include contextual knowledge (the teacher's knowledge of the context). This is the framework used for this research (see Figure 1). Contextual learning provides everything from a teacher's awareness of available technologies to the teacher's knowledge of their school, district, state, or national policies (Mishra, 2019). The purpose for making contextual knowledge another knowledge domain requires teachers to integrate context into instruction (Mishra, 2019). Contextual knowledge is especially significant for distance learning during COVID-19 because the context highly compounded the challenges of instruction during this time.

Teaching with technology is complicated, as teachers must often work outside of their comfort zone to take advantage of new technologies (Mishra & Warr, 2021). This could be due to their attitude toward technology, lack of knowledge of the technology, confidence in using it and integrating it into their lessons, as well as modifying their established practices since the newer technology may not fit well with their current pedagogy (Hsu, 2016; Mishra & Warr, 2021; Mundy et al., 2012; Scarber et al., 2021; Tawfik et al., 2021). Distance learning during COVID-19 revealed many challenges for both the teacher and learner in technology use and instruction. However, it critically demonstrated that teaching facilitated by technology is different from just shifting the content or processes onto the web (Mishra & Warr, 2021). For example:

> The significant disparities that exist in access to technology across our communities mean that standard practices of technology integration, which are often school-based, will not work. Moreover, teachers who have been proficient in using technology in face-to-face contexts may need to gain the knowledge to teach remotely or online. The rush to re-

> make the classroom through synchronous video meetings is an indication of the need for more relevant ability of online pedagogy. This indicates that TPACK does not exist in a vacuum. Technology integration occurs within specific systems and cultures of practice. These systems and cultures can often define or constrain the kinds of moves teachers can make in pedagogical space. By emphasizing the critical role of context, the TPACK model takes a step in this direction. (Mishra & Warr, 2021, p. 1)

TPACK has focused on integrating technology with content, pedagogy, and technology knowledge (Koehler et al., 2007; Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Distance learning during COVID-19 demonstrated that there needs to be less focus on the tool and more attention to the kinds of knowledge, skills, and attitudes teachers require to successfully integrate technology into their instruction (Mishra & Warr, 2021). Moreover, as the development of teacher knowledge types and overall TPACK is pursued, Mishra (2019) states, "It becomes clear that we ought to work toward increasing their contextual knowledge as well. Contextual knowledge becomes of critical importance to teachers, and a lack of it limits the effectiveness and success of any TPACK development or a teacher's attempts at technology integration" (p. 77).

**Integrating Transformative Learning and TPACK**

Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory explains *how and why* transformation happens. TPACK provides the framework to explain *what* prompts teacher transformations to occur. As Mishra and Koehler (2006) stated, studying cause and effect is difficult due to the dynamic complexities of teaching, students, and the context. Because this is a qualitative study, causes and effects are not examined. However, due to the dynamic complexities, teachers can provide multiple realities of varied experiences. Transformative learning and TPACK, therefore,

provide an excellent framework to view this phenomenon because distance learning is dynamic, complex, and contextually bound. Integrating transformative learning theory and the TPACK framework provides a model for viewing the phenomenon.

Before ERT, teachers were in equilibrium in their instruction (Figure 1). Their knowledge of content, pedagogy, technology, and context were all synchronized. In March 2020, COVID-19 initiated ERT-prompted distance learning, causing a change in TPACK. Change to any of the four domains requires a change to one or more of the other domains. COVID-19 affected the context (health, safety, political, and social), which is culture and practice-based. This prompted a change in instructional delivery, which affected contextual knowledge, technology knowledge, and the other content and pedagogy knowledge domains. When teachers were affected by the TPACK change, the perspective transformation process was initiated. As a disorienting dilemma or change rocked TPACK, teachers were thrust into self-examination and critical assessment of their assumptions. This was followed by recognizing that others experienced similar changes. While exploring instructional practices, they planned a course of action. Teachers acquired knowledge and skills for implementing the plan. Moreover, as they provisionally tried new practices, they gained competence and self-confidence in their new methods. This allowed them to reintegrate new perspectives into their instruction, resulting in transformative learning. As an integrated model, transformative learning and TPACK are used as the lens to understand teacher transformation.

## Related Literature

Less than one year after school districts in the United States began closing schools and commenced distance learning, studies and commentaries surfaced, focusing on teachers' personal experiences (Hill et al., 2020; Jain et al., 2021; Kaden, 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020).

Other studies examined methodologies, instruction (Basilaia & Kavavadze, 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020), technology, and implementation (Peterson et al., 2020). Articles on teacher support (Borup et al., 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020), teacher stress, and means of coping (Kim & Asbury, 2020) were also available. Although educators, community members, and policymakers affirm the need for in-depth studies on the psychological and social-emotional impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, updated studies on how it affected elementary students are still limited, with more focus on higher education and adult learning (Ingram et al., 2021; Klosky et al., 2022; Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2021). Currently, most empirical studies with data related to learning and instruction during the COVID-19 distance learning are focused on adults, international studies, professional learning, psychological, and socio-emotional. There is a gap in empirical research on the relationships between digital competence and academic achievement because data still needs to be forthcoming (Mehrgarz et al., 2021; Villegas & Garcia, 2022).

Even less is studied about how rural Els have been learning and coping through the pandemic (Coady, 2020). Russell (2020) looked at the anxieties of the situation and learning a language but mentioned that more research is urgently needed to understand whether these students experienced higher levels of language anxiety due to their lack of agency in selecting their learning environment (face-to-face or online). Studies dealing with feelings of isolation are also limited (Marstaller, 2020; Peterson et al., 2020). Ample literature notes information and studies on online methodologies, support, and student-independent language learning (Thamarana, 2016; Zhang, 2013). However, the amount of online independent language learning information for elementary students and marginalized populations is slim (Dube, 2020; Vincent, 2018). Distance learning of foreign languages in higher education has revealed the difficulties university instructors had to overcome. Maican and Cocoradă (2021) reviewed the literature on

the efficacy of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), which showed positive effects on the quality of writing, reading, and listening skills. However, selecting relevant activities and balanced integration of all language skills have been challenging when students could not access easily access them. Information related to the difficulties surrounding online foreign language learning is also limited (Zulaini et al., 2020).

The social ramifications of distance learning have educators, community and political leaders, and parents highly concerned. Many are worried about meeting educational needs. However, social distancing relegated younger and older students alike to refrain from the very activity all educators have been engrained with during their pre-service training: social interaction, which is critical to language development. Many questions and concerns surround the development of students' socialization and how the lack of interaction has affected young people. Some studies demonstrated pronounced adverse effects of prolonged school closures and confinement to homes on children's physical and mental health (Brazendale et al., 2017; Dunton et al., 2020; Garcia de Avila et al., 2020). There is also the long-lasting, wide-ranging, and substantial psychological impact of quarantine to consider (Brooks et al., 2020; Cowie & Myers, 2021).

***Pandemics in Perspective***

Examining pandemics in perspective leads to a better understanding of why extreme measures were taken for school closures. During the mid and late 19$^{th}$ century, it was not uncommon for children and adults to be in quarantine and isolation because of various epidemics such as malaria, dysentery, and cholera (Shah, 2017). Although epidemics continued, it was in the early 1900s that worldwide pandemics began to surface, such as polio. In 1916, there were 27,000 cases of polio in the US, with 6,000 deaths (Cowie & Myers, 2021; Rich, 2020). The

polio vaccine was not available until 1955 (CDC, 2018). The 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic produced 500 million cases with 50 million deaths worldwide, where 675,000 deaths were in the US alone (CDC Pandemic Resources, 2018). The CDC (2019) reported an estimated 60.8 million cases of H1N1 virus, with 12,469 deaths. Globally, 80% of the deaths occurred in people younger than 65 years of age. Vaccines were not available until after the peak of the second wave. Finally, the COVID-19 virus affected 78,855,000 cases in the US, with 947,882 deaths as of February 28, 2022 (CDC, 2022; see Appendix D for pandemic comparison).

### *Purpose of School Closures*

Although COVID-19 caused significant disruptions in the educational system, non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) such as masks, social distancing, school closures, and quarantines have been a common practice for several pandemics (Markel et al., 2007; Meyers & Thomasson, 2021; Roos, 2020). The purpose for school closures is to lower the peak mortality burden during a pandemic or seasonal influenza (Bootsma & Ferguson, 2007; Ferguson et al., 2006; Halloran et al., 2008; Kelso et al., 2009). Epidemic simulations showed that school closures lessen the peak but not the mortality rate (Cauchemez et al., 2008; Johnson et al., 2008; Mniszewski et al., 2008). Moreover, the commonality of all school closures was the extent of varied closures across political and geographical locations (Meyers & Thomasson, 2021).

**Effects of School Closure on Learning Pre-COVID-19.** When schooling is disrupted for even short periods, younger children's performance can be negatively affected (Meyers & Thomasson, 2021). Disruptions during crucial points of development may cause problems in educational attainment in the long run (Meyers & Thomasson, 2021). Interruptions in schooling impacted student performance and development, and attrition in the case of the polio pandemic (Meyers & Thomasson, 2021).

In the initial school closures of pandemics, there was a focus on medical health to contain the spread. Before the Progressive Era, little was done to reintroduce children with medical illnesses to school; however, because school nurses were brought into the public school system, systematic contact with students became the norm for cities and towns. Many school-based health clinics were staffed with full-time nurses and organized plans for isolation. The broadest reach was educating children and parents about personal hygiene (Klaiman et al., 2009). During the Swine Flu, there was a more significant concern for mental and social development and students receiving social services (Faherty et al., 2019). Students with special needs and individualized education plans (IEPs) were also considered due to fewer instructional hours. Other concerns affected by school closures included complete daycare, maintaining safety while parents worked, and providing free school meals.

In the case of the H1N1 Swine Flu virus of 2009, school closures could have resulted in substantial costs to society. The potential costs of lost productivity and childcare far outweighed the cost savings in preventing influenza cases. (Brown, 2001; Klaiman et al., 2009). In May 2009, the CDC modified its initial guidance for schools with confirmed or suspected cases to close for up to 14 days, depending on the scope and severity of the illness (Roos & Schnirring, 2009). By August 2009, the CDC advised against closing schools (McKenna, 2009). The Department of Education Secretary advised that schools may still be in session but should prepare for temporary homeschooling plans (McKenna, 2009). Surveys found that during school closures, students continued face-to-face interactions with other students and the community, although far fewer than if they were in school. The level of interaction increased with grade; this was the same with the 1918 Spanish Flu (Miller et al., 2010). Some parents stayed home; others had difficulty finding childcare. School attendance was another problem because laws mandated

the number of instructional days. Due to the emergency, some states had to pass laws to waive the instructional days' requirement for school closure (Klaiman et al., 2009).

***Pandemics and School Closures***

COVID-19 has been compared with the Spanish Flu of 1918-1919 (see Appendix D). However, the effects of missed school and school closures on educational attainment began before the Spanish Flu with the polio pandemic in 1916 (Meyers & Thomasson, 2021). The polio epidemic started in June 1916 and began to accelerate in July, persisting through the beginning of the school year (Meyers & Thomasson, 2021). This postponed school start dates nationwide, with the latest documented start date as October 2, 1916, in Boston (Meyers & Thomasson, 2021). Since children under ten were most susceptible, schools that did not close early experienced high absenteeism rates. Although the number of students enrolled in public schools, especially high schools, began to increase in the early 1900s, the effects of school closure may have prompted children 14 years and older to quit school and work because labor laws permitted it at the time. In 1910, 22 states had 14 years old as the minimum age for working in manufacturing (Moehling, 1999). By 1918, more students were staying in school due to the reformed curricula of the Progressive Era compulsory attendance policy (Edson, 1978; Gutek, 2011).

Unlike polio, which is transmitted by fecal material, the Spanish flu, H1N1 virus, and COVID-19 are airborne. Because there were no vaccines to mitigate the spread of the viruses, communities and schools relied on NPIs (Markel et al., 2007; Germanna et al., 2019; Stern et al.,2009). This involved social distancing, wearing masks, quarantine, and isolation. In the case of polio, it also involved washing the streets (Meyers & Thomasson, 2021). School closures were seen as an NPI.

Spanish Flu differed from COVID-19. The former pandemic struck the US in three waves, peaking during the second wave and resulting in the highest fatality rates (CDC, 2018). Schools were closed during the second and third waves. Death rates were the highest among children (0-5) and workers 25-34, different from COVID-19, which had the highest mortality rates among older adults (Ager et al., 2020). School closures were brief, unlike COVID-19, and the "lack of effective remote learning platforms in 1918 may have reduced the scope for school closures to increase socioeconomic inequality (Ager et al., 2020). Although many people stayed home, authorities found school closures for NPI ineffective due to schools' lack of sanitation and hygiene. Most states did not mandate closures. Few cities, New York, Chicago, and New Haven, did not close schools (Ager et al., 2020; The New York Times, 1918; Stern et al., 2010; Stern et al., 2009). In some areas like New York, tenement housing meant unsanitary conditions for children. They were better off in school. High absenteeism rates resulted from children staying home and families fearing infection. Schools were pressured to remain open as long as possible and to reopen quickly. Some cities reopened schools too soon before the pandemic was contained, forcing schools to close once again (Ager et al., 2020).

The H1N1 virus of 2009, or Swine Flu, closed schools during the first wave. Although it primarily affected children and young and middle-aged adults, morbidity rates were higher in adults over 65 (CDC, 2009). Few young people had any existing immunity compared with almost one-third of people over 60 who tested for antibodies. Existing immunity for older people was most likely due to exposure to a strain of the H1N1 virus earlier in their lives (CDC, 2009). The rationale for school closures was based on limiting the spread of the virus in the community, protecting vulnerable children, and reacting to staff shortages due to parents' fear of becoming infected (Klaiman et al., 2009). Although this rationale was not observed during the Spring 2009

H1N1 outbreak, school closures due to high levels of absenteeism became common in the fall (Klaiman et al., 2009). A total of 980 schools across 24 states, including the District of Columbia, shut down by May 2009 (CDC Resources, 2009; EdWeek, 2009).

### *K-12 School Preparedness for Pandemic*

Uscher-Pines et al.'s (2018) research showed that 35 states had some type of pandemic response or guidelines in place since schools were already preparing for the possibility of school closures due to the H1N1 virus in 2009. The response guidelines varied from California's seven-page skeletal pandemic response for K-12 education (California Department of Education, 2006) to Georgia's Department of Education's 89-page guideline explaining delivery systems and instructional guidance, leadership, teacher, and stakeholder duties and responsibilities (Woods, n.d.).

## Challenges from the COVID-19 Pandemic and Distance Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the world, including health organizations, the economy, politics, labor, quality of life, and education (UNESCO, 2020). Both public and private schools all over the United States had to accommodate quickly and transition to distance learning, in many cases, with no initial technology or instructional training (Peterson et al., 2020). Lockdowns and stay-at-home orders began in March 2020 (Marstaller, 2020). Although it had been less than three months when stay-at-home orders were given and schools relegated to distance learning in the United States, other countries like China and Iran had already conducted distance and virtual learning for six months (Huang et al., 2020).

Initial research and information needed to be included (Salzer, 2020). After conducting Boolean searches in June 2020 of various databases using key terms COVID-19 *and* education, COVID-19 *and* K-12, COVID-19 *and* virtual learning, COVID-19 *and* distance learning,

pandemic *and* distance learning, COVID-19 *and* technology, COVID-19 *and* ESL, there were only a handful of articles and none of them from the United States (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020). Although there was considerable literature regarding technology-based learning and delivery systems for higher education and professional learning (e.g., medical and nursing school; Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020), more was needed in the K-12 realm. Only one article from China explained its educational response to COVID-19 and how schools dealt with distance instruction (Huang et al., 2020). Dube (2020) addressed the challenges of distance learning for students in rural South Africa, particularly those lacking the devices and WIFI necessary for virtual learning. More applicable to this study, Zulaini et al. (2020) discussed the challenges of teaching a foreign language online, especially since the usual realia and classroom tools were not readily available. Although more information has become available regarding K-12 distance learning since the major COVID-19 outbreak, there still needs to be a significant gap in the literature for EL and rural distance learning during this time.

Another critical issue related to school closures and technology use is variation and equity. Not all schools in the United States had the equipment or capability to deliver online learning. The initial consideration for distance learning dates back to 2009 in response to the H1N1 virus when the United States looked at possible school closures due to the pandemic (Uscher-Pines et al., 2018). Other researchers examined the variability of school closure decisions and the efficacy of academic instruction (Day, 2015; Klaiman et al., 2009). Response guidelines varied from state to state (California Department of Education, 2006; Klaiman et al., 2009; Uscher-Pines et al., 2018). Concerns centered around equity were the conditions and support systems for equitable learning outcomes for students with disabilities, transient and homeless students, and those lacking technological and financial resources. These needed to be

explored to develop new guidelines for supporting various vulnerable and marginalized populations (Kaden, 2020; Peterson et al., 2020).

***Emergency Remote Learning***

Uscher-Pines et al. (2018) noted that more than half of the states had a plan that explained a swift transition to school closures and an alternative learning system in the event of another pandemic. The responses and preparedness were organized following school district guidelines. Despite school closure plans written post-H1N1, schools needed to prepare for the change and availability of new technologies, educational apps, and delivery platforms from 2009 to 2020 (Day, 2015; Klaiman et al., 2009; Uscher-Pines et al., 2018 With the additional problem of remote teaching, TPACK presented challenges for educators. Most research related to the effectiveness of digital technology in a language learning classroom has been reported in colleges, universities, adult education centers, or international K-12 settings. Therefore, more research is needed in K-12 settings related not only to the efficacy of technology-based instruction for English language learning but also to the utilization of TPACK for language instruction (Cheng, 2016; Gill & Dalgarno, 2017; Habibi et al., 2020; Paneru, 2018). Conversely, a vast body of literature that examines the usage and implications of activities that integrate and implement technology in classroom instruction exists (Flores, 2020; Kazakoff et al., 2018; Macaruso et al., 2020; Schellinger et al., 2019). As for TPACK, Harris and Wildman's (2019) research showed over 1,200 journal articles and book chapters, over 315 dissertations, and 28 books that focus on TPACK as the central construct since 2009.

Peterson et al. (2020) examined how Minnesota schools embraced distance learning as educational leaders contemplated decisions for technology, instruction, communication, attendance, and food distribution. Although the goal was to support continued academic

achievement for all students, Peterson et al. related that the reality of students' homelife guided leaders' expectations. Kaden (2020) identified two of the biggest hurdles for distance learning in American schools: the limited number of digital devices and the lack of high-speed internet at home. Kaden (2020) asserted a need to research and document shifts in teaching practices and teacher responsibilities. These new approaches would influence future educational policies.

It is critical to understand that online learning during COVID-19 was no ordinary transition nor "online instruction" as traditionally defined (Marshall et al., 2020), but emergency remote teaching. Hodges et al. (2020) describe it as "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances" (Emergency Remote Teaching section). One of the significant differences between online learning and ERT is that online learning is "a viable, sustainable, valuable method of teaching and learning" (Manfuso, 2020). Many teacher-preparation programs loosely reference *online* learning to require teachers to use multimedia tools and digital resources in their instruction (Kaden, 2020). It is flexible and accessible to students remotely, whereas the online environment delivery of instruction relies heavily on asynchronous methods of communication (Roddy et al., 2017). Roddy et al. (2017) further explained that intensive online environments require effective communication and technology management. Content delivery and assessment are especially significant because more time is needed to adapt to new tools and operating environments.

Moreover, monitoring student progress is also essential for instructors to keep students engaged and attentive. In their study, Marshall et al. (2020) found that 92.4% of the 328 teachers surveyed said they had never taught online before the emergency transition. One participant indicated that all her "pedagogical training assumed that teaching would take place in a face-to-face environment" (Marshall et al., 2020, p. 48).

Initial studies showed that the transition to remote learning created challenges in job functions and responsibilities, technological competence, administrative skills, communication, responsiveness, and efficacy (Marshall et al., 2020; Oliveria et al., 2021; Roddy et al., 2017; Trust & Whalen, 2020). Despite difficulties in attaining desired learning outcomes, lack of training, personal experience in productivity, motivation, workload, and mental health, teachers demonstrated increased teacher-student interaction, new ways of developing content, and resilience to adapt and adopt new technologies (Oliveria et al., 2021).

### *Teacher Response*

Overall, teachers' response to the pandemic was feeling overwhelmed and unprepared, particularly in light of involuntary e-learning (Klapproth et al., 2020; Kulikowski et al., 2021; Trust & Whalen, 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Trust and Whalen (2020) indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a significant variation in educators' readiness to use technology for distance learning. Trust and Whalen (2020) found that "the lack of preparation, training, and support the participants had for designing quality instruction with technology created additional stressors and barriers to teaching and learning remotely in times of need" (p. 193). That stress was beyond what they felt when teaching students in a classroom context. In their quantitative study with teachers in German schools (N = 380), Klapproth et al. (2020) found that stressors included increased workload and a lack of technological competence. Some stress was caused by the inability to meet student needs (Minkos & Gelbar, 2021) and engage students (Kaden, 2020). Uncertainty and changing routines were also stressors (Grooms & Childs, 2021). Although there were patterns of stressors generalizable in the US and worldwide, other stressors were unique to schools and individual teachers (The Hunt Institute, 2021; The Inverness Institute, 2021a, b).

## Teaching English Language Learners

Natural progression in language development is the best way of acquiring a language. Krashen and Terrell's (1998) natural approach states that students developing a second language should not be taught in the traditional grammar-translation method but in ways where speech is communicative and authentic. This includes respecting the time a language learner needs to process and organize language within the cognitive domain. Hence, instruction should focus not on language output but on understanding instructional input (Krashen, 1992). Language teachers should promote interaction within the environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Students should receive low-impact activities and learning (Krashen, 1992). Moreover, teachers should promote consistent interaction and the negotiation of meaning within the student's learning level (Eun, 2019; Krashen, 1982; Piaget, 1953; Vygotsky, 1982).

Educators questioned the new distance learning because a holistic approach is better suited for learning in younger children. During COVID-19 distance learning, many teachers could not meet students' needs because they were ill-equipped to transition to distance learning. With added stress and anxiety, many language learners need to prepare for the virtual learning environment (Russell, 2020; Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2020).

***Constructive and Social Construction Development***

Piaget (1969) explained that humans construct meaning through schema. Experiences are what make up various schemata. Hence, learning results as schema builds one on top of the other. While younger learners have a natural advantage of holistic developmental learning due to brain plasticity and development, older learners do not experience the same biological benefits. Eriksen Robert Kegan (2000) posited that older learners utilize constructive theories based on Piaget (1963). Kegan stated that older learners continue to make meaning by accommodating

new knowledge. Whereas in childhood, stages are correlated with age, they are not in older learners and adults.

Vygotsky's (1978) ideas of social interaction must be reviewed since school learning for the EL includes language learning to understand social construction. Students need to be able to connect to what they are learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Krashen, 1982). Meaning is constructed both in terms of academic learning and language. While the ability to communicate knowledge may not be present in an EL, it does not necessarily entail that the student lacks the cognitive ability to understand knowledge or even construct meaning for it; the student lacks language skills. This constant interaction between the student, teacher, and materials occurs within what Vygotsky (1978) referred to as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). From the language learner's perspective, what needs to be clearly understood is that this ZPD is either a huge sphere of learning or the EL has several of these that overlap because of the lack of language, background knowledge, and technology skills. Els were already immensely diverse and had varying experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mitchell, 2020). This included a broader range of educational, instructional, physical, and health-related needs (Mitchell, 2020).

***Learning Through Social Interaction***

Combining language learning and holistic developmental learning helps language learners construct meaning for both language and knowledge purposes. Most importantly, however, the interaction between the teacher, students, learning materials, and the environment highly influences learning outcomes. (Agbadogun, 2014). Whether the EL is conscientious of their language acquisition, second language learning requires the learner to take ownership of learning activities through interaction, active participation, and use of the target language (Agbadogun, 2014). Hence, teachers and students can only rely on direct instruction or teacher-

centered instruction. Knowledge is best constructed when meaning is negotiated within social interaction and learner-centered environments (Agbadogun, 2014; Piaget, 1969). Agbadogun (2014) further states that classroom interaction promotes better learning outcomes and critical thinking. Additionally, learning with applications needs to be connected. The Els' learning context is particularly effective when it is connected to visual images (Krashen, 1982; Mayer, 2001).

Distance learning has limited social interaction, which is essential to Els's learning needs. The transition to distance learning changed the second language skills students were practicing (Sayer & Braun, 2021). Students routinely engaged in listening and speaking during regular in-class instruction. However, teachers resorted to hastily compiled learning packets focused on reading and writing. Sayer and Braun (2021) also noted that online resources available for content-area learning did not support the ELs' need for language acquisition because they needed more meaningful social interactions necessary for second language learning. This affected emergent reading primary-level English learners since remote learning limited one-on-one or small group instruction, providing support through scaffolded oral interaction (Sayer & Braun, 2021). Primary learners usually receive literacy support through any combination of the classroom teacher, bilingual instructional aides, ELD teacher, or a reading specialist. Oral interaction, supported by differentiated learning, became limited or halted altogether due to online instruction (Sayer & Braun, 2021).

***Integrated Learning Environments for Academic Learning***

Els must also contend with the teacher's perception of their language ability (Lichtman, 2016). The language learner may exhibit English proficiency because they demonstrate advanced fluency in spoken language, use appropriate language terms and expressions, and show a cultural

understanding both from the school and American culture (Krashen & Terrell, 1998). The general education teacher can misconstrue this as being proficient, especially if the EL has been re-designated as fluent English proficient (Cummins, 1979/2008). Scaffolding and support offered through sheltered language programs may prematurely cease as students are mainstreamed back into their general education classroom (Gibbons, 1991). Students may only develop language proficiency with scaffolding and support. Sheltered language instruction provides content-based instruction where teachers adapt their English language to the student's proficiency level (Colorin Colorado, 1993). The lack of language support may influence their academic language comprehension. Sheltered English and content-based programs focus on content rather than language development. If decreased scaffolding and support can result from a reclassification, limited time and technology challenges from distance learning can also contribute to reduced support.

**BICS vs CALP.** Fluency in English ability that can mislead teachers is referred to by Jim Cummins (1979) as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). This conversational language is also called the *playground language* (Gibbons, 1991). Language learners can be proficient in it as they interact with their friends and explain basic everyday happenings to their teacher. Although BICS can be significantly developed and mislead teachers, these language learners are still weak in their Cognitive Academic Language Processing (CALP). In this case, the academic language, expressions, technical terminology, and content-specific vocabulary is used and is referred to as what Gibbons (1991) calls "classroom language." In schools focusing on developing language proficiency and communication, students can severely need more academic knowledge in all content areas. CALP develops through social interaction from birth

but later is differentiated from BICS after the student enters school and uses the language effectively; they need CALP to progress at each grade level.

**Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices.** Despite training, available resources, and support, many teachers, particularly pre-service teachers, still rely on methods and practices they remember from when they were students, usually *sink or swim* (Cho & Clark-Gareca, 2020; Lortie, 1975). ELs do well when culturally and linguistically responsive practices are utilized, and the student's background can be connected with content (Bonner et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2019; Kibler et al., 2019). The *English Language Arts/ English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* defines culturally and linguistically responsive instruction as

> using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It is culturally validating and affirming. Along with improving academic achievement, these approaches to teaching are committed to helping students of color maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities. It helps develop a sense of personal efficacy, building positive relationships and shared responsibility while they acquire an ethic of success that is compatible with cultural pride. Infusing the history and culture of the students into the curriculum is essential for students to maintain personal perceptions of competence and positive school socialization. (Collins et al., 2015, p. 917)

Extant literature on culturally responsive teaching points to teachers' lack of self-efficacy and challenges working with culturally diverse students (Parkhouse et al., 2019). Bottiani et al. (2018) reviewed in-service interventions to promote educators' use of culturally responsive

teaching (CRT). Existing literature reveals that CRT aims to promote equitable learning environments; however, findings showed that the studies needed to utilize rigorous design features to permit causal inference. Intentional inclusion of the students' culture into the daily life of the classroom enhances student learning experiences (Bennett et al., 2021; Bonner et al., 2018).

Distance learning complicated CRT because time, space, and engagement were limited. The US Department of Education (2019) reported that only some teachers assigned Els to use digital learning outside of class due to students' lack of technology access at home (Zehler et al., 2019). Furthermore, EL teachers were more apt to use general digital resources than applications specifically designed for ELs. If teachers take time to effectively develop their own linguistically responsive teaching practices with technology, applying them to their class instruction will be easier (Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). In times of an emergency crisis, utilizing CRT or linguistically responsive teaching (LRT) can be overwhelming since teachers are being asked to conduct teaching strategies they are unfamiliar with (Lopez, 2021). Hence, teachers may be more apt to continue using digital resources for the general population than those specific to ELs.

***Challenges to Sheltered Instructional Programs During Distance Learning***

Regardless of which sheltered instruction model was used, distance learning complicated it, mainly when both content and English instruction were done without thoughtful planning and integration of pedagogies, content knowledge, technology skills, and context (Mishra & Warr, 2021). Teachers were overwhelmed with preparing general content lessons for online delivery while using new and unfamiliar technologies (Allen et al., 2021; Anderson & Hira, 2020; The Inverness Institute, 2021a, b). The literature acknowledges the challenges of distance learning

during the pandemic like teacher learning, learning management systems, access, technology concerns, student use of technology, home support of student technology, and sustainability (Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2021). The literature also clearly shows how teachers combine their knowledge of content area and knowledge of pedagogy into their teaching practice. (Shulman, 1986). Kundu and Bej (2021) state that this is also essential for distance learning,

> where it is vital to carefully direct the integration of technology based on the teacher's knowledge of pedagogies and content…. Therefore, online teaching requires some skills to support a teacher's role as an intersection point for technology, pedagogy, and content. (Kundu & Bej, 2021, p. 3)

This is in acknowledgment of TPACK and directed to general education (Koehler et al., 2013, 2007; Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). However, it excludes English learning. Therein lies the gap in the literature.

Research related to TPACK with English language learning exists. Greene and Jones (2020) reviewed 24 articles of 365 identified in their literature review on TPACK and ELLs. The objective was to determine whether TPACK was based on knowledge or competence. Of all the self-reporting cases, 81.82% reported that TPACK was based on ability compared to 18.18% on performance. Tai and Cheung (2012) reviewed literature examining computer-assisted language learning competencies (CALL) and knowledge that effectively integrated technology into the classroom environment. In a case study, Tseng (2017) presented empirical data showing how a bundled TPACK-SLA (Second Language Acquisition) enhanced lesson helped students develop interpersonal communication competency by negotiating meaning. However, in most cases, TPACK, in association with English language learning, is generally associated with EFL,

international schools, or higher education (Adipat, 2021; Fariknah, 2021; Nguyen, 2022; Paneru, 2018; Sariçoban et al., 2019; Setiawan et al., 2018; Tai et al., 2015; Tseng et al., 2019). Even the references indicating *TPACK* and *language learning* cited in Greene and Jones (2020) were either EFL, international schools, or higher education-related. The one study Greene and Jones (2020) mentioned included *TPACK*, *K*-12, or *online learning* but needed to cover *English language learning.* Hence, learning contexts are either entirely English language instruction or immersion-based. The literature does not cover TPACK concerning K-12 sheltered instruction programs.

