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Teachers' Perceptions of Challenges in Post-pandemic Recovery for English Language Learners

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Abstract

Survey research (*N*=108) examined teachers' perceptions of challenges facing educators working to ameliorate pandemic learning losses among English language learners (ELLs). Fifteen challenges in four categories were assessed, including five *student* factors, three *home/family* factors, three *curriculum* factors, and four *teacher/administrator* factors. Both *curriculum* factors and *teacher/administrator* factors were rated as significantly more challenging than *student* factors. Within *student* factors, *students' skills in the home language, students' motivation to learn,* and *students' academic skills prior to the pandemic* were rated as most problematic. Within *home/family* factors, respondents indicated that the most pressing challenge was *students' immigration status.* Within *curriculum* factors, teachers expressed the greatest concern about the *cultural relevance of curriculum used with ELLs.* Finally, within *teacher/administrator* factors, teachers rated two as the most challenging*: administrators' support for pandemic recovery for ELLs* and *teacher skills in working with ELLs*. The data suggest that teachers did not regard student factors as the primary drag force on pandemic recovery, instead judging the greatest challenges to come from the curriculum used to teach ELLs and the skills and practices of teachers and administrators who work with them. The results have the potential to inform ELL pandemic-recovery initiatives in curriculum development, administrative policy/procedures, and professional development.

Keywords

English learners, Teachers' perceptions, Learning challenges, Post-pandemic recovery, Factors affecting learning efforts

The Covid-19 pandemic has produced unprecedented challenges for schools, with countless students experiencing significant learning losses (Ardington, Wills, & Kotze, 2021; Betthäuser et al., 2022; Donnelly & Patrinos, 2021; Kaffenberger, 2021; Moscoviz & Evans, 2022; Panagouli et al., 2021; The Nation's Report Card, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). These losses seem widespread and involve virtually all students; for example, ELA scores dipped significantly in the early elementary grades and math performance dropped a full grade level in nearly all grades (Bailey et al., 2021; Dawson, 2021; Dorn et al., 2020; Storey & Zhang, 2021).

However, not all students have been affected similarly by the pandemic. Rather, the difficulties seem to have fallen

hardest on students who were disadvantaged prior to the pandemic (Betthäuser et al., 2022; Author et al., 2021; Engzell et al., 2021; Sahlberg, 2021). Among these students are English Language Learners (ELLs), who have long lagged their native-English peers on academic and nonacademic assessments (Ardasheva et al., 2012; Bailey et al., 2021; Cummins, 2011; Gibson, 2016; Grimm, Solari, & Gerber, 2018; Hakuta et al., 2000; Hill, 2018; Mahon, 2006; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2017; Olson et al., 2017; Parrish et al., 2002; Thompson et al., 2002).

However, as this article is written, research on pandemic recovery for ELLs remains scant. Author identification masked (in press-a) reported that teachers judged shortfalls in students' English proficiency to be the main predictor of learning losses among ELLs, with the most profound losses coming from students with low proficiency in both English and the home language. At the same time, the research showed that students' home-language skills have the potential to be used to remediate learning losses, which brings to the fore the issue of how pandemic recovery for ELLs might well be structured and how professional development programs can be crafted to enhance this recovery.

Accordingly, survey research was conducted to investigate the following research question: How do teachers weigh the various factors that may prove challenging as pandemic-recovery initiatives for ELLs are designed and implemented? The research has the potential to clarify teachers' views concerning the most vexing challenges teachers face as they embark upon pandemic-recovery initiatives in schools, informing both how these initiatives should be structured and how professional development can be targeted to enhance ELL pandemic recovery. In what follows we present a literature review, problem statement, methods, results, and discussion concerning teachers' perceptions of the challenges of ameliorating pandemic learning losses among ELLs.

1. Literature Review

There is little doubt that the mandated school closures and the resulting shift to online instruction precipitated by the pandemic have directly impacted students and other stakeholders in virtually every community. Accordingly, the research literature examining changes in students' academic performance is not encouraging.

