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Teachers in Elementary Schools...Do They Have What They Need?

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This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the program chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education.

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Teachers in Elementary Schools...Do They Have What They Need?

By

Claire Smith

A culminating thesis, submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science of Education.

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

2023

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand a group of teachers' perspectives and experiences about inequitable access to instructional materials for students in K-5 classrooms and the effect this lack of access has had on the teaching and learning process (Albornoz, Berlinski, & Cabrales, 2018). The problem identified for this project was that instructional materials (including textbooks, curriculum documents, and technology) are not equally available at all K-5 schools. Hahnel (2020) discussed how even though California is one of the wealthiest states in the nation, funding awarded to schools in California was not enough to meet educational goals or individual needs of students, partially due to the high cost of living. This connects to the topic because to understand inequitable access to sufficient materials for students, educators need to understand how materials are funded and purchased. When schools lack access to instructional materials, there are consequences, especially for standards-based education systems like those in the U.S. Those consequences include failing to meet state standards set by the state of California (Oakes & Saunders, 2004). A weakness of the literature reviewed for this project was that comprehensive data related to the investigated problem was limited. Clearer and comprehensive quantitative data is needed to provide a sense of how much funding each school receives for the purposes of acquiring sufficient instructional materials. To understand teachers' perspectives and experiences, interviews were conducted with several elementary school teachers. After open, focused, and peer coding, several findings were identified, which highlighted teachers' experiences navigating inequitable access to instructional materials. These findings, which point to limited funding for learning materials and show that teachers do not have enough resources to provide materials through 180 days of school, have important implications for school districts and classroom teachers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When teachers are not given adequate resources and materials, students and teachers may face challenges in the learning process. Teachers are trusted by students and parents to provide students with the best education possible. But when teachers are not set up for success, effective learning cannot happen. The problem is that the materials and resources that are given to teachers are simply not enough, not enough to last through 180 days of school. Teachers have expressed concerns about needing to stretch out materials they are given because those materials will be gone before the end of the academic year. One teacher that was interviewed was allocated only \$800 to split between an entire grade level team of three teachers; consequently, that teacher only had \$267 to purchase learning materials intended to support her students through one school year.

While reviewing relevant literature, I found that the awareness of this problem has been documented across research studies; however, no clear, direct solution was provided to address this problem. Some studies acknowledged a direct correlation between having access to sufficient learning materials and increased student achievement. The literature clearly acknowledged that teachers and schools are not provided enough funding to secure adequate materials and resources for classrooms. In interviews, teachers reiterated this problem and also shared some creative ways to make their resources last for the entire school year.

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to raise an awareness of the insufficient supply of instructional materials available to teachers and students in many k-5 classrooms and the effect this may have on the teaching and learning process. There were many questions that teachers did not know the answer to, especially regarding funding structures and processes for purchasing classroom materials. I did not expect teachers to have a clear answer for

all interview questions but when teachers were not sure about these processes and structures, that raised more questions for me as the researcher.

This qualitative study was framed around two main research questions: (1) What are elementary teachers' perspectives about and experiences with inequitable or insufficient access to learning materials in classrooms? and (2) What are elementary teachers' perspectives about how inequitable access to learning materials affects teaching and learning at their school sites?

The study took place at a Bay Area public elementary school and the participants were elementary school teachers working at the school site. I have either worked with or observed all teacher participants in the past. The school serves 618 students and is part of the local city's public school district. This school is made up of 88.7% Hispanic students, 6.1% White students, 3.2% Asian students, 1% multiracial and 0.6% African American students. Overall, the school's students, administration, faculty, and staff are considered diverse. The teacher participants had been teaching for as little as 5-6 years to upwards of 20-25 years. This gave an interesting perspective on the topic as teaching experience levels were in a wide range.

My research approach was qualitative because I collected data from interviews with teachers. I focused on teachers' perspectives and experiences. This focus made the project feel more personal and informed my own teaching practices, as I will soon work as a full time classroom teacher. As I transition from the role of graduate student to teacher, I soon will have my own classroom; as I begin to set up my classroom, I will need to learn how to deal with the supply and funding shortages. As a soon-to-be first year teacher, this is nerve wracking knowing that this issue is something most teachers face in California. Through interviews, I have learned that being flexible is something that I need to keep in mind when teaching. Therefore, when I plan an art project or a lesson that requires an abundance of materials, and if I am unable to

receive these materials, I need to have a back up plan or plan in advance to ask for materials to be donated or receive them from the principal.

The themes that emerged from interview data were: Teachers' Experiences with Access to Sufficient Instructional Materials, How Teachers Purchase Materials for their Classes, The Context of the COVID Pandemic Affected Access to Sufficient Learning Materials, Teacher Perspectives about How Access to Materials Impacts Student Learning, and How Teachers Navigate Inequitable Access to Sufficient Instructional Materials. These central themes helped me understand why teachers may have a lack of sufficient learning materials in their classrooms. This study advances the scholarly conversation about this topic because it not only captures some of the central problems related to this issue but raises awareness about an additional factor- how the context of the COVID pandemic affected equitable access to sufficient learning materials in elementary classrooms. This context brings a new set of problems related to how materials might be shared among students.

If teachers were provided more funding for their classrooms, teachers and students would not have to worry about running out of resources or materials throughout the school year. Teachers would not have to request that their students use every last bit of ink in their whiteboard pens, relying on paler, less legible writing over time. With adequate access to sufficient materials, learning would continue without concerns about having enough materials to complete projects and assignments. Ultimately, teachers need to be set up for success before they can set their students up for the same success. Adequate access to sufficient learning materials is part of being set up for success.