Many features of sheltered instruction became challenging to maintain because of the unique differentiation built into the models specifically to support Els. Components like support, materials, hands-on activities, real-life applications, collaboration and cooperative learning, pairing, and grouping by proficiency levels for a multi-level class were complex. Technology intended for general education could have been better suited for language learning, placing an added burden on sheltered instruction online (Kennedy & Dunn, 2018; Mahyoob, 2020). In their study, Sayer and Braun (2021) researched why Els were the most disadvantaged than other students during the COVID-19 distance learning. Their findings revealed that socioeconomically marginalized families and immigrant families needed to prepare to provide resources to shift to remote learning (Villegas & Garcia, 2022). There were also significant communication challenges during the organization and distribution of resources. Finally, although online resources and distance learning were in place for content learning, they did not necessarily support students' English learning. They needed more meaningful social interactions to support second language learning (Sayer & Braun, 2021). Sayer and Braun's research also demonstrated

how distance learning impacted the home and parent support necessary for successful sheltered instruction.

***EL Assessment and Reclassification***

In the 2019-20 school year, approximately 1.145 million English learners attended California public schools (California Department of Education, 2021). The goals of CDOE are to ensure that ELs achieve equivalent rigorous grade-level academic standards that are expected of all students. The standards are met through designated and integrated English language development (ELD) instruction, dual language immersion programs, transitional or developmental programs, or structured English immersion. Students are classified based on their proficiency placement through the English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC). However, students were not reclassified within the 2019-2020 school year because there was no ELPAC testing. The current literature regarding what teachers did to support their ELs based on their classifications is limited. There was also a considerable degree of variability (Stavely, 2020). The re-designation was based on the existing reclassification criteria. The criteria included locally determined teacher evaluation, Parent opinion and input, and locally determined comparison of student performance in basic skills against empirically established performance criteria for English proficient students of the same age (California Department of Education, 2021).

Usually, ELPAC's overall placement of 4 of the English language proficiency assessment is required to determine reclassification. California teachers must give Els integrated and designated instruction by law. However, distance learning created challenges, making it difficult to conduct designated learning (explicitly focused on ELD). Regular classroom instruction

includes self-contained, planned leveled, small, and whole-group instruction to meet the varying degrees of English language proficiency (Lopez, 2021; Ong & McLean, 2014).

Once students are reclassified as fluent English proficient (RFEP), they no longer come under the English language development umbrella, which requires language instruction. They are then put into *monitor* status. This new designation may give students a fluently proficient designation but needs to indicate competence in English-based content learning. Current literature related to K-12 English learner reclassification and leveled instruction during distance learning is yet sparse because "the tools to measure their progress in becoming proficient in English became largely unavailable after California schools switched to distance learning in March 2020" (Hill et al., 2021, p. 3). However, there needs to be more literature and studies on how teachers dealt with distance learning with ELs and the challenge of providing leveled instruction based on their classifications. A particular concern is for ELs, who were in a "monitor" state as they did not require designated ELD; however, they still needed language scaffolding to support their academic performance, which could be affected due to language deficit (Linquanti et al., 2016).

**Teaching English Language Learners in Rural Areas**

Coady (2019) categorized *rural* as both a place and descriptor where "geography, space, and place intersect and are characteristics of culture" (p. 2). Instructing English learners has difficulties but is further challenged by logistics and location. Many students living in rural areas also come from poverty. Children from low-income households live in conditions not conducive to online learning (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). These marginalized students are already at risk. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the California Department of Education was already en route to provide targeted assistance to the state's small and rural school districts (Vincent, 2018).

Targeted assistance was an effort to provide adequate and equitable learning facilities for small and rural school districts. The challenges that small and rural districts have faced are the management of district facilities, budget constraints due to the lack of funding, and the need for more expertise and adequate staffing (Vincent, 2018).

Due to the limitations and difficulties of distance learning, namely the lack of devices and high-speed internet, California State partnered with private companies, businesses, and philanthropists to assist in providing funding and devices needed for distance learning (Office of Governor Newsom, 2020f). School districts in other rural and poverty-stricken districts in the US received different funds. (García & Weiss, 2020; Lopez, 2021; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020).

In California's case, rural and marginalized students had access to technology. Nevertheless, student score results from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) standardized testing indicate learning gaps. The CAASPP was suspended for California students for the 2019-2020 school year. Schools had the option for testing in the 2020-21 school year. Routine testing resumed during the 2021-2022 school year. The results show consistently lower scores post-COVID-19 and distance learning than before the pandemic (see Appendix P).

***The Significance of Communities***

In their literature review of case studies from Wisconsin rural school districts, Lee and Hawkins' (2015) discovered that Els destined for rural schools were isolated, understaffed, and overwhelmed. Collaboration with general education teachers was complex, further exacerbated by the inferior classroom spaces (Liggett, 2010). Teachers themselves felt marginalized and longed for collaboration and support. Liggett found that providing structural support for teachers

was essential not only to the academic success of ELLs but also to the personal and professional growth of the English language teacher.

The pandemic intensified the need to understand crisis management and change, mainly where management was minimal, lacking, or underdeveloped (Harris, 2020). Students from low-income families often attend structurally disenfranchised schools. Districts and leadership needed to focus on schools in ethnically and socioeconomically diverse school communities (Grooms & Childs, 2021). The pandemic brought about a crisis where new ways of teaching and learning unexpectedly shifted from the classroom to the home environment (Beaton et al., 2021). The new normal offered increased opportunities and agency for children in marginalized situations where the attention was going towards embracing the community where they reside. In many ways, it allowed the various agencies to come and work together for equitable opportunities for learning and instruction.

Many English learners learning multiple languages at home, school, and community may already speak different languages. Back (2020) looked at EL instruction as a village with translanguaging and collective responsibility. Back's study dealt mainly with the gap in TESOL research regarding how professional development can mold teachers' attitudes and practices towards emergent multilingual language learners. In her study, Back found that teachers who practiced flexible pedagogy while making space for student languages and cultures significantly increased engagement and academic achievement. How teachers shift and incorporate attitudes encompassing language use and culture "reflect[s] the teacher's flexibility and willingness to change the course of the lesson and assessment, as well as the language use planned for it" (Garcia et al., 2017).

### *Teacher Preparedness for Instructing ELs in a Rural Setting*

Teachers of marginalized students all have some challenges. EL teachers in rural areas need help with financial and material resources, limited parental involvement, parents' perception of teachers, which can be culturally based, and the lack of teacher preparation (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Some problems related to teacher education are uniformity of pre-service training and preparation. The teacher's self-efficacy is directly proportional to the students' outcome or job achievement. In particular, Hansen-Thomas et al. (2016) found that better-trained teachers perceive themselves as effective in applying ELD instructional methods and strategies in different environments and situations. They also suggest that formal, long-term training is required to improve attitudes, skills, and self-efficacy.

Many states have experienced increased ELLs (Coady, 2019; Guerrettaz et al., 2020; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Lee & Hawkins, 2015; Lopez, 2021). However, unlike some rural communities in those states, California is diverse. Despite pre-service teacher preparation requiring coursework for EL instruction, diversity, and ample resources, California teachers struggled to recreate language-rich classes for English learners online (Stavely, 2020). Cho and Clark-Gareca (2020) found that part of the challenges pre-service teachers had in creating lessons for distance learning is because their cultural and linguistic backgrounds and experiences do not emulate their EL students. Despite COVID-19-based challenges, Lopez (2021) found that rurality shapes teachers’ instruction of Els. His research revealed that place-based awareness limitations of rurality, professional collaboration, and teacher upbringing influenced their instruction. The factors that affected teachers in developing lessons would be something this research would investigate.

## Modifying Curriculum and Instruction for Distance Learning

The sudden shift to technology-based instruction was challenging for everyone in the educational sector. It was a time surrounded by adaptive and transformational challenges (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021). Adjustments to instruction were necessary throughout general education. However, continued instructional pedagogy toward the whole class excluded students with special needs and English language learners (Stavely, 2020). Best practices and "good teaching" were not going to be effective for ELLs (Cunningham & Crawford, 2016; Goldenberg, 2013). Although various modifications were made in curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy, how they affected student learning is yet to be seen in the literature.

### *Digital Learning and Competency*

Mobile technology has been used to teach English language learners in the United States for quite some time. It has been engaging for students because learners have control over their learning using the devices (Ok & Ratliffe, 2018). Kukulska-Hulme et al. (2009) mentioned that mobile learning focuses on context, alluding that the traditional classroom is based on the stability of context. As technology influenced instruction, educators questioned whether technology could replace the traditional classroom setting, which is in a fixed location, using an agreed curriculum, and with a single teacher. They also questioned whether students could make meaning from daily instructional activities based on temporarily unstable contexts. (Ok & Ratliffe, 2018). In their review of the literature, Ok and Ratliffe (2018) found that most studies, in general, showed that using mobile devices helped improve the learning of content and English language development. Mobile devices improved the students', teachers', and parents' self-efficacy for reading and enjoyment of academic activities. Ok and Ratliffe's (2018) research was limited to using mobile devices as tools rather than for online instruction delivery (Roddy et al.,

2017). Furthermore, this use of mobile devices comes outside the definition of emergency remote learning.

***Technology Engages and Motivates Learning***

Motivation plays a significant role in learning. Students are motivated to learn when they are actively engaged (Agbadogun, 2014). Language learning, in particular, requires interacting socially. Moreover, planning for communicative tasks that engage student participation in interaction encourages student learning. Language teachers would be challenged, but the teacher should facilitate activities incorporating tasks involving fluency. Although students may be motivated and ready to learn using technology, the concern is whether teachers are equipped and skilled to use the technology necessary for such tasks (Hill et al., 2020). Technology plays an important role in engaging students and creating an interactive learning environment. Agbadogun (2014) also added that technology-based learning allows students to make choices and decisions about their learning processes.

On the other hand, Kazakoff et al. (2018) questioned the efficacy of technology, particularly within blended learning environments for language learners. There is also concern for the unmotivated language learner (Gamble et al., 2018). Only some people are motivated by technology.

It is important to note that the source of motivation incentivizes people to engage in certain types of behaviors and activities because they are fun (Bugenhagen & Barbuto, 2012). When this happens, an intrinsic process of motivation occurs. Instrumental motivation comes from external rewards, whereas extrinsic motivation is derived from tangible and social motives (Bugenhagen & Barbuto, 2012). If positive teacher attitudes, good preparation, and training are provided, technology becomes a substantial motivational factor for learning. Technology

engages students, makes learning fun, and promotes interactive tasks. It also provides communicative opportunities for language learners to learn English and academic content. As fun as the technology may be, the content will induce challenges, particularly when students need more prior knowledge and academic vocabulary (Borup et al., 2020).

Technology can also motivate students to learn academically. Even with language limitations, while tasks are scaffolded and supported, high-energy, paced, focused, enthusiastic game-based learning can motivate language learners (Dunn & Kennedy, 2019; Havens, 2014). Although technology may motivate and engage students, teachers should constantly monitor student engagement. Teachers should assess students' level of engagement to ensure the activities and tasks keep students engaged (Marzano, 2017).

Conversely, technology can also be unmotivating for both the teacher and the language learner. Russell (2020) found that although teachers could be competent in language pedagogy, they may need to be more competent in technological pedagogies and, therefore, unable to deliver competent language instruction via technology. Using the TPACK framework, Paneru (2018) studied EFL teacher competencies in Information Communication Technology (ICT) or Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). He discovered that teachers showed more functional practices (hands-on) in ICT versus formal practices (limited learning interactions and mechanistic development of TPACK). The same goes for the students. A student lacking in technology skills can even develop anxieties, which could impact the lack of interest or motivation to learn a language (Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2020).

### *Adjusting the Virtual Learning Environment*

Since social interactive language learning requires subjects and a learning environment to interact within, the virtual classroom needs to be modified to accommodate support and learning.

Because the EL is not only learning from academic sources, teachers also need to provide the content that would have made up the learning environment in a regular classroom. For example, a school has playground noises, a cafeteria, a library, and an office – all of which help to create the school environment or context. There are many visual images ELs connects with to negotiate and create meaning and knowledge. Sounds, routines, and ambiance all contribute to creating the schemata students use to create meaning and build knowledge. Teachers need to remember that when speaking to ELs, a language without a connection will be ineffective. Since language is needed for instruction and academic learning, teachers need to provide further support for students to understand the academic content the language describes. Teachers need to adjust the input level further so students are not confused (Krashen, 1982). Managing negotiation for learning and keeping the ZPD distance of learning close is critical so students are not overwhelmed (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017).

Blended instruction (using technology and digital apps) and traditional classroom instruction through online delivery can benefit everyone involved (Kazakoff et al., 2018). There are challenges to modifying and adjusting the digital learning environment. However, not all usable apps are age appropriate (Kennedy & Dunn, 2018). Additional support or prior knowledge may be required for students and teachers to utilize the instructional app (Moore-Adams et al., 2016). Assistive technologies and services also require new updates and maintenance, requiring skilled personnel.

***Students Also Need to Be Prepared and Trained to Use Technology***

Learning for a typical student can be stressful and overwhelming at times. However, it adds the need for more ability to express oneself due to the lack of vocabulary or ability to analyze or synthesize academic material in the target language with added cultural barriers. The

language learner can feel further inundated and inadequate, possibly leading to demotivation to learn. Students should be adequately trained and prepared for the technology-based task. Small group meetings explaining the task and the technology can be helpful. Students should also be provided with instructional videos which can be accessed and streamed on demand.

Teachers must ensure that they do not assume their digital natives know everything. Digital natives are considered the young generation born into the digital age, while digital immigrants are those who acquire computer usage sometime during adulthood. In their literature review, Wang et al. (2013) noted that age and accessibility are common characteristics that differentiate the two. The problem with these definitions is that not all young people have access to technology, so they can hardly be considered digital natives. Also, accessibility to technology does not guarantee better usage. A better way to conceptualize this dichotomy is digital fluency and digital literacy. Digital fluency is the ability to reformulate knowledge to express oneself creatively and appropriately express oneself and produce and generate information, not simply comprehending it (Wang et al., 2013). "Digital access is obviously a prerequisite for gaining digital fluency but is not in itself sufficient to determine one's digital fluency" (Wang et al., 2013, p. 412). Educational factors influencing digital fluency are a school's support for technology activities, teaching computer skills, and interest. Social influence from peers, family, teachers, and schools also affects technology proficiency. Wang et al. (2013) also found that the types of activities rather than types of technology were the mediating factor associated with digital fluency.

***Narrowing the Digital Gap and Promoting Digital Equity***

Recent policy briefs showed that many marginalized students of rural households have yet to be able to adapt to distance learning requirements due to the lack of access to necessary

technologies (Galperin et al., 2020). In the past, the digital gap in K-12 education was described as students who have access to technology and those who do not (Dolan, 2016; Warschauer, 2002). Currently, the digital gap is characterized by the type of technology students can access, where it can be accessed, and what platforms are in place to enable its usage (Aguilar, 2020). Before COVID-19, libraries provided the means to access technology (Schuck et al., 2017). California urban schools showed that almost half of the students depended on school-issued devices to complete their homework. At the same time, 20% did not have devices, and 16% did not have access to the Internet (Partnership for LA Schools, 2020). However, the patterns of inequity were present well before COVID-19. Baek and Freehling's (2007) research from over ten years ago revealed that teachers assigned technology-based homework on resources students had no access to. Furthermore, the digital equity gap widens when school districts continue to invest in technology because new technology can create barriers for low-income students (Aguilar, 2020).

The literature also features studies on teachers' digital competence. Many teachers' self-efficacy and digital usage were challenged (Falloon, 2020). Digital competence involves more than just using devices and applications. According to Falloon (2020), "it adopts a wider sociocultural stance by signaling the need to understand and consider implications and effects of digital technologies on individuals and society" (p. 2,451). It also requires grit and a growth mindset toward technological innovations so that teachers may understand and value their position and influence in developing new practices (Aparicio et al., 2017; Falloon, 2020).

Teachers are either digital natives or immigrants themselves. As mentioned above, however, just because a teacher is a digital native does not indicate they possess digital fluency or competency due to their technology usage and activities (Wang et al., 2013). Teachers can be

digital immigrants, but they can be well-versed in new technologies, especially those interested in their field or expertise. Regardless of whether they are digital natives or immigrants, teachers faced challenges during COVID-induced distance learning. What kept many teachers going was perseverance and passion for teaching (Teimouri et al., 2020).

In their work, Duckworth et al. (2007) identified grit as perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. Perseverance of effort has to do with a person's tendency to endure over a long period, while consistency of interest has to do with a person's consistency of passion for a high-reaching goal despite challenges, obstacles, or failures (Teimouri et al., 2020). Grit "entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over the years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress" (Duckworth et al., 2007, pp. 1087-1088).

Moreover, many educators have been trained in a growth mindset to support their students. "Students with a growth mindset are not as worried about looking intelligent, and so they take on more challenges, persist longer, and are more resilient in the face of setbacks" (Dweck, 2015, p. 36). Students with a fixed mindset lean toward viewing challenges as risky and effort and setbacks as signs of limited talent (Dweck, 2006). Resilience and persistence are also valid for teachers, school administrators, and districts with a growth mindset. A growth mindset empowers while supporting those willing to take risks (Dweck, 2006). A growth mindset and grit helped teachers overcome the challenges of distance education and teaching with new technologies (Aparicio et al., 2017; Falloon, 2020).

Although there is a gap between the content, digital competence, and pedagogic strategies (Dube, 2020; Peterson et al., 2020), the resilience of EL teachers must also be considered when trying to implement distance learning without the necessary equipment and infrastructure. Teacher resilience leads to creative means of communicating and delivering

instruction remotely. Rwodzi and de Jager (2021) demonstrated how teachers in rural South Africa could inform their students via social media, cell phones, and even television and radio. However, the latter could have been more personable than social media. Teachers also used discussion group chats, Google searches, tweets, and SMSs for questions and answers related to English learning. Weller (2020) identified the top technologies used most in 2020: videos, blogs, Twitter and social media, e-learning, wikis, Google (one of the four most linked domains), and Zoom. Although professional development was limited, teachers contacted colleagues from other teaching and learning environments. Through collaboration and sharing of resources, teachers learned how to provide opportunities for their learners. Students benefitted by gaining access to content and other essential information from different geographical spaces (Rwodzi & de Jager, 2021). Resilience is made for successful learning. More research must be done on the methodologies and designs sensitive to complex and dynamic realities (Kimmons et al., 2021).

Finally, 2020 was full of significant social and institutional upheaval in response to COVID-19. There were change, dramatic, and responsive shifts in educational technology. Kimmons et al. (2021) identified that most changes in 2020 “seemed to be changes of degree rather than kind and that, in many ways, the educational technology field was already trending in directions that seemed to be necessary for addressing the pandemic before it started” (p. 135).

***Academic Achievement and Learning Gaps***

COVID-19 school closures have been compared and contrasted with out-of-school time, generally summer vacation, school closures due to inclement weather and natural disasters, and absenteeism (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Being absent from school significantly impacts learning loss more than just being out due to summer vacation. Kuhfeld et al.'s study indicates that the COVID-19 closures are similar to weather-related school closures. However, the literature on the

latter comparison needs to be more consistent. One reason past studies may not be ideal data for comparing and contrasting learning is the delivery of instruction. Made-up school time due to inclement weather is still face-to-face instruction, while instruction during distance learning is remote. There was no shortage of remote learning plans, including suggestions for curricula, assignments, progress monitoring, and resources. Online instruction was a way to mitigate learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic (Brenan, 2020).

Evidence shows the ineffectiveness of schools' measures during the pandemic-forced remote learning, particularly regarding communicating with students (Lieberman, 2020). A survey conducted by *Education Week* after the first month showed that only 39% of teachers interacted with their students at least once daily, with most communication occurring via email (Kurtz, 2020). Another district survey showed that only one in five schools met their rigorous learning standards (Malkus, 2020). Early on, there were concerns about whether online instruction would be as effective as traditional learning.

International studies have not necessarily focused on learning loss. Chamberlain et al.'s (2020) study on Swedish primary students focused on heterogeneity in learning progress. The same social disparity before school closures presented itself during remote learning. The interindividual differences became obvious during remote learning. Tomasik et al.'s (2020) findings were compatible with parent surveys (Andrew et al., 2020) and teacher surveys (Cullinane & Monacute, 2020). In Tomasik et al.'s study, learning slowed down for students from least affluent homes, while students from affluent households received active assistance from their parents or tutors. Primary school students learn more than twice as fast when attending in-class instruction compared to distance learning. Tomasik et al. (2020) attributed the increased variance and decreased pace to developmental perspective due to cognitive, motivational, and

socio-emotional factors. Hence, the younger the students are, the more they depend on cognitive scaffolding during instruction.

Learning loss for general education students is already being observed (see Appendices E and F). Although the ELPAC Student Score Reports (SSRs) have been released for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, comparisons of the aggregated data for Lewis County were not available at the time of this writing (Ed Data, 2023; California Department of Education, n.d.-f.). However, California statewide summative scores are available for 2021-2022 (see Appendices E and F). Analyzing learning loss and identifying the attributing factors will be difficult because so many variables will need to be considered: school situations, technological competence for both teacher and student, curriculum, platforms, instructional delivery, home support, home environments, and level of English proficiency.

## Summary

In summary, Chapter Two explained Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory and TPACK conceptual framework's theoretical framework. An integrated transformative learning theory and TPACK framework provided the lens to view the experience of distance learning teachers of Els in rural areas. The related literature examined the pandemic in perspective, the purpose for school closures, and distance learning, which included TPACK, preparedness, and teacher response. Challenges COVID-19 created for virtual learning were considered by examining K-12 school preparedness and initial responses to virtual learning. Literature involving language learning within the academic context was also reviewed, as well as integrated learning environments and learning through social interaction. Culturally responsive practices and EL reclassification were also observed. Engagement with technology, as well as technology-motivated learning, were reviewed. Finally, modifications in curriculum and

instruction for virtual learning were examined. The problem was that rural elementary classroom English language teachers had to deliver instruction through distance learning during the pandemic regardless of whether they had technology skills, an understanding of online pedagogy, and knowledge of best practices. This research addressed the gap in the literature related to teachers meeting the needs of rural English learners, EL, and rural distance learning, the relationships between digital competence and academic achievement, and the TPACK framework with English language development.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

## Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the transformation of rural elementary classroom teachers who transitioned to distance learning with English learners (ELs) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley. As this study examined the lived experiences, a transcendental phenomenological design was chosen (Moustakas, 1994). Data collection for this research was obtained through questionnaires, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews. The purpose of Chapter Three is to present the research design, research questions, setting and participants, researcher's positionality, researcher's role, procedures, data collection plan, data analysis, data synthesis, and trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations and a summary of this section for this study.

## Research Design

Qualitative inquiries reveal how people and groups construct meaning; hence, qualitative researchers are dedicated to determining what is meaningful (Patton, 2015). They are also individuals who commit themselves to several issues. Research for qualitative design takes place in a real-world setting while minimizing preconceived ideas, expectations, causal effects, or control (Patton, 2015). This study sought to understand the lived experiences of rural elementary classroom EL teachers instructing online through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was researched within the natural setting. There were no fixed treatments or controlled experiments to be observed over time since natural environments are changing and dynamic (Harris et al., 2009; Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Patton, 2015). Qualitative studies make meaning by understanding how and why it matters, with the context defined as what is

happening "around the people, groups, organizations, communities, or systems of interest" (Patton, 2015, p. 5). Due to this study's problem, a qualitative study was conducive to this research.

Transcendental phenomenology, or Husserl's phenomenology, was selected for this inquiry since this study dealt with discovering the subjectivity and essence of personal experiences. A transcendental approach to phenomenology provided a systematic and disciplined methodology for deriving knowledge while using only the data available to the consciousness by reflecting on subjective acts and their objective connections (Moustakas, 1994). Hence, this approach was appropriate for this research because it is a "scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49). Husserl viewed consciousness as intentional and directed toward objects. "[Consciousness] always contains content that is intentional" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 50). Hence, intentionality refers to consciousness, implying being internally conscious of something. "The act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are intentionally related…The knowledge of intentionality requires that we be present to ourselves and things in the word, that we recognize that self and world are inseparable components of meaning" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28).

Intentional acts can be objectified, while feeling acts are non-objectifiable. The following explains a deliberate act: teacher experiences forced distance learning during COVID-19. The intentional act of perceiving COVID-induced distance learning could be with the feeling of positivity, negativity, or other. The instruction and delivery methods (distance learning) are real and objectifiable. Even the COVID-19 virus is objectifiable because it can be seen through a microscope. It caused the situations for lockdown, safety, and health measures that put schools into the position of closing and instituting distance education.

On the other hand, the positive, negative, or different feelings are non-objectifiable. The perception of COVID-induced distance learning may remain even when the positive, negative, or other feeling disappears. Distance learning remains open as a concrete, independent, intentional experience while the feeling the act of positivity, negativity, or other may or may not continue to exist (Moustakas, 1994). In contrast, here is an example of an act of consciousness: the experience of interest or frustration in learning a new video conferencing app that will be used to deliver COVID-19-induced distance learning. The app is the software, the object of the intentional act, for example, its perception in the consciousness. The software enables the app to manifest as an object rather than just existing in the consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the interpretive form is the perception that allows the app to appear. A teacher's perception creates it and enables the app to exist in their consciousness. The *objectifying quality* is the actuality of the app's existence, while the *non-objectifying* quality is the interested or frustrated feeling evoked in the teacher by the app (Moustakas, 1994).

The phenomenon of internal perception is comprised of actual existence as well as intentional existence:

> There is no act of thinking without an object that is thought; no will without the willingness of something; no act of judgment without something being judged; no love without an object of love. In feelings, however, like pain, the consciousness of the pain and the object of pain are fused as one. Otherwise, the perceiving act is always directed intentionally toward its object (Moustakas, 1994, p.50)

Moustakas (1994) explained that inner perception is dependable and verifiable since both the presentation and real object exist in our consciousness (see Table 2). However, "the meaning of a phenomenon is in the act of the experience, not in the object" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 51)

It does not matter whether the object actually exists or not. The consciousness fills it with sought-after experiences if it is empty to develop a perception. Otherwise, the consciousness is already in a state of completion or wholeness of perception. Regardless of how the physical object is presented to the senses, one can find additional meaning to the experiences. Through the process of reflection, the phenomenon becomes clearer and develops meaning. Husserl stated

> that an object has reality in consciousness but that this reality is reality for me only as long as I believe I can confirm it. By this, I mean I must be able to provide useable procedures and other evidence which lead me to the object itself and through which I realize the object as being truly there. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 51)

Another critical component of transcendental phenomenology is to be unbiased. "In phenomenological studies, the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47). Steps were taken to make a conscious effort to minimize presuppositions, biases, and assumptions through the process of *Epoché* (see Appendix E). According to Moustakas (1994), "Epoché requires the elimination of suppositions and raising of knowledge above every possible doubt" (p. 26). A problem was identified with the intent to openly investigate how rural elementary classroom EL teachers construct meaning from their experience. Epoché requires a new way of looking at the problem in a revisited, fresh, naïve, open sense, and "from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33).

**Table 2**

*Phenomenon of Inner Perception*

| | Actual Existence | Intentional Existence |
|---|---|---|
| Object | Distance Learning | One's thoughts on distance learning |
| Will | Instructional planning and delivery | One's desire to plan and deliver (or not) instruction |
| Judgment | District Expectations | One's judgment of self-expectations. |
| Feelings | Love; hate | Love one's job; hate one's job<br>Headache/stress → distance learning<br>(feeling) ← (object) |

*Note:* Husserl perceived that consciousness is intentional. It is directed toward objects and contains deliberate content. From C. Moustakas, 1994, *Phenomenological Research Methods.* Copyright 1994 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

Every teacher's reality of instruction through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was their experienced reality. The goal was to define and explain their experiences, their reality as it appeared to them, so that the transformation of individual experiences into essential insights could be understood (Moustakas, 1994). The design of transcendental phenomenology allowed me to describe things in myself, to permit what I saw to enter my consciousness, and then to understand their meanings and essences, bearing in mind insight and self-reflection (Moustakas, 1994). The central question of this study is what transformation have rural elementary classroom EL teachers have experienced while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Transcendental phenomenology was crucial to understanding transformation through the experience of rural elementary EL teachers as they shared the transformation of individual or empirical experiences into essential insights (Moustakas, 1994).

The theoretical framework used to interpret teacher experiences was Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1991, 1997, 2000). Mezirow's theory provided a helpful lens to

examine how teachers as adult learners transformed their perspective in the context of challenges resulting from a disorienting dilemma, such as a change in lifestyle and the instructional environment. The transformation of rural elementary EL teachers was examined "in retrospect, where participants [reflected] back on their transformative experience … based on their participation in a shared learning event" (Taylor, 1997, p. 4). The conceptual framework to inform transformative learning theory was TPACK (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Shulman, 1986).

## Research Questions

Examining rural EL teacher experiences aimed to understand what transformation rural classroom EL teachers experienced in their own learning and pedagogical practices. This study was guided by the following central question to discover the answers,

### Central Research Question

What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### Sub Question One

What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience in their pedagogical practices to meet the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of their students?

### Sub Question Two

How did rural elementary classroom EL teachers implement technology to communicate instructional content and support their pedagogy?

**Sub Question Three**

What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience in their technological skills and practices?

**Sub Question Four**

What role did teacher collaboration play during distance learning (common planning time, PLC, critical friends' groups)?

**Sub Question Five**

How does a new perspective of instruction impact teachers' current practice of instructing ELs with technology?

## Setting and Participants

The setting of this study was not one particular site but relatively rural schools within Lewis County (pseudonym) in the California Central Valley. Although none of the counties within the Central Valley meet the definition of a "rural" county, the schools are located in metro areas that have rural clusters within them (State of California Department of Justice, 2021; United States Census Bureau, 2021; United States Department of Agriculture, 2021). According to the US Census Bureau, the participants were elementary EL teachers from schools located within clusters that meet the definition of a rural area.

### Setting

This study took place in Lewis County, located in the California Central Valley. This area was chosen due to its wide range of locale classifications and many ELs within the county. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) locale classification system has four major categories: city, suburban, town, and rural, subdivided into three categories (NCES, n.d.). Each primary type is then subdivided into three subtypes. The first subtype of rural is the *fringe*. The

fringe is less than or equal to five miles from an urbanized cluster distance, more than five miles, but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area. The second rural subtype is a *rural territory*, an area more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster. The third rural subtype is *remote*, more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and more than 10 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, n.d.).

Under NCES, the location of any school can be precisely identified, and distances can be measured to determine town and rural subtypes. Rural areas are not necessarily based on the number of students but by population and location to an urban area. NCES can also identify and differentiate rural schools and school districts in relatively remote areas from those outside an urban center. School classifications can be searched on the NCES website. All schools are classified into one of these categories based on their addresses and geographic locations. The names of the schools were provided by the school districts, which were obtained from the California state county offices of education (California Department of Education, n.d.-g.).