Declines in academic performance have been reported in research conducted in numerous countries around the world. A study in the Netherlands revealed that student learning declined during the pandemic by three percentile points in core subjects such as math, reading, and spelling (Engzell et al., 2021). In Belgium, Maldonado and De Witte (2022) discovered losses of .19 SD in math and .29 in Dutch for grade 6 students. Gore et al. (2021) indicated that Australian grade 3 students were at least two months behind in math as compared to the prior year. Scores for Grade 5 students in Germany plummeted in reading comprehension and mathematics (Schult et al., 2022), while in Pakistan, the pandemic resulted in a decline in learning and an increase in dropout rates especially for girls and elementary-level students (Khan & Ahmed, 2021). Finally, a study in Norway reported that tests of students' writing skills were markedly lower relative to pre-pandemic levels (Skar et al., 2021).

Similarly, in the United States, declines in student performance have been broad and deep (Betebenner & Wenning, 2021; Dawson, 2021; Dorn et al., 2021; Kwakye & Kibort-Crocker, 2021; The Nation's Report Card, 2022; Moscoviz & Evans, 2022; Panagouli et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). For example, a study using National Association of Education Progress (NAEP) assessments administered to nine-year-old students showed a decline of seven points in mathematics and five points in reading compared to scores generated in 2020 (The Nation's Report Card, 2022). The decline in reading performance was the largest since 1990, and the first decline in mathematics scores since the advent of NAEP testing.

The pandemic has also produced meaningful non-academic difficulties, especially among students suffering from emotional or behavioral challenges. For instance, a study in the United Kingdom reported that depression was more common, in the wake of the pandemic, in children with previously existing mental-health issues (Newlove-Delgado et al., 2021). Similarly, another investigation in the UK found increased rates of psychological symptoms among students with neurodevelopmental disorders and/or special needs (Onwumere et al., 2021). Finally, in data collected in the United States, 20% of 7,482 Black, Asian, and other minority students reported that they had experienced suicidal thoughts or had already harmed themselves – a far higher rate relative to pre-pandemic levels (Campbell, 2020).

While all students have been challenged by the effects of Covid-19, those who were disadvantaged prior to the pandemic have been hit the hardest (Agostinelli et al., 2022; Campbell, 2020; Author et al., 2021; Dawson, 2021; Engzell et al., 2021; Moscoviz & Evans, 2022; Newlove-Delgado et al., 2021; Sahlberg, 2021). Students from disadvantaged households experienced greater losses as compared to their more affluent peers (Contini et al., 2022; Dorn et al., 2021; Engzell et al., 2021; Panagouli et al., 2021). Reporting similar difficulties, other studies indicate that low-achieving students suffered greater learning losses and received weaker instructional support since the pandemic (The Nation's Report Card, 2022; Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020). Accordingly, students from low-SES households reported lower access to computers, fewer quiet places to work, and less support from teachers/caregivers compared to students from more affluent homes (Herold, 2020; The Nation's Report Card, 2022).

As for ethnic differences, studies show that minority students experienced larger losses that their White counterparts (Campbell, 2020; Author et al., 2021; Dorn et al., 2021; Engzell et al., 2021; Sahlberg, 2021). In the United States, NAEP testing revealed a 13-point decrease in mathematics scores among Black students relative to pre-pandemic numbers, while White students declined only five points (The Nation's Report Card, 2022). Per NAEP data, the Black-White achievement gap expanded from 25 points in 2020 to 33 points in 2022. Other reports add that more ground was lost in math than in reading, especially among students from low-SES backgrounds (Betthäuser et al., 2022; Dorn et al., 2020; Dawson, 2021). Consequently, minority students and low-SES students fell to two or more grade levels below their White and high-SES peers (Kayitsinga, 2021; Kuhfeld et al., 2020).