Later on throughout my research process my perspective on this issue started to change as my research started emerging. After interviews and reading more articles I found that the amount

of supplies impacts the teacher's ability to teach and the students' abilities to perform well in the classroom. Though the data in the literature was limited it showed just how big of an issue this problem is. The literature showed that funding plays a huge role in this issue and how that then leads to teachers leaving the field as the demand for resources from teachers start to soar.

In order to solve this problem of lack of resources and materials, school districts need to dedicate more funding to schools. Schools need this additional funding for resources and materials because effective learning cannot happen without adequate resources. The fact that funding plays a huge role in the amount of resources that gets provided to schools means that the policy written for schools and teachers to allocate a certain budget needs to increase drastically. This way the teachers can get funding from the state and/or district to be able to get enough funding for an entire school year.

This study advances equity and social justice in education because when it comes to providing enough materials for learning, schools are provided with varying amounts of funding and available resources and materials. Therefore, some schools are able to advance student learning while other schools have limited resources and limited ways of structuring the learning process.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This literature review seeks to investigate and understand the problem of insufficient supply of instructional materials available to teachers and students in K-5 classrooms, as well as how the lack of instructional materials has a direct effect on teaching and learning. This issue has been around for a while but, unfortunately, there has been little movement toward equitable access to all learning materials in elementary schools. According to a Hahnel, a Policy Analyst, “California school funding-before COVID-19- was insufficient to meet educational goals and address the needs of the students” (Hahnel, p. 1, 2020) due to the high cost of living in California. Therefore, funding has not been sufficient to provide enough resources for students even before the recent pandemic. Throughout this review, readers will get a sense of how this issue is impacting students and teachers alike in their own classrooms. Through published literature reviews and research studies, there is a documented link between students’ academic success and equitable access to all learning materials in the classroom.

The following review of literature is organized into three categories that support the problem in regards to lack of instructional materials and the effect this has on teaching and learning. The first category provides an overview of the problem and discusses some historical context related to school funding. The second category is about teachers’ perspectives about access to resources for students. The third category is about how the lack of resources is linked to student behaviors in classrooms.

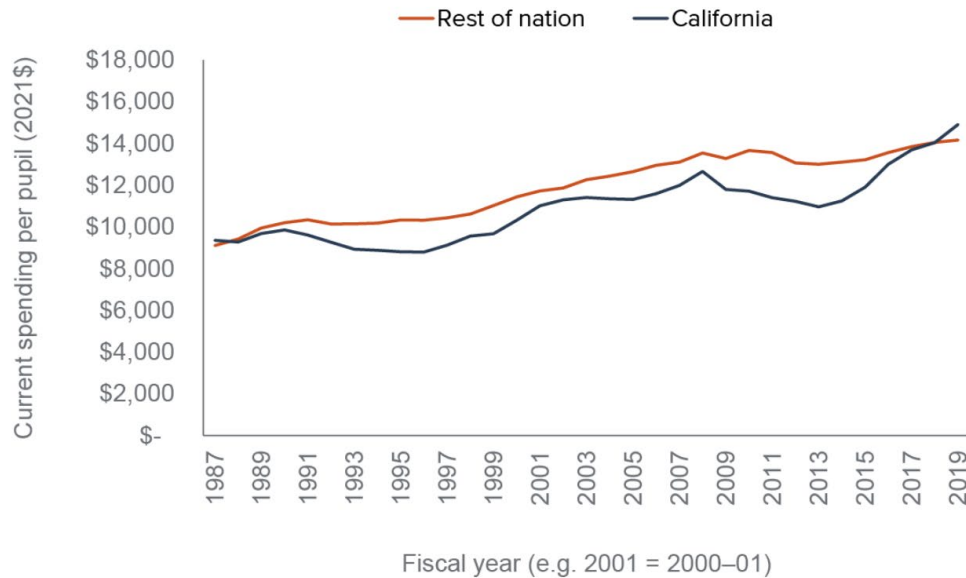
Overview and Historical Context

The inequitable access to instructional materials in California elementary school classrooms has been an ongoing issue for many years. Throughout my research, I identified sources focused on this problem that have dated all the way back to the early 2000s where this

issue was starting to become a big problem. The chart below shows how California's spending per student has grown 60% since 1987 but how spending per student has been lower than other U.S. states during most of these years.