The county office of education provides services to the school districts (California Department of Education, n.d.-g.). Each school district is considered the local educational agency (LEA) and oversees the operations and management of the schools within their locality. The school administration comprises the principal and vice principal or learning director. The learning director assumes the traditional jobs of a vice principal but also facilitates professional development and coordinates categorical programs, services, interventions, and extended learning opportunities (Edjoin, 2021). Each school has its technology support shared within schools depending upon the school district's size and number of schools supported.

Regardless of socioeconomic status, being in a rural area means less access to technology (International Telecommunication Union, 2012). The digital gap between rural and urban areas is

at risk of widening as unemployment is higher in areas where broadband adoption is lowest (International Telecommunication Union, 2012). As a result, household incomes and education rates suffer (Whitacre et al., 2014). Because of the location, the student population, and limited cell towers and access to broadband internet were additional reasons this setting was chosen.

**Participants**

The target population of this study was elementary teachers instructing English learners from kindergarten through eighth grade (in elementary unit schools). These teachers provided English Language Development (ELD) to students designated as English learners on the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC). ELs also included those who had been *reclassified as fluent English proficient* (RFEP) but still required support and scaffolding using Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) or Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) strategies.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants with the credentials below. Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2015). This technique was also used so that I could choose participants as they "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 158). Individuals were identified and selected due to their knowledge or experience with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Hence, the teachers' educational backgrounds, experience working with EL populations, residence in a rural area, and shared instructional experiences provided the basis for this purposeful sampling. The participants selected had a minimum of a bachelor's degree, a current state license in multiple subjects, and an EL authorization Crosscultural Language Academic Development (CLAD). Demographic

information was collected, and pseudonyms were used for sites and participants to protect their identities. The study comprised thirteen participants: one male and twelve females, with ten Caucasians, one African American, and one Hispanic (see Table 3). All participants met the criteria except for two teachers: One teacher was not located in the Central Valley, and one was not a classroom teacher.

**Table 3**

*Teacher Participants*

| Teacher Participant | Years Taught | Educational Level | Age Range | Grade During DL | Gender | Ethnicity | Languages Spoken |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anna | 20+ | Masters | 55-64 | 2nd | Female | African American | English |
| Ashley | 5-9 | Masters | 25-34 | 3rd & 4th | Female | Filipino | English/Tagalog |
| Bea | 20+ | Masters | 55-64 | 1st & 2nd | Female | Hispanic | English |
| Brenda | 15-19 | Masters | 35-44 | 3rd | Female | Caucasian | English/Spanish |
| Cora | 20+ | Bachelors | 55-64 | TK/K | Female | Caucasian | English |
| Danielle | 20+ | Masters | 55-64 | 1st | Female | Caucasian | English |
| Holly | 5-9 | Bachelors | 25-34 | 4th & 5th | Female | Caucasian | English |
| Kaitlyn | 20+ | Bachelors | 35-44 | K | Female | Caucasian | English |
| Kimberly | 20+ | Masters+ | 45-54 | K-3rd | Female | Caucasian | English/Spanish |
| Leanne | 10-14 | Bachelors | 35-44 | 5th | Female | Caucasian | English/Spanish |
| Sally | 10-14 | Bachelors | 35-44 | 7th | Female | Caucasian | English |
| Sarah | 20+ | Masters | 45-54 | 5th | Female | Caucasian | English |
| Ross | 20+ | Masters | 45-54 | 5th | Male | Caucasian | English/Spanish |

Note: TK is transitional kindergarten, the first year of a two-year kindergarten experience, using a modified kindergarten curriculum that is age and developmentally appropriate based on

California's Preschool Learning Foundations and Frameworks. From “Universal Prekindergarten FAQs,” California Department of Education, (https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/em/kinderfaq.asp)

## Researcher Positionality

I was one of the teachers who taught ELs online in a rural setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. With online apps like Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams, I observed teachers conduct online instruction. Professional development and professional learning communities (PLCs) likewise took place online. The meetings allowed me to keep various pedagogies, styles, feelings, and attitudes. These experiences were unique and surprising, only sometimes as negative as had been deemed (Kohnke & Zou, 2021). This research allowed me to become the teachers' voice to share their stories and lived experiences. This study also allowed me to demonstrate how rural elementary EL teachers, as adult learners themselves, took a disorienting dilemma (Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 2000), which caused disequilibrium or disorganization of their known instructional practices (Piaget, 1963) and through a dynamic process of discourse (Habermas, 1981) and social interaction with colleagues within a kindred rural culture (Vygotsky, 1978), made meaning of their experiences as a group of California rural elementary EL teachers (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1985; Gergen & Gergen, 1991). This research revealed how rural elementary EL teachers assimilated schemas and experienced change. The data also showed how teachers reorganized perceptions, thoughts, and values through social engagement and interaction with colleagues and other educational support (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Their stories and experiences shed light on a dynamic transformation process within a TPACK framework.

## Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework is threefold. This study examined teacher experiences through the lens of constructivism, social constructionism, and transformation theory. The

interpretative framework shed light on how individuals constructed meaning, how a group of individuals with shared experiences created meaning together, and how the experience transformed the group. Hence, this research examined how California rural elementary classroom EL teachers experienced distance learning during COVID-19 and were transformed by a shared phenomenon.

***Constructivism***

In research, the primary assumptions of constructivism include that truth is a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with objective reality…[and] phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied…neither problems nor solutions can be generalized from one setting to another" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 44-45). Human beings make sense by "utilizing the constructive character of the mind and limited only by the imagination, to deal with confusion by means of using a semiotic organization…that attaches meanings to 'realized' elements" (Lincoln & Guba, 2016, p. 45). Human beings have the ability to interpret and construct reality, whereas the world of human perception is not real in the absolute sense (Patton, 2015). The reality of rural EL teacher experiences conducting DL during COVID-19 was the individual's experience and reality. How each teacher made meaning of that is uniquely individualized. The seminal works to help understand individual meaning-making were provided by Piaget (1951), Vygotsky (1978), and Fosnot and Perry (2005). Piaget (1951) explains how structures (cognitive mental systems of individuals) lead to constructions. Vygotsky's (1978) work addresses the individual and society through social interaction, language, and culture. Fosnot and Perry (2005) link and apply both theorists to educational learning.

Constructivism helped to understand that individual learning is a complex, non-linear progression (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Individuals learn by creating their realities through understanding and negotiating natural experiences with things, the environment, and other people (Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1978; see Table 4 for comparison). Teachers experienced learning and growth while assimilating various schemas of action and accommodating different objects from which they gained experience (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Schema provided the constructs for individuals to build knowledge constructively and, in essence, their reality.

**Table 4**

*Constructivism*

| Theorist | How Knowledge is Constructed | Role of Language | Facilitation of Change | Role Social & Culture |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Piaget** | Knowledge is based on structures (schemas) resulting from adaptation of structures with the environment. | Language depends on thought | Contradictions that cause disequilibrium. | "Collective intellect is the social equilibrium resulting from the the interplay of the operations that enter into all cooperation." (Piaget, 1969, p. 114). |
| **Vygotsky** | Making meaning is a result of knowledge developed socially by sharing and negotiation. | Thought depends on language. | Conflict requiring problem solving. | The environment plays a significant role in the process of making meaning. |

Non-linear, dynamic progression of adaptation, growth, and change resulting from interaction and engagement allows teachers to assert themselves and act on new experiences and information (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Constructivism helped explain how teachers individually took schemas of instructional experiences to maintain and work on the unique experiences, regardless of whether they were positive, negative, or neutral.

***Social Constructionism***

Constructio*nism* is based on constructi*vism* with the idea that individual constructs build knowledge and meaning. However, constructionism builds on constructivism by suggesting that as people learn, they understand their meaning-making process by expressing themselves to others, who, in return, enhance learning (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In other words, there is "shared knowledge and reality as people negotiate to understand and make meaning by working with others" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 3). Since rural EL teachers experienced this phenomenon as a unique group, social constructionism would help to obtain diverse understandings and multiple realities of how they define the phenomenon and the experiences of their situation (Patton, 2015). The seminal works which were used to explain how individuals construct social meaning and their own shared realities through social interactions with each other were Gergen (1973, 1985), Gergen and Gergen (1991), and Burr (2015; see Table 5 for comparison).

Social constructionism helped to understand the constructed reality of a group. Unlike constructivism, social construction starts with the premise that the human world is different from the natural and physical world (Guba, 1990). Things do not feel. People do. Instead of looking at the objects and how people's interaction with them creates learning schemas and reality, social constructionism incorporates emotion and subjectivity. As a result, people interpret. and construct reality differently. Human perception may not be real in the absolute sense (Patton, 2015). Social constructionism is the continuation of constructivism and the lens that explains what a social group experiences and creates as their truth and reality. Patton summarized it as

> phenomenology seeks to discover and illuminate essence. . . .[T]hings do not and cannot have essence because they are defined interpersonally and intersubjectively by people interacting in a network of relationships. A group of people can assign essence to a

phenomenon and do so regularly, but essence does not reside in the phenomenon, but rather in the group that constructs and designates the phenomenon's essence. From a constructionist perspective, the notion of phenomenological essence is a social construction (Patton, 2015, p. 121).

**Table 5**

*Social Constructionism*

| Theorist | How Knowledge is Constructed | Role of Language | Facilitation of Change | Role Society and culture |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Bergen & Luckman (1966)** | The sociology of knowledge understands and studies the constructed character of what human beings mean by "reality" (Vera, 2016). | People construct reality by the use of agreed and shared meaning communicated through shared language (Galbin, 2014). | Dialectical processes of internalization, externalization, and objectification (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Jarvis, 1992). | An individual's reality is constructed by those who guide them (Bergen & Luckman, 1966). |
| **Burr (2015)** | Understanding is historically and culturally relative, specific to particular cultures and periods of history, products of that culture and history, and dependent on specific social and economic arrangements prevalent in that culture at that time. | The way language is structured determines the way experience and consciousness are structured. | Disbelief and indignation regarding truth and reality. | Shared understandings inform social practices only as a result of discourse. |
| **Gergen (1973, 1985)**<br><br>**Gergen & Gergen (1991)** | Knowledge is historically situated and embedded in cultural values and practices. | Language is generated, sustained, and abandoned during social interaction. It is the social origin of knowledge. | Radical doubt of taken-for-granted world. | The self is a social construction that is embedded in social processes as a result of a critical review of the cultural and political beliefs of the self (Gergen, 1985). |

### *Transformative Learning Theory*

Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory served as a lens to interpret how teachers, as adult learners, ultimately viewed their experience. Mezirow (1991, 1997, 2000) builds on Habermas's (1981) theory, which helps to understand problem-solving and learning. Learning can be instrumental; when adults learn, they learn to manipulate or control the

environment or other people to enhance efficacy for improved performance. Habermas stressed that learning is the process of understanding the meaning of what is being communicated. Learning is communicative because it involves reaching a consensus and understanding purposes, values, beliefs, assumptions, and feelings (Mezirow, 2000). As adult learners, teachers engage in autonomy and self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975). Autonomy provides communicative competence (Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learning theory helps to engage in discourse (Merriam, 2004). In communicative learning, adult learners need to "become critically reflective of the assumptions underlying intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 6). Critical reflection is focal to transformative learning. Good teaching practice involves thinking. Self- and critical reflection as a reflective discourse with colleagues sharing the same experiences shed light on teachers' transformation of their learning and practice while conducting distance learning during the pandemic.

Constructivism, social constructionism, and transformation were all vital to the interpretative framework of this study. Each assumption builds on the other. Constructivism focuses on the individual teacher learner and scaffolding of learning. An individual learns as they interact with others and their environment. Social constructionism encompasses the shared understanding of a social group or community. The reality of the individual is something that is shared with other members of the community (see Table 5). Transformation occurs when social structures, beliefs, and assumptions influence the values of the community. From the perspective of this study, constructively, teachers have knowledge from their respective teacher training and preparation, interactions with other teachers and their professional learning communities, as well as through district-provided professional development. The context of providing distance learning to EL students in a rural area during the pandemic was the basis of social

constructionism. They became a unique community of teachers, living and working through a shared reality and experiences. The transformation occurred as a result of their previous teaching context, assumptions, beliefs, and understanding affected by COVID-19-prompted distance learning.

Thus, constructivism provided the interpretive framework for teaching learning individually. Social constructionism provided the interpretive framework for teachers learning within a group. Finally, transformation provided the interpretive framework for transformative learning. Regardless of whether the teachers were constructing meaning, engaged in discourse, or critically reflecting, these frameworks helped me to understand teacher realities within the context of providing distance learning to EL students.

## Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions inform the nature and approach to research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One's values and belief systems inform them. Philosophical assumptions inform how one approaches research and serve as the lens through which the world is viewed. The three assumptions which will be discussed are ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

### *Ontological Assumptions*

Ontology is the nature of reality. From a constructivist view, I co-constructed reality with the participants. “Ontological practice involves vulnerability, openness, and reimaging of how we engage, teach, and learn together” (St. John & Akama, 2022, p. 27). This study offered a way for teachers to speak about their own transformative learning experiences. Also, working within the realm of social constructionism, multiple realities can be experienced. These realities are created by different groups of people and affect what constructive repercussions have for their lives and their interactions with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). In essence, all

realities as meaningful reality are socially constructed (Crotty, 1998, p. 54). Truth becomes a matter of shared meanings and consensus among a group of people (Patton, 2015). Co-constructing realities call for accountable research relationships, which have value for those trying to understand this phenomenon (St. John & Akama, 2022).

***Epistemological Assumptions***

Epistemology involves the origin of human knowledge and subjectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Kegan (2000) stated that Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning is nothing new. Transformation refers to any change or process (Kegan, 2000). Even Piaget (1953) differentiated assimilative processes. He distinguished between assimilative processes (new experiences shaped to conform to existing knowledge structures) and accommodative processes (individual structures change in response to new experiences (Kegan, 2000).

In transformative learning, the frame of reference, or the way of knowing, will always be some part of an epistemological change. Although the concept of transformative learning should narrowly focus more on epistemology, it also needs to encompass the participants' teaching background and experiences in their entirety (Kegan, 2000). I could better discern the nature of the participants' transformative learning by better understanding not only their present epistemologies "but the epistemological complexity of the present learning challenges that they face in their lives" (Kegan, 2000, p. 48).

Many educators firmly hold to the values of constructivist thinking because knowledge is constructed through meaningful interactions with individuals and the learning environment. Educational constructivism also encompasses schema or individual knowledge structures that build on one another to help interpret and understand the world. I share the same professional

and educational philosophies as the participants because they are my peers and colleagues. This study could be approached subjectively because both the participants and I shared similar experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the researcher's experiences and thoughts needed to be bracketed. This study was about others' experiences, not mine. Care needed to be practiced so that personal judgments, background experience, or instructional practices were not elicited from the participants' experiences. As co-collaborators, both researcher and collaborator could construct meanings of the phenomenon experienced.

***Axiological Assumptions***

Axiological assumptions address the role of values. Values shape the narrative and include their interpretation. By nature of the conceptual framework, TPACK involves beliefs, values, and attitudes toward the teaching constructs. I also brought significant biases to this study. First, not only because I am an EL teacher, but growing up, I was also an ESL student. I needed to ensure that I did not allow my feelings as either an EL teacher or a former ESL student to affect my perceptions of similar teachers. Second, I am not a Central Valley native. I grew up and lived in suburbs and urban areas. Also, I am not accustomed to poverty or teaching students of a lower socioeconomic status. I had to be very careful not to impose any prejudices or judgments upon the participants, their lifestyles, or their students. Last, I perceive myself as having advanced technology skills. Not only do I have experience in online instruction, but I also have been an online learner. What may be simple to me may be a difficult task for others. I had to be careful not to judge their abilities, their feelings toward technology, or their experiences using technology.

**Researcher's Role**

As an EL teacher who shared the experience of instructing ELs via distance learning in a rural setting during the COVID-19 pandemic, my role as a researcher and scholar is to share the lived experiences of other teachers. I am an expert in my field. My master's degree is in TESOL. My training goes beyond the minimum requirements for California state's English learner authorization. Teachers had varying degrees of experience and backgrounds. I could not allow my own biases to influence or judge teachers' delivery of online instruction or even the reception of the instruction during observations. As the human instrument, my role was to listen to the participants and gain as much information from them regarding the phenomenon as possible, analyze it, and check back with them to ensure the interpretations accurately represented their experiences.

Because of my personal background and similar work conditions, I entered this research with biases, preconceived beliefs, and suppositions. These need to be identified. Moustakas (1994) discussed the process of setting aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas as Epoché. Epoché was practiced so that my personal experiences and knowledge were "invalidated, inhibited, and disqualified" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). The participants' experiences had to be heard and seen in their purest forms (Moustakas, 1994). The act of practicing Epoché was through bracketing. This was performed by "investigators set[ting] aside their experiences, much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). To be objective, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study, where I recorded my notes, reflections, and observations. I had to remember that my role as the researcher was to maintain objectivity by focusing on the participants without subjecting my personal feelings or experiences.

## Procedures

The first step for this phenomenological study was to solicit participants by making contact with the gatekeepers of the various schools that met the criteria of this study. Since participants were selected via purposeful and snowball sampling from various sites, no single permission for a site was sought. However, administrators of the schools were contacted, given information letters, and requested to become the gatekeepers of that site. Other means of recruitment were networking through professional associations and organizations as well as social media. School administrators and gatekeepers were contacted, and I applied for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the study (see Appendix F).

Once the IRB from Liberty University approved this study, I piloted the interview questions. Before conducting personal interviews, the questions were piloted and then modified (Yin, 2014). This ensured that the interviewees understood the questions as well as the intent. I emailed the participant recruitment flyer (see Appendix G) and letter (see Appendix H) to the district superintendent to be disseminated to site administrators, who were asked to forward the email to their respective school sites. The letter explained the details of the study, time commitment, and expectations, along with my contact information. From the responses, interested participants were contacted, and interviews followed.

Before conducting any interviews or data collection, I sent an informed consent form (see Appendix I) to all participants to complete. I interviewed the participants with questions from the modified pilot. Focus groups were formed based on themes from the questionnaire and interviews, and more in-depth questions were asked. With permission from the participants, all interviews were video recorded via Zoom and used for later analyses.

Google Sheets and Microsoft Excel were used to collect and manage data. Data was input throughout the study. Any identifiable information was removed or not included. Pseudonyms were given to all participants, students, schools, sites, and locations to maintain confidentiality. All interviews were auto-transcribed by Zoom and reviewed by two trusted volunteers and myself. Data analyses were conducted using Moustakas's (1994) organization and data analysis method.

**Permissions**

Once this proposal was accepted, the application was sent to Liberty University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix F). The pilot study and data collection commenced when IRB approval was granted. Since participants were recruited by snowball sampling from various sites, specific site approval was non-applicable. ELA/ELD Curriculum Consultant from the Lewis County Office of Education was also contacted regarding this study.

**Recruitment Plan**

An initial invitation flyer (see Appendix G) was sent to the *gatekeepers* of the schools. Invitations were also sent through professional and personal networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Participants needed to meet strict criteria; namely, they had to be elementary EL teachers (grades K-6) who taught in Lewis County at a rural school while conducting online distance learning during the time frame of March 2020 to June 2021 of the COVID-19 pandemic. They must have taught post-distance learning so that how transformation impacted their practice could be observed. A school is designated *rural* by the Census Bureau if it is in an area that does not lie inside an urbanized area (50,000 or more people) or urban cluster (2,500 – 50,000 people; Geverdt, 2019; NCES, 2022). The term *rural* includes all population, housing, and territory that are not included within an urban area (see Definitions section, p. 42).

A recruitment letter (Appendix H) and an online questionnaire were sent via email. Based on the responses and teacher contacts, purposeful and snowball sampling was used to obtain participants. The number of participants required depended on the adequacy of sampling by reaching the point of thematic saturation. This implied sampling continued until saturation was reached, meaning no new findings were identified with the addition of new participant data.

## Data Collection Plan

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the transformation of teachers instructing English language learners from their subjective, personal responses and their perspectives. Three types of data were collected and triangulated: (a) questionnaire, (b) interview, and (c) focus group to meet this aim.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire was selected as the first approach because large amounts of information could be collected from many people in a short period. It was also a cost-effective way with limited effects on validity and reliability (Roopa & Rani, 2012). I selected Google Forms as the delivery platform for the questionnaire because it allowed different types of questions, such as short answers, multiple choice, pull-down, and linear scale. Google Forms could also be sent by email, integrated into a website, or sent via social networks (Melo, 2018). The questionnaire was piloted with teachers outside of Lewis County who were not participants in this study to determine face and content validity. Their feedback helped to clarify, improve, and filter non-relevant questions. The pilot also tested the viability, settings, and transitions of each section. Face and content validity were checked by reviewing responses and data collection of the piloted questionnaire.

Questions from the first five sections determined eligibility. Questions from sections 6-11 were related to self-efficacy and based on teaching, curriculum, computer usage and technology integration, and English language instruction (Bandura, 1997; Compeau & Higgins, 1995; Greene & Jones, 2020; Kiili et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2004). The questions in these sections were used to triangulate data obtained from the other two methods. Sections 12-14 provide questions based on demographics, experience, and contact information. The questionnaire was configured to terminate respondents as soon as they answered a question that disqualified them. It was also set so that contact information would only be collected if the participant qualified and completed the questionnaire.

***Questionnaire Questions (see Appendix J)***

1. Are you an elementary classroom teacher? YES NO
2. Did you provide instruction via distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic during March 2020 to June 2021? YES NO
3. If yes, at which school were you employed? Check one.

____ Rock Point Elementary School

____ John Muir Elementary School

____ Sycamore Elementary School

____ Vista Creek Elementary School

____ Magnolia Elementary School

____ Juniper Elementary School

____ Walnut Elementary School

____ Rosemont Elementary School

____ Mission Elementary School

____ Other

4. Which grade did you teach during the COVID-19 distance learning, March 2020 - June 2021?

____ Kindergarten

____ 1st Grade

____ 2nd Grade

____ 3rd Grade

____ 4th Grade

____ 5th Grade

____ 6th Grade

____ 7th Grade

____ 8th Grade

5. Did you have at least one English learner (EL) in your class during this time? YES NO

6. Consent: The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in the study. Please type in your name and today's date.

_____

8. First Name _____

9. Last Name _____

10. Cell/Phone Number _____

11. Email Address _____

12. Demographic Information

What is your age?

____ 18-24 years old

____ 25-34 years old

____ 35-44 years old

____ 45-54 years old

____ 55-64 years old

____ 65+ years old

13. Ethnicity: Please specify your ethnicity.

____ Asian

____ Black or African American

____ Hispanic or Latino

____ Pacific Islander

____ White or Caucasian

____ Other _____

14. Gender: To which gender identity do you most identify?

____ Female

____ male

____ Other

____ Prefer not to say

15. What pronouns do you use?

____ He/Him/Himself

____ She/Her/Herself

____ They/Them/Themselves

____ Other: _____

16. Is English your primary language? Yes No

17. What other languages do you speak fluently? Check all that apply.

____ Chinese

____ Hmong

____ Indigenous

____ Korean

____ Spanish

____ Tagalog

____ Vietnamese

____ Other _____

18. Marital Status: What is your marital status?

____ Single, never married

____ Married or domestic partnership

____ Widowed

____ Divorced

____ Separated

Education and Experience

19. Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, check the highest degree received.

____ Some college credit, but no degree

____ Associate Degree

____ Bachelor's Degree

____ Master's Degree

____ Professional Degree

____ Doctorate Degree

20. Certifications: What certifications do you hold? (Check all that apply.)

____ Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential (Elementary)

____ Single Subject Credential (secondary/middle school)

____ Education Specialist Credential

____ English Learner Authorization or Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD)/Bilingual Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development (BCLAD)

____ Literacy Specialist

____ Counseling

____ Substitute Teaching Permit

____ Teacher Intern Program

____ Other

21. What grades have you taught? (Check all that apply)

____ Kindergarten

____ 1st Grade

____ 2nd Grade

____ 3rd Grade

____ 4th Grade

____ 5th Grade

____ 6th Grade

____ 7th Grade

____ 8th Grade

____ High School

____ College/University

22. How many years have you been teaching?

____ Less than one year

____ 1-4 years

____ 5-9 years

____ 10-14 years

____ 15-19 years

____ 20+ years

Instructional Delivery

For questions 23 and 24, rate yourself on a scale from 1 - 10, where 1 is "Not Applicable" and 10 is "Always."

23. I could create meaningful learning experiences for English language (EL) students before the pandemic.

24. I could create meaningful learning experiences for EL students while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 to June 2021).

25. (Short answer). How did you incorporate Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) or other English Language Development (ELD) approaches before the pandemic and during COVID-induced distance learning? (March 2020 to June 2021).

26. (Written response). What types of district-provided resources did you utilize before COVID and during COVID-induced distance learning?

Instructional Preparation

27. On average, how many hours of preparation did you put into your instruction before the COVID-19 pandemic?

____ 0 - 5 hours a week

____ 6 - 10 hours a week

____ 11 - 15 hours a week

____ 15 - 20 hours a week

____ 20+ hours a week

28. On average, how many hours of preparation did you put into your instruction during COVID-induced distance learning (March 2020 - June 2021)?

____ 0 - 5 hours a week

____ 6 - 10 hours a week

____ 11 - 15 hours a week

____ 15 - 20 hours a week

____ 20+ hours a week

Motivation and Student Engagement

For questions 29 and 30, rate yourself on a scale from 1 - 10, where 1 is "Not Applicable" and 10 is "Always."

29. I could motivate EL students to engage in active learning before the pandemic.

30. I could motivate EL students to engage in active learning while conducting distance learning during the pandemic (March 2020 to June 2021).

Technology Integration and Usage

For questions 31 and 32, rate yourself on a scale from 1 - 10, where 1 is "Not Applicable" and 10 is "Always."

31. I could integrate technology to provide meaningful instruction to ELs before the pandemic.

32. I could integrate technology to provide meaningful instruction to ELs while conducting distance learning during the pandemic (March 2020 - June 2021).

16. Are there any technologies or instructional practices that you learned or integrated into your instruction from March 2020 to June 2021 that you continue to use today?

Classroom Management

For questions 33 and 34, rate yourself on a scale from 1 - 10, where 1 is "Not Applicable" and 10 is "Always."

33. I could effectively manage my class to monitor disruptive behavior before the pandemic.

34. I could effectively manage my class to monitor disruptive behavior while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 - June 2021).

Communication

35. (Written response). Describe your communication with your EL students' parents before the pandemic and while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 - June 2021).

***Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan.*** Google Forms stores the feedback received so the questionnaires could be analyzed quickly and efficiently. It integrates information with Google

Sheets, which can be accessed to a spreadsheet view of the collected data (Melo, 2018). Spreadsheet application made data more manageable. I was also able to create graphs, charts, and tables to analyze the data. Short-answer responses were analyzed through textual and structural analysis. This involved looking at the meaning units and themes. Once individual surveys were synthesized, a composite description was crafted. Likert-type questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics. These questions were individually analyzed for deeper insights into specific attributes through reflection and comparison. Each question was coded into a number and then added up to get an overall score for each participant (see Table 6). Higher scores indicated a more positive experience, while lower scores showed a negative experience. Overall scores were compared with the responses within themes and meaningful units. The questionnaire responses were analyzed before the interview. I prepared follow-up questions or clarifying questions based on their responses.

**Individual Interviews**

The second method of data collection was individual interviews. The phenomenological interview is an informational, interactive process and utilizes open-ended questions and comments (Moustakas, 1994). The initial interview began with a general interview question since I would not have "tapped into the experience qualitatively and with sufficient meaning and depth" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 116). Moustakas further explains that broad questions can facilitate rich, vital, and substantive descriptions of the phenomenon. Before the interview, I took some time to get to know the participants so they were not intimidated by the interview process. Finally, I informed them that this was a partnership, and we were co-researchers (Moustakas, 1994). While I put the study together, the participants were providing the information. We were also collaborators in co-constructing reality to build knowledge and shared meanings to

understand. “This reality is constructed within a shared group over a period of time” (Jackson, 2010, p. 68). This concept should be very familiar to teachers of Lewis County because teachers meet weekly for collaboration. Hence, I took a collaborative approach to interviewing where I (the interviewer) and the participant (the interviewee) were equal in questioning, interpreting, and reporting (Kvale & Brinkman, 2015).

The one-on-one interview consisted of 18 open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were used to help participants focus on the phenomenon (Yin, 2016). The questions were aligned with how teachers viewed their experience. Questions for the focus group were based on the responses and themes that developed from the individual interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following are the open-ended questions used for this phenomenological research (see Appendix K).

**Table 6**

*Calculating Overall Rating Score*

| Questions | Before DL | During DL |
|---|---|---|
| Instructional Delivery Questions 23 -24<br>Motivation Questions 29-30 | | |
| Technology Integration and Usage Questions 31-22<br>Classroom Management Questions | | |
| **Overall Score Calculation**<br>Some of *Respondent Score* divided by (/) *Sum of Questionnaire Scale* multiplied by (*x*)10<br>i.e. (*x*/40)x10 = | | |

*Note:* Adapted from “Understanding ‘overall score’ for a survey response,” 2021, *Birdeye Support Center*, (https://support.birdeye.com/s/article/Understanding-Overall-Score-of-a-survey-response). Copyright 2022 by Birdeye.com.

***Individual Interview Questions***

1. Please share with me what motivated you to become a teacher, and specifically an EL teacher. (Opening Question)
2. Describe your experiences and approaches to teaching content to ELs before the pandemic. (SQ1)
3. How would you describe your confidence in providing ELD and specially designed academic instruction (SDAIE) before, during, and post-distance learning? (SQ1)
4. How has distance learning changed your understanding of pedagogical knowledge of technology? (SQ1)
5. What did you do to help meet the socio-emotional needs of your students when there were language and cultural barriers? (SQ1)
6. How did you manage your classroom with regular students and different levels of EL students? (SQ1)
7. What changes did you make to scaffold ELs when the usual supports were not available? (SQ2)
8. How would you describe your English Language Development (ELD) and sheltered instruction using technology during this time? (SQ2)
9. How did you integrate ELD with regular classroom learning through distance learning? (SQ2)
10. What challenges did you face providing distance learning instruction to your ELs (SQ3)
11. How did you address these challenges? (SQ3)
12. What would you do differently if you had to instruct ELs via distance learning again during this pandemic? (SQ3)

13. What support and resources were most valuable to you during distance learning? (SQ4)
14. What was the role of reflection, and whom did you share these with? (SQ4)
15. How would you describe the role of professional learning communities (PLCs) during the time of distance learning? (SQ4)
16. What teacher preparation/staff development has been most helpful for you in meeting the instructional needs of your ELS, including pre-service and in-service? (SQ4)
17. Describe your preferences for staff and PLC meetings (in person or via Zoom). Why? (SQ4)
18. Is there anything further you would like to share on this topic? (Closing question)

The questions were developed to understand the central research question: What transformation did rural EL teachers experience while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? Question 1 served as the grand tour question to help break the ice and make the interviewee feel comfortable (Peoples, 2021; Seidman, 2019). Questions 2-6 served to answer sub-question one: What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience in their pedagogical practices to meet the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of their students (Chafouleas & Marcy, 2020; Cowie & Myers, 2021; Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Garcia de Avila et al., 2020; Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2021; Minkos & Gelbar, 2021)? They were interpreted through a constructivist framework (Bugenhagen & Barbuto, 2012; Crotty, 1998; Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1982). Questions 7-9 served to answer the sub-question two: How did rural elementary classroom EL teachers implement technology to communicate instructional content and support their pedagogy (Coady, 2019, 2020; Colorin Colorado, 2019; Dube, 2020; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Lee & Hawkins, 2015)? This was interpreted through a social constructionism framework (Burr, 2015; Engzella et al., 2021; García & Weiss, 2020;

Gergen, 1973, 1985; Gergen & Gergen, 1991). Questions 10-12 served to answer sub-question three: What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience in their technological skills and practices (Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Fallon, 2020; Francom et al., 2021; Greene & Jones, 2020; Havens, 2014; Kalonde, 2017; Kennedy & Dunn, 2018; Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Koehler et al., 2007; Kulikowski et al., 2021; Trust & Whalen, 2020)? This was interpreted through a transformational framework (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000). Questions 12-17 served to answer sub-question four: What role did teacher collaboration play during distance learning, such as joint planning time, PLC, and critical friends' groups (Lomicka, 2020; Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Roddy et al., 2017; Stavely, 2020)? This was interpreted through a reflective framework and transformational learning (Guba, 1990; Habermas, 1981; Kulikowski et al., 2021; Taylor, 2000; Wang et al., 2004). Question 18 is a catch-all closing, serving as the concluding question (Peoples, 2021; Seidman, 2019).