ELLs have also been affected adversely and disproportionately by the pandemic. These students have long lagged their English-speaking peers on academic and non-academic assessments, resulting in considerable achievement gaps (Ardasheva et al., 2012; Bailey et al., 2021; Cummins, 2011; Gibson, 2016; Grimm, Solari, & Gerber, 2018; Hakuta et al., 2000; Hill, 2018; Mahon, 2006; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2017; Olson et al., 2017; Parrish et al., 2002; Solórzano, 2008; Thompson et al., 2002). Unsurprisingly, the pandemic has fallen hard on ELLs (Author et al., 2021; Dawson, 2021; Domingue et al., 2022; Dorn et al, 2020; Dorn et al., 2021; Engzell et al., 2021; Grewenig et al, 2021; Lazarin, 2020; Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020; Sahlberg et al., 2021). Learning losses have been disproportionately larger for ELLs due to a lack of language support during the pandemic and inequities that existed prior to the pandemic (Domingue et al., 2022; Callahan, 2005; Dorn et al., 2020; Grewenig et al., 2021; Lazarin, 2022; Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020). Since ELLs hail from home environments where English is not the first language, school closures curtailed students' access to academic support concerning English-language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Lazarin, 2022). Although research literature on the impact of Covid-19 on ELLs is not abundant at present, the available evidence indicates that this vulnerable group has suffered disproportionately, necessitating vigorous efforts to initiate pandemic-recovery programs.

2. Problem Statement

The literature review above documents that the Covid-19 pandemic has produced unprecedented difficulties in schools, especially for disadvantaged students such as ELLs. However, the available research does little to assist educators in their attempts to design and implement pandemic-recovery programs for ELLs. Certainly, educators face myriad challenges as they endeavor to set these programs up and roll them out.

Some challenges likely stem from the students themselves, including such factors as student proficiency in the home language and student proficiency in English, as well as students' prior achievement level, motivation, and emotional issues. Other challenges likely stem from students' home and family backgrounds, such as family support for education, financial issues, and immigration status. Still, other challenges are likely to arise concerning curriculum factors such as quality of curriculum materials, level of curricular rigor, and cultural relevance of curriculum for ELL populations. Finally, a variety of challenges likely stem from teachers and administrators, such as teacher proficiency in the home language(s), teacher skill in working with ELLs, the extent to which teachers prioritize ELL pandemic recovery, and administrators' support for ELL pandemic-recovery efforts.

Absent existing research in this area, it remains unclear how teachers appraise these various factors. Surely some factors are considered more problematic than others. Identifying these factors may prove helpful in the design and implementation of pandemic-recovery initiatives, allowing resources to be deployed where they are most needed. Moving into the breach, we conducted research to address this research question: How do teachers weigh these various factors that may prove challenging as pandemic-recovery initiatives for ELLs are designed and implemented? Below we present the methods, results, and discussion of this research.

3. Methods

With schools returning to in-person instruction in the wake of the pandemic, and research showing considerable learning losses among ELLs (Author et al., 2021; Dawson, 2021; Domingue et al., 2022; Dorn et al, 2020; Dorn et al., 2021; Engzell et al., 2021; Grewenig et al, 2021; Lazarin, 2020; Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020; Sahlberg et al., 2021) initiatives to buttress education for ELLs have become a salient issue among educators. It seems meritorious to explore how teachers judge the challenges facing these efforts; after all, teachers are most likely to invest their time and other resources where they are most needed and where they are most likely to succeed, and they are well-positioned to report on which challenges seem most problematic.

Accordingly, we developed a survey to assess teacher perceptions of candidate factors that may prove challenging in ELL post-pandemic. As shown in Table 1, the survey assessed 15 factors selected for the likelihood of proving challenging

to educators seeking to improve ELLs' academic outcomes as the pandemic recedes. (Candidate factors that were conceived or operationalized poorly would be rated as irrelevant by respondents, who essentially perform a test of construct validity in their ratings.) The 15 factors were grouped into four naturally occurring categories including five *student* factors, three *home/family* factors, three *curriculum* factors, and four *teacher/administrator* factors.