Figure 1

California's Spending per Student since 1987



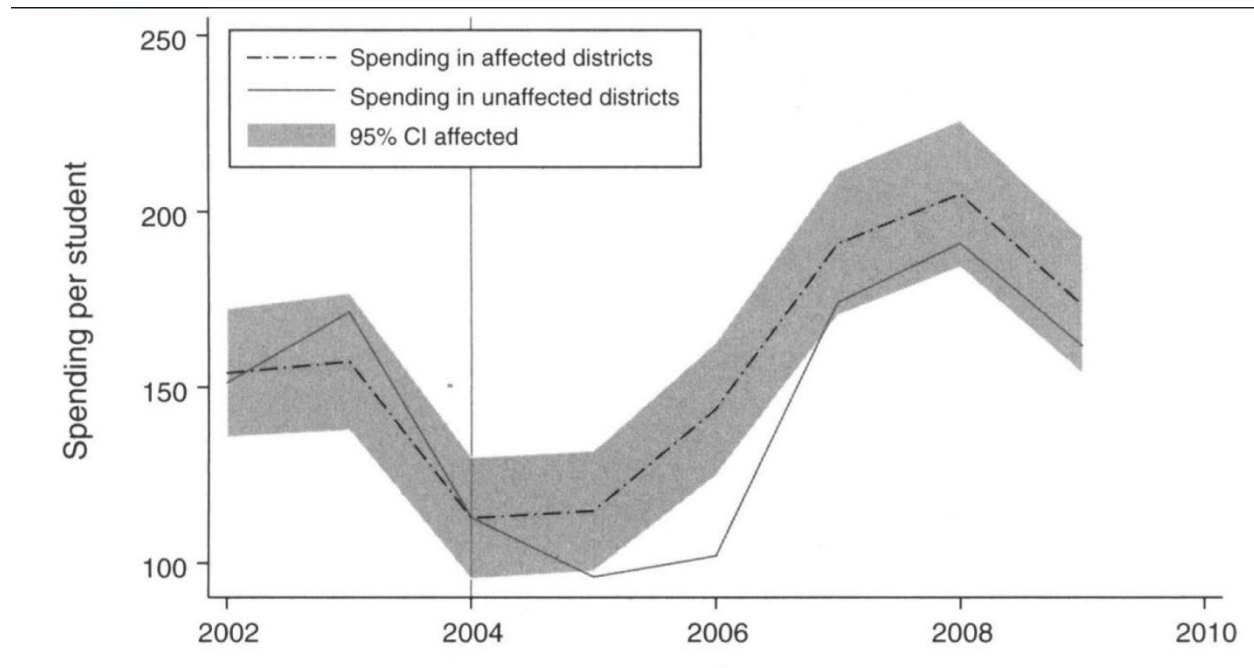
Note: This chart shows California's spending per student. This graph shows that it has grown 60% since 1987. However, this graph also indicates that in other states during these years spending per student has been lower.

Hahnel (2020) discussed how even though California is one of the wealthiest states in the nation, funding awarded to schools in California was not enough to meet educational goals or individual needs of students, partially due to the high cost of living. This connects to my topic because in order to understand why there are not enough resources and curriculum materials for each student in a class, we need to understand how the money for purchasing these materials is distributed, especially throughout the different schools within California.

Considering the problem at the federal level, Kaufhold, Alvarez, and Arnold (2006) discussed how teachers across the United States are struggling to meet the learning needs of their students because there is a lack of adequate school supplies, learning materials, and resources. Clearly, this issue of inequitable access to learning materials in schools is not only affecting teachers and students in California but across the country as well. These authors explain that this lack of adequate learning materials is a national issue.

Albornoz and Cabrales (2018) suggest that schools in the United States do not have enough resources and that this lack of resources has a negative effect on teachers, students, and even parents. The authors explain that “school resources affect learning *cæteris paribus*,” (p. 200) which they explain further, stating that inequitable access to learning materials negatively affects student achievement, even with all other things being equal for those students. Another way to think about this issue is that the lack of equitable access to learning materials and resources means that teaching and learning is not an equal and fair process. This article also argues that “educational policy is at the forefront of the social and political debate” (Albornoz & Cabrales, 2018, p. 199). It is clear that this issue is not new and that it is a part of current discussions. Would addressing educational policies about the issue help schools make progress to provide equitable access to learning materials?

Albornoz and Cabrales (2018) discuss the means as to how school resources are divided up and spread out across different schools within the country. This relates to the topic of my thesis because I am curious to understand how the resources are distributed and who determines the amount of resources that can be placed into certain schools. Below is a figure that shows district level spending on textbooks per student over a span of eight years from 2002-2010.

Figure 2*District Level Spending on textbooks from 2002-2010*

These are districts in California that qualify for IMWC funding which is the Instructional Materials-Williams Case, which was designed to provide additional support to underfunded/low-performing schools in California. There was a decline in 2003-2004 and then spending spiked again during 2006-2008; then, we see the trend that spending is decreasing again after 2008. The Williams Case was filed back in 2000 in San Francisco County Superior Court. The lawsuit that was filed against the State of California and state education agencies including the California Department of Education stated that agencies failed to provide public school students with equal access to instructional materials, safe facilities, and qualified teachers.

In summary, we are seeing the historical outcomes of this issue and that it has been a prevalent issue for quite some time now. The issue always leads back to funding and even for California, among one of the wealthiest states, adequate funding for schools is lacking.

According to the figure above, there have been increases and decreases in spending over time

which leads to why schools do not currently have enough funding to provide access to learning materials for all students.

Teacher Perspectives

In an article titled *Detracking Effort will Fail without the Support of Teachers* (1992), the Common Destiny Alliance authors discuss how teachers are preparing to strike and have been considering leaving the profession because of the issue that teachers are not getting enough resources to support their students in their own classrooms. The issue that this article is discussing is that this particular California district actually has access to adequate funding but the funds are not being used to purchase and distribute learning materials to all students in an equitable manner.

When schools lack adequate access to basic materials and resources, students tend to perform at lower levels on state achievement tests. This ultimately leads to students not being able to meet state standards. Oakes and Saunders (2004) wrote an article where they address this idea that textbooks, curriculum materials, and technology are educationally important but yet some schools lack access to these basic learning materials. When schools lack resources or materials, there are consequences for standards-based education systems. Those consequences include students not being able to meet state standards set by the state of California. One consequence that has happened in one Los Angeles district was a teacher strike because teachers were not given sufficient resources to teach in their classrooms. This article, which was published in NPR in 2019, discusses that teachers are preparing to strike and have been considering leaving the profession because of the issue of not having enough resources to support their students in their own classrooms.