To determine the face and content validity of the questions, the dissertation committee members reviewed the questions as peer and expert reviews. The value of the interview questions was approximated by eliciting feedback from the first few participants.

***Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan***

Data analysis and organization were conducted through the methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data (Colaizzi, 1973; Keen, 1975; Stevick, 1971) was used since I shared everyday situations with the participants. The procedures for analysis began with Epoché by describing my own experience of distance education (see Appendix F). From my verbatim transcribed personal experience, I

- Considered each statement, looking for significant descriptions of the experience.
- Recorded all relevant statements.
- Reduced statements down to nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping, and significant statements through the process of horizonalization (see Appendix L). These are considered invariant horizons or meaning units.
- Related and clustered invariant horizons or meaning units into themes.
- Created a description of the textures of my experience by synthesizing the invariant meaning units and themes. Synthesis involves reviewing the written narrative to find anything which may enlighten, clarify, or illuminate the text.
- Created a description of the structures of my experience by reflecting on my textural description. This was done through imaginative variation, which is the process of taking the different perspectives and unifying them into structural themes that represent the essences or the underlying structures of the experience (see Appendix M; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Moustakas, 1994).
- Constructed a textural-structural of the meanings and essences of my experience

Once I completed my personal description of the experience, I created verbatim transcripts of all the participant's experiences using the same steps above. From the participants' individual textural-structural descriptions, I constructed a composite textural-structural description of all the participants' experiences, "integrating all individual textural, structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole" (Appendix N; Moustakas, 1994, p. 122).

**Focus Groups**

Focus groups provide an opportunity for researchers to interact with multiple participants

at the same time while encouraging dialogue amongst participants about the area being researched. There were three focus groups, with each focus group comprised of 3-5 people, although 6-8 were preferred (Krueger, 2002). Twelve of the 13 participants participated in the focus group interview. Participants were grouped based on common answers, patterns, or themes from the responses from the individual interviews. This convergence-focused group (people with homogeneous experiences) was utilized to enhance and give rich details for the everyday experiences they shared. The focus of the questions was based on a more in-depth discussion regarding the themes of motivation, autonomy, social contexts of learning, competence, and relationships. Focus group questions were derived from the interview responses, and initial findings were generated from the analysis of the interviews.

Focus groups are an excellent means to create triangulation using varied sources of evidence in a study when needing to conserve time rather than conducting follow-up interviews of all participants or when collective responses are as good as, or superior to, individual interview evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Focus group questions must be developed and reported using the same format as interview questions (see Interview Question subsection above and Appendix K) and should avoid re-asking questions already asked during individual interviews. Additionally, researchers should keep in mind that when using a focus group as a source of triangulation for individual interviews, the focus group protocol may need to be modified after the study is underway to follow up most effectively on initial data findings of individual interviews (Patton, 2015).

***Focus Group Questions (see Appendix O)***

1. How did distance learning complicate EL instruction? i.e., what were the challenges you faced in providing ELD and/or SDAIE-based content learning? (SQ1)

2. Discuss how isolation affected you as the teacher (isolation from your team, students, specialists, resources, support). (SQ2)
3. How did you meet the socioemotional needs of your students due to forced isolation caused by mandated lockdowns and no face-to-face engagement? (SQ4)
4. What was/were the catalysts that made you change your delivery of instruction (either general education or EL-based instruction) (SQ1)
5. What technology did you have to learn to make it happen? (SQ3)
6. Name something new you learned related to technology as a result of distance learning. How did you implement it in your practice post-distance learning? (SQ5)
7. Discuss the value of the support you had: professionally, tech-based, grade-level team, family, administration, district, and colleagues. (SQ2)
8. How has your experience during distance impacted your current practices and pedagogy for ELs using technology? (SQ5)

***Focus Group Data Analysis Plan***

Data analysis and organization were conducted through the methods and procedures of Moustakas's (1994) phenomenal analysis. I used Moustakas's modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data. A similar process of data analysis was done as in the individual interviews. The process included horizonalization, delimiting to invariant horizons or meaning units, clustering of significant statements into themes, textural and structural descriptions (individual focus groups), composite textural and structural descriptions, and synthesis of textural and structural meaning and essences (Moustakas, 1994).

**Data Synthesis**

Data was organized, analyzed, and synthesized using the modified van Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for transcendental phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). Data was entered into Google Sheets and Excel for data management purposes only. Individual textural and structural descriptions derived data. This was followed by "intuitively-reflectively integrat[ing] the composite textual and composite structural descriptions to develop a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 181) for each data set and each method. The personal and professional outcomes described the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Triangulation was used to interpret the results. The role of triangulation is to help make sense of conflicting and inconsistent patterns. During the process of triangulating data sources across the three methods (questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups), I compared and cross-checked the consistency of the information. I compared and cross-checked consistency, which involved examining meaning units and themes within and across data sources and methods. I compared the perspectives of the participants from various points of view. The findings were also checked against the literature and other written evidence, which corroborated what participants have reported (Patton, 2015).

## Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1989) state, "phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied . . . neither problems nor solutions can be generalized from one setting to another" (p. 45). Each setting and participant presented unique experiences and realities. This cannot be generalized. However, it is essential in a qualitative study that the researcher exerts excellent effort to represent a study that is unbiased and presents data and information in a way that represents accurate and responsible reporting of data and information that is reliable and

generalizable. The most effective way of maintaining trustworthiness in a qualitative study is prevention (Shufutinksy, 2020). Ensuring bias was bracketed (Husserl, 1931), utilizing self-transparency (Shufutinksy, 2020), and engaging in reflexive journaling to develop constructs and analyze data (Pillow, 2010). Reflexivity involves constant reflection and thinking to ensure that bias does not influence the study to maintain credibility. The dependability and confirmability of the findings achieved trustworthiness. Transferability also contributed to trustworthiness.

**Credibility**

Credibility is similar to internal validity for quantitative research (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). A qualitative study is considered credible when the data or interpretation of the human experience accurately represents the shared experience of others (Krefting, 1991). Continuous self-checks were conducted, and reflexivity was practiced through personal journal writing and peer and colleague oral discussions to ensure this study was credible. Epoché was a priority to ensure that the study focused on teacher experiences and not the researcher. One of the ways data was reviewed was through member checks (also known as informant feedback), which involved going back to the participants who provided data to ensure the researcher's interpretation was an accurate representation of their experience (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Member checking of the transcripts was also conducted before analyzing the data.

**Transferability**

Although the purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth look at how elementary classroom EL teachers adjusted to teaching through distance learning in a rural setting during the COVID-19 pandemic, this has been a phenomenon experienced worldwide. The findings of this study should be highly transferable to many aspects of learning. Of particular interest to educators would be the fact that this study focused on elementary students. Although studies

have focused on online instruction in higher education (Dunn & Kennedy, 2019; Singh & Thurman, 2018), newer studies are showing the transferability of K-12 student online student learning (Popov et al., 2020). Thomas and Magilvy (2011) explained that transferability can be established by providing descriptions of the demographics and geographic boundaries along with an in-depth description of the population being studied. I worked to achieve maximum variation in my samples to increase trustworthiness as well.

**Dependability**

The dependability of the data and findings is significant, especially if someone else wants to repeat this study. Dependability also suggests that the results will endure over time (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Provided that the procedures are consistent, anyone should be able to replicate the study and find similar results that are transferable. Providing consistency with data collection, data reporting, data management, and organization was also important so that proper triangulation of the data could be conducted. For dependability, I documented the research context, particularly any changes that occurred while the research was ongoing (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Moreover, dependability was demonstrated by maintaining a log of all steps taken, presenting tables and artifacts detailing analysis procedures, and creating an audit trail in the appendices (see Appendix L).

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is a term that suggests that the researcher has remained neutral during data analysis and interpretation (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The results should be confirmed or corroborated by others to maintain confirmability (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The following explains the strategies that were used:

- Methodological coherence describes the interconnectedness and interrelatedness between the purpose, research questions, methods, data collection, and analytical processes of my study. The dissertation committee and methodologist assisted in ensuring the methods were congruent throughout this study.
- Triangulation means that multiple data points can be used to broaden the understanding of the experience (Savin-Baden, 2010). Triangulation was used to find consistencies across all data obtained from the three methods. Consistency across data from the questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus groups increased confidence in the meaning units and themes. Although inconsistencies arose, this did not necessarily weaken the credibility of the results but instead provided an opportunity for more profound insight by asking questions and reflecting as to why specific methods produced certain results (Patton, 2015).
- Peer examination entails recruiting objective colleagues and experts in the field to review and ask questions regarding the methods and results of the study, as well as any other emerging conclusions for accountability and honesty (Peoples, 2021). Modifications made as a result of peer interaction were noted in this manuscript.
- Member checks involve the participants' review of the transcripts of their information for accuracy. Participants reviewed the interpretations of their experiences and agreed that the conclusions were credible. However, when they disagreed and found the results inaccurate, I followed Peoples' (2021) suggestion to ask participants to verify the accuracy of the transcripts only, but not the interpretations.

**Ethical Considerations**

Three issues had to be considered when conducting this study. The first was to maintain confidentiality and protect the identities of the participants. The name of the state, along with other information, could reveal the location and schools used in this study. Because the community is small, even pseudonyms may not protect the identity of participating teachers or the parents and the students whom they referenced. The plan to maintain anonymity and protection of identities is to be as broad and ambiguous in identification information as possible. For example, instead of giving the name of the county, the pseudonym Lewis County was used.

The second consideration was the teacher's perception of judgment. Although this is a study to examine instructional and learning experiences, teachers may feel their instruction and technology ability were being questioned and judged. This is particularly true of any in-depth questions related to their pedagogies, educational philosophies, and lesson planning. One solution for this was to specify the purpose of the question clearly and reiterate that they were not being evaluated but rather to obtain the explanation behind their experiences. For the questions, I conducted a few pilot interviews with non-participating teachers. Based on their feedback, the questions were tempered in a manner that was subjective and non-judgmental.

The third consideration was implied guilt. Through interviews and focus group discussions, teachers may have felt a sense of guilt that their instruction was not good enough or that student learning did not meet district or personal expectations. Participants were reminded of a set of norms before each interview and focus group to alleviate any sense of blame or guilt. The norms included an explanation of appreciation for participating in the study as well as a reminder that the COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant changes in working conditions. Their participation aided in contributing vital information and lessons to be learned so that this

knowledge could be disseminated for any future crisis. Strict adherence to ethical considerations was necessary to protect the rights and welfare of those who were participating in the research. To ensure that appropriate steps were taken concerning those protections, approval for this research was sought from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board before data collection. Informed consent was also obtained before any interviews were conducted.

## Summary

Chapter Three outlined the methods and procedures, data selection, data collection, and data analysis. The problem focused on teachers having to instruct English learners in rural areas with additional learning needs and challenges created by forced online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative design featuring a transcendental approach was selected for this research. The study was viewed through a constructivist, social constructionist, and transformative framework. The participant sample and selection procedures were discussed. The research questions, setting, researcher's role, and methods would further serve as guiding steps for conducting the research. The data to be collected was obtained through questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. The researcher's role was explained, as well as the need to bracket my background and experiences so that the study would not be influenced by personal bias. Data analysis and synthesis were discussed. Finally, the chapter concluded with steps to increase trustworthiness and ethical considerations for protecting the participants.

# CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

## Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the transformation of rural elementary EL classroom teachers who transitioned to distance learning with English learners (ELs) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley. A total of 13 participants were selected to share their experiences. This chapter includes participant descriptions and results, which are presented through a questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Emerging themes are introduced in the context of the research questions. Summary findings identify both textural and structural descriptions of how rural elementary classroom EL teachers experienced distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley.

## Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to select 13 elementary classroom EL teachers. Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to identify and choose information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2015). Seventy-three individuals responded to the eligibility questionnaire. Although emails and recruitment letters were sent to schools meeting the setting criteria, I needed help to obtain participants. After loosening the settings criteria and including rural schools from neighboring Burton County (pseudonym), I was able to secure 12 participants. One participant school was located in Southern California, outside of the Central Valley. However, I decided his experience could be used for comparison with the Central Valley and possible generalizations (see Appendix L). Participants were identified and selected based on their educational background, experience working with EL populations, teaching in a rural school in the Lewis County area, and shared instructional experiences. The

participants selected had a minimum of a bachelor's degree, a current state license in multiple subjects, and an EL authorization. Demographic information was collected, and pseudonyms were used to protect participant identities.

**Anna**

Anna is an African American who has taught for over 20 years. She is between the ages of 55 and 64. She has a master's degree. Anna took a non-traditional route to becoming a teacher as she first started as a parole officer. During the 2019-2020 school year, she taught second grade. Since then, she has been working as a reading specialist, serving first through third grades. She taught at Rosemont Elementary School, where 33.5% of students were ELs, and 78.9% of students qualified for free lunches in the 2021-22 school year (see Appendix P). It is Title I schoolwide and at a distant rural locale. Her motivation to become a teacher began while growing up in South Central Los Angeles. Several students struggled around her. She felt they deserved a quality education and people who cared about them despite their circumstances. She had an ex-boyfriend who was four years older than her. He struggled a lot academically, so she helped him. That made her want to go into teaching. As far as teaching ELs, that was part of her California teaching credential.

How she teaches ELs depends on her class. If they have been reclassified as English fluency proficient (RFEP), they have been exited from the program. Based on their EL level, she provided a quality education, language acquisition, and English development. Anna used the McGraw Hill Educators *Wonders* curriculum for ELs and followed their instruction based on the students' level before testing because they came with a level from the previous grade. Based on that, she gave them 20-30 minutes daily of English Language Development (ELD) instruction built into the schedule. With content, she worked with students on vocabulary using picture

cards. For primary, she brought in realia, an artifact that students could see and manipulate.

**Ashley**

Ashley is a teacher with a Filipino background. She immigrated to California when she was young. She is bilingual at varying degrees in both Tagalog and another Filipino dialect. Ashley does not think she was an EL student herself. However, in high school, a teacher asked her if she was an EL student due to her passive writing style, a common trait for English learners. She is between the ages of 25 and 34. She has a master's degree and has taught for seven years. During distance learning, she taught third and fourth grades. During the 2021-22 school year, 10.5% of students were ELs, and 37.1% of students qualified for free school lunches (see Appendix P). Ashley taught at John Muir Elementary, which is a Title I school and is within the fringes of a rural locale. As for why she became a teacher, she does not remember a time when she did not want to be a teacher as she was growing up. Her grandmother was a teacher. She loves kids and feels a sense of community. She has a desire to reach out and support kids in any way she can. It is a compassion that was built into her by my mom, grandmother, and all of the people who raised her, instilling in her that children are one of the most essential things in our world. She loves being around children and feels there is no better job to put oneself in that position than being a teacher guiding young children and letting them know that they are loved, supported, and cared for in different ways. As for teaching students and ELs, she usually uses her cultural background to make connections with her students, even if it is not about ELs. Before the pandemic, her approach to teaching ELs was that she would provide a lesson students could access within her four walls, looking for ways to change her lesson to meet that criterion. It was easy because all of the ways to differentiate a lesson had been done or shown to her before. She had an outline of how she could change it to make it more accessible.

**Bea**

Bea is a teacher of Hispanic background but speaks very little Spanish. She is between 55 and 64 years of age and has taught for over 20 years. Post-distance learning, she taught third and fourth grades. During the 2021-22 school year, 33.5% of students were ELs, and 37.1% of students qualified for free school lunches. Bea taught at Carson Elementary, which is a Title I school within a small city locale. I recruited Bea at a colleague's referral. Although the school itself is not within a rural area, it shares similar traits as rural schools within a three-mile radius (see Appendix P). She did not go straight into teaching after college. Bea first worked in retail, then tried a variety of other jobs. She has always enjoyed working with children. With the support and encouragement of her husband, who thought she should be a school teacher, she returned to school to work on her teaching credential after she had her first child. While she was still in school, she had her second child, completing her credential at the age of 30. When her children were in high school, she obtained her master's degree. As for teaching ELs, if the student did not have language, she would use a lot of Total Physical Response (TPR), repeated directions, have the student sit closer to her, give immediate feedback, and picture labeling – it depended on the level of the student. She would also have them work on speaking in complete sentences, giving them constant feedback.

**Brenda**

Brenda is a Caucasian teacher and is fluent in both Spanish and American Sign Language. She is between the ages of 35 and 44. During distance learning, she taught third grade. During the 2021-22 school year, 10.5% of students were ELs, and 37.1% of students qualified for free school lunches (see Appendix P). Brenda taught at John Muir Elementary, which is a Title I school within the fringes of a rural locale. She has taught for over 15 years.

Initially, she had no interest in becoming an elementary school teacher. She wanted to be a high school agriculture teacher because she admired her high school agriculture teacher. As she started going to school, she became pregnant with her oldest daughter and realized she did not want to give up her summers to be with other people's kids; Brenda wanted to be with her kids. However, she did not want to give up teaching altogether. That was when she decided to go into elementary education. As for teaching English learners, she went back to school and got her masters in bilingual education. She felt that she could serve her students better than just getting a master's in multiple-subject credential.

Brenda has both a Bilingual Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development (BCLAD) and Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) authorization. As for teaching ELs before the pandemic, it was very planned out. She had small groups, picture cards, note cards, and vocabulary that she would go over. She did a lot of front-loading and making sure that they knew vocabulary, not just in ELA but also in math. In the afternoon, she had a math group of EL students. During that time, there was an extra aide. She worked with them, while one of the other teachers worked with them as well. They were getting that additional support because of the large amount of vocabulary in math, especially in first grade.

**Cora**

Cora is Caucasian and has taught for 36 years. She holds a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. She is between the ages of 55 and 64 and has taught transitional kindergarten and kindergarten during distance learning. During the 2021-22 school year, 10.5% of students were ELs, and 37.1% of students qualified for free school lunches (see Appendix P). Cora taught at John Muir Elementary, which is a Title I school and is within the fringes of a rural locale. Her motivation to become a teacher was based on her fourth-grade teacher, who inspired

her. She was fortunate enough to get hired at the same school district where she was an elementary student. She was the third generation of her family to attend Walnut Elementary. Since then, five generations have attended the school. When the district was first incorporated, she was able to teach side by side with him, and then he ended up becoming the superintendent. He was an educator with a vision. She has been able to continue the relationship, that bond with the person who was her inspiration.

When Cora first started school, there was no such designation as a second language learner. This friend may have spoken Spanish. This friend spoke Portuguese, and they learned from each other back then. As for teaching ELs before the pandemic, it was hands-on. She believes students need visuals. In all her experiences in transitional kindergarten and kindergarten, hands-on learning and visuals have been tried and true practices in an early childhood setting since she began teaching on the first day she walked in the door. Students need to have time to play with their peers. Her experience has been that students need to have the chance to develop social language and connections in those relationships to input academics. Otherwise, it would be challenging.

**Danielle**

Danielle is a Caucasian teacher with more than 20 years of teaching experience. She is over 60 years of age and holds a master's degree. She retired in 2022, the year after distance learning ended. During distance learning, she taught first grade. She taught at Rosemont Elementary School, where 33.5% of students were ELs, and 78.9% of students qualified for free lunches in the 2021-22 school year (see Appendix P). It is Title I schoolwide and at a distant rural locale. Danielle felt that becoming a teacher was the natural thing to do, to help, nurture, and take people from point A to point B to see growth, not necessarily on grade level, but to see

general growth. She comes from a family of educators; her parents were teachers, and her aunt and uncle were speech therapists. Her husband was also a teacher, although he retired three years before she did (the year before COVID-19 hit). She started as a high school aide, exposing herself to teaching. Since then, this has been the only career for her. After she did her student teaching, she was hired as a long-term substitute teacher. She has done all her teaching in the Central Valley. Her EL authorization is a California Teacher of English Learners (CTEL) certificate. Before the pandemic, EL instruction was all hands-on, small-group instruction. She was much more interactive with the actual student, not necessarily a group of students. She was also able to do one-on-one EL instruction with them at their level. She did not lecture; everything was geared not only towards the EL student but also towards the whole class so that they benefitted from her lessons.

**Holly**

Holly is a Caucasian teacher between the ages of 25 and 34. She has been teaching for seven years. She has a bachelor’s degree. She taught fourth and fifth grade during distance learning. She taught at Cypress Elementary School, where 15.9% of students were ELs, and 78.8% of students qualified for free lunches in the 2021-22 school year (see Appendix P). It is Title I schoolwide and at a distant rural locale.  She has always wanted to be a teacher since she was a student. When other kids struggled, like with math, and if she knew those concepts, she would assist them. When the teacher was not available to help students, she would step in to do it. She likes to teach. Besides the desire to do it, she felt the career would help her financially as well as for health insurance due to her medical history. She planned to teach from high school. She would attend the local community college, then into Chapman University. Once she was done with her bachelor's degree, she began to substitute teaching, then full-time teaching.

Teaching is the only job she has had, and she considers it a good job. As for teaching ELs before the pandemic, she used many visuals. She repeated information in as many ways as she could. She was in tune with the "blank stare." With that, she would reword it and provide more visuals for it. She modified instruction and materials to make them accessible to learners while still providing them with academic vocabulary.

**Kaitlyn**

Kaitlyn is a Caucasian teacher between the ages of 35 and 44. She has been teaching for close to 20 years. She holds a bachelor's degree and taught kindergarten during distance learning. Her school of employment is located in a rural area and is a Title I schoolwide. During the 2021-22 school year, 10.5% of students were ELs, and 37.1% of students qualified for free school lunches (see Appendix P). Kaitlyn taught at John Muir Elementary, which is a Title I school and is within the fringes of a rural locale. She taught kindergarten during distance learning and currently teaches it as well. One thing that she likes about kindergarten is that – as the saying goes – all students are English learners. They are all starting from scratch. She has found that the strategies she learned going through the CLAD program are suitable for all students, especially kindergarteners. In the current area where she teaches, there is a large EL population. She feels that the more knowledge one has in learning strategies, the better one can reach all the kids. Before the pandemic, as well as during and after, she found that the more visuals and the more hands-on approaches that can be used in content areas, the better. Her goal was to incorporate as many learning modalities as possible into every lesson so that she could reach all her students and their different ways of learning.

**Kimberly**

Kimberly is a Caucasian teacher who speaks Spanish. She is between the ages of 54 and 65. She has taught for 24 years. She has a bachelor's degree and was a reading specialist servicing first, second, and third graders. Initially, the grade criterion for this study was restricted to classroom elementary teachers K-6. However, because of the difficulty of recruiting elementary classroom EL teachers, I changed it to include similar experiences of specialists. Kimberly's school of employment is Taylor Elementary School, which is a Title I school. It is within the fringe of a town locale in neighboring Burton County. Although the school itself is not within a rural area, it shares similar traits as rural schools within six miles. During the 2021-22 school year, 53.6% of students were ELs, and 87.6% of students qualified for free school lunches (see Appendix P). Her mother and grandmother highly influenced Kimberly. She considers herself one of those kids who always knew since her first day at school that she wanted to be a teacher and nothing else. She has liked school, and it has been her dream since she was little. Kimberly lived on the California coast when she initially began teaching. The demographics are very different compared to the Central Valley, where she moved after marrying her husband. As for her approach to teaching ELs, she would utilize skills and strategies that would help every student in her classroom, not just those who were designated and classified as English learners. Her instructional focus is vocabulary and comprehension. When learning may seem challenging, she would frontload using pictures and videos, helping students to make some connection to their personal lives that would bring into context something that makes sense to them. She would additionally present realia to students when the item was being discussed.

**Leanne**

Leanne is a Caucasian teacher who speaks Spanish and is between the ages of 35 and 44. She has a bachelor’s degree and taught 5$^{th}$ grade during distance learning. She has been teaching

for over ten years. She taught at Sycamore Elementary School, where 4.9% of students were ELs and 41.7% of students qualified for free lunches. It is Title I schoolwide and at the fringe of a rural locale. She first started volunteering at school when her son was in first grade. After volunteering more and more, she thought she could continue with it. She enjoyed being around kids at whatever grade level. By the time her son was in fourth grade, she decided to become a teacher. As far as being an EL teacher, it was part of the job. During the first few years, she felt very uncomfortable pulling small groups and doing ELD activities. Before COVID-19, she would check in with ELs throughout the day, making sure that when using Kagan's strategies, they were engaged. She conducted designated ELD, which involved pulling a small group. The school used the McGraw Hill Education *Wonders* curriculum. There is an ELD component that was specific for ELD instruction. She used many visuals, having students repeat the directions in their own words to make sure they understood. If the student were a recent immigrant with little language skills, she would buddy them up with another student.

**Ross**

Ross is a Caucasian teacher who speaks Spanish and has been teaching English language learners, both K-12 and adults. He has a master's degree and has been teaching for 25 years. When he first started teaching, he began as a substitute teacher, still determining the exact grade level he wanted to teach. He has spent much time working with students with limited proficiency and with elementary students. He particularly enjoys teaching writing. He is a teacher/leader and consultant for the California State University, Long Beach, California Global Education Project. During distance learning, he taught fifth grade. Ross is the only male teacher participant in this study. He responded to the eligibility questionnaire through LinkedIn. Although his school was located outside the Central Valley and was not defined as a rural school, I decided to include his

experiences for comparison purposes, particularly for observing generalizations outside of the locations since, as a teacher, he was serving English learners during distance learning (see Appendix L). Ross taught at Meadowbrook Elementary School in Hughes County, where 3.3% of students were ELs and 7% of students qualified for free lunches in 2021-22. It is a targeted Title I school located in a large suburb. Before the pandemic, Meadowbrook had its own EL teacher, and ELD was conducted via pullout. Once distance learning began, her services were no longer available, and Ross had to provide designated ELD instruction. Because of his Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) background and teaching adults, he was able to transfer many strategies and approaches and adapt materials to his fifth-grade class. Although a handful of aides were available, they needed to be more knowledgeable in teaching ELs.

**Sally**

Sally is a Caucasian teacher who has taught for 14 years. She is between the ages of 35 and 44 and has a bachelor's degree. During distance learning, she taught 7$^{th}$ grade. Initially, the grade criterion for this study was restricted to elementary grades K-6. However, because of the difficulty of recruiting teachers from rural schools, I changed it to include the 7$^{th}$ and 8$^{th}$ grades of unit elementary schools (TK-8 grades). Sally taught at Sycamore Elementary School, where 4.9% of students were ELs and 41.7% of students qualified for free lunches. It is Title I schoolwide and at the fringe of a rural locale.  She first went to college to be a business major. Having worked with children for many years before that, she quickly realized that sitting behind a desk was not her forte. The passion for children and helping them develop became the motivation to make the change to teaching. Sally also looked forward to being an EL teacher to help students bridge the language gap so they may become more proficient in California schools. Her approach to teaching ELs before the pandemic was focused on vocabulary and language

usage for writing grammatically English language. She also heavily emphasized vocabulary for speaking because students needed to learn vocabulary to use the language.

**Sarah**

Sarah is a Caucasian teacher who has been teaching for over 20 years. She has a master's degree and is between 45-54 years of age. During distance learning, she taught sixth grade. Sarah taught at Sierra Hills Elementary, which is a Title I school within a small suburban locale. I recruited Sarah at the referral of one of the participants. Although the school itself is not within a rural area, it shares similar traits as rural schools within eight miles (see Appendix P). During the 2021-22 school year, 12.3% of students were ELs, and 71.6% of students qualified for free school lunches. Since she was a little girl, she wanted to be a teacher. She played school in her grandma's house. By high school, the motivation to teach was replaced with a higher-paying job. During the 1990s, there was a teacher shortage, and there were TV commercials to recruit potential teachers. She was re-inspired to go back to school to pursue teaching instead of going for a higher-paying job. It was her heart's calling. After she got her teaching credential, she began working in a small district where there were 98% free and reduced lunches with a very high Hmong, Hispanic, and African-American population. She taught kindergarten, using a lot of ELD strategies there. After seven years, she moved to a charter school in another town, teaching fifth and sixth grade, then over to Sierra Hills when COVID hit. She is currently teaching third grade, which she loves.

## Results

This study was guided by a central research question and five sub-questions to investigate the transformation rural elementary classroom EL teachers experienced while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were collected using a

questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups. All participants responded to the questionnaire and contributed to the personal interviews. Twelve of the thirteen participants were involved in three focus group interviews. Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological research process consists of data collection, analysis, and horizontalization. The data from the interview and focus group were transcribed and analyzed along with the data from the questionnaire. The results of this study are presented through the methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Data analysis and organization were conducted through transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of the textual and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). After completing questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus group interviews, four primary themes were developed in line with the theoretical framework of transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 1997) and the conceptual framework of TPACK (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Four themes (see Table 8) were identified from the data analysis of the participants' questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus group interviews.

**Theme Development**

The transcendental-phenomenological reduction was utilized to consider each experience in its singularity (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon is perceived and described in its totality (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Through the process of horizontalization, I looked for horizons or meaning units by eliminating any data that was not directly related to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This was done by reading and reflecting on the written answers to the questionnaire responses, in-depth individual interviews, and focus group interviews to find significant statements, keywords, concepts, and ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Significant statements were analyzed for categories that were used to develop broader themes. Data was coded into Google

Sheets and Excel. I looked for repeated words, phrases, and meaning units throughout the transcripts.