Table 1. Candidate Factors

Student Factors
1. Students' skills in home language
2. Students' skills in English
3. Students' emotional issues
4. Students' motivation to learn
5. Students' academic skills prior to the pandemic
Home/Family Factors
6. Support for education in students' families
7. Financial issues in students' families
8. Students' immigration status
Curriculum Factors
9. Level of academic rigor in curriculum used with ELLs
10. Cultural relevance of curriculum used with ELLs
11. Quality of curriculum materials used with ELLs
Teacher/Administrator Factors
12. Teachers' proficiency in students' home language(s)
13. Teachers' skills for educating ELLs
14. Whether teachers prioritize pandemic recovery for ELLs
15. Administrators' support for pandemic recovery for ELLs

The factors were assessed using 10-point scales, selected for the intuitive ease with which individuals are able to render judgments (as in the widely used 1-10 "pain scale" in hospitals). Respondents rated each factor according to how challenging they judged it to be in ELL-recovery efforts, such that 1 = "not much" and 10 = "a great deal."

Of the 108 responses, 97 were collected using Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Links to the Qualtrics survey were distributed on social media websites that feature large numbers of teachers. Eleven responses were collected in hardcopy form at a conference attended by teachers in a large city in the northeastern United States. These data-collection methods appear to have been successful since the results were highly similar to previous studies using in-person data-collection methods. In particular, the distributions obtained for gender, ethnicity, age, educational attainment, and teaching experience were highly similar to those obtained in six prior studies using samples collected at school faculty meetings (author identification masked, in press-a, in press-b, 2012, 2018, 2019, 2021).

Respondents were also asked for demographic information including gender, ethnicity, age, educational attainment, years of full-time teaching completed, years of full-time school administration completed, and whether respondents held certification in Bilingual Education and/or English as a Second Language. Instructions indicated that 1) the survey tapped opinions and had no correct answers, 2) survey responses were fully confidential and no identifying information would be presented, and 3) participants would not be compensated. SPSS version 27 was used in data analysis.

4. Results

The 108 survey respondents were a veteran group of teachers, averaging 41 years of age and 15 years of teaching experience. Over 90% held a master's degree or higher. There were 88 women, 18 men, and one self-identified as other, with 59 elementary and 43 secondary teachers. The sample was identified as 61% white and 27% Hispanic. About 28% held certification in Bilingual Education and 13% in English as a Second Language.

Less than 1% of data were missing, and no outliers were detected. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2 (continuous variables) and Table 3 (categorical variables). Paired-sample T-tests were conducted for comparison of means among the response variables.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Variables

Variable	n	Mean	SD
Factor 1: Students' skills in the home language	107	4.46	2.66
Factor 2: Students' skills in English	108	3.14	2.35
Factor 3: Students' emotional issues (depression, trauma, etc.)	107	3.47	2.64
Factor 4: Students' motivation to learn	107	4.02	2.62
Factor 5: Students' academic skills prior to the pandemic	107	4.01	2.33
Factor 6: Support for education in students' families	107	3.58	2.52
Factor 7: Financial issues in students' families	107	3.78	2.70
Factor 8: Students' immigration status	105	4.78	2.74
Factor 9: Level of academic rigor in curriculum used with ELLs	108	4.00	2.70
Factor 10: Cultural relevance of curriculum used with ELLs	107	4.50	2.56
Factor 11: Quality of curriculum materials used with ELLs	107	4.39	2.67
Factor 12: Teachers' proficiency in students' home language(s)	107	3.78	2.66
Factor 13: Teachers' skills for educating ELLs	107	4.58	2.88
Factor 14: Whether teachers prioritize pandemic recovery for ELLs	105	4.17	2.55
Factor 15: Administrators' support for pandemic recovery for ELLs	108	4.73	2.72
Aggregate of *Student* Factors (1-5)	104	3.80	1.94
Aggregate of *Home/Family* Factors (6-8)	103	4.00	2.15
Aggregate of *Curriculum* Factors (9-11)	107	4.30	2.37
Aggregate of *Teacher/Administrator* Factors (12-15)	104	4.25	2.01
Age	101	41.89	13.75
Years of teaching completed	107	15.23	11.25
Years of administration completed	93	4.87	8.08