The table (Lafortune, 2022) below shows visually that there is in fact an achievement gap among the low income, English Language Learners, and for Asian, Black, Latino, and White students. This particular chart shows achievement gaps by subgroups from eighth grade in the English/Language arts core curricular area.

Research also shows that “\$1,000 in additional spending for four years improves test scores by 0.035 standard divisions” (Lafortune, p. 2, 2022). In order to close the gap in test scores, schools would need “an additional \$10, 200 dollars annually for eight years to close the gap for eighth-grade low-income students” (Lafortune, p. 15, 2022). At current spending levels, achievement gaps may take years to close. In fact, it would take “70 or more years to close income or achievement gaps at current progressive levels” (Lafortune, p. 16, 2022).

Lafortune (2022) explains that there is no impact on spending due to the “impact on test scores between low and non-low-income students” (Lafortune, p. 2, table 2). For the review of literature for this thesis project, I wanted to know if there was a direct correlation between spending and test scores; there is not. In California, “spending is higher for low-income, Black, and Latino students” (Lafortune, p. 1) but “current spending progressivity is not enough to close existing test score gaps” (Lafortune, p. 2). The impact of spending is due to student outcomes, which has to do with the property tax revenue and not test scores. We can see in the table below the achievement gap within particular groups of students.

Table 1*Achievement Gap*

	Low- Income	Non- Low Income	EL	Non- EL	Asian	Black	Latino	White
Share meeting or exceeding standards	37%	68%	6%	55%	78%	31%	38%	64%
Average test score in standard deviations from the statewide mean	-0.29	0.43	-1.04	0.15	0.70	-0.45	-0.25	0.32
Difference (in SDs): vs. Non- EL	-0.72	0						
Difference (in SDs): vs Non-EL			-0.49	0				
Difference (in SD): vs White					0.38	-0.77	-0.58	0

Note: Spending and test scores are not directly related, in fact there is no direct correlation between the two. This chart also shows the achievement gap between particular groups of students.

Access to Resources is Linked to Student Behavior

Studies have shown that there is a direct link between access to resources and student behaviors. This section will discuss how these elements are directly connected. Albronzon and Cabrales wrote an article called *Motivation, Resources, and the Organization of the School System* (2018); in this article, they suggest that schools in the United States do not have enough resources and that this lack of resources affects teachers and students. This source states that “class size is determined by schools according to behavior” (p. 200) which the authors are saying

that if students have a short attention span or are easily distracted they should be placed in a smaller classroom size setting. When students are not capable of completing their coursework on their own as the teacher instructs them, this is due to the fact that the resources they were provided with are not sufficient. Therefore, the resources the teacher was provided with were insufficient as well because the students are now not focused on their coursework.

When students are not focused on their work, students become distracted and start using this time as a social hour rather than working on their coursework. This often is directly linked to discipline issues and even poor attendance. According to Albronzon and Cabrales (2018), this is why schools should have adequate resources for both students and teachers to be able to accomplish the task at hand. If schools were provided with such resources, students may have less desire to rush through activities and more desire to learn and grow as an individual.

Conclusion

The review of literature showed that there is an issue related to how schools across the United States, and California schools in particular, receive and use funding for basic learning materials for students. The existing literature helps educators understand the issue of inequitable access to learning materials, especially considering the funding for resources and the effects of inequitable access on student achievement scores.

The ongoing debate about providing adequate access to learning materials is related to funding. Where is all this money for learning materials going? Why aren't all schools provided adequate funding to provide students with basic learning materials? These are important questions when considering that many teachers teach with limited resources and that many students also have to endure the consequences as well because inadequate access to learning materials may mean they are not getting the education they deserve.

The consequences, as reviewed in literature, point to students not being able to meet state standards set by the state of California. When students do not have enough resources to complete assignments or understand material, issues arise as students are not able to meet state standards. If teachers were adequately set up with more resources in their classroom for students to use, those students would have a smaller chance of falling behind in their studies.

The strength of the existing literature reviewed in this chapter is that teachers and students are negatively affected by an inequitable access to learning materials. Studies showed time and time again how access to learning materials and student achievement are linked. For example, some studies showed that when students do not have access to materials and resources, their testing scores are lower. Unfortunately, California's annual achievement test scores for K-8 students can impact federal funding. So annual achievement tests that measure student knowledge can actually alter the funds which a particular school has access to. Therefore, the amount a school is awarded each year could vary based on how students performed on a particular test. This is clearly an educational equity issue. Not all students excel on annual state achievement tests and funding for learning materials should not be tied to how well students performed on a standardized test.

The overall weakness of the literature reviewed in this chapter is that comprehensive data related to the investigated problem was limited. Clearer and comprehensive quantitative data would provide a sense of how much funding each school receives specifically for learning materials and resources. Knowing this information would have provided a clearer understanding about how not having adequate resources has an effect on students in elementary school classrooms.

The purpose of this study was to understand a group of teachers' perspectives and experiences about inequitable access to instructional materials for students in K-5 classrooms and the effect this lack of access has had on the teaching and learning process.

Chapter 3: Methods

The problem in education that my topic will address is the inequitable access to learning materials for students and teachers in K-5 classrooms. Research has shown that textbooks, curriculum materials, and technology are educationally important but yet some schools lack these basic materials (Slavin, 1999). Research has also shown that funding given to schools in California was not enough to meet educational goals or needs of students due to the high cost of living (Hannel, 2020).