Significant statements, nonrepetitive, and nonoverlapping statements were compared across multiple participants. Individual interviews were conducted through Zoom video conferencing. All interviews were audio and visually recorded. Written transcripts were automatically generated and reviewed for accuracy before analysis. Individual interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. All 13 participants completed the separate interview. Participants were very engaged and gave in-depth responses. Participants were sent a copy of the questions before the interview (Appendix K). Focus Groups were created based on grade levels and the similarity of responses from the questionnaire and individual interviews. Participants were more open and eager to answer questions during the Focus Group interview. Discussion amongst the participants was limited. I prompted them as well as elicited round-robin responses. Twelve of the 13 participants participated in the Focus Group interviews. The process for phenomenological reduction was repeated with the focus group interviews as well.

I kept a reflexive journal to enter my thoughts and notes as mental aids for keywords, ideas, phrases, and also for bracketing. Coded statements were sorted into categories and entered into Google Sheets and Excel. Statements were analyzed and used to develop broader themes and subthemes (see Appendix Q), as well as areas of agreement and divergence. All data were compared for agreement and divergence. Triangulating data showed no divergence. Depending on the responses, however, one data collection method expounded or clarified information. For example, participants gave robust explanations of the challenges of providing designated ELD instruction and SDAIE during the individual interviews. Still, they focused more on the challenges of general classroom content during the focus group. Younger teachers were apt to

provide in-depth discussions during individual interviews; however, their responses could have been more robust during the focus group, where they were together with more seasoned teachers. I continued to collect data until no new data could be ascertained and participant perspectives were saturated. Four primary themes Data collection and analysis continued until unique perspectives of the phenomenon were exhausted or saturated. Four primary themes with subthemes were identified (see Table 7). The four primary themes are technology usage, professional interaction, instructional practices, and teacher transformation.

**Table 7**

*Themes and Subthemes from all Data Sources*

| Themes | Subthemes |
|---|---|
| Technology Usage | Used existing knowledge and practices<br>Learned new platforms and applications<br>Necessity of various supports<br>Decreased student computer time post-distance learning |
| Professional Interaction | Worked with grade-level teams<br>Professional learning communities (collaboration)<br>Professional development and training |
| Instructional practices | Modified instruction<br>“Classroom management” challenges<br>Delivery of SDAIE and ELD<br>Increased awareness of social-emotional needs |
| Teacher Transformation | Learned new skills and applications<br>Tech skills were elevated.<br>Increased personal technology usage<br>Reverted to old practices<br>Realized technology requires pedagogy of its own. |

## Technology Usage

The core of distance learning was instruction conducted through online video conferencing. Lessons were delivered synchronously or asynchronously. The challenges participants faced included unfamiliarity with video conferencing apps like Zoom and Google Meets. Not only did they have very little training on how to use the various features, but they also had the task of trying to fit their lessons, which were created for face-to-face instruction, into an online format. Moreover, they also had to communicate with classes of mixed students (general education and English learners). Participants were also confronted with how to provide designated ELD using the new online formats. The subthemes derived were (a) used existing knowledge and practices [of technology], (b) learned new platforms and applications, (c) necessity of various supports, (d) decreased student computer time post distance learning.

### *Used existing knowledge and practices*

Seven of the participants were tech-savvy and were able to transfer their knowledge of technology to the new formats smoothly. Five of the participants' technological knowledge was limited. They also taught primary grades (transitional kindergarten to third grade), so they used existing practices to conduct instruction online. Moreover, teachers could not create engaging content already on the internet, as Cora had indicated. She said:

> I cannot compete with Bluey and Blues Clues or whoever is out there this week. It was all the things that, as an early childhood educator at the beginning of my career, I broke out of the trunk again because you needed the puppets. You needed that extra pizazz of drama to try and make it engaging through the screen for them.

***Learned new platforms and applications***

Twelve of the thirteen participants spent more hours preparing lessons while integrating new applications. This involved increased usage of visual and interactive applications. Most teachers simultaneously used at least two devices (laptop or desktop) with two screens and a tablet. This was done to monitor students so that they were on task as well as to follow along with resources they were using while sharing their screens for a different application. As Ross noted, learning new applications changed how he was able to deliver lessons online:

> I feel like I got a masters in Zoom presentations because once I figured it out, then it really was something very beneficial. I could put some students in small groups and really have a lot of visuals, videos, and things like that that I really was not using as much in in the larger classroom. It did take me a while to figure that out. At first, I was kind of wondering why those students just couldn't grasp the presentation. The teacher is asking you to read something. The teacher is asking me to pull something. Why are you not able to do that? For the first, I'd say definitely a month and a half, maybe two months, it was a real scramble.

***Necessity of various supports***

The data for the types of support varied. This included support from the district, school administration, tech team, grade-level teams, PLCs, participant families, and students' parents. Kaitlyn stated that without parental assistance, it was challenging to get kindergartners logged on: "It was really difficult with the kids, just even the things like having Internet access because with kindergarten we had to have someone there with them, and they sometimes they were at home with a sibling who was doing school themselves on Zoom. They weren't there to help

them. It was very hard during the pandemic to provide support for the students because we didn't have time." Sally also shared:

> In general, I had a really good team teacher. We worked really good together. That probably was a saving grace that we were able to coordinate plan, and work together even through distance. I do understand technology. So, the technology part was not too bad for me. But, trying to assist kids in figuring out technology issues at a distance was not easy. [In person], I can figure it out. But, trying to walk through things through virtual classroom was not easy.

***Decreased student computer time post-distance learning***

Primary teacher participants stressed the importance of hands-on approaches to learning both developmentally and for language learners. Post distance learning, all primary grade teachers used less or no computers in their instruction. Holly summed it up as: "I try to focus more on back to the old school – physical, hands-on things and stay away from technology. Even with my own kids at home, [there was] too much technology because we were stuck at home. What else was I going to do with my kids? I read to them all the time and stuff like that. But at some point, I need space."

**Professional Interaction**

Most significant statements were centered around professional interaction. All participants sought support from their grade-level teams. Ten of the participants had a good working relationship with their grade-level team. Brenda taught strictly distance learning even after students returned to the classroom. Because she was the sole grade-level teacher, she did not have anyone to turn to. Kimberly was in a similar situation as a specialist. One participant had a team member who did not collaborate with her. Both teachers ended up doing separate

lessons. These three participants looked for their professional learning community and professional support. The subthemes derived from the significant statements are (a) working with grade-level teams, (b) professional learning communities (collaboration), and (c) professional development and training.

***Worked with grade-level teams***

Grade-level teams were significant to the participants. They shared lesson plans, content, and resources. They learned from each other, sharing independent trial and error. When their team member did not collaborate, they created their support as Anna did: "I had another [grade-level] teacher on my team, and I didn't talk with her. She and I did not communicate because she was not comfortable with technology and not conversive. I found myself Zooming with others on different sites." Ashley's grade level engaged in true collaboration:

> We did a lot of sharing because we knew that there had to be so much differentiation and so much change that happened, and how instruction was to be delivered because we couldn't just go like same old same old. We'll just go on the Zoom like it wasn't that way. We actually got together quite frequently and divided up the work:

***Professional learning communities (collaboration)***

All schools in Lewis, Burton, and Hughes Counties (pseudonyms) continued to set aside a designated minimum day for collaboration and professional development. How PLCs were conducted varied across schools and districts. Rock Point Union School District (pseudonym) discontinued mandated PLCs and replaced them with as-needed collaboration. Sometimes, PLCs were led by the school administrator. Instead of having scheduled PLCs, they were replaced with as-needed collaboration.

On the other hand, some districts continued their usual PDs and collaboration meetings with the exact expectations as pre-COVID. Training on online platforms was provided. The regular collaboration meetings were considered useless and not helpful, as Leanne stated:

> I didn't quite understand why we were doing it. Why are we tracking this data? Why are we dissecting all of this when it was really difficult for me to say this kid did poorly on the test because he doesn't know this reading skill? That's easy to say, and it's difficult for me to think that's what the problem is. Maybe the kid didn't do well. I don't know his environment. We're charting all this data. I just thought this is kind of garbage because there's just so many variables going on. We had parents having full-on fights, screaming about divorce. That's probably why that kid didn't do well in his test.” He can't sleep at night because Mom and Dad are fighting and screaming at each other. I can hear it, you know. I had a really hard time even discussing any of that. I had a partner that was very difficult to work with. We had very different ideas on how things should be done. Our PLC time could have been more productive, and I didn't see the point in keeping data on how the kids were doing because there were too many variables.

***Professional Development***

Few participants felt that pre-service teacher training was helpful during distance learning. Brenda stated, "The EL part, I actually went back and got my masters in bilingual education because I felt that I could serve my students better. Most participants found that in-service professional development relevant to instruction was the most helpful. For Ashley, before distance learning, there was PD, where English Language Proficiency Assessments in California (ELPAC) resources were presented. "If you wanted to do an ELPAC lesson on reading, you

would simply click [and] at would break it up into the different sections. The software would prepare lessons." Anna shared how PD before the pandemic helped her with technology:

> Our district at that time had tech talks where the head of the tech department and one or two staff people would come, and they would train us. We would get the initial training, and then they would come back and say, "Now, let's teach you this part." I went every single time to tech talks because technology wasn't my strength. I always went to those pre-COVID, aways kept notes, and I made a tech folder. I always made sure I took that tech folder home during Zoom. It helped because this is how I do it and get it done.

**Instructional practices**

The second most significant statement came from instructional practices. Subthemes included modified instruction, classroom management challenges, delivery of SDAIE and ELD, and increased awareness of social-emotional needs. Within each of the subthemes were reoccurring statements like more time and the need for internet-based resources and materials. For example, Kaitlyn reflected that she wanted

> more time to build the background and that prior knowledge vocabulary. We were just so rushed at the time, and none of us really had done this before...Looking back, I can see that we just need to make the time. I would probably try to have a separate time to meet with just my EL students as well. We allotted them a certain amount of extra time. We're supposed to do so many minutes, but I think I would increase that.

***Modified instruction***

Instruction had to be modified because of time constraints, technology limitations, and knowledge of the devices and online content. Ross explained, "I really tried to find content. Some of the textbooks had online programs, some did not. I had to go search for things online

that some other teachers found somewhere else”. Participants also made modifications due to unreasonable district expectations. However, most teachers were able to cover target standards even if they were unable to teach them to mastery. For example, Cora found "menus so parents could pick and choose. Here's our PE menu. Here's our social studies menu. Parents greatly appreciated that. Here's your set thing on Monday. There was always something fun, yet not taxing for the families because they were burdened enough.” Modifications also had to be made to meet EL needs both for scaffolding and designated ELD.

***Classroom management challenges***

Classroom management was complex because it entailed not only behaviors and organization of the instructional time but also managing student activities online. This was done through the Go Guardian app. Participants used communication apps like Class Dojo and Reminder. Other challenges included motivating and engaging students while online, keeping students online, enforcing distance learning classroom rules and disciplinary action, and home disruptions during synchronous instruction. Sally comments on small group instruction:

> We did try and take time during the distance learning to have one-on-one meetings virtual meetings with lower students and give them a little bit more support. Tried to do breakout groups with students so they can work with their peers still. But again, technology was an issue because not everybody was able to connect or stay connected or even attend our virtual times that we had set up for lessons during distance learning.

***Delivery of SDAIE and ELD***

Although some schools, such as Sierra Hills (Sarah's school), had an EL specialist on site, teachers had to provide designated ELD and SDAIE by carving out time into their schedules for EL lessons. Although some participants were able to continue ELD instruction and scaffolding

for EL content-based learning, others were challenged or were not able to provide SDAIE, let alone ELD. Brenda shares: "I feel like I did not do a service to the students. I had small groups I met with those kids separately, but you had to find other strategies because you couldn't just hand them the paper. You would have to hold it up, make sure everyone can see, even if there are smaller groups. I didn't feel like the kids were learning as well." Ashley noted, "I didn't feel equipped to support Els digitally like none of my schooling prepared me for any kind of like digital support." Kaitlyn also stated, "It was a lot harder to reach all the children, especially the EL students because they benefit the most from hands-on learning, and from all those visuals when you use them to build vocabulary and build background knowledge.

***Increased awareness of social-emotional needs***

Of all the findings, these statements surprised me the most because what I deemed as meeting social-emotional needs were structured and counseling-based activities. I discovered that there was a clash between my definition of what social-emotional needs were versus the participants as the things I considered meeting the social-emotional needs were structured and counseling-based activities. Although the implied meaning of the question, *how were the students' social-emotional needs met* was *what types of professional strategies and support (i.e., personnel resources like counselors) were used to help students deal with the isolation of distance learning,* participants' responses focused on the activities they specifically provided for students to be able to interact with one another during the time of isolation and social distancing. Significant statements surrounded planned activities for students to share feelings and concerns; feelings of teacher guilt because teachers could not meet the social-emotional and academic needs of their students; they made personal visits to student homes; and "took" students into

breakout rooms to privately address student feelings and emotions. Bea involved her Spanish-speaking mother to assist her:

> I could only do so much, so I sort of cheated (at this point, contact with students was not allowed). I would take my mom with me on the home visit. I didn't really understand the power of that because my mother is part of that community. I'm not considered part of that community. I would take her, and that was so powerful because when I'd say, this is my – I introduced her in Spanish – my mother, and she's going to translate for me, and they were like [surprised facial expression]. At first, they were all confused. But then, when she started speaking and translating what I was saying, they bought into the education part. They bought into it. I didn't realize how powerful that was. She wasn't a teacher. She wasn't a principal. She was just a person like them.

## Teacher Transformation

Participants transformed as a result of enduring a trying dilemma that forced them to learn new things. The subthemes include: (a) learning new skills and applications, (b) elevating technology skills, (c) reverting to former practices, (d) increasing personal technology usage, and (e) realizing technology requires pedagogy of its own.

### *Learned new skills and applications*

The most obvious of the skills and applications were Zoom and Google Meets. Participants also increased their usage of videos and instructional learning applications. Each participant resorted to learning how to use the applications and tech features independently through YouTube videos and TikTok. All participants went outside their comfort zone to learn. For example, Danielle stated: "not only did we start Zooming, I had to become a student and learn how to Zoom and learn how to block this person or share a video through Zoom. So, my

off time was spent becoming more tech-savvy." Cora learned to depend on apps when conventional interaction could not be utilized: "That's where my use of Go Noodle greatly increased for the brain breaks if they're having to sit in one space all day. They're four and five. You got to get creative because they have to move if you want them to re-engage and to put content in no matter how crazy it looks and with no manipulatives.”

***Technology skills were elevated***

Participants have been able to integrate newly learned skills and applications for classroom-based instruction. They have increased their usage of applications and platforms before distance learning. For example, Holly shared, "I've increased technology since the pandemic because, during distance learning, it was so much easier. Here's a PowerPoint slide. Let's just go through the slides because that was the only way to present the information. It became a kind of organized way of doing things." Participants also continued the usage of video conferencing for PLCs, professional development, and staff meetings while applying newly learned skills. Anna stated, "I probably would do more screen sharing because I feel comfortable with that versus my whiteboard. It would free me to do some hand movement, maybe. I think I would probably use the technology a little bit more. Now I own some skills that I didn't own before."

***Reverted back to old practices***

Despite new and engaging applications and skills being learned, all teachers reverted to pre-COVID practices. This was particularly true of the primary grades and for teaching EL students requiring hands-on learning. As far as meetings, 12 of the 13 teachers preferred face-to-face for PLCs. About half preferred face-to-face for staff meetings or professional development.

The other half chose Zoom or were indifferent. As students returned to school in person, there was a sense of urgency to return to the basics of communication. Kimberly noticed

> loss of language and expressive language because they, indeed, were not talking to anybody at home. I feel like there were definitely a vocabulary and language loss when they came back because their parents were probably out working in the fields all day, and they saw their families at nighttime. Whether or not they got on Zoom was their choice or grandma's. Half of the time, they did, and half of the time, they did not. All of that structure, routine, conversation, communication, all of the things that they had built over the years that they were in school just seemed to go away so much faster than it took to make it back up.

***Realized technology requires pedagogy of its own***

In line with TPACK, participants realized that distance learning requires a pedagogy of its own. Teachers could not transfer brick and mortar to the two-dimensional screen. It also took much work to differentiate with ELs instruction mainstreamed to general education when everyone is synchronously online. Teachers required more training in pedagogies and online classroom management. Also, more EL-specific applications for teaching and supporting ELs for academic content were needed. Brenda sums it up:

> I had to learn a lot more. I just had to be the expert. I had to be my own technician. I had to be learning a lot more. Technology showed me how adaptable I could be and how adaptable learning and teaching could be. But so far, and only with certain kinds of kids and certain kinds of families and certain kinds of technology. When I was doing my hybrid, I can reach these kids at the certain time with all of our limitations. But if a student had bad wi-fi, I can't hear them. They can't hear me. They're not getting out of

anything out of this. So, it changed my perception of how well I could teach with technology in that I felt like I could do a lot more in certain avenues but not in the ones that I was used to. It's almost like I had to change my idea of what my ability is. When you come to work, you have an idea of what you can get done for the day. But with a lens of teaching, what I can get done kind of shifts. I have to change my expectations because they're just not applicable all the time with the technology.

**Questionnaire**

After eliminating non-eligible participants from the questionnaire, I aggregated the results of participant ratings (see Table 9). Questions 23, 24, 27-34 were answered on a Likert scale of 1-10. The overall teaching experience was calculated using the *Understanding "Overall Score" for a Survey Response* (see Table 6). The results showed that teachers rated themselves much higher in the tasks before distance learning versus during distance learning (see Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Eligibility Questionnaire Teacher Average Ratings*

| Questions | Task | Before DL | During DL |
|---|---|---|---|
| 23 & 24 | Create meaningful learning experiences for ELs | 8.9 | 5.3 |
| 27 & 28 | Average time for preparation | 6-10 hours | 11-15 hours |
| 29 & 30 | Motivate ELs to engage in instruction | 8.9 | 4.6 |
| 31 & 32 | Integrate technology for meaningful instruction to ELs | 7.8 | 5.8 |
| 33 & 34 | Effectively manage class behavior | 9.1 | 5.4 |
| | Overall teaching experience | 34.7 | 21.1 |

*Note:* Overall teaching experience excludes the average time for preparation (questions 27 and 28). Ratings are based on a Likert scale of 1-10. Calculations are based on the adapted "Understanding 'overall score' for a survey response." For questionnaire data analysis, see Appendix R.

Questions 23-24 fall within the theme of instructional practices. Questions 27-28 fall within the theme of technology usage. Questions 29-30 fall within the theme of instructional practices. Question 31 falls within the theme of technology usage. Question 32 falls within the theme of teacher transformation. Questions 33-34 fall within the theme of instructional practices. For subthemes, see Table 9.

As for Question #25, *How did you incorporate SDAIE and/or other ELD approaches before the pandemic and during COVID-induced distance learning*? This fell into the theme of Instructional Practices and the subtheme of Delivery of ELD and SDAIE. Teachers used SDAIE-based activities and instruction as they were trained: small group lessons, vocabulary building, use of realia, pictures, and visuals; videos, frontloading providing background knowledge as well as activating prior knowledge but could not do those things with distance learning, although they tried to communicate in a variety of ways.

As for Question #26**,** *What types of district-provided resources did you utilize BEFORE COVID and DURING COVID-induced distance learning*? This fell into the theme of Instructional Practices and the subtheme of the necessity of support. Before the pandemic, most teachers used the ELD component of the district-provided ELA curriculum, such as *Benchmark Advanced* or *McGraw-Hill Education Wonders.* One teacher mentioned that there was an EL teacher who did pull out. During DL, she would pull EL students as well as other struggling students for small group instruction. Some districts provided continuous technology training and

**Table 9**

*Questionnaire Results*

| Questionnaire Question | Theme | Sub Theme(s) | Research Question |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| #23 & #24 | Instructional Practices | Modified instruction, classroom management challenges, delivery of ELD and SDAIE | SQ4 |
| #25 | Instructional Practices | Delivery of ELD and SDAIE | SQ4 |
| #26 | Instructional Practices | Necessity of supports | SQ4 |
| #27 & #28 | Technology Usage | Using existing knowledge and practices, learning new platforms and applications, the necessity of various supports | SQ1 |
| #29 & #30 | Instructional Practices | Classroom management | SQ4 |
| #31 | Technology Usage | Learning new platforms and applications | SQ1 |
| #32 | Teacher Transformation | Realized technology requires pedagogy of its own | SQ3 |
| #33 & #34 | Instructional Practices | Classroom Management | SQ4 |
| #35 | Technology Usage | Used existing knowledge and practices; learned new platforms and applications | SQ1 |

professional development which resulted in a smoother transition for DL. During DL, students were provided hotspots and tech support for teachers, parents, and students.

As for Question #35, *Describe your communication with your EL students' parents BEFORE the pandemic and while conducting distance learning DURING the COVID-19 pandemic*; this fell into the theme of technology usage and subthemes of used existing knowledge and practices and learning new platforms and applications. For most teachers, communicating with parents was positive and done with a translator—a few used Class Dojo. One teacher sent postcards and made random calls to families but at regular intervals. One teacher made home visits as part of starting up the school year. Generally, communication was face-to-face. During COVID, the use of Class Dojo went up. This was a positive app because it translated messages into the parents' language. Communication was either through Class Dojo or Zoom. A few teachers gave their personal cell phone numbers to parents. Initially, it was more

challenging to talk with parents, but as everyone became familiar with Zoom, communication became more manageable. For some ELs, it was more difficult to communicate because parents were working. Students or siblings translated for parents. Unreliable internet also made it difficult for some families in rural areas.

### Outlier Data and Findings

Any theme or finding which does not align with particular research questions or themes are discussed here.

#### *Outlier Finding #1*

All participants agreed that distance learning was challenging. The overall opinion regarding this experience was negative. Hence, it was surprising to hear Danielle express the challenge in a positive light: “I thought it was, I don't want to say fun, but it was a fun challenge. I didn't look upon that as poor me. Oh no, I have to learn something new." The mindset of veteran teachers (those who taught 20+ years) generally was that despite the difficulties and stated lack of confidence, they were able to utilize their background experience and knowledge to endure the challenge. Besides Danielle, no one expressed the challenge as fun.

## Research Question Responses

This section offers answers to the research questions presented in this research, primarily using the themes and subthemes described in the previous section. The responses represent the perception of the participants. Data collected from all methods were used when considering the response to the research questions.

### Central Research Question

*What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?* This study demonstrated how

classroom EL teachers transformed their assumptions, pedagogy, planning, and organization related to teaching using technology. Constructivism, social constructionism, and transformation served as the interpretative framework of this study. Each assumption was built on the other. Constructivism focuses on the individual teacher-learner and scaffolding of learning while they interact with their new digital environment. Social constructionism included the shared experiences of the community of EL teachers during DL. The participants shared a common reality and experiences that caused disorder with their social structures, beliefs, and assumptions about the values of the community, resulting in the transformation of their previous teaching context, assumptions, beliefs, and understanding affected by COVID-19 prompted distance learning.

First of all, they were transformed in their technology usage. The initial lockdown in March 2020 caused massive confusion. Without a plan in place, many teachers resorted to using existing knowledge and practices. However, the "usual" ways were not sustainable because they were incompatible with online learning. This forced teachers to learn new platforms and applications. Instruction was delivered via Zoom and Google Meet. Classroom platforms such as Showbie and Google Classroom were used as the means to manage classroom instruction. Class Dojo became an effective communication tool between teachers and parents, particularly for EL students, because it could translate messages into different languages. However, even with all the technology in place, instruction was only possible with the support of various individuals. For all students, and particularly the EL students, it was the parents who helped them log in to their devices and managed students to ensure they stayed on. IT and administrative support were invaluable. Teachers depended on their teams and other professionals (like specialists and classroom aides) as they collaborated and discussed various ways of teaching online. Finally,

they had the support of their families in terms of emotional and mental support, as well as physical support, as family members stepped in to aid in creating a classroom environment in teachers' homes.

Second, teachers experienced transformation within their professional interaction. Through reflection, sharing, and discourse, teachers learned various ways of presenting materials and instructing online. As Leanne notes below, there was no single PD or training that helped to prepare them for distance learning. Instead, how teachers learned new technologies and web-based applications were seen through the interactions of social discourse (Burr, 2015; Galban, 2014; Gergen, 1985). When teachers applied critical and self-reflection as well as rational discourse (Mezirow, 1991) and self-directed learning (Manning, 2007), they were able to change their view of using technology, indicating a transformation of their perspective (Mezirow, 2000).

Third, participants showed a transformation in their instructional practices regardless of whether they met student needs or not. Teachers had to prioritize their instruction, making modifications in their instruction for it to be presented through technology. Not all participants were able to conduct designated ELD. Five participants set aside time to deliver ELD instruction through breakout sessions or with the help of an aide (who worked with the rest of the class), two teachers were hit and miss, and six teachers did not do designed ELD, stating it was difficult or lack of time. On the other hand, all participants utilized SDAIE strategies for all their students. As Ashley and Danielle stated, what was beneficial for some students was beneficial for all.

Distance learning greatly affected classroom management. Teachers had to work around connectivity issues and parent's schedules. They resolved this by rescheduling classes, modifying instruction, or providing asynchronous activities and assignments. Teachers found ways to monitor students and keep them engaged and motivated. One of the problems was the inability to

do small groups. Some teachers had the assistance of aides, and upper-grade students could do breakout rooms. To resolve this, teachers scheduled their small groups for the afternoon while conducting core instruction in the morning.

Another transformation within instructional practices had to do with meeting students' social-emotional needs. All participants were aware of their students' needs, particularly ELs. All but two participants made attempts to meet their needs, whether it was setting aside specific times for students to share, making home visits, or spending private time with them in a breakout room. The two teachers were very much aware of student needs. However, one of them was very overwhelmed with the whole DL situation, increasing her preparation time. It was an additional task that they needed help with to keep up. The other teacher needed to learn how. As a result, both teachers were very guilt-ridden and felt terrible that they could not provide in this situation. Lastly, the general transformation was experienced by all participants. Some learned new technology skills and applications both online and on their devices. Regardless of whether it was intended or not, all teachers' technology skills were elevated. Some participants continued to use their newly acquired applications; others returned to their "old" ways. The most significant transformation in this area was their changed assumption for student usage. Although they continued allowing students to use their devices in class, most decreased the amount of time spent on the devices to not using them at all. Teachers realized the importance of hands-on learning, particularly for their ELs and all language-developing students, as well as the significance of face-to-face learning for social interaction. Distance learning limited social interaction, which is essential to the ELs' learning needs. Although online instruction did not support the ELs' need for language acquisition because they lacked the meaningful social

interactions necessary for second language learning (Sayer & Braun, 2021), teachers still tried their best to connect with students in some way.

**Sub Question One**

*How did rural elementary classroom EL teachers implement technology to communicate instructional content and support their pedagogy?* This was done through technology usage, whether it was in the form of using existing knowledge and practices, learning new platforms and applications, relying on various supports, or delivering SDAIE and ELD instruction.

Primary teachers could learn a few new apps to provide instruction. Once they had the delivery media (Zoom or Google Meets), they used the document camera, Smartboard, hand-held whiteboards, puppets, and other realia. State-approved curricula like *Wonders* and *Benchmark Advanced* were already available online. Moreover, older students were already using Google Classroom and online assessments. Participants were apprehensive about trying new things, even if some things were available online. Ashley pointed out, "I didn't try to use it during DL because it was too difficult to show students how to do it." Since teachers needed to take time to effectively develop their own linguistically responsive teaching practices with technology, applying them to their class instruction was challenging. Linguistically responsive teaching (LRT) was overwhelming since teachers were being asked to conduct teaching strategies that they were not familiar with during an emergency crisis.

Distance learning through technology was not possible with the various support teachers had. The majority noted the dedicated support from their administrator, whether it was with material, hardware needs, or emotional. The IT tech teams were also invaluable. Specialists, when available, were helpful as well. For the primary teachers, parent support was critical, particularly for the ELs. Classroom Dojo, a communication app, translates texts into any

language. If students were not online, teachers could text parents in their language to remind students to attend class or to turn on their cameras. Not all participants had aides, but as Kaitlyn noted, "because of Title 1, we did have aides who were helpful and supportive." The aides monitored students, chats, and small groups. In this way, instructional support staff was available to help students connect to the content for SDAIE-based learning.

The participants tried to use SDAIE-based activities and instruction as per training: small group lessons, vocabulary building, use of realia, pictures, visuals, and videos. They also frontloaded, providing background knowledge as well as activated prior knowledge. However, they had difficulty doing those things with distance learning despite trying to communicate in a variety of ways. Like all the participants, Anna shared, "I had to learn to how to share screens and that way I can show them photographs of different vocabulary…for [students] to see what we are talking about, to have a visual—technology [was] not my strength. I felt comfortable teaching the skill. I just needed to work around the technology." Teachers worked through their anxieties regarding the challenges of online and technology-based learning to provide the learning context ELs need by connecting learning with applications

**Sub Question Two**

*What role did teacher collaboration play during distance learning (common planning time, PLC, critical friends' groups)?* This question was answered through the theme of professional interaction and the subthemes of working with grade-level teams, professional learning communities (collaboration), and professional development and training.

As for working with grade-level teams, all the participants noted the importance of the team. Ten of them had a very positive experience with their grade-level team, while three of them did not. Four of those teachers explained how they created one subject/content area lesson

and shared it. Holly mentioned, "The team was the biggest thing. I wasn't doing my slides all on my own. I would take care of math. The other teacher would take care of ELA. The other teacher would take care of science or social studies. We broke it apart." Anna did not have a partner who worked with her: "She and I did not communicate because she was not comfortable with it and not conversive with technology." The lack of competence with technology was definitely a stressor that created challenges not only for the individual teacher, but also for collaborating teachers. Kaitlyn noted, "it was kind of a lonely time for a lot of teachers because we're used to that collaboration, and we didn't get to share." Teacher resilience could lead to creative means of communicating. Longing for collaboration and support, Anna created her own PLC by seeking other grade-level teachers with whom she could collaborate.

As for professional development and training, several of the teachers were provided PD from their districts focusing on ELD. The problem was that they needed to learn how to incorporate it with distance learning and technology-based pedagogies. Cora explains, "ELs were a low priority. Meeting the needs of EL students was low. And getting the technology in place? Stage one is sometimes those that are SPED [special education] students, speech students. How was I going to provide?" Leanne summed it up perfectly: "I didn't receive anything that could have prepared me in any capacity to be an effective EL teacher during distance learning. I think any teaching with online would have been beneficial for any student." Participants needed help to recreate language-rich classes for ELs online. The quick transition did not allow for preparation or in-depth professional development; hence, many teachers were left to learn on their own. The results demonstrated how they applied critical and self-reflection as well as rational discourse and self-directed learning.

**Sub Question Three**

*What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience in their technological skills and practices?* This question was answered through the theme of teacher transformation and the subthemes of learning new skills and applications, technology skills were elevated, and increased personal technology usage.

Regarding learning new skills and applications, all participants had to learn Zoom or Google Meets. Ross noted how technology-based lessons provided materials he could not find within textbooks:

> I really know how to write Zoom lessons, and I do it for a lot of other teachers at this time because the combination of introducing, repeat in a couple of different instances, have videos, have photos, have things that are visually appealing, that wasn't the textbook that I had. I don't know about everybody else, but the textbooks we had were kind of flat and not really visually engage, and now I know how to do that, and that's what these students need for that type of lesson.