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Categorical Variables

Variable	Codes	Frequency	Percent
Gender	women	88	16.7%
	men	18	81.5%
	other	1	.9%
Grade Level Taught	elementary	59	54.6%
	secondary	43	39.8%
	other	5	4.6%
Ethnicity	White	66	61.1%
	Black	5	4.6%
	Hispanic	29	26.9%
	Asian	3	2.8%
	other	4	3.7%
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's	11	10.2%
	Master's	29	26.9%
	Master's +30	28	25.9%
	Master's +60	27	25.0%
	Doctorate	12	11.1%
Bilingual Certification	yes	14	13.0%
	no	93	86.1%
ESL Certification	yes	30	27.8%
	no	78	72.2%

4.1 Factor Aggregates

In this analysis, a comparison of means is undertaken using the average of the items within each response category (five *student* factors, three each for *home/family* factors and *curriculum* factors, and four for *teacher/administrator* factors). This aggregation is supported by high levels of internal consistency reliability among intra-category factors, with high alpha values for the category aggregates (.83, .74, .88, and .74, respectively).

In pairwise testing, two significant differences were obtained. Both *curriculum* factors (p=.01, Cohen's d=.25) and *teacher/administrator* factors (p=.003, d=.31) were rated as significantly more challenging than *student* factors. (Other pairwise comparisons did not show statistically significant differences.) Teachers apparently regarded elements of the school environment – teachers, administrators, and curriculum – as more problematic than the challenges students bring to school (e.g., proficiency in English).

4.2 Student Factors

Within the five factors in the *student factors* category, six pairwise comparisons yielded statistically significant differences, presented here with three bullets:

- *Students' skills in the home language* were rated as significantly more challenging than both *students' emotional issues* (p<.001, d=.35) and *students' skills in English* (p<.001, d=.52). Teachers apparently regarded students with weak home language skills as particularly at risk in pandemic recovery.
- *Students' motivation to learn* was rated as significantly higher than both *students' emotional issues* (p<.001, d=.23) and *students' skills in English* (p<.001, d=.39). In these findings, teachers suggest that students' level of motivation meaningfully predicts the outcomes of ELL pandemic recovery.
- *Students' academic skills prior to the pandemic* were rated as more challenging than both *students' emotional issues* (p=.03, d=.21) and *students' skills in English* (p<.001, d=.42). Perhaps unsurprisingly, teachers indicate here that students with a history of weak academic skills are likely to experience profound difficulties in the wake of the pandemic.

4.3 Home/Family Factors

The variable *students' immigration status* was rated as significantly more challenging than both *financial issues in students' families* (p<.001, d=.36) and *support for education in students' families* (p<.001, d=.41). Teachers apparently regarded undocumented students as meaningfully at-risk.

4.4 Curriculum Factors

The variable *cultural relevance of curriculum used with ELLs* was rated as more challenging than the *level of academic rigor in the curriculum used with ELLs* (p=.006, d=.27). Teachers apparently were concerned that the curricular materials in use in schools are insufficiently responsive to ELLs' cultural backgrounds.

4.5 Teacher/Administrator Factors

The variable *administrators' support for pandemic recovery for ELLs* was rated as more challenging than *teacher proficiency in students' home language* (p=.008, d=.26). In addition, the variable *teacher skills in working with ELLs* was rated as significantly more challenging than *teacher proficiency in students' home language* (p=.005, d=.28). Participating teachers were evidently concerned about the level of administrative support for ELL pandemic recovery, and they apparently believe that teachers' skill in working with ELLs is more important than knowing students' home language.

5. Discussion

5.1 The primary challenges stem from curriculum and educators, not students

A survey-research project tapped teachers' views about the challenges that lay ahead in ameliorating pandemic learning losses among ELLS. Strongly held positions were revealed, beginning with teacher's beliefs concerning which challenges loom largest as pandemic-recovery initiatives unfold. A great deal has been published of late lamenting extensive and wide-ranging learning losses owing to the pandemic, yielding the impression that students are in a bad way, especially the most disadvantaged students (Kayitsinga, 2021; Kuhfeld et al., 2020; The Nation's Report Card, 2022). Accordingly, the teachers who completed this survey might have been expected to point to challenges that stem from students and their

families. But this is not what responding teachers indicated. Rather, they saw the main challenges coming from schools – that is, stemming from the characteristics of the curriculum used to teach ELLs and the skills and practices of the educators who implement this curriculum. As such, teachers appear to take responsibility for the situation concerning ELLs in schools, rather than attributing the problem to students and families.