The purpose of this qualitative research project is to understand a group of elementary teachers' perspectives about insufficient and inequitable access to instructional materials in K-5 classrooms. A second purpose of the study is to understand educators' perspectives and the effects inequitable access to learning materials has on teaching and learning. The following research questions were formed in response to the review of literature and guided the development of individual interview questions for teachers. The central research questions are: (1) What are teachers' experiences like with the resources they currently have? (2) How does this impact student learning?

Description and Rationale for Research Approach

Creswell (2014) identifies three components of a research approach: the philosophical worldview, the design, and the methods. The point of the philosophical worldview is to shape what I see during research and therefore shows how I know what I know. Creswell (2014) states that the word "worldview" has been given a meaning such as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). This research project is aligned with a constructivist approach. A constructivist approach is used because I interviewed teachers and asked open ended questions to get a deeper understanding about my topic. According to Creswell (2014), with a constructivist

approach, “the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (p. 8). Understanding teacher participants’ experiences and perspectives is what I wanted to achieve in my research project so a constructivist approach aligns well

Through interviews of elementary teachers I chose to take a qualitative approach to my research (Creswell, 2014). Diving deeper into the qualitative research approach, I will be using an inquiry/interview style when I interview teachers. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is about exploring and understanding individuals to attribute to a social or human problem. It is important to use qualitative research because it addresses the “why” and “how” of research questions.

Research Design

This qualitative research project included interviewing teachers at one school site. I was placed at this school site for observations and from there, I developed relationships with the principal and teachers to get permission to conduct research at the school site. According to the school’s website, the school enrolls 94% of minority students and 80% of students who are economically disadvantaged. This study, which involved two elementary school teachers, used a constructivist approach with an emphasis on qualitative data. Qualitative data was collected through individual interviews with teachers. Interviews were conducted virtually (using Zoom platform) with questions formatted in an open-ended way so participants could express their thoughts and opinions openly. The purpose of this qualitative data was to understand educators’ perspectives about the problem of inequitable access to learning materials in K-5 classrooms.

The research site was a public elementary school in northern California and the teachers who were interviewed worked at this site. I maintained a relationship with the school and teacher participants before, during, and after the project.

The first step in the research process was requesting permission from the school site principal to recruit teacher participants. After the principal signed the letter of permission, I started the recruitment process. Then, I contacted the teachers to provide an overview of the study to see if they would be willing to participate. In the next step, when teachers expressed interest in participating, I sent and reviewed the informed consent forms to make sure they understood their participation rights in this study including that they can opt out at any time. Teacher participants who agreed to continue in the study signed the informed consent form. Next, I conducted hour-long individual interviews with each teacher participant over Zoom. The interviews took place in February 2023. All interviews were recorded. Research notes were taken during the interviews, and teacher participants who were more comfortable with answering individual interview questions in writing did so. Written information, including analytic memos, did not include any names or identifying information. All interviews were transcribed for the purposes of data analysis.

Data Analysis

I collected data using qualitative methods, specifically individual interviews with teachers using open-ended questions. Throughout the interviews, I also recorded key phrases and words that seemed important to participants. Similarly, I reviewed researcher notes after each interview was conducted and wrote analytic memos. Afterwards, I categorized all researcher notes into sections based on the topic discussed.

I used some of Maxwell's (2013) strategies for qualitative data analysis: writing analytic memos post interview, categorizing strategies, including coding and thematic analysis, and connecting strategies, or narrative analysis. After each interview, I wrote analytic memos. When creating these memos, I observed connections among topics and issues participants discussed.

Analytic memos provided more information than merely listening to the recording of the interview. For example, memos indicated participants' tone, facial expressions, and/or body language when answering questions. Memo writing also helped to remember where the interview took place and what the circumstances were like during the interview.

Prior to conducting interviews, I took notes on words and phrases I expected to hear. These expected codes were: lack, resources, data, needs/wants, experience. During the interview, I did not refer to this list of expected codes; instead, I wrote new key words and phrases that stood out to me. Later, after the interview session and an initial open coding process, I compared expected and unexpected codes. In addition to recording analytic memos for each interview, I transcribed interviews and then read through transcripts several times to get a sense of the data. This process was repeated for each interview.

After reading through all transcripts, I began an open coding process using color coding to highlight and link together similar words, phrases, or thoughts expressed by participants. This organized open coding was a helpful strategy for keeping track of ideas and concepts. I used a data analysis matrix to keep track of initial codes and related data (including quotes from participants and analytic memos).

Next, I categorized all the codes. Finally, I used focused coding by looking for similar or the same words used by the interviewees. From focused codes, I created a concept map where codes lead to themes, which are the central findings from this project.

Validity

I have a dual relationship with the teacher participants involved in this study as I am a student teacher at the school site where I recruited participants. This has influenced my research process because I made personal connections to teachers and I have first hand knowledge about

the realities of classrooms not having enough resources for all students. I am aware of my own bias and will make sure my analysis is focused on addressing the research questions and objectives of this study. To address these possible threats to validity, I implemented several strategies, as described below.

In my research, I collected data through individual interviews with teachers and included data from research observation notes and analytic memos. The secondary data from memos and notes helped me confirm initial findings. This is important because it allows a more complete picture of the experiences discussed in interviews (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, I have observed in some of these classroom settings for the past several years and have a strong relationship with the teachers involved in this study. This allowed me to have in-depth conversations with participants because we established a sense of trust amongst each other (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) also state that having a strong participant/researcher relationship can lead to more accurate and valid findings.