Kimberly noted how she learned to use an iPad as a document camera. “I could either write on the tablet with an app, and they could see it on their computers. All of those things that, never in a million years, would we have had to use [it] in the classroom.” Support with new knowledge helped participants utilize instructional apps.

All participants’ level of usage was elevated because they never had to utilize technology to the degree it has been had it not been for distance learning. Cora mentioned how she had to use technology to engage her kindergarteners. “That's where my use of Go Noodle greatly increased for the brain breaks if they're having to sit in one space all day. They're four and five. You got to get creative because they have to move if you want them to re-engage and to put

content in no matter how crazy it looks and with no manipulatives.” Technology plays a vital role in engaging students and creating an interactive learning environment. Technology-based learning also helps students make choices and decisions related to their learning processes.

Participants also increased their usage of technology. For example, Ashley "would try and find ones that are more interactive like that because, with the videos and the graphic organizers, that was very active learning." Holly noted," I've increased technology since the pandemic because, during distance learning, it was so much easier. Here's a PowerPoint slide. Let's just go through the slides because that was the only way to present the information. It kind of became a kind of organized way of doing things." Perseverance and passion helped teachers to continue with increased technology usage and exposure to new technologies, especially those that were of interest and practical.

**Sub Question Four**

*What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience in their pedagogical practices to meet the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of their students?* This question is answered within the theme of instructional practices and subthemes of modified instruction, classroom management challenges, and increased awareness of social-emotional needs.

When teachers initially went into lockdown and distance learning, they did not have all their materials; hence, modified instruction became a necessity. Most had limited resources. Leanne stated, "I was reaching for anything in my house, in my classroom, whatever I could find. If I could do it differently, I would definitely be prepared." Not only did teachers lack instructional materials, but students were also limited with their textbooks. Ross had difficulty finding content. “The textbooks we had were kind of flat and not really visually engaging. Now I

know how to do that, and that's what these students need for that type of lesson." Kaitlyn remembered the lack of time: "Our lessons were a lot shorter, and it was just kind of focusing on the facts. There wasn't time to really build the thematic units that we do to help children learn the concepts." Teachers' modification of instruction demonstrates perspective transformation. Perspective transformation emphasizes the necessity to establish critical awareness of how perspectives and guiding assumptions limit the participants' ways of teaching and functioning within an online environment.

Secondly, there were many challenges with classroom management. Students did not think it was a priority, so attendance became an issue. Creating small groups and conducting breakout sessions on Zoom was equally challenging. The problems were not limited to students. Parents would use inappropriate language while students were zooming. Mothers would be using the vacuum cleaner while school was in session. There were problems with getting feedback from other siblings' devices as they had their microphones on and were listening to their teachers on Zoom as well. Students would be logged in, but they would not be paying attention, either watching TV or playing video games. Some were logged in but turned their cameras off; hence, teachers had to deal with black screens. Ashley noted, "It was not just management, but not a lot of differentiation was allowed because of the spacing proximity wasn't allowed. It was really hard to do digitally to the point I feel like it didn't really happen, which is sad."

Despite all participants having increased awareness of social-emotional needs, not all of them were able to meet student needs, which led to much guilt for teachers. Three teachers had daily check-ins. Four teachers carved out time for a talk session or share time. One teacher did show and tell. Schools did drive-through events to acknowledge students. One teacher did it in the form of art and having students express their feelings. Participants were dedicated. Four of

them went to students' homes to meet with them and deliver packets. Bea took her Spanish-speaking mother to visit her students and parents. "[Teachers] are really not part of that community. So, I would take her. I introduced her in Spanish, my mother, and she's going to translate for me. At first, they were all [withdrawn]. But then, when she started speaking and translating what I was saying, they bought into it. I didn't realize how powerful that was." Bea utilized culturally and linguistically responsive practices and the students' backgrounds to help parents support student learning and ultimately connect with content.

**Sub Question Five**

*How does a new perspective of instruction impact teachers' current practice of instructing ELs with technology?* This question is answered within two themes: technology usage and the subtheme decreased student computer time post-distance learning, and the teacher transformation theme with subthemes reverting to old practices and realizing technology requires a pedagogy of its own.

As for technology usage and decreased student usage after distance learning, primary teachers in particular (TK-2nd grades) used less because they used a more developmental, hands-on approach to learning. Additionally, TK and kindergarten are not only about academics but also about teaching social skills. Kindergarten teacher Kaitlyn noted, “It was not appropriate for my grade level. Kids this age need to have hands-on experiences that they don't get through technology. When they're in school, we try to focus a lot on social and emotional things. They can't get through technology, in my opinion.” Fifth-grade teacher Leanne noted:

> I try to still balance it in my classroom on a daily basis. I feel more comfortable using technology overall because of distance learning and having to learn the ins and outs of things that I never otherwise would have. But even now, in my daily classroom, we have

> one-to-one Chromebooks, and I don’t like more than 30 minutes at a time. I’m more hands-on. Let’s build something, let’s dig in the dirt type of teacher. But I do feel comfortable.

Maybe it is not a new perspective of instruction that impacted teacher's usage of technology with their students, but more of an affirmation of the purpose of technology. Distance learning demonstrated that there needs to be less focus on the tool and more attention to the kinds of knowledge, skills, and attitudes teachers require to integrate technology into their instruction successfully.

As for reverting to their old practices, teachers saw this more as a necessity for both students and themes. As language learners, they saw the need to go slower and be more intentional in using pictures, gestures, word banks, and sentence frames. Sarah summarized it: "I would try not to go as fast, go slower, and be more conscious of the strategies I was using, not just with my ELs, but with everybody. There was such a push that they still had to take that state test, and we still had to get them ready." Cora noted: "[I would] give myself a little bit more freedom about what to do within the confines of that, not so much trying to tick off whatever boxes somebody needs to tick off, but to give the student what they needed more sometimes." District-mandated constraints went against many core attributes of SDAIE, namely more time for language production, pairing or small groups, visuals and manipulatives, and lessons with sensory activities – all of which were challenging during distance learning.

Realizing that technology requires a pedagogy of its own, participants unanimously agreed that technology-based learning is more than using a device. Sally noted, "A teacher's understanding of technology definitely plays a role in how the students can handle it. A teacher who's more confident in using it would be definitely more of a help than a hindrance for virtual

learning, regardless of the student's academic level or language." Ashley added, "[distance learning] highlighted how much you could do with technology, but at the same token, it highlighted how much I couldn't do like I could. Technology showed me how adaptable I could be and how adaptable learning and teaching could be." The participants realized that online teaching requires knowledge and skills to support the teacher as the meeting point for technology, pedagogy, and content. By nature of the profession, teachers practice critical reflection of their instructional practice. They engage in problem-solving through discourse with peers, colleagues, and mentors. As Danielle stated, "I had to become a student and learn how to Zoom." Teachers had to become learners themselves as they took on self-directed practices of unfamiliar and new pedagogical learning out of necessity due to the conditions brought about by the pandemic. They were challenged to discover and examine their own assumptions regarding distance learning.

## Summary

This chapter began by introducing the participants of this study, which included one male and 12 female participants. Using Moustakas's (1994) approach to analyzing transcendental phenomenology, four primary themes were developed, which included technology usage, professional interaction, instructional practices, and teacher transformation. Structural descriptions, along with significant statements, were provided to support themes and subthemes. Following the discussion on themes, the central research question and sub questions about the findings were discussed. After describing each of the themes, I discussed how the findings addressed the central research question and each of the supporting research questions. One significant finding in this study was that all participants expressed the importance of their grade-level team and the difficulties that isolation posed on their support and collaboration. The

participants were very aware that the parents, school districts, administrators, and ITs did the best they could for the circumstances. Without their support, distance learning was taxing. The participants were challenged to provide meaningful instruction to ELs, modify the delivery of their instruction, and learn new technology skills regardless of whether it was voluntarily or not, which was the essence of their experience.

# CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

## Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the transformation of rural elementary classroom teachers who transitioned to distance learning with English learners (ELs) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley. This chapter summarizes the findings meaningful to the participants' experiences while instructing elementary EL students during COVID-19-induced distance learning. The discussion begins with the interpretation of the findings considering the developed themes, followed by the implications for policy and practice. The next section examines the theoretical and methodological implications, including the limitations and delimitations. Chapter Five concludes with recommendations for future research.

## Discussion

This section summarizes the findings of this study given the developed themes. Interpretations of findings are supported by empirical and theoretical sources, along with clear evidence from the study. The themes were based on data acquired from the questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups. The discussion also includes how the findings fit within the theoretical framework of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997) and conceptual framework of Technology Pedagogy and Content Knowledge (TPACK; Koehler et al., 2007; Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Mishra & Koehler, 2006)

### Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study add to the literature examined in Chapter Two regarding the experiences of elementary EL teachers who taught during distance learning, as well as the literature concerning distance learning in rural areas. This section begins with a summary of

thematic findings, as discussed in Chapter Four, followed by the interpretations of the findings. Inferences from the data, application of Mezirow's transformational learning theory (1997), and the TPACK framework (Koehler et al., 2007) will help interpret and challenge my interpretations through comparisons with existing data, relevant literature or my initial hypotheses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This will be done through a process where carefully considered judgments about what is meaningful in the patterns, themes, and subthemes are generated by analyses (Poth, 2015).

### *Summary of Thematic Findings*

This research was guided by transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 1997) and the TPACK framework (Koehler et al., 2007) and focused on the experiences of the teachers who taught classroom ELs in a rural setting during COVID-induced distance learning. Key themes that emerged in this investigation were technology usage, professional interaction, instructional practices, and teacher transformation. One of the main findings of this study was the importance of professional interaction. This supports one of the key constructs of transformational learning, where adults learn through discourse. Communication promotes dialogue, which helps clarify any conflicting interpretations by observing evidence, arguments, and different points of view (Mezirow, 1991), which is precisely what teachers did.

**Change in TPACK.** Participants had to deliver instruction through a video conferencing app such as Zoom or Google Meets with very little prior training. They were challenged trying to communicate and instruct classes of mixed students (general education and English learners). Intensive online environments require effective communication and technology management (Roddy et al., 2017). With those, all instruction, including designated English Language Development ELD, became more accessible as teachers were in survival mode. Seven of the

tech-savvy participants made a smooth transfer. Although the remaining six of the participants' technological knowledge was limited, they managed to instruct using their existing knowledge and practices. That came in the form of using regular whiteboards with dry-erase markers or the document camera. Because the online instructional format was new to teachers, 12 of the 13 participants spent more time preparing for lessons during distance learning compared to before the pandemic. Most began utilizing more hardware to meet their needs for visualization. For example, one computer screen monitored students, another was used for sharing screens, and yet another was used for the lesson. This is in line with teachers adjusting as Hodges et al. (2020) noted a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. However, even with difficulty trying to attain desired learning outcomes, the lack of training, personal experience in terms of productivity, motivation, and mental health, teachers demonstrated new ways of developing content and resilience to adapt and adopt new technologies (Oliveria et al., 2021).

Technology-based instruction could only be delivered with the necessary support. This included support from the district, school administration, tech team, grade-level teams, PLCs, participant families, and students' parents. Getting younger students logged in would have been difficult without parental assistance. When parents were working, other family members (older siblings, grandparents, and aunts) helped, although school-age siblings had their distance learning to deal with. This experience demonstrated that student use of technology, home support of student technology use, and sustainability were significant in the delivery of online instruction. (Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2021). Participants gained support from other teachers and colleagues when they needed help with tech-based issues or learning. Four teachers spoke outwardly about using YouTube to learn how to use some apps. Another

participant watched TikTok videos to learn. However, when regular classes resumed, most teachers decreased the amount of time on devices post-distance learning even with all the support and what they learned about technology. The literature supports this finding as teacher knowledge of pedagogies and content for online teaching requires some skills to support a teacher's role as an intersection point for technology pedagogy and content (Kundu & Bej, 2021).

**Necessity of Professional Interaction.** Professional interaction had the most significant statements or references to it. Participants valued the support from their grade-level teams. Three of the participants did not have a good relationship with at least one member of their grade level. Despite this, they sought out other colleagues to obtain the necessary support for collaboration. Resources, lesson plans, and differentiated activities were shared to help ease the burden on one another. When professional support or interaction was not available, participants sought after other professional learning communities across districts. How PLCs were conducted varied across schools and districts. Sometimes, PLCs were led by the school administrator; others were replaced with as-needed collaboration. Very few participant schools tracked data to drive their instruction, although one school continued with it. That participant could not understand why considering the reasons for poor performance could be based on everything but academics.

The discussion above relates the significance and necessity of professional social interaction supported by the literature. As one of this study's paradigms, constructivism demonstrates that individual learning is a complex, non-linear progression (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Individuals learn by creating their realities through understanding and negotiating natural experiences with things, the environment, and other people (Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1978). That learning is conceived by the understanding of people’s meaning-making process; this happens when individuals express themselves to others, who in return, enhance the learning (Savin-Baden &

Major, 2013). This is part of the assumption of social constructionism. In working with others, teachers share knowledge and reality as people negotiate to understand and make meaning (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013)

According to the participants, most professional development that was ongoing during distance learning was not considered helpful. There needed to be more, given in a short amount of time or delivered via asynchronous or video format. Few participants felt that pre-service teacher training was helpful during distance learning. Most participants found that the in-service professional development they received before distance learning related to instruction was the most beneficial, mainly when it had to do with EL teaching strategies or English Learning Performance Assessment in California (ELPAC) test prep. Teachers need to receive suitable training and professional development because the knowledge of how technologies can be used to scaffold existing knowledge can lead to developing new epistemologies or strengthening old ones (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). On the other hand, stressors and barriers to teaching and learning remotely can be and were created due to the need for more preparation, training, and support for designing quality instruction with technology (Trust & Whalen, 2020).

**Instructional Practices Challenged.** The second most significant statement came from instructional practices. Participants experienced challenges in modifying instruction, classroom management, and delivery of SDAIE and ELD, as well as having an increased awareness of social and emotional needs. Instruction had to be modified due to time constraints, technology limitations, and the lack of knowledge of the devices and online content. Sometimes, modifications were made to meet unreasonable district expectations. Most participants were able to cover target standards even if they were unable to teach them to mastery. Finally, modifications had to be made to meet EL needs both for scaffolding and designated ELD.

Although some participants were able to continue ELD instruction and scaffolding for EL content-based learning, others were challenged or not able to provide SDAIE, let alone ELD. These teachers tried to give more emphasis on vocabulary. Regardless of their efforts and good intentions, participants carried much guilt as a result of not being able to service their ELs.

The literature is evident that knowledge is best constructed when the negotiation of meaning occurs within social interaction and learner-centered environments (Agbadogun, 2014; Piaget, 1969). Second language learning requires the learner to take ownership of learning activities through interaction, active participation, and use of the target language (Agbadogun, 2014). Hence, neither teachers nor students can rely on direct instruction or teacher-centered instruction, although contrarily, which was often the case during distance learning. Agbadogun (2014) also advocated that classroom interaction promotes better learning outcomes and critical thinking, and learning with applications needs to be connected. The ELs' learning context is particularly effective when it is connected to visual images (Krashen, 1982; Mayer, 2001).

The context for the EL is critical; hence, for the teacher, contextual knowledge needs to include everything from their awareness of available technologies to their knowledge of their school, district, state, or national policies (Mishra, 2019). Contextual knowledge was essential for distance learning during COVID-19 because the context highly compounded the challenges of instruction during this time.

One of the concerns for social distancing stated in the literature has been how it has affected students socially and emotionally (Chafouleas & Marcy, 2020; Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2020; Saline, 2021). Although the implied meaning of the question of *how the students' social-emotional needs met* was *what types of professional strategies and support (i.e., personnel resources like counselors) were given to help students*

*deal with the isolation of distance learning*, participants' responses focused on the activities they specifically provided for students to be able to interact with one another during the time of isolation and social distancing. Their significant statements surrounded planned activities for students to share feelings and concerns, feelings of teacher guilt because teachers could not meet the social-emotional and academic needs of their students; they made personal visits to student homes, providing a special breakout session to address student feelings and emotions privately. One participant, Bea, took her Spanish-speaking mother along to meet her parents and translate. Although the move was against state and school policy for social distancing, the participant valued face-to-face communication with her students and their parents. More importantly, she learned how powerful it was because Bea's mother shared the culture and understanding of the students and parents. Although online resources and distance learning were in place for general students, they did not necessarily support students' English learning; they lacked meaningful social interactions required to support second language learning (Sayer & Braun, 2021).

However, this was not only the case during distance learning. The US Department of Education (2019) reported that few teachers assigned ELs to use digital learning outside of class due to students' lack of technology access at home (Zehler et al., 2019). EL teachers were more apt to use general digital resources than applications designed specifically for ELs. Bea's experience of using culturally-based learning is also supported in the literature. ELs do well when culturally and linguistically responsive practices are utilized, and the student's background can be connected with content (Bonner et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2019; Kibler et al., 2019).

**Transformational Learning.** The participants had various backgrounds and educational experiences, as noted by Trust and Whalen's (2021) study that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a significant variation in educators' readiness to use technology. However, they all experienced

transformation in their pedagogies, use of technology, and increased content. The subthemes that emerged from this theme were learning new skills and applications, elevated technology skills, reverting to former practices, increasing personal technology usage, and realizing technology requires pedagogy of its own. Learning new skills came as a result of challenges like teacher learning, learning management systems, access, and technology concerns (Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2021). Because they learned a new technology skill, they were able to apply it to creating lessons or use it as a resource in their lesson planning. There was an increase in participant usage of videos and instructional learning applications. All of them resorted to learning how to use the applications and tech features independently through YouTube videos or TikTok. Participants were able to integrate newly learned skills and applications for classroom-based instruction. A few of the same participants who used student devices less post-distance learning used them more personally for planning and/or instructional purposes. Participants also continued video conferencing for PLCs, professional development, and staff meetings while applying newly learned skills.

Although new applications and skills were learned, all teachers reverted to pre-COVID practices, mainly the primary grades and for teaching EL students requiring hands-on learning when they returned to the classroom. As far as staff meetings, 12 of the 13 teachers preferred face-to-face PLCs. About half preferred face-to-face for staff meetings or professional development. The other half chose Zoom or were indifferent. As students returned to school in person, there was a sense of urgency to return to the basics of communication. One teacher noticed the loss of oral language and expressive language because students were not talking with anyone at home. Before returning to face-to-face learning, one school district provided training

on reminders to work with students. Although the training was focused on regular students, teaching English learners benefitted because it covered grammar and communication strategies.

Finally, participants realized that distance learning requires a pedagogy of its own. It is not easy to differentiate between EL instruction and general education when everyone is synchronously online. Participants unanimously felt more training on pedagogies and online classroom management is necessary. Also, there need to be more EL-specific applications for teaching and supporting ELs for academic content. The literature indicates that teaching with technology and knowledge regarding technology cannot be context-free; "good teaching requires an understanding of how technology relates to the pedagogy and content" (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1026). Hence, skilled, meaningful, and effective teaching with technology requires an understanding of how technology is used to represent concepts, along with the pedagogical techniques that use technology to teach content. Teachers who realized this and modified their instruction as a result of this truly experienced positive transformation in TPACK (Koehler et al., 2007; Mezirow, 1997).

## Implications for Policy or Practice

The findings of this study have political, practical, theoretical, and empirical implications for state, higher education, school districts, administrators, and educators. Since COVID-19 involved government, social, and human entities, there are many broad implications as a result of the findings. This section discusses the implications for policy and practice supported by the data collected and analyzed in this study.

### *Implications for Policy*

**Implications for California State.** Distance learning was the solution to continue educating students after the state of emergency lockdown was issued. California Department of

Education worked with various local educational agencies (LEAs) to devise a plan that would address students' academic, social, and emotional needs. This included providing free meals and the means for their distribution. Educational leaders also worked to ensure that students requiring educational services received them by their individualized education program (IEP). The unintentional consequence of distance learning without guidance and support for teacher delivery of ELD and SDAIE-based content learning is that English learners did not receive adequate language instruction. Students with IEPs are protected under IDEA (2004). Non-compliance can become a legal issue. However, English language instruction comes under Title III, which is the Language Instruction for English Learner and Immigrant Students Act. This grants LEA funds to instruct ELs (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020; California Department of Education, n.d.-h.). This study demonstrated that teachers did not or had difficulty providing English language instruction for students because of the challenges of distance learning. Hence, this should be a consideration for the future since federal funds were not used for their intended purpose.

**Implications for the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.** Although teachers were challenged in instructing all students during distance learning, they particularly had difficulty with managing time and conducting small groups necessary for designated ELD. Most teachers' pre-service teacher training did not adequately prepare them to create language lessons or SDAIE-based content learning to teach English learners using technology. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing should review the requirements for teacher coursework to include instruction or guidance on how to use technology to teach English learners. This could be done as part of their pre-service work or during their teacher induction

after their initial essential credential, or it could be added as a requirement for the EL authorization.

### *Implications for Practice*

This section discusses implications for higher education, school districts, administrators, and teachers.

**Implications for Higher Education.** Colleges and universities should work together with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) to create courses that would help teachers incorporate technology-based pedagogy with ELD and SDAIE strategies. The approach should include teaching ELs with technology within various contexts. The course can be an elective and/or continuing education class. However, an introduction or basic level of information can be inserted into the currently required Methods and Inquiry for Teaching English Learners course. A more detailed component can be included in the Differentiated Instruction portion of the California Teacher Induction Program. The teacher induction program is a two-year job-embedded program that focuses on extensive support and mentoring to new teachers in their first and second year of teaching (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2023).

**Implications for School Districts.** School districts try to keep their school staff up to date with various trainings, especially those that have to do with health and safety. Additionally, they may consider district-wide technology-based emergency lesson plans. As the Department of Education and school districts reflect on lessons learned and how to be prepared for another type of remote learning caused by a state or national emergency, cloud-based lesson plans should be available for all teachers and all grade levels. A team comprised of the curriculum instruction director, grade-level leaders, and specialists should discuss distance learning emergency lesson

plans for each grade level. Periodic professional development should be conducted to review the protocols and delivery of instruction provided through distance learning. Districts should also provide professional development on virtual classroom management, which would include attendance, virtual norms, and motivating students to attend and perform. One technology-based recommendation to assist in managing students during synchronous instruction is to provide classroom teachers with multiple screens and a larger screen. Another screen will be helpful when sharing screens so teachers can see their screen and what students are seeing. A bigger screen can show a large number at the same time.

**Implications for Administrators.** The findings stressed the significance of administrative support during a time of crisis. Much of the technology and instructional material/resource needs were met by the administrator. They worked hard to meet their teacher's requests. In addition to tangible things and help, administrators need to remember that time is a valid commodity, too. The results showed that teachers valued having extra time to prep and to collaborate. Teachers need time to communicate with one another to help get their work done. By promoting and supervising teacher collaboration and PLCs, administrators will be supporting a critical teacher need.

**Implications for Teachers.** There is a difference between *teaching with technology* and *teaching through technology*. What teachers did before COVID-19 was the former, and what endured during distance learning was the latter. These findings show that teachers are not adept at using technology to instruct ELs. However, although they were challenged, they demonstrated a growth mindset with resilience, persistence, and a willingness to take risks (Dweck, 2006). Teachers understood and valued technology, which influenced the development of new practices (Aparicio et al., 2020; Falloon, 2020). They became digitally competent not only in using

devices and applications but also in gaining a broader sociocultural perspective required to understand the implications and effects of digital technologies (Falloon 2020). They also showed grit, working through the challenges, maintaining effort and interest without giving up regardless of failure and adversity (Blackwell et al., 2007). Through grit and a growth mindset, they were empowered and given support to take risks and overcome challenges.

Additionally, teachers cannot be isolated in their practice. There is a huge advantage in collaborating and seeking support from their grade level teams, specialists, and other professionals for guidance and resources. Discourse, particularly critically reflective dialogue about assumptions, allows teachers to transform those assumptions and acquire the ability to cope with ambiguity, uncertainty, and contingency (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020; Mezirow, 1991).

Another advantage of technology-based collaboration is departmentalized teaching, where the whole department delivers one lesson, as Sarah's grade-level team did. Tasks needed to make this pedagogy successful must be assigned: Who will deliver instruction, who will monitor student screens, and who will monitor chat messages, questions, and answers?

The positive that participants got out of this experience was learning how to share screens and how to use a digital whiteboard. Sharing short videos was particularly significant for English learners because it provided a quick and often comprehensive visual that could also be displayed in the learner's home language. All participants experienced transformation because of their experience, namely that they all had to learn new technologies, pedagogies, and applications. Otherwise, they could not communicate their instruction to their students. However, the transformation was forced. Those who embraced change continued to use different parts of technology and applied it to newly learned platforms when transitioning back to the classroom.

Although participants used new technology and skills for themselves, this was not necessarily the case for their students. The reasons stated were (a) teachers considered hands-on learning better, (b) not using technology allows for better social interaction among students in person rather than online, (c) adequate apps for EL students and learning were not available, (d) difficulty in maintaining classroom management through online learning.

## Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The theoretical framework used in understanding this phenomenon was Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1997), while the TPACK (Koehler et al., 2007) provided the conceptual framework.

### *Theoretical Implications*

**Transformative Learning Theory.** When adults are faced with a situation of not knowing, coping with uncertainty, ambiguity, and alienation, a change in their assumptions occurs, which involves a fundamental reordering and redescription of how one thinks, feels, or acts (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). A change in their view or perspective transformation occurs through a process initiated by a crisis or dilemma. Perspective transformation emphasizes the necessity of establishing critical awareness of how perspectives and guiding assumptions limit our ways of living and existing in the world (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020).

Transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference or meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1997). Teacher experiences included their associations, concepts, values, feelings, and conditioned responses as the frame of reference that defined their world or the context (Mezirow, 1997). Transformative learning changes the way individuals think about themselves and their world. The participants truly experienced this through their instructional experiences during distance learning.

Transformative learning theory provided a theoretical framework for understanding the dilemmas and challenges. Through collaboration at various levels, the participants engaged in rational or reflective discourse for the critical assessment of their assumptions. The collective experience of sharing and engaging in critical reflection and rational/reflective discourse led to a clearer understanding. It allowed them to arrive at a tentative best judgment to transform their pedagogical processes of instructing rural EL students through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, transformative learning theory was ideal for this study.

**Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge (TPACK).** Teaching with technology is complicated, as teachers must often work outside of what they are familiar with to learn and apply new technologies (Mishra & Warr, 2021). The participants' experience was evident that instruction facilitated by technology is different from just shifting the content or processes onto the web (Mishra & Warr, 2021). Before COVID-19, their attitude toward technology, lack of knowledge of the technology, confidence in using it and integrating it into their lessons, as well as modifying their established practices since the newer technology may not fit well with their current pedagogy – may have contributed to not using technology (Hsu, 2016; Mishra & Warr, 2021; Mundy et al., 2012; Scarber et al., 2021; Tawfik et al., 2021). Moreover, the sudden transfer to distance learning complicated instruction, particularly when both content and English instruction were done without thoughtful planning and integration of pedagogies, content knowledge, technology skills, and context (Mishra & Warr, 2021).

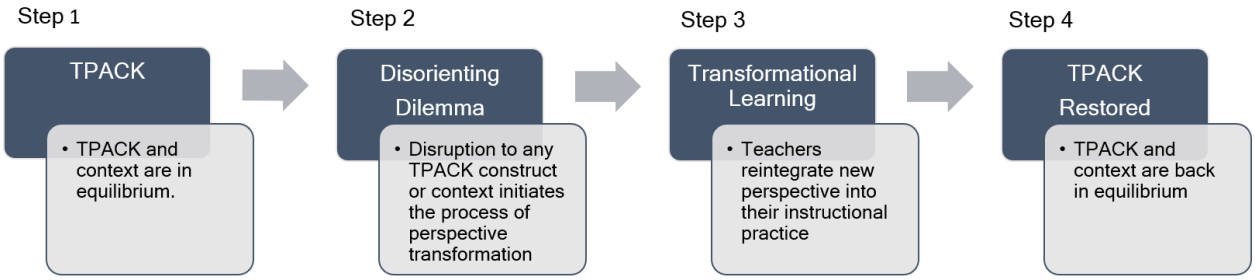
Teachers instruct in highly complex, dynamic classroom contexts, which requires them to constantly shift and change their understanding (Harris et al., 2009; Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Effective instruction depends on rich, flexible, and integrated knowledge of content, subject matter, and pedagogy (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Shulman, 1986). Teachers must additionally

consider and integrate knowledge of student thinking and learning and, increasingly, knowledge of technology (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). There is more than simply learning technological applications; teachers must learn new techniques and skills as current technologies become outdated (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Moreover, contextual knowledge cannot be excluded from the knowledge constructs. This includes everything from a teacher's awareness of available technologies to the teacher's knowledge of their school, district, state, or national policies (Mishra, 2019). The interaction of these different knowledge bases necessitates flexible knowledge to integrate technology successfully into teaching, both theoretically and practically (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Through their experiences, teachers realized this and made the changes as they acquired the necessary knowledge to help them teach through technology.

**Transformational Learning Theory and combined TPACK framework.** Based on this research, I can create a new framework that explains elementary classroom EL teacher technology usage, professional interaction, instructional practices, and transformation during distance learning. By combining both theory and concept, I devised the combined transformational learning and TPACK framework (see Figure 2). For educators before COVID-19, TPACK and context (regular classroom instruction, designated online learning, SDAIE-based ELD, special education, etc., ) were in equilibrium (Step 1). The shift to distance learning served as a disorienting dilemma disrupting any one construct (Step 2). The causal effect is a total disruption in all TPACK constructs (Figure 3) since a change in any one construct affects other constructs in a cascading or simultaneous manner. As noted in Step 3, teachers then begin the process of perspective transformation (see pp. 48-49). When teachers have achieved a new perspective on learning, made a judgment, and taken a new course of action, TPACK is restored within the former or contemporary context, and equilibrium is achieved (Step 4).