The results could also be interpreted as a concern that the curriculum and staff are less-than-optimally positioned to respond to ELL learning losses. Participating teachers appeared to be short on confidence that schools can mount a sufficient response, due to issues with both the curriculum used to teach ELLs and the educators who teach it. This lends support to calls for sweeping, "Moonshot"-level pandemic-recovery initiatives (Goldhaber et al., 2022; Lazarin, 2022; Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020; Williams & Marcus, 2021).

5.2 The curriculum challenge: culturally relevant pedagogy

Since teachers regard curriculum factors and teacher/administrator factors as the most challenging, it seems relevant to examine the individual factors within these categories. To begin with, teachers expressed concern regarding the cultural relevance of the curriculum used with ELLs. A great deal has been written of late regarding the need for curriculum and instruction designed to comport with students' cultural and linguistic heritage (Cho, Lee, & Herner-Patnode, 2020; Paris, 2012; Vázquez-Morilla, Just, & Triscari, 2014). Much of this work has been published under the heading *culturally responsive teaching* (Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Gay, 2002; Kozleski, 2010; Vavrus, 2008), however, the resulting acronym (CRT) has become identified with a different construct, *critical race theory*, which has gained notoriety of late (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Zamudio et al., 2011). For educators interested in education that accommodates students' cultural backgrounds, but not in wading into the political battleground that critical race theory has become, sidestepping this confusion has resulted in the use of other terms such as *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, *culturally relevant pedagogy,* and *culturally relevant education*. Although the tenets of these various approaches vary, modestly, they center on the core idea that students' cultural identities and lived experiences are essential in the design and implementation of educational services. This core idea is supported by a growing body of research underscoring its academic benefits (e.g., improved test scores and grades) and non-academic benefits (enhanced well-being in school, fewer disciplinary referrals) (Farinde-Wu, Glover, & Williams, 2017; Fredericks, 2012; Samuels, 2018).

Perhaps unfortunately, the participants in this study seem to lack confidence that schools are well suited at present to deliver effective culturally relevant teaching. Indeed, they rated the cultural relevance of curriculum used with ELLs as a meaningful challenge as pandemic recovery initiatives roll out. They apparently don't believe the current curriculum is sufficiently culturally relevant for ELLs, and they apparently don't see improvements in this regard on the horizon. As such, the results of this study are consistent with calls for increased cultural relevance in curriculum and instruction for ELLs (Herrera, 2016; Islam & Park, 2015; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Needed are curriculum-development initiatives that make more effective contact with students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and pandemic learning losses have added urgency to calls for such initiatives.

5.3 Challenges from teachers and administrators

Survey respondents also singled out a pair of teacher/administrator factors as especially challenging for pandemic recovery, with one factor on each side: *teacher skills in working with ELLs* and *administrators' support for pandemic recovery for ELLs.* In keeping with findings showing teachers taking responsibility for the challenges of ELL pandemic recovery, the respondents rated *teacher skills in working with ELLs* as an issue of concern. Apparently, they did not see the teacher workforce as meaningfully prepared for this challenge, perhaps because they lacked the requisite skills due to shortfalls in training or experience in working with ELLs. Perhaps this is unsurprising in light of a considerable body of research showing that teachers 1) regard themselves as inadequately trained to work with ELLs (Goldenberg, 2008; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Jimenez-Silva, Olson, & Jimenez Hernandez, 2012; Wessels et al., 2017) and 2) express an interest in professional development in this area (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005; He & Bagwell, 2022). At the same time, it seems striking that teachers – the professionals on the front lines of pandemic recovery – evidently believe that the teaching workforce is, in its current state, poorly prepared for the task. Clearly such a result indicates a need, one reported by the teachers themselves, for professional development programs designed to support ELL pandemic recovery.