For this project, I collected and analyzed qualitative data. Through the individual interviews, I collected rich data by transcribing each interview and reading transcripts verbatim several times before coding. Aware of my own bias and experiences navigating inequitable access to learning materials in classrooms, I also examined all data to “assess whether it [was] more plausible to retain or modify the conclusion, being aware of all the pressures to ignore data that [did] not fit [my] conclusions” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 127). Lastly, I used respondent validation, which involved sharing my findings and conclusions with participants to ensure I understood their perspectives accurately. This ruled out any possible misunderstandings of what participants said in the interviews (Maxwell, 2013).

Chapter 4: Findings

After analyzing qualitative interviews with teachers, it is clear that teachers experience inequitable access to sufficient instructional materials for their classrooms. It is also evident that teachers believe inequitable access impacts both students and teachers alike. In fact, inequitable or insufficient access to materials may be a common experience for many elementary teachers.

I interviewed two teachers. They both had experience working in the elementary classroom for several years. The first teacher I interviewed was Ms. W and she has been teaching for four years. Ms. W taught transitional kindergarten for two years and now is in her fourth year teaching second grade. She has never taught at another school nor district; however, Ms. W did teach preschool in her early professional years. The second teacher I interviewed was Ms. D and she taught kindergarten and second grade; she spent 24 years teaching as a classroom teacher. Ms. D has been a learning specialist for the last two years and works with eighth grade students. She has worked at two different schools throughout her teaching career.

This qualitative interview project was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are teachers' experiences like with the resources they currently have? (2) How does that impact student learning? To begin to address these questions, interviews were conducted with elementary teachers at one school site. The following findings are organized into five broad themes: Teachers' Experiences with Access to Sufficient Instructional Materials, How Teachers Purchase Materials for their Classes, The Context of the COVID Pandemic Affected Access to Sufficient Learning Materials, Teacher Perspectives about How Access to Materials Impacts Student Learning, and How Teachers Navigate Inequitable Access to Sufficient Instructional Materials.

Each of the five themes were topics that occurred frequently in discussions during interviews. The first theme “Teachers’ Experiences with Access to Sufficient Instructional Materials” refers to teachers not able to get through an entire school year with the supplies they are either given or requested to have in their classrooms. The second theme is “How Teachers Purchase Materials for their Classes.” This theme is important because this talks about funds and how those funds are divided up by classes as well as how little teachers are given to work with for 180 days of school. With the third theme “The context of the COVID Pandemic Affected Access to Sufficient Learning Materials;” teachers have had to keep materials separated and each student needs their own supplies, which hindered collaboration amongst the students. The fourth theme, “Teacher Perspectives about How Access to Materials Impacts Student Learning;” teachers have noticed that not having access to adequate materials impacts student learning. Teachers are forced to teach one way because they simply do not have the resources or materials to allow for appropriate differentiation in learning. The final theme is “How Teachers Navigate Inequitable Access to Sufficient Instructional Materials.” Since teachers are not given a substantial amount of materials in the beginning of the year, teachers have to be careful and plan ahead so that the materials can be stretched out and last a long time. One teacher has said to one of their students who was turning in their whiteboard pen for a new one, “Oh, this has some more ink left in it, and they have to continue using it, even if it's kind of, you know, dried out a little bit, because I'm thinking ahead that I don't have that many.” Ms. W knows that she can't just get new materials whenever she wants so she has to make materials last as long as possible.

Teachers’ Experiences with Access to Sufficient Instructional Materials

The first theme highlights teacher participants’ experiences with access to sufficient materials. Teachers that participated in interviews said they were not provided with enough

instructional materials, consumables, and/or resources to get through an entire school year. Teacher participants expressed that for 180 school days, the amount of money allocated for buying materials was not only divided amongst the grade level team but that the initial total amount allotted was not enough to get through the whole school year. One teacher participant said, “I do feel like it’s not enough. Like I said, it’s not enough to get us through the entire school year.” However, when asked if getting more materials at the beginning of the school year would help most teachers said that there would be a storage issue. One teacher in particular said,

I would say that the biggest problem would be that we're just not given enough at the beginning of the year to last us the whole year. And even if they did, I don't know if we would have enough space to store those materials. I wish that we had like a second time of the year to do another order or replenishment of materials, like maybe in December, or when we come back from winter break in January, to do another order of those materials, because usually about halfway through the year, that's when, you know, materials are pretty scarce.

Teachers also shared that they need two or more separate orders of materials throughout the school year in order to provide enough materials for all students in their classrooms throughout the duration of the school year.

How Teachers Purchase Materials for their Classes

The second theme provides information about how teachers purchase materials for their classes. The teacher participants involved in this study shared that they are provided funds from the school district for materials which are then divided up by class. So after the money gets divided up the “average range is \$800-900 per class per academic year, which is shared amongst the teachers in the same grade;” usually this is shared among two teachers, sometimes three. For example, one teacher teaches second grade with three grade level team members, which means one teacher only has \$267-300 to spend on materials for one entire school year.

Most materials must be approved by the school administration, principal, or the office manager. Ms. W mentioned that she has to ask administration, the principal or the office

coordinator if we have any extras (materials or supplies), or if they can order me some; it's kind of like, random if they're going to say yes or no; if they say no, then I'll have to ask families for them, or buy them out of my own pocket.