**Figure 2**

*Transformational Learning Theory and Combined TPACK Framework*




Participants did not remain wholly transformed because the context changed. Twelve of the participants returned to the classroom for in-person instruction. Brenda was the only one who remained transformed one year later because she continued to teach via distance learning for the 2021-2022 school year. The rest could not remain transformed because they were affected by the change in context (online distance learning to classroom instruction). The change in context knowledge provided a new disorienting dilemma, causing teachers to initiate another process of perspective transformation (Figure 2). Reverting to their old ways was not necessarily because they did not want to remain transformed but because the change in the domain of contextual knowledge affected change in the other domains as well (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3**

*Change in TPACK Wheel*

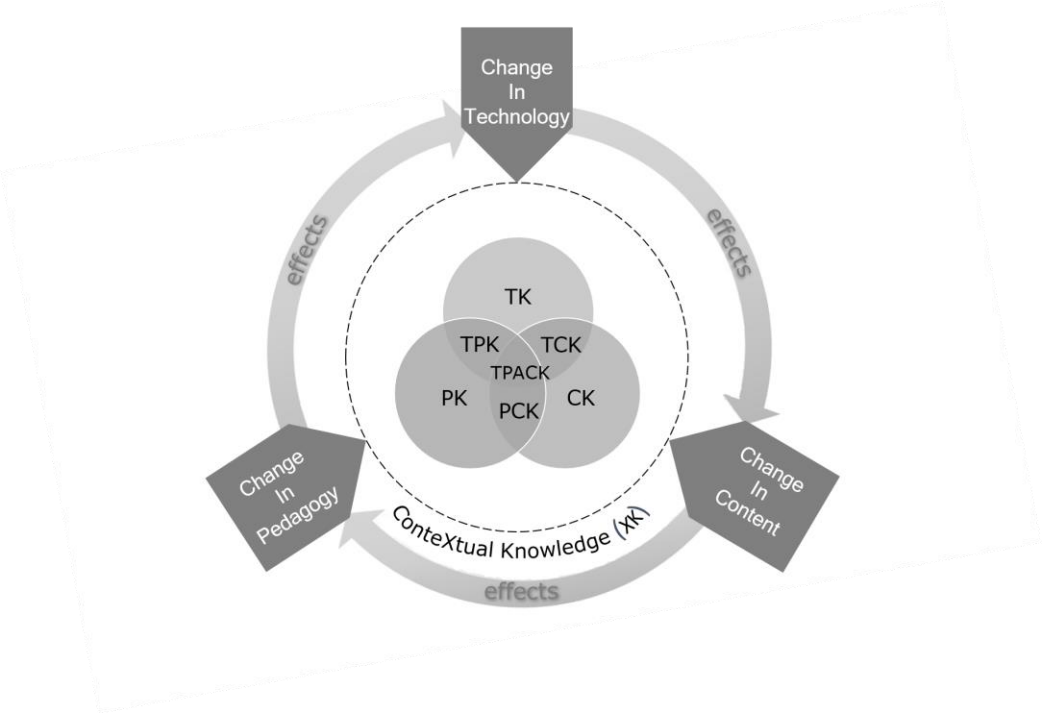
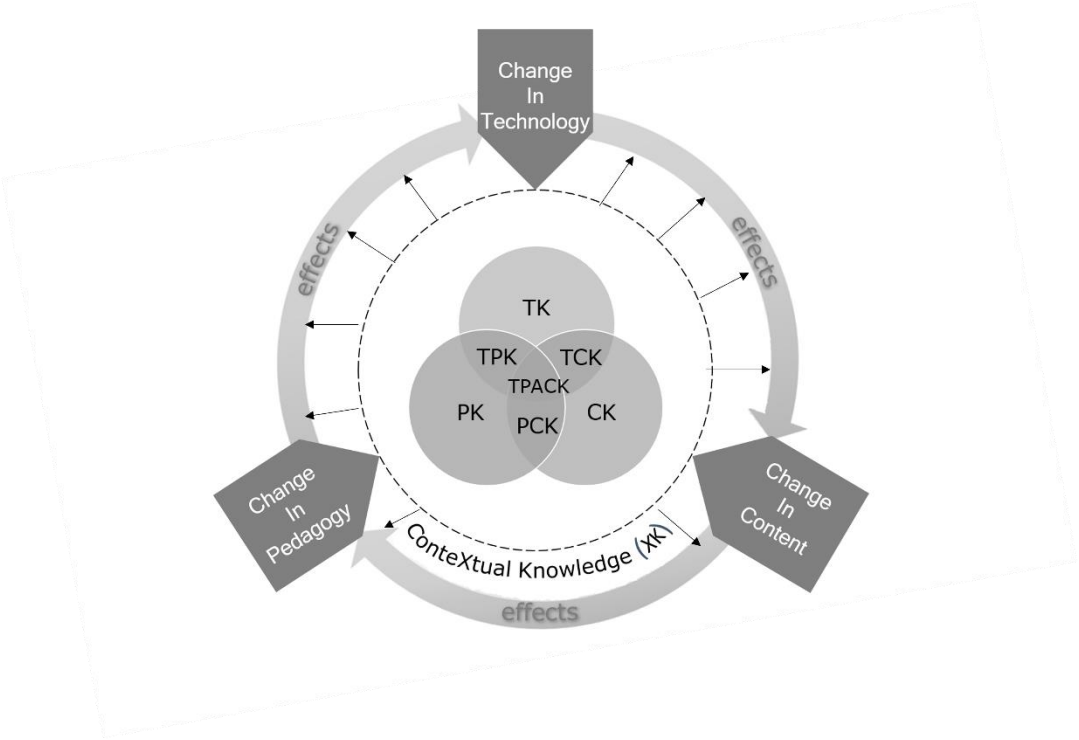



**Figure 4**

*How Changes in Contextual Knowledge Affects Other TPACK Domains*



*Note:* Small arrows within Contextual Knowledge represent change within the contextual knowledge domain and affect change in the other domains.

### *Empirical Implications*

What is generally considered empirical is research that is quantifiable and measurable. This type of research is often attributed to student learning and learning gaps. However, the focus of this paper was solely on teachers. The findings of this study clarified what has been long talked about but has yet to be studied. Although ELs make up only a fifth of California's total student population, they consist of one-third to half of the student population in the Central Valley due to immigrant working families. As Coady (2019) indicated, studies on rural ELs have been underrepresented. The findings from this study help to open dialogue and debate on many of the issues surrounding the challenges elementary teachers have to instruct ELs in rural areas, especially in the area of using technology. With test results from the 2021-22 CAASP and ELPAC being released (see Appendix P), researchers may now begin empirical research to study the impact distance learning had on English learners in the California Central Valley.

## Limitations and Delimitations

There were three limitations to this research. (1) This study was limited to classroom teachers in rural areas; however, past teaching experiences could not necessarily be generalized or transferred to other educators due to their locality. Because of this limitation, a broad cross-section of teacher participants was not attainable. (2) Obtaining participants who met the criteria was difficult, so specialists were then accepted to meet the minimum number of participants required (see Appendix L). However, specialists tend to work in small groups. ELs can receive support from a Resource Specialist Program (RSP), Special Education (SPED) teacher, or pull-out ELD teacher. Although classroom teachers and specialists shared similar experiences during

distance learning, there are differences in the delivery of instruction based on the nature of classroom teaching versus small group instruction. (3) Teacher interns should have been included. Interns are usually uncredentialed teachers who have taught for one to three years with little-to-no prior teaching experience or pre-service training. They receive educational training while providing in-service instruction to students. Like specialists, they shared similar experiences with credentialed classroom EL teachers. However, their experience, due to a different training background, would offer another dimension to this phenomenon.

### *Delimitations*

There were two delimitations to this study. (1) Emergency protocols of other states were not examined. Only information and data from California were considered, as technology devices and internet access were provided through private partnerships in this state. Comparisons with other regions in California or other states may reveal similar experiences, yet differences are unique to those regions or schools. (2) The experience of EL teachers in urban and suburban areas was outside the scope of this study. Although these findings can be generalized and transferred to urban and suburban areas, too many uncontrolled variables would question the validity and transferability of those generalizations. Context and environment highly affected all regions, necessitating school closures to mitigate the spread of the virus. Densely populated urban areas had longer and reoccurring lockdowns in comparison to scantly populated rural areas. This context would have affected distance learning for teachers and students in those areas.

## Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of these study findings, limitations, and delimitations, there are several recommendations for future research. The first recommendation is to widen the participation

base to include all California classroom EL teachers. As mentioned above, many findings are generalizable and transferable. However, for confirmability and validity, the results need to be compared. This is essential when considering policy implications that affect educators statewide. I recommend that the study be divided by grade level. The results of the ELPAC indicate that older grades needed to have the deficiencies that the younger grades had (Department of Education Assessment Development and Administration Division ELPAC, 2023). This should be conducted only for K12 self-contained classroom EL teachers since the findings from a study of multiple teachers' instruction of secondary grades will vary and affect the validity of the results.

The second recommendation is TPACK research for the K-12 English Language teacher. A large amount of literature is available for TPACK and general K-12 education. TPACK has also been studied within English language instruction for international contexts as well (Tseng, 2017). As of this writing, there are no studies that look at TPACK from a K-12 ELD or SDAIE perspective. Since the California ELA/ELD standards and framework align with the Common Core English Language Arts Standards, which emphasizes integrating technology, research should be conducted to see how the TPACK framework could be used to assist teachers in the delivery of ELD and SDAIE-based content learning (Ronan, 2018).

The third recommendation is focused collaboration for English language instruction. Participants valued interacting with their grade-level teams, administration, and colleagues. Teachers were overwhelmed with a myriad of resources and training already. However, the findings indicated that they were resilient and found ways to learn. Research into how to deliver short, effective, and practical professional development or training would help assist teachers with online EL instruction.

Finally, further research is needed for digital classroom management. Technology-based classroom management was one of the significant statements that came from instructional practice findings. Teachers are trained in how to do classroom-based classroom management. However, digital classroom management has become a new issue. Research on how to manage students when conducting instruction via distance learning should be highly beneficial not only for EL classroom teachers but also for K12 teachers. As the results of performance assessments are released, more research on learning gaps will be conducted. Although learning gaps are beyond the scope of this research, scores from the 2021-2022 CAASP and ELPAC (Appendix P) show that the percentage of students who did not meet the minimum lowest level of performance was higher the year after distance learning ceased except for Sycamore Elementary School. Sycamore returned in person in the fall of 2020 after obtaining a waiver approved by the state. Further research is recommended to study the correlation between distance learning and learning gaps for English language learners.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the transformation of rural elementary classroom teachers who transitioned to distance learning with English learners (ELs) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley. Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory and the TPACK (Koehler et al., 2007; Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Mishra & Koehler, 2006) conceptual framework guided this study while looking at the experiences of how EL teachers transformed their perspective, assumptions, feelings, and judgments while conducting distance learning. Participants were challenged in many ways during distance learning. All of them experienced transformation as they journeyed through unfamiliar learning situations. In finding the essence of their meanings, one of the

foremost was observing the true humanity and care teachers had for their students and families. Another is the resilience and grit teachers have for learning: "You have to be willing to [learn.]. We want our kids to be lifelong learners. We have to be this, but we [teachers] are lifelong learners, too.” Distance learning transformed teachers. Participants' technological perspectives and pedagogy for instructing ELs online were transformed. Several stayed transformed in their usage of technology, but all of them reverted to their old practices when the learning context changed back to the classroom.

## References

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# Appendix A

## TESOL ESL Standards 1997

**Goal 1: To use English to communicate in social settings.**

- *Standard 1:* Students will use English to participate in social interactions.
- *Standard 2:* Students will interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for personal expression and enjoyment.
- *Standard 3:* Students will use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence.

**Goal 2: To use English to achieve academically in all content areas.**

- *Standard 1:* Students will use English to interact in the classroom.
- *Standard 2:* Students will use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form.
- *Standard 3:* Students will use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge.

**Goal 3: To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways.**

- *Standard 1:* Students will use appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting.
- *Standard 2:* Students will use nonverbal communication appropriate to the audience, purpose, and setting.

*Standard 3:* Students will use appropriate learning strategies to extend their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence. (Short, 2000, pp. 3-4)

# Appendix B

## TESOL Pre-K–12 English Language Proficiency Standards Framework 2006

The standards publication presents five language proficiency standards. They include both social and academic uses of the language students must acquire for success in and beyond the classroom. The English language proficiency standards are as follows:

- **Standard 1:** English language learners communicate for social, intercultural, and instructional purposes within the school setting.
- **Standard 2:** English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of language arts.
- **Standard 3:** English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of mathematics.
- **Standard 4:** English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of science.
- **Standard 5:** English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of social studies (TESOL International Association, 2022b)

# Appendix C

## WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards 2004

- *English Language Development Standard 1:* English language learners communicate for Social and Instructional purposes within the school setting
- *English Language Development Standard 2:* English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Language Arts
- *English Language Development Standard 3:* English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Mathematics
- *English Language Development Standard 4:* English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Science
- *English Language Development Standard 5:* English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Social Studies (WIDA, 2007, p. 9)

# Appendix D

## Pandemic Comparison

| | Polio 1916 | Spanish Flu 1918 | H1N1 2009 | COVID-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **School Closure** | The outbreak began in June 1916. School start dates are delayed as late as October. | Second and third waves. | First wave. | First, second, and third waves. |
| **Duration** | Varied. In cases where schools did not shut down, high levels of absenteeism existed. | Varied. Sometimes, schools had to shut down again due to a resurgence of cases. | 7 to 14 days. | Most schools closed from March to June 2020. Many reopened in the fall. Reopening varied across regions and localities based on the number of cases. |
| **Governance** | The decision to close and duration is based on state and local officials. | The decision to close and duration is based on state and local officials. | State of Emergency declared. The decision to close and duration is based on local officials. | State of Emergency declared. The decision to close and duration is based on local officials. |
| **Treatment** | Nonpharmaceutical Interventions (NPI). | NPI. | NPI. Vaccine available after second wave. | NPI. Vaccine available after third wave. |
| **Susceptibility** | Children under 10 years old. | Death rate is higher in children less than 5 years old, 20-40 years old, and over 65 years old. | Primarily affected children and young and middle-aged adults, morbidity rates were higher in adults over 65 years old. | Most susceptible are elderly 75 and older, followed by 65-75 and 45-64 age brackets. Children under 18 are the least susceptible. |
| **Case and Death Rates** | 27,000 cases; 6,000 deaths in the U.S. | 500 million cases worldwide; 50 million deaths. 675,000 deaths in the U.S. | Estimated 60 million cases in the US; 12,469 deaths in the U.S. | 78,855,000 cases and 947,882 deaths in the US. |
| **Remote Learning Platform** | Probable reading assignments, but school work was minimal. Students could practice spelling using the alphabet or speller boards. | Similar to Polio. | Instructional packets and some online coursework (USDOE, 2019). | Primarily online learning through digital classroom platforms and instructional packets. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Concerns** | Transmission is through fecal material. Educating the public and communicating proper sanitary and hygienic practices are focal. | Transmission is airborne. Communicating sanitary and hygienic practices is focal.<br><br>New York City, NY, New Haven, CT, and Chicago, IL city schools did not close stating school conditions were more sanitary and hygienic compared to tenant housing with poor air circulation. | Transmission is airborne. Ensuring school environments are sanitized, and students are assessed for symptoms.<br><br>Concerns for students who qualified for free breakfast and lunches.<br><br>Strict attendance laws requiring 180 days of instruction affected closures. | Transmission is airborne. Ensuring school environments are sanitized, and students are assessed for symptoms.<br><br>Lunches are made available despite school closures.<br><br>Lack of digital and hot spot devices for students, internet receptibility.<br><br>Student and teacher knowledge of technology skills. |

*Note:* COVID-19 data is based on the statistics provided by the "COVID Data Tracker," by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022, February 26 (https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailycases)

# Appendix E

## Bracketed Experience of Researcher

I have been teaching for over 25 years in K12 classrooms, ESL/EFL, adult education, and university settings. My area of expertise includes curriculum and instruction development, professional development, and teacher mentoring/support for both general education and English as a second language. My communication, creativity, and motivational skills have been enhanced by teaching students and working with colleagues in a wide variety of situations. Because I have worked overseas with students of various cultures, I have considerable experience in creating cultivating, collaborative, and engaging educational environments, resulting in successful instruction, learning, and educational programming. I have also been involved in developing targeted curricula, planning instructional/training programs, and educating students of diverse ages and backgrounds in subjects of reading and writing, language skills, content-based language learning, cultural understanding, and integrated technology education.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning, and hybrid instruction, I served as a long-term substitute teacher for 3$^{rd}$ and 4$^{th}$ grades as a reading specialist. My ability to communicate effectively and understand technology-based pedagogy allowed me to instruct students and collaborate with colleagues while facing cultural, language, and learning challenges. Because of my prior knowledge and experience in teaching ELs using technology, I did not face the challenges many EL teachers faced during distance learning. I also had a good understanding of the applications and platforms used, so although I did not have all the training other teachers had going into distance learning, I was able to make a smooth transition into teaching at the point of full-on distance learning.

# Appendix F
## Liberty University Institutional Review Board Approval

December 9, 2022

Cecilia Salzer
Lucinda Spaulding

Re: IRB Exemption - [redacted] The Transformation of Rural Elementary Classroom English Language Teachers During Distance Learning: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Dear Cecilia Salzer, Lucinda Spaulding,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data-safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants' research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*
**Research Ethics Office**

**Appendix G**
**Recruitment Flyer**

# Research Participants Needed

## Study on Teacher Transformation during COVID-19 Pandemic Distance Learning

- Are you an elementary EL Teacher at a rural school?
- Did you conduct distance learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

If you answered **yes** to either of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in an educational research study.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of rural elementary classroom teachers who transitioned to distance learning with English language learners (ELLs) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley.

Cecilia Salzer is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.
Join Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9665329518?pwd=aXl1eTJyNlNhbXJhVThjdXRXYWtDdz09
Meeting ID: 966 532 9518
Passcode: Education

Cecilia Salzer, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Please contact Cecilia Salzer at [redacted] or [redacted] for more information.**

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

**Appendix H**
**Recruitment Letter**

[Date]

Dear Elementary Educator:

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to fulfill the requirements of a doctoral degree. I am writing eligible participants to join my study. As a teacher instructing English language learners, you are in an ideal position to give me valuable first-hand information from your perspective. The title of my research project is "The Transformation of Rural Elementary Classroom Teachers with English Learners During the COVID-19 Distance Learning: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study."

Participation is completely voluntary. All participants will be informed and reminded of their rights to participate or withdraw before any interview or at any time in the study. Participants will receive an information letter including detailed information about this study, as well as informed consent forms.

Quotations and excerpts from the stories will be used and labeled with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants from supporting the findings of this study. Names of participants will not appear in the dissertation or reports resulting from this study. Participants will not be identifiable and only described by gender.

All collected paper field notes will be retained in a safe place. All paper notes will be confidentially destroyed after three years. Further, all electronic data will be stored indefinitely in a cloud with no personal identifiers. Finally, only my advisor, Dr. Spaulding, in the Education Department of Liberty University, and I will have access to these materials. There are no known or anticipated risks to participants in this study.

If you have any comments or concerns with this study, please feel free to contact me at [redacted]

I hope that the results of my study will be beneficial to educators throughout the California Central Valley, educators throughout the state of California, as well as the broader educational community. I very much look forward to speaking with you, and thank you in advance for your assistance with this research.

Yours sincerely,

Cecilia F. Salzer
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

# Appendix I
## Consent Form

**Title of the Project:** The Transformation of Rural Elementary Classroom English Language Teachers During COVID-19 Distance Learning: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study.

**Principal Investigator:** Cecilia Salzer, Ed. S., Curriculum and Instruction, Liberty University; MS TESOL, California State University, Fullerton

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a certified elementary teacher with an English learner's authorization at a school which is designated as rural as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the transformation of rural elementary classroom teachers while instructing English language learners through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in the California Central Valley. The reason to study this is to find meaning to teachers' instructional practices through their experiences of modifying and adjusting pedagogies to meet the needs of distance learning ELLs within a rural setting.

### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Questionnaire: To be filled out via Google Forms.
2. One-on-one interviews: Interviews will take 30 minutes to one hour either in person or via Zoom. Participants will be audio and visually recorded.
3. Focus Groups: There will be 6 to 8 individuals to a group. Discussions will last up to one hour. The Participants will be audio and visually recorded.

### How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefit participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study is information leading to how elementary classroom EL teachers coped and were transformed in their instruction, knowledge, and pedagogies while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

**The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.**

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be anonymous. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in the cloud. Data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

- Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Cecilia Salzer. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] and/or [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding, at [redacted]

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record/photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

# Appendix J

## Eligibility Questionnaire

Link to Google Form https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdgGRPFL1lk-3BvTE_1dJ9BqDc-Z5Jj0k96J9ZZKsvtcc_HrQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

## Questionnaire to Determine Eligibility

Transformation of Rural Elementary Classroom Teachers with EL Learners

---

* Required

1. Are you an elementary classroom teacher? *

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes *Skip to question 2*

No

Distance Learning During COVID-19

2. Did you provide instruction via distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic * from March 2020 to June 2021?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes No *Skip to question 3*

## School of Employment

3. If yes, at which school were you employed? *

*Mark only one oval.*

Cypress Elementary School *Skip to question 4*
Rock Point Elementary School *Skip to question 4*
John Muir Elementary School *Skip to question 4*
Sycamore Elementary School *Skip to question 4*
Magnolia Elementary School *Skip to question 4*
Juniper Elementary School *Skip to question 4*
Walnut Elementary School *Skip to question 4*
Rosemont Elementary School *Skip to question 4*
Other: _____

---

## Students Taught During Distance Learning

4. Which grade did you teach during the COVID-19 distance learning, March 2020 - * June 2021? (Check one) *Mark only one oval.*

Kindergarten *Skip to question 5*
1st Grade *Skip to question 5*
2nd Grade *Skip to question 5*
3rd Grade *Skip to question 5*
4th Grade *Skip to question 5*
5th Grade *Skip to question 5*
6th Grade *Skip to question 5*
7th Grade
8th Grade

## English Language Student Instruction

5. Did you have at least one English language learner (ELL) in your class during this * time?
*Mark only one oval.*

Yes No *Skip to question 6*

## Demographic Information

Age: What is your age? *
*Mark only one oval.*

18-24 years old
25-34 years old
35-44 years old
45-54 years old
55-64 years old
65+years old

Ethnic origin: Please specify your ethnicity.

*Mark only one oval.*
Asian
Black or African-American
Hispanic or Latino
Pacific Islander
White or Caucasian
Other

Gender: To which gender identity do you most identify?

*Mark only one oval.*
Female
Male
Other
Prefer not to say

Is English your primary language?

*Mark only one oval.*
Yes No

What other languages do you speak fluently?

*Check all that apply.*
Chinese
Hmong
Indigenous
Korean
Spanish Tagalog
Vietnamese Other:

Marital Status: What is your marital status * *Mark only one oval.*
Single, never married
Married or domestic partnership
Widowed
Divorced
Separated

## Education and Experience

Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? * If currently enrolled, check the highest degree received.

*Mark only one oval.*

Some college credit, no degree
Associate degree
Bachelor's degree
Master's degree
Professional degree
Doctorate degree

Certifications: What certifications do you hold? *

*Check all that apply.*
Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential (elementary)
Single Subject Credential (secondary/middle school)
Education Specialist Credential
English Learner Authorization or Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD)/Bilingual Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development (BCLAD)
Literacy Specialist
Counseling
Substitute Teaching Permit
Teacher Intern Program
Other

What grades have you taught? *
*Check all that apply.*
Kindergarten
1st Grade
2nd Grade
3rd Grade 4th Grade
5th Grade
6th Grade
Middle School
High School
College/University

28. How many years have you been teaching? *
*Mark only one oval.*
Less than 1 year
1-4 years
5-9 years
10-14 years
15-19 years
20+

**Instructional Preparation**

On average, how many hours of preparation did you put into your instruction * before the COVID-19 pandemic?

*Mark only one oval.*

0 - 5 hours a week
6 - 10 hours a week
11 - 15 hours a week
15 - 20 hours a week
21+ hours a week

On average, how many hours of preparation did you put into your instruction * during COVID-induced distance learning (March 2020 - June 2021)?

*Mark only one oval.*

0 - 5 hours a week
6 - 10 hours a week
11 - 15 hours a week
15 - 20 hours a week
21+ hours a week

Instructional Delivery

For questions 8 and 9, rate yourself on a scale from 1 - 10 where 1 is "Not Applicable" and 10 is "Always."

I could create meaningful learning experiences for English language (EL) * students before the pandemic.

*Mark only one oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. *

I could create meaningful learning experiences for EL students while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 to June 2021).

*Mark only one oval.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not Applicable | | | | | | | | | | | Always |

Icould incorporate SDAIE and/or other ELD approaches before the pandemic and during COVID-induced distance learning? (March 2020 to June 2021).

What types of district-provided resources did you utilize before COVID and during COVID-induced distance learning?

## Motivation and Student Engagement

For questions 12 and 13, rate yourself on a scale from 1 - 10 where 1 is "Not Applicable" and 10 is "Always."

10. I could motivate EL students to engage in active learning before the pandemic. *

*Mark only one oval.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not Applicable | | | | | | | | | | | Always |

*

13. I could motivate EL students to engage in active learning while conducting distance learning during the pandemic (March 2020 to June 2021).

*Mark only one oval.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not Applicable | | | | | | | | | | | Always |

14. I could integrate technology to provide meaningful instruction to ELLs before * the pandemic.

*Mark only one oval.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not Applicable | | | | | | | | | | | Always |

15. I could integrate technology to provide meaningful instruction to ELLs while conducting distance learning during the pandemic (March 2020 - June 2021).

*Mark only one oval.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not Applicable | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | Always |

## Classroom Management

For questions 16 and 17, rate yourself on a scale from 1 - 10 where 1 is "Not Applicable" and 10 is "Always."

16. I could effectively manage my class to monitor disruptive behavior before the pandemic. *

*Mark only one oval.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not Applicable | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | Always |

17. I could effectively manage my class to monitor disruptive behavior while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 June 2021). *

*Mark only one oval.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not Applicable | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | Always |

Communication

18. Describe your communication with your EL students' parents before the * pandemic and while conducting distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 - June 2021).

Your personal information and responses will be confidential.

Contact Information

First Name *

Last Name *

Cell/Phone Number *

Email Address *

# Appendix K
## Individual Interview Questions

1. Please share with me what motivated you to become a teacher, and specifically an EL teacher. (Opening Question)
2. Describe your experiences and approaches to teaching content to ELLs before the pandemic. (SQ1)
3. How would you describe your confidence in providing ELD and specially designed academic instruction (SDAIE) before, during, and post-distance learning? (SQ1)
4. How has distance learning changed your understanding of pedagogical knowledge of technology? (SQ1)
5. What did you do to help meet the socio-emotional needs of your students when there were language and/or cultural barriers? (SQ1)
6. How did you manage your classroom with regular students and different levels of EL students? (SQ1)
7. What changes did you make to scaffold ELLs when the usual supports were not available? (SQ2)
8. How would you describe your English Language Development (ELD) and sheltered instruction using technology during this time? (SQ2)
9. How did you integrate ELD with regular classroom learning through distance learning? (SQ2)
10. What challenges did you face providing distance learning instruction to your ELLs (SQ3)
11. How did you address these challenges? (SQ3)
12. What would you do differently if you had to instruct ELLs via distance learning again during this pandemic? (SQ3)

13. What support and resources were most valuable to you during distance learning? (SQ4)
14. What was the role of reflection, and whom did you share these with? (SQ4)
15. How would you describe the role of professional learning communities (PLCs) during the time of distance learning? (SQ4)
16. What teacher preparation/staff development has been most helpful for you in meeting the instructional needs of your ELLS, including pre-service and in-service? (SQ4)
17. Describe your preferences for staff and PLC meetings (in person or via Zoom). Why? (SQ4)
18. Is there anything further you would like to share on this topic? (Closing question)

# Appendix L

## Audit Trail

| Date | Task |
|---|---|
| 10/28/22 | Self-interview with H. A. |
| 11/15/22 | Transcribed video 1 and 2 of self-interview |
| 12/9/22 | IRB Application approved |
| 12/13/22 | Contacted C.W. (Rosemont) via text and email for research recruitment. |
| 12/13/22 | D. P. (Central) asked what grade the teacher taught during distance learning.<br>The response says he will help out. Send him information |
| 12/13/22 | Sent first email recruitment invitation:<br>S. E. (Cypress)<br>B. I. (Rosemont)<br>R. M. (Rosemont)<br>A. S. (Rosemont)<br>M. S. (Rosemont) |
| 12/14/22 | D.P. (Rosemont) responded 6/7 combo class. |
| 12/15/22 | A follow-up email to D. P.'s recruitment invitation.<br>Sent recruitment invitation to S. D. (assistant principal at Lewis) |
| 1/5/23 | I have created template questions for impending interviews.<br>Called J. H. (Sycamore) for a recruitment invitation |
| 1/8/23 | Sent follow-up emails to<br>S.E. (Cypress)<br>B. I. (Rosemont)<br>R. M. (Rosemont)<br>A. S. (Rosemont)<br>M. S. (Rosemont<br>Sent recruitment invitation follow-up email to J.H. (Island). Responds and completes the questionnaire. |
| 1/18/23 | Contacted A.A. (Rosemont) via text per research recruitment. |
| 1/21/23 | Completed transcription of self-interview.<br>Individual interview with J. H. (Sycamore) |
| 1/28/23 | Talked in person with A. B (Rosemont) for recruitment. Agreed to participate. |
| 1/30/23 | Sent A. B (Rosemont) invitation link |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1/30/23 | A. B. (Rosemont) completed the questionnaire. |
| 1/31/23 | Sent a thank you email for A. B.'s completed questionnaire. |
| 2/1/23 | Talked with Dr. Spaulding regarding participants to include specialists. Decided to keep with the original plan. |
| 2/10/23 | Contacted G. C. (Rosemont) via email per research recruitment.<br>Contacted T. M (Oakridge) via email per research recruitment. |
| 2/11/23 | Asked to join the LinkedIn group:<br>EFL Teachers Development Network by Oxford TEFL<br>Elementary group for teachers<br>Professional English Teachers Network<br>Elementary School Teachers of America<br>CATESOL - California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages<br>Elementary School Teachers<br>English Language Teachers<br>The Teachers' Network |
| 2/11/23 | Request to The Teachers' Network approved (LinkedIn). Posted recruitment. |
| 2/12/23 | - Request to Teacher/Educator Resources and Jobs in California approved (Facebook Group). Posted recruitment.<br>- Request to Innovative Teachers of English approved (Facebook Group). Posted recruitment.<br>- Request to California Teachers Empowerment Network approved (Facebook Group). Posted recruitment.<br>- Request to CABE (California Association of Bilingual Education) Bilingual Resources approved (Facebook Group). Posted recruitment.<br>- Request to CATESOL - California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages approved (LinkedIn). Posted recruitment.<br>-Re-sent follow-up email to D. S. (Lewis). |
| 2/17/23 | - Follow-up email to D. P. (Cypress)<br>- A follow-up phone call to A. A. (Rosemont). Left message<br>- Contacted cousin, S. D., who lives in Burton seeking any acquaintances who work at rural schools.<br>- Set up time with A. B. (Rosemont) for individual interview |
| 2/18/23 | Sent an introductory email to J. G. (Walnut),<br>M. A. (Cypress)<br>K. C (Walnut)<br>A. C. (Walnut)<br>N. Q. (Cypress)<br>V. F. (Cypress) |

| | |
|---|---|
| 2/19/23 | M.A. (Cypress) emails back stating they would like to participate but first need to get approval from the principal. |
| 2/20/23 | - Sought advice from L.P. on how to respond to M.A.'s email. She said I should state that for this study, approval is not required and contact the principal in person via email (making an appointment for a call)<br>- Emailed Dr. Spaulding for advice regarding the above M.A.<br>- Interviewed A. B. (Rosemont). Asked her for some referrals. She said she would talk to M. A. (Cypress)<br>- A. B. called friend K.A (Taylor) |
| 2/21/23 | - Called K.A. (Taylor). She couldn't talk at that time and said she would call back.<br>- Began D. B. (Rosemont) transcription of Zoom interview. |
| 2/22/23 | - Phone call meeting with Dr. Spaulding regarding participant recruitment. Decided to allow specialists since I was having difficulty recruiting teachers.<br>- Continued D. B. (Rosemont) transcription of the Zoom interview |
| 2/22/23 | - Asked C. C. and H. B. (John Muir) to participate and accepted. |
| 2/24/23 | - New Google Form response from R. P. (Meadowbrook) |
| 2/25/23 | - New Google Form response from L. G. (Sycamore) |
| 2/27/23 | - Follow-up call to K. A. (Taylor) |
| 2/28/23 | - Sent email invitations to K. A. (Taylor), C. C. (John Muir), and H. B. (John Muir) to set up interviews.<br>- Sent follow-up emails to R. P. (Meadowbrook) and L. G. (Sycamore) to set up an interview. |
| 3/2/23 | - K. A. (Taylor) texted, saying she did not receive the email. I incorrectly typed the email address. Recent questionnaire & research invitation. |
| 3/3/23 | I sent H. A. an email with my bracket interview and transcript, explaining the format. |
| 3/5/23 | I spoke with H. A. regarding the transcript on Zoom. Could not figure it out. Tabled and retried again on Friday, 3/10/23 |
| 3/6/23 | - Sent follow-up text via cell to L. G. (Taylor) and R. P. (Meadowbrook).<br>- Interviewed R. P. (Meadowbrook). Set up an interview with L. G. for Tuesday, 3/7. |
| 3/7/23 | - Canceled interview due to laryngitis |
| 3/10/23 | - Sent J. H.'s audio transcript to H. A. for editing and reformatting. |
| 3/11/23 | - Follow-up with K. A. (Taylor), L. G. (Sycamore), and M.A (Cypress) |