Similarly, survey respondents expressed doubt that school administrators are ready and willing with respect to recovery programs for ELLs. Citing *administrators' support for pandemic recovery for ELLs* as an issue of note, the participants apparently were concerned that recovery initiatives would not be prioritized by their supervisors and might even be tacitly undermined. Although it is not clear why teachers are concerned as such, or whether such concerns are warranted, a large corpus of studies shows that teachers routinely harbor doubts about the level of administrative support for their work

(Gigante & Firestone, 2008; Russell, Williams, & Gleason-Gomez, 2010; Stanley, 2021; Tickle, Chang, & Kim, 2011). These findings and those in this article combine to support the assertion that administrators need to be proactive and vociferous concerning their support for pandemic recovery.

5.4 Informing the design and implementation of pandemic recovery

The results in this study have the potential to inform the design and implementation of pandemic recovery programs, in part because they provide teachers' views regarding the challenges these programs are likely to face. Research shows that educational interventions are more likely to succeed when designed to incorporate teachers' input (Alsubaie, 2016; Oloruntegbe, 2011; Ramparsad, 2001; Scanlon et al., 1994). Fortunately, the factors that respondents in this research found most challenging are ones that educators have the potential to affect (e.g., curriculum design, teacher skills), rather than factors that lie largely outside of educators' purview (e.g., students' immigration status, financial issues in students' families). This portends well for the effectiveness of pandemic recovery since it suggests that teachers find appropriate pandemic-recovery innovations to be within their locus of control.

Accordingly, three vehicles for pandemic recovery seem promising, based on the results of this study. The first involves curriculum-development initiatives. As noted, teachers regard the curriculum and the staff in schools as the main impediments to pandemic recovery, and in particular they are concerned that programs for ELLs lack cultural and linguistic relevance. Innovations in curriculum can be crafted to address this problem. It could be argued that the problem should have been addressed before the pandemic, but it can also be argued that the pandemic provided new impetus to consider the extent to which the existing curriculum adequately supports ELLs. Perhaps the time is right for educators to dig into the task of providing ELLs with a culturally responsive curriculum.

Professional development is the second vehicle for pandemic recovery. As noted, prior research indicates that teachers do not feel adequately prepared to work with ELLs (Goldenberg, 2008; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Jimenez-Silva, Olson, & Jimenez Hernandez, 2012; Wessels et al., 2017) and the results of this study indicate specifically that they do not view the teacher workforce as sufficiently prepared to implement pandemic recovery for ELLs. It follows that robust professional-development programs are needed, to help teachers learn any new culturally relevant curricula that are implemented, and more generally to build teachers' knowledge and skills concerning best practices for teaching ELLs. Research shows that professional development programs are most likely to succeed when based on topics teachers believe they need help with (Crano & Prislin, 2011; Decker, Kunter, & Voss, 2015; Derakhshan et al., 2020; Matherson & Windle, 2017; Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000), which means that pandemic recovery for ELLs may not be a heavy lift for professional-development providers.

Finally, pandemic recovery for ELLs might well entail thoughtful and deliberate innovations in administrative policies and procedures. As noted, teachers in this study were dubious that administrators are sufficiently supportive of pandemic recovery efforts. Whether or not this is true in any particular school, it calls for clear communications from administrators voicing unqualified support for pandemic recovery. Research suggests that if teachers believe administrators won't throw their weight behind a program, the teachers won't either (Archibald et al., 2011; Guskey, 2021; Hill, 2009; Pieterse, Caniëls, & Homan, 2012; Stanley, 2021). Administrators might well put in place explicit and conspicuous policies and procedures that underscore pandemic recovery for ELLs.

6. Conclusion

Numerous studies document pandemic learning losses that are both broad (affecting virtually all students, especially disadvantaged ones such as ELLs) and deep (involving losses that are quite profound, perhaps more so than originally feared). There is little doubt that the pandemic has been a unique event in schools, causing problems heretofore unprecedented. As educators attempt to respond to the situation, pandemic-recovery initiatives are underway in many schools. The research reported in this article sheds light on teacher's beliefs about what the most vexing challenges are as these initiatives proceed. Incorporating these beliefs into curriculum design/implementation, professional development, and administrative policies/procedures in the wake of the pandemic increases the likelihood that the problems for ELLs caused by the Covid-19 pandemic can be effectively remedied.

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