How the COVID Pandemic Affected Access to Sufficient Learning Materials

The third theme from interviews was the context of the COVID pandemic and how this moment further affected the access teachers had to sufficient learning materials for their classrooms. Several teachers expressed how the context of COVID negatively impacted the way materials were to be distributed within the classroom. Since the pandemic started in 2020, the material systems have changed within the classroom. Teachers were required to give students their own set of materials, so students were no longer allowed to share materials as this was a health-related cause for concern. Materials were not only divided among grade levels teams, but were also provided to individual students with no option of sharing materials among classmates. Additionally, because of ongoing health concerns, the school policy was that all learning materials were to stay in the classrooms. Even when materials were scarce, teachers were unable to share resources or materials.

One teacher shared that “everyone has their own pencil box materials instead of sharing them.” It was easier for “the students to keep track of their own materials” and Ms. W was trying to teach them a little bit about responsibility and what that looks like. There was a silver lining with the COVID pandemic as Ms. W was not doing art projects during this time; she now has a plethora of art supplies so that is something she did not need to order this year. Ms. W also said, “we didn't use a lot of glue sticks either during the COVID pandemic” so now she has a lot of glue for her students to use as well. So although teaching during COVID was difficult, the silver

lining was that when teachers did return to their classrooms, they still had some materials that were able to be used, so they did not have to start from scratch.

Teacher Perspectives About How Access to Materials Impacts Student Learning

The fourth theme addressed teachers' perspectives about how access to materials impacts student learning. During interviews, teachers shared that they had to explain to their students why they do not have enough materials/resources. One teacher expressed how it made her feel awkward having to explain this concept to an eight-year-old. She said, "It is awkward explaining to your students why we don't have enough resources." She also went on to explain that the lack of resources in the classroom is never something a child needs to worry about because this should not be "on them." Teachers also expressed that when you "lack sufficient materials, it is hard to have a variety of ways to introduce a concept in different ways to your students." Teachers said that "when you do not have the right manipulatives or tools to support your students, you may lack variety in your teaching methods." Another teacher expressed that "the situation made things 'very cookie cutter' in terms of how you teach and how your students learn."

How Teachers Navigate Inequitable Access to Sufficient Materials

The final theme gathered from interviews was teachers' experiences navigating inequitable access to sufficient instructional materials. Teachers said they had to "be careful" and plan ahead so materials could last all school year. Several teachers expressed that they want a replenishment of supplies halfway through the year and some even expressed how they wanted a replenishment several times a year. Even though teachers said they can support their students with what limited resources they have, they also stated that they have to "stretch the resources" to make them last for 180 school days. For example, one teacher has a policy that the whiteboard

pens their students use have to use “every last drop” and that students need permission from the teacher before a pen can be thrown away. Even if the pen is mostly dried, one teacher said she encourages the students to still use it because she simply does not have the money to purchase more markers or supplies whenever items run low.

Conclusion

After interviewing teachers about their experiences with inequitable access to sufficient learning materials, it is clear that three main points are frequently discussed. The first point is that teachers do not have enough resources to get through 180 school days with just one big purchase at the beginning of the year. The second point is teachers want to be able to replenish materials several times a year so materials do not have to be used so sparingly. Finally, the third and final point is the amount of money given to the teachers to spend on materials has to be split amongst the rest of the grade level team and after the split, there is not enough money to buy the materials that are needed.

This qualitative research project was driven by two research questions: (1) What are teachers' experiences like with the resources they currently have? (2) How does that impact student learning? Both questions were addressed through these interviews focused on teachers' experiences. Some impacts on learning include that teachers may be limited in how they teach- possibly not having the necessary materials for using a variety of teaching methods to deliver instruction and also missing materials needed for ongoing differentiation of lessons. With limited resources, students may not be able to complete certain projects or assignments because teachers may not have been given the adequate resources for these projects.

The themes developed in this project relate to the research questions posed. Considering these points, it is important to consider the variety of reasons why there is a lack of materials in

the classroom. In conclusion, when teachers are not set up for success due to inequitable access to sufficient learning materials in their own classrooms, it is hard for them to set their students up for the same success.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Throughout the research process, the original topics I set out to study shifted. After speaking with the teachers involved in this study, my perspective and focus moved from understanding how classroom resources were obtained to understanding teachers' perspectives and experiences with inequitable access to sufficient learning materials. Because of this shift in focus, the findings share only one major similarity with the themes found in the literature review. The review of literature indicated that access to materials impacted student learning and the teachers participating in this interview study spoke about ways inequitable access to materials impacted student learning; they also shared that this issue of limited learning materials impacted teachers' ability to teach using a variety of methods. The teachers who participated in interviews for this study continuously shared that the materials they have or do not have impact student learning either in a positive or negative way.

The major findings (as presented in the previous chapter, Chapter 4) were: Teachers' Experiences with Access to Sufficient Instructional Materials, How Teachers Purchase Materials for their Classes, The Context of the COVID Pandemic Affected Access to Sufficient Learning Materials, Teacher Perspectives about How Access to Materials Impacts Student Learning, and How Teachers Navigate Inequitable Access to Sufficient Instructional Materials. These themes directly link to the problem teachers are facing in classrooms today- inequitable access to sufficient learning materials for their students.

Implications for the Literature

The teacher participants discussed how the context of the COVID pandemic has impacted the way they teach and how the students learn. This was a surprising finding as I had not anticipated how the recent pandemic may have affected equitable access to sufficient learning

materials for classrooms. However, some teachers told me that the changes they made during COVID are changes they still practice today because they found these more effective. One implication for the literature is that the current and recent context of schooling may shift the discussion about how teachers are using resources and materials in their classrooms.

The overall weakness of the literature reviewed in this research process is that comprehensive data related to the investigated problem was limited. Clearer and comprehensive quantitative data would provide a sense of how much funding each school receives in terms of supplies. The findings from this study indicate that this is an ongoing issue for many teachers. The teachers involved in this study did not fully understand the process of how resources and supplies are purchased for and distributed into the classroom. The problem of inequitable access to sufficient learning materials is significant for teachers as inadequate materials may negatively impact students' learning. The teachers interviewed for this project provided comments about their experiences with navigating this issue. This is another implication for the literature- that teachers' perspectives and experiences should be included in discussions about access to sufficient learning resources and materials.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Teachers can use the findings from this project to understand that many teachers are faced with this similar problem. This issue is not just an issue one school has; it is one that many schools have. Acknowledging this shared problem allows teachers to come together and have an understanding of one another's experience with inequitable access to sufficient learning materials. One consideration may be state and/or district policies that provide increased funding for teachers so that they can have more funding for an entire school year. What teachers are

provided now is simply not enough to purchase the needed materials for all students across at least 180 days of school.

My topic is a social justice issue because every school district or school receives a different amount of funding and then that funding determines the kinds of materials teachers can provide for students. A school with an abundance of resources and money/funding has the potential to help students move forward in their learning process. Whereas schools with limited resources and limited money/funding may struggle with helping students stay on track with learning.

Limitations of the Study

A major limitation for this project was the small sample of participants; it was challenging to recruit teachers to participate as many teachers felt busy and overwhelmed with responsibilities during this time of the school year. If I had a larger group of participants, I would have a better understanding of teachers' expectations and experiences navigating this issue. Another possible limitation is only hearing from teachers; interviewing school principals about their experiences navigating this issue would have provided a clear picture of the process of providing adequate learning resources for classrooms.

In the future, studies focused on exploring how teachers experience and navigate the issue of inadequate learning materials in classrooms would help educators understand the complexity of this problem. Such future studies would provide opportunities to compare data to understand the effects for teachers, schools, and students in different contexts. It is clear that not all teachers understand the funding process and sources for securing enough learning materials for their classrooms. Future research should dive deeper into funding processes and sources and

include interviews with school leaders and district personnel who are involved in this process. Such a study would provide a clearer understanding of this process.

Conclusion

My research topic about the lack of resources in the classroom came to me quickly because it was something I saw first hand when I was in the classroom observing and student teaching over the last few years. It was frustrating when I asked teachers for supplies or materials and they said, “Oh sorry we do not have that” because then I had to change my lesson plan. That is when I decided there needs to be more awareness about this issue so we can receive more funding for schools, teachers, and supplies. I wanted a better understanding of how funding works in schools and how materials were distributed into schools.

Although my curiosity was not fully addressed, I found an abundance of information and understanding about how funding for classroom materials works. The teachers I spoke with did not have a clear understanding of how the funding process works and that tells me something; it tells me that it may be difficult to advocate for and secure enough funding for purchasing these materials if we do not know where the money originates from and how it is distributed throughout our schools. There seems to be a need for allowing teachers access to this information so they can successfully navigate the process for obtaining adequate learning materials for their students.

An important concept I learned about my topic is that the lack of materials and supplies in the classroom can impact both teachers and students. The interviews with teachers showed me the real impact this has on students, unfortunately a negative one most times. My research findings will hopefully inspire educators to seek information about the process for securing enough materials and advocate for changes in the amount of funding that every school and/or

teacher receives for these important items for learning. Every student deserves an education and every teacher deserves to be set up for success to allow every student to succeed in their education. Adequate education requires more than a few textbooks, pens, pencils, and paper.

Education happens when the teacher finds new ways of teaching their students and fully engages them in their learning. But teachers cannot authentically engage with all students in their learning when the supplies are scarce. Hopefully, other teachers will read what these teachers discussed and, as a result, will not feel alone in navigating this problem. In addition, educators may see that there is a real need to advocate for additional funding for classroom resources. In the meantime, this awareness may encourage teachers to explore avenues to request additional funds for their classrooms.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching? and how long have you been teaching on this campus?
2. In your teaching career, have your students had sufficient access to learning materials, including textbooks and supplies?
 - Does each student have access to their own textbook for each subject area each year?
 - If not, how do you ensure students can access textbooks?
3. How often have you purchased learning materials and supplies that were lacking in your classroom, using your own personal funds? And how often have you purchased items using funds provided by your school or district?
4. How much do you, personally, spend on learning materials each year?
 - How much, if any, is provided by the school or district for purchasing learning materials?
5. Throughout the school year, when supplies start to run low, what is the process for obtaining new materials?
 - Do you make requests through the school or district for funding?
 - Are you expected to purchase your own materials using personal funds?
6. Over the years you have been a classroom teacher, have you noticed any increase or decrease in?
 - the funds provided (by school/district) for purchasing learning materials?
 - the amount of resources (especially textbooks & related materials) provided for your classroom?
7. In your opinion, why is it important that all students have equitable access to learning

materials, including textbooks?

8. Is there a need for more resources and learning materials in your current classroom? If “yes,” please tell me more about this need.
9. What other resources or supplies would be helpful to you and your students but there isn’t enough funding for or there are other barriers to access these resources?
10. What else should I know about equitable access to learning materials and resources in elementary classrooms?

Appendix B: IRB Acceptance