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| 3/25/23 | - Sent D.V. L. G. audio transcript |
| 3/26/23 | - Emailed M.A. to schedule an interview for 3/29/23 with a Zoom link<br>- Reviewed defense timeline with Dr. Spaulding via email. |
| 3/27/23 | - H. A. returned J. H.'s reformatted transcript. |
| 3/30/23 | - Interview with S. R. (Sierra Hills) |
| 3/31/23 | - D. V. returned the reformatted L.G. transcript to me. |
| 4/3/23 | - Reviewed and reduced L. G.'s transcript.<br>- Reviewed and reduced A. B. transcript. |
| 4/4/23 | - Reviewed and reduced J. H.'s transcript.<br>- Reviewed and uploaded C. C., B. B., & K. B. interviews to Zoom |
| 4/5/23 | - Reviewed and uploaded R. P. & H. B. interviews to Zoom. |
| 4/7/23 | - Sent D. V. K. A.'s transcript |
| 4/9/23 | - D. V. returned K. A.'s transcript |
| 4/10/23 | - Interview with B. K. (Vista) |
| 4/12/23 | - Verbally asked C. C., H. B., K. B., and B. B. for a Focus Group meeting on Thursday, April 20 or 27, teachers at John Muir. Either day was okay. |
| 4/13/23 | - Emailed A.M. for Focus Group meeting for Thursday, April 20 or 27. Decided to go on April 27 because of a school event on April 19.<br>- Emailed J.H. transcript for member checking |
| 4/14/23 | - Emailed L. G. transcript for member checking |
| 4/19/23 | I messaged A. B. and D. B. to see if 4/27 2:30 would work. A. B's response was not an ideal time, but she will make it work. D. B. responded that she couldn't make 4/27, and on 5/4, she may be traveling. You will have to get back to me. |
| 4/20/23 | I messaged R. P. and K. A. to see if Thursday, May 4 would work.<br>Emailed Dr. Spaulding a question: Do all participants have to participate in the Focus Group interview? |
| 4/21/23 | - R. P. May 4th does not work. Suggested Tuesday at 3:30, and he agreed to that date and time.<br>- Suggested to A. B and D. B. Tuesday 3:30 and both rescheduled for that day.<br>I messaged K. A. if she would like to do it on Tuesday at 3:30 since one of her friends/colleagues was doing it the same day.<br>- Dr. Spaulding responds that I can go on with the Focus Group even if everyone cannot participate. We cannot force them. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 4/22/23 | - Scheduled and sent Zoom invitations to every participant:<br>Tuesday 4/25 3:30-4:30 is A. B., D. B., R. P. K. A. had a schedule conflict. Have not heard back from B.K.<br>- Thursday 4/27 2:30 - 3:30: C. C., H. B., K. B., B. B., & A. M.<br>- Thursday, 5/4 4:00 - 5:00 pm S. R., J. H., & L. G. |
| 4/24/23 | - D. V. returned C. C. Transcript |
| 4/25/23 | - Focus Group 1 Zoom interview. |
| 4/27/23 | - Focus Group 2 Zoom interview |
| 5/4/23 | - Focus Group 3 Zoom interview. L. G. could not make it. |
| 5/5/23 | - D. V. returned K. B. transcript |
| 5/6/23 | - Completed H. B. transcript |
| 5/7/23 | - Completed B. K. and A. M. transcript |
| 5/17/23 | - Discussed textural and structural descriptions for focus group format with Dr. Spaulding via TEAMS call. |
| 6/5/23 | - Completed S. R. transcript |
| 6/6/23 | - Submitted themes and subthemes to Dr. Spaulding |
| 6/9/23 | - Completed Focus Group 1 transcript<br>- Emailed Dr. Spaulding regarding the Chapter 4 writeup |
| 6/10/23 | - Completed Focus Groups 2 & 3 transcripts<br>- Talked to Dr. Spaulding via teams to discuss textural descriptions of Focus Group interviews. |
| 6/12/23 | - Submitted revised themes and subthemes to Dr. Spaulding |
| 6/24/23 | - Sent R.P. transcript for member checking |
| 6/25/23 | - Sent S.R., B. B., K. B., and C. C., transcripts for member checking.<br>- S. R. replied on member checking email. |
| 6/26/23 | - Sent D. B. transcript for member checking. |
| 6/27/23 | - Reviewed and reduced A. B. transcript |
| 7/2/23 | - Reviewed and reduced B. K. transcript |
| 7/3/23 | - Reviewed and reduced H. B. transcript |
| 7/5/23 | - Reviewed and reduced A. M. transcript |

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| 7/7/23 | - Reviewed and reduced Focus Group 1 transcript<br>- B. B. replied to a member checking email. |
| 7/8/23 | - Reviewed and reduced Focus Group 2 transcript |
| 7/10/23 | - Reviewed and reduced Focus Group 3 transcript<br>- Sent A. M, A. B., B. K., and H.B. transcripts for member checking<br>- Sent Focus Groups 1, 2, and 3 transcripts for member checking<br>- R. P., S. R., & K. A. replied to member checking email.<br>- Sent gift cards to K. A., S. R., & J. H. |
| 7/11/23 | D.B. replied on member checking email. |
| 7/13/23 | A.B. replied on member checking email. |
| 7/17/23 | Sent Dr. Spaulding Textural and Structural description samples |
| 7/25/23 | Submitted incomplete rough drafts to Dr. Spaulding for progress review |
| 8/4/23 | Submitted completed Chapter 4 rough draft to Dr. Spaulding |
| 8/17/23 | Submitted completed Chapter 5 rough draft to Dr. Spaulding |
| 8/22/23 | Dr. Spaulding returned the reviewed manuscript. |
| 8/25/23 | Talked with Dr. Spaulding via phone regarding edits for this round of manuscript corrections |
| 9/3/23 | Emailed Dr. Spaulding regarding Fall 2023 timeline. She agreed it is doable.<br>10/20 Final manuscript review deadline<br>11/17 Deadline to defend dissertation.<br>12/8 Deadline to submit to JFL |
| 10/3/23 | Submitted corrected manuscript to Dr. Spaulding. I was concerned with markups it would be hard to read. She advised me to remove the markups and comments. |
| 10/9/23 | Resubmitted manuscript, removing markups and comments. |

# Appendix M

## Sample of Individual Textural Descriptions

| **Participant:** Sally | |
|---|---|
| **Theme:** | **Significant Statements/Supporting Ideas** |
| Theme Two<br>Professional Interaction | *Subtheme: Necessity of various supports*<br><br>It was definitely more difficult. My English language learner that I had at the time, the family was not extremely supportive in education, so she was not necessarily required to come to school if she didn't want to. During distance learning, she was not a very active participant, and she was already a low-level student. So that was challenging, to be able to continue to instruct her where she needed, and keep her actively involved in her own education. |
| | *Subtheme: Decreased student computer time post-distance learning*<br><br>I would say that we probably do use it more now than we did before. But again, I tried to steer away from it because I know how much kids are on technology outside of school, eliminating the screen time in the classroom and actually having the hands-on with actual books and papers and stuff, I think is a good separation from what they would consider maybe like play time on a computer.<br><br>I would say probably 30 to 60. No, not much more than an hour out of the entire school day are we actually on technology. |
| | *Subtheme: Worked with grade-level teams*<br><br>In general, I had a really good team teacher. We worked really good together. That probably was a saving grace that we were able to coordinate and plan and work together even through distance.<br><br>Probably, my team teacher did do check-ins and probably with administration. and to let them know how things were going. But it is basically just myself and my team teacher. |
| | *Subtheme: Professional learning communities (collaboration)*<br><br>Our PLCs are just our grade level teams, for the most part. It was just working with my grade level partner, figuring out what we |

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| | really needed to focus on. We still need to prepare them for next grades. So it was, what should our focus be? Try to make it as fun as possible, so the kids wanted to be a part of the group, and we did talk with some of the other grade levels about what they were doing to see how interactive they were. Being with the classes it was not required for us to do at the beginning of the pandemic [at the end] of the school year of and 2020. It was not required for us to do virtual classes. My co-teacher and I, we did do virtual classes at the beginning of the next year. We were all required to do it. We had a condition to start the next year out with it. So yeah, on the other grade levels to see what they were doing was part of what we did. |
| | *Subtheme: Professional development and training*<br><br>We had a lot of focused EL staff development or like that in our school that I have been. I did, of the course for the EL portion for my California State certification when I moved here. That was really helpful to understand, like the different languages, and how things are said differently in the different languages, and how to relate it to the English language and stuff like that. But again, with everything I've seen, it's vocabulary focus on English vocabulary. Make it relatable, and that has been the most helpful for me. |
| | *Subtheme: Classroom management challenges*<br><br>During the distance learning it was hard. The students didn't feel like they had to do it because they weren't in a classroom sitting at a desk face-to-face with the instruction. It was not a priority.<br><br>We did try and take time during the distance learning to have one-on-one meetings virtual meetings with lower students and give them a little bit more support. Tried to do breakout groups with students so they can work with their peers still. But again, technology was an issue because not everybody was able to connect or stay connected or even attend our virtual times that we had set up for lessons during distance learning.<br><br>Again, I think it was just her desire, this particular student, [for her] education, was not her thing, even coming to school like to regular school. She was not a willing participant. So, there are behavior issues before the pandemic. So again, just trying to encourage participation and get something from her was the biggest challenge I had. |

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| | Tried to get her to do one-on-ones if she wanted to do that because again, she knew she was academically low, and didn't want to participate with the rest of the class. So, offering one-on-one times. I even offered to go to our house and socially distance, and try and do it that way, and to avoid any technological concerns, because again, there was the claim of "oh, my Internet doesn't work, or you know my Chrome book wasn't working so. And it was just trying to get a motivator for her. |
| | *Subtheme: Delivery of SDAIE and ELD*<br><br>I have. I feel like now it's more building that relationship getting that strong relationship where they're comfortable, and will be more willing to interact and be more active in participating in their own learning, especially during our EL time focusing on their interests and getting them involved in what they're doing.<br><br>Well, that's the that's the way it was as they were the virtual small groups, but it was what they were doing then, basically working on the stuff themselves. It was asynchronous, like I was not with them.<br><br>It was trying to connect with them like the one I had during distance learning. It was very hard to get in contact with them and get them on. So, it was constant messaging and calling and trying to get them on, encourage them to be participants in their learning participants in their learning, to have one-on-ones even instead of doing our regular group times.<br><br>We have a learning coordinator. What does she call instructional support? She's basically like the vice principal sort of position who does our all of our ELD paperwork and testing and stuff like that. |
| | *Subtheme: Increased awareness for social-emotional needs*<br><br>Again, it's trying to build that relationship, get the rapport with them. So then build a trust a lot of times that's lacking, especially if the students are transient based off of family situations and what not. Just trying to build a relationship, figure out what their likes are, what their dislikes are, what their family situation is, just have a better understanding of the child as a whole outside of the academics. |
| | *Subtheme: Tech skills were elevated* |

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| | I do understand technology. So the technology part was not too bad for me. But trying to assist kids in figuring out technology issues at a distance was not easy. [In person], it's like, hand me your Chrome book and I can figure it out for you. But teaching trying to walk through things through virtual classroom was not easy. So, having a good understanding of the technology was definitely helpful. |
| | *Subtheme: Realized technology requires pedagogy of its own.*<br><br>I have learned that technology is good for education, but it also can be a hindrance, definitely with technological issues, with Internet connections and so forth. It's a good learning tool. It's a good learning opportunity. But it is not the only means of learning or teaching.<br><br>.A teacher's understanding of technology definitely plays a role in how the students can handle it. A teacher who's more confident in using it would be definitely more of a help than a hindrance for virtual learning, regardless of the students' academic level or language. |

## Appendix N

## Sample of Focus Group Composite Textural/Structural Description

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|---|---|
| Theme Two<br>Professional interaction | Subtheme: Worked with grade-level teams<br><br>Ashley - I miss the camaraderie being around my team. I have a fabulous team. We all get along just beautifully, and we're supportive of each other. Even when we did our collaboration with how to do everything on Zoom -- we were in different classrooms, and we couldn't really be around each other. Just kind of lose that human contact. I still feel I have support for sure, but it just wasn't the same. It wasn't the same to not have that personal contact.<br><br>Anna - But we did have our aides with us the whole time during COVID, so that was nice to have that support. That's probably with the closest I'd ever been with my classroom aide during that time because normally I don't have time to talk with them. They were in there with us the whole day, and so that was probably the person that I talk to the most during that time.<br><br>Holly - I had no support from the resource staff. However, we did get together, even though it was distance learning for the kids. We teachers would get together at least once a week, and one would be in one corner. The other one would be in another corner, and then the other person would be in the other corner because there's three of us. That way we were totally distant from each other. But we would put things on the projector and plan everything together.<br><br>Sally - We didn't rely on the tech person at our school. I think I probably know more than our tech person did at the time. My partner was pretty good about figuring things out. She and I worked really close together.<br><br>Sarah - I think the same with me. We were a group of three, and we had one teacher who was not tech savvy at all, and me and one of the other younger teachers. She was all into it. Between the two of us it was great, and she was a huge support. She showed me some things that [were] so awesome. Then I showed her a couple of things, and I think she was a little shocked that an older teacher knew so much about technology because it's young kids know about this. “No, I do, too”. I'm old, but I do know things.<br><br>Kimberly - I'm kind of like the troubleshooter on our campus. When somebody had a tech problem and tech wouldn't respond, or couldn't get there right away, “Kimberly, do you have students right now? |

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| | Can you come? Help me figure this out?" We would generally figure it out so that wasn't as much of a support for me. Our administrator came in tech deficient. There wasn't a whole lot that we felt like we could reach out to her for support or help for some of those things. I will say much like Jen, one of my coworkers was probably my biggest support and asset. We kind of bounce back and forth, and we had a time each day that we would call each other that lined up with what we used to have as recess time. At recess times we would normally go for walk. During recess time of our online days, we would call each other and take a walk and chat about things, what worked, what didn't, who I was having trouble with what she was having trouble with, and just talk to each other to regain some sanity, and to share with each other that we weren't alone in our challenges. We could share our excitement so that I think just having somebody to talk it out with was what we needed. |

# Appendix O

## Focus Group Questions*

1. How did distance learning complicate EL instruction? i.e., what were the challenges you faced in providing ELD and/or SDAIE-based content learning? (SQ1)
2. Discuss how isolation affected you as the teacher (isolation from your team, students, specialists, resources, and support). (SQ2)
3. How did you meet the socioemotional needs of your students due to forced isolation caused by mandated lockdowns and no face-to-face engagement? (SQ4)
4. What was/were the catalysts that made you change your delivery of instruction (either general education or EL-based instruction) (SQ1)
5. What technology did you have to learn to make it happen? (SQ3)
6. Name something new you learned related to technology as a result of distance learning. How did you implement it in your practice post-distance learning? (SQ5)
7. Discuss the value of the support you had: professionally, tech-based, grade-level team, family, administration, district, colleagues, etc. (SQ2)
8. How has your experience during distance impacted your current practices and pedagogy for ELs using technology? (SQ5)

*Focus group questions can change depending on the trends and patterns from the individual interview findings.

# Appendix P

## California Schools Summary Statistics

| School | ELA 2018-19 | ELA 2021-22 | Math 2018-19 | Math 2021-22 | English Learners | Free lunches |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lewis County overall (Central Valley) | 30.38 % | 33.05% | 39.04% | 46.85% | 2018-19 17.5%<br>2021-22 18.7% | 2018-19 70.7%<br>2021-22 70.9% |
| Burton County overall (Central Valley) | 29.05% | 33.8% | 37.13% | 45.8% | 2018-19 18.8%<br>2021-22 19% | 2018-19 74.2%<br>2021-22 73.4% |
| Hughes County overall (Southern CA) | 27.14% | 30.1% | 35.48% | 42.54% | 2018-19 18.6%<br>2021-22 18.5% | 2018-19 68.5%<br>2021-22 67.2% |
| | | | | | | |
| Sycamore Elementary Title 1 Schoolwide Locale: Rural, Fringe | 13.19 % | 11.11% | 17.01% | 14.81% | 2018-19 3.4%<br>2021-22 4.9% | 2018-19 35.2%<br>2021-22 41.7% |
| Rosemont Elementary Title 1 Schoolwide Locale: Rural, Distant | 29.41% | 50.52% | 30.48% | 63.02% | 2018-19 31.5%<br>2021-22 33.5% | 2018-19 80.2%<br>2021-22 78.9% |
| John Muir Elementary Title 1 Schoolwide Locale: Rural, Fringe | 12.23 % | 21.99% | 11.79% | 28.22% | 2018-19 11.8%<br>2021-22 10.5% | 2018-19 41.3%<br>2021-22 37.1% |
| Cypress Elementary Title 1 Schoolwide Locale: Rural, Fringe | 61.88 % | 67.52% | 55% | 61.54% | 2018-19 52.7%<br>2021-22 32.7% | 2018-19 89.2%<br>2021-22 79/9% |
| Sierra Hills Elementary Title 1 Schoolwide Locale: Suburb, Small | 29.48 % | 26.35% | 29.56% | 31.44% | 2018-19 15.1%<br>2021-22 12.3% | 2018-19 62.7%<br>2021-22 71.6% |
| Carson Elementary Title 1 Schoolwide Locale: City, Small | 34.44 % | 36.25% | 40.89% | 42.86% | 2018-19 20.1%<br>2021-22 15.9% | 2018-19 82.5%<br>2021-22 78.8% |
| Taylor Elementary Title 1 Schoolwide Locale: Town, Fringe | 18.09 % | 36.54% | 19.15% | 40% | 2018-19 55.1%<br>2021-22 53.6% | 2018-19 85.8%<br>2021-22 87.6% |
| Meadowbrook Elementary Targeted Title I Locale: Suburb, Large | 13.97 % | 7.74% | 10.56% | 7.19% | 2018-19 8.8%<br>2021-22 8.3% | 2018-19 7.3%<br>2021-22 7% |

*Note:* ELA and Math scores are based on the CAASPP scores and are the overall scores of all students, including ELs. Scores do not include CAASPP alternate tests. Results indicate the percentage of students who did not meet the standard level of performance. This data was aggregated from Education Data Partnership, by Ed Data (https://www.ed-data.org).

# Appendix Q

## Themes and Subthemes

| **SQ1:** How did rural elementary classroom EL teachers implement technology to communicate instructional content and support and pedagogy? | |
|---|---|
| **Themes** | **Sub-themes** |
| 1. Used existing knowledge and practices | A. Continued usage of familiar technology |
| | B. Continued practice of existing and usage of instruction and materials |
| | C. Modified existing technological and instructional practices |
| 2. Support necessity | A. Tech support |
| | B. Administration support |
| | C. Parental support |
| 3. Utilization of technological media during online instruction | A. Increased usage of visual and interactive applications |
| | B. Simultaneous usage of various devices |
| 4. Delivery of SDAIE and ELD | A. Continued designated ELD instruction and scaffolding for EL content-based learning |
| | B. Unable to provide SDAIE let alone designated ELD |

| **SQ2:** What role did teacher collaboration play during distance learning (common planning time, PLC, critical friends' groups)? | |
|---|---|
| **Theme** | **Sub-themes** |
| 1. Working with grade-level teams | A. Grade-level teams shared lesson plans, contents, and resources |
| | B. Grade-level teams did not work together |
| | C. Isolated and sought support outside of the school building |
| | D. Learned through independent trial and error |
| | E. Learned through colleagues |
| 2. District-mandated PLCs replaced with as-needed collaboration | A. School administration led |
| | B. No scheduled PLC and at teacher and team discretion. |
| 3. District continued PDs and collaboration meetings | A. Initial training on distance learning platforms |
| | B. Same expectations as pre-COVID |
| | C. Useless and not helpful |

| **SQ3:** What transformation have rural elementary classroom EL teachers experienced in their technological skills and practices? | |
|---|---|
| **Theme** | **Sub-themes** |
| 1. Learned new skills and applications | A. Video conferencing on Zoom or Google Meets |
| | B. Increased usage of videos and instructional learning applications |
| | C. Independently learned how to use applications and tech features |
| | D. Learning outside the comfort zone. |

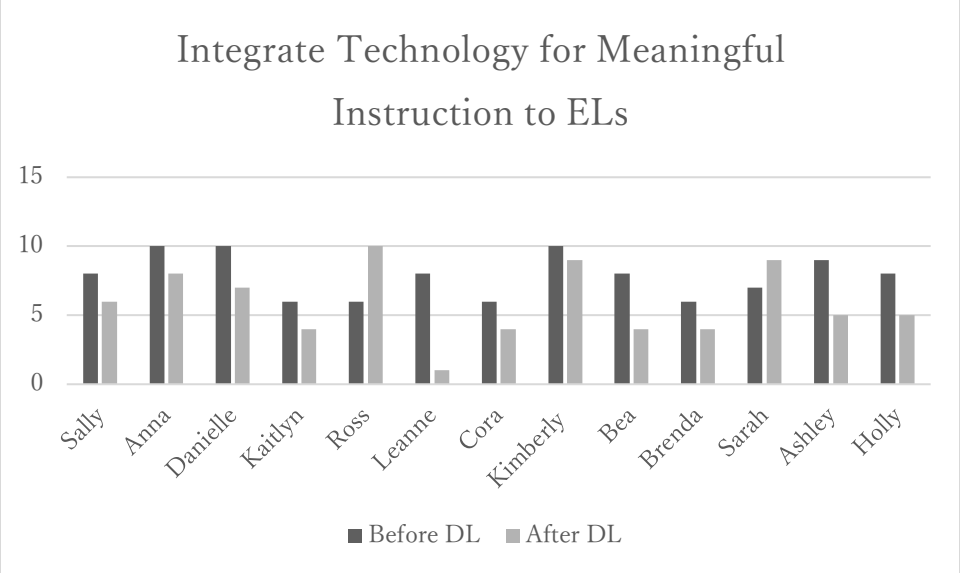
| | |
|---|---|
| 2. Teacher technological skills were elevated | A. Increased usage of applications not previously used |
| | B. Became highly proficient in fewer applications |
| **SQ4:** What transformation did rural elementary classroom EL teachers experience in their pedagogical practices to meet the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of their students? | |
| 1. Classroom management challenges | A. Motivating students to learn |
| | B. Keeping students online |
| | C. Enforcing "DL classroom" rules and disciplinary action |
| | D. Home disruptions during synchronous instruction |
| 2. Increased awareness of academic and social-emotional needs | A. Planned activities and time for students to share feelings and concerns. |
| | B. Feelings of teacher guilt because teachers could not meet the social-emotional and academic needs of students or EL support. |
| | C. Made personal visits to students' homes |
| | D. Took students into breakout rooms to address student feelings and/or emotions. |
| 3. Made modifications to academic instruction. | A. Due to unreasonable district expectations. |
| | B. Were able to address target standards. |
| | C. Unable to meet EL needs (both for scaffolding and designated ELD. |
| **SQ5:** How does a new perspective of instruction impact teachers' current practice of instructing ELs with technology? | |
| 1. Reverted to pre-COVID instruction | A. Lessons, activities, and materials are back to pre-COVID "old ways." |
| | B. Prefer in-person conferencing and collaboration during staff meetings. |
| 2. Decreased computer time for students | A. Realized the necessity of hands-on materials and activities |
| | B. Increased usage of manipulatives |
| | C. Lessons and activities requiring in-person interaction. |
| 3. Increased technology usage for teachers. | A. Integrate newly learned technology skills and applications for classroom-based instruction. |
| | B. Increased usage of applications and platforms used before distance learning. |
| | C. Continued usage of video conferencing for PLCs, professional development, and staff meetings. |
| 4. Realized technology requires pedagogy of its own. | A. Cannot transfer brick and mortar to 2D screen. |
| | B. Difficult to differentiate between EL instruction mainstreamed and general education instruction when everyone is synchronously online. |
| | C. Need more training on pedagogies and online classroom management. |
| | D. Lack of EL-specific applications for teaching and supporting ELs for academic content. |

# Appendix R

## Sample Questionnaire Data Analysis

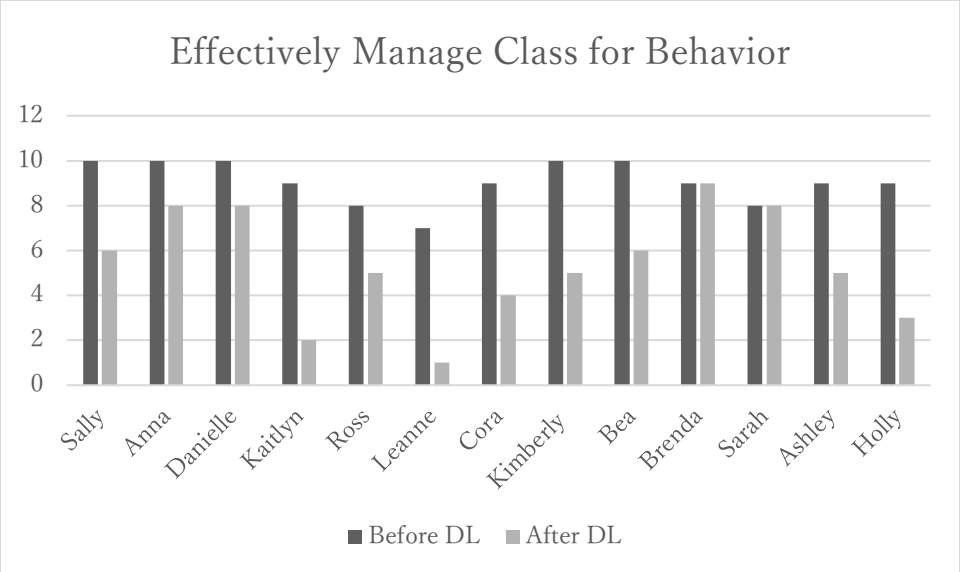
31. I could integrate technology to provide meaningful instruction to ELs BEFORE the pandemic.

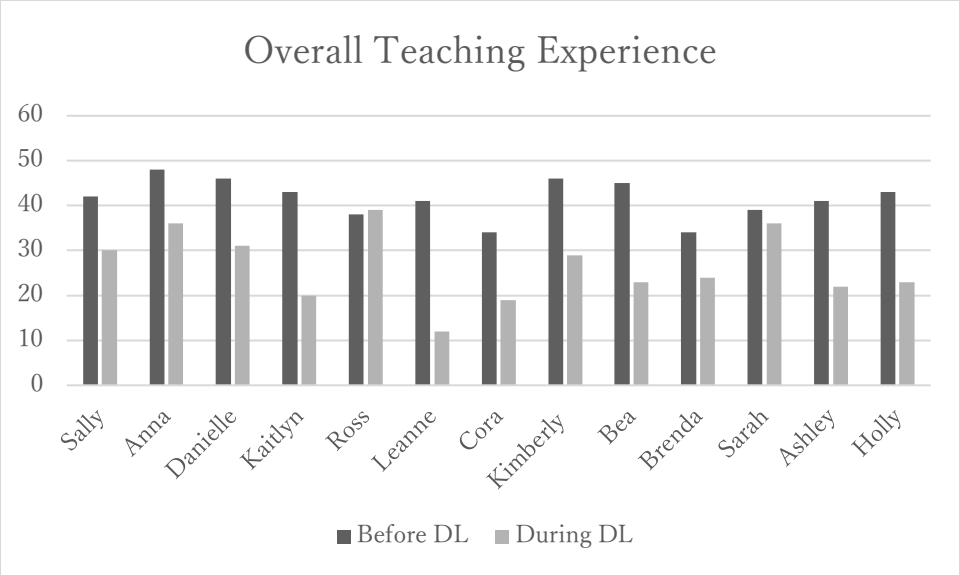
32. could integrate technology to provide meaningful instruction to ELs while conducting distance learning DURING the pandemic (March 2020 - June 2021).




33. I could effectively manage my class to monitor disruptive behavior BEFORE the pandemic.

34. I could effectively manage my class to monitor disruptive behavior while conducting distance learning DURING the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 - June 2021).






35. Describe your communication with your EL students' parents BEFORE the pandemic and while conducting distance learning DURING the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 - June

**Textural**

Before positive good at communicating with parents, through a translator. Class dojo. Daily sent postcards called families and random phone calls. Communication before was by parents to create a team. Face-to-face communication. In-person conference.

During DL, used Class Dojo, Remind, Zoom, and phone calls via my cell phone. Class dojo improved communication because parents can translate it into their language. Meetings were in Zoom. Instead of the translator, the student or sibling translated and rarely spoke with parents. Many students who did not show up were ELs. Parents not home and working. Familiarity with Zoom made communication easier. Unreliable internet made it difficult for many families.

**Structural:**

Before COVID, for most teachers, communicating with parents was positive and done with a translator—a few used Class Dojo. One teacher sent postcards and made random calls to families but at regular intervals. One teacher made home visits as part of starting up the school year. Generally, communication was face-to-face. During COVID, the use of Class Dojo went up. This means it was a positive app because it translates messages into the language of the parents. Communication was either through Class Dojo or Zoom. A few teachers gave their personal cell phone numbers to parents. Initially, it was more difficult to talk with parents, but as everyone became familiar with Zoom, communication became easier. For some ELs, it was more difficult to communicate because parents were working. Students or siblings translated for parents. Unreliable internet also made it difficult for some families in rural areas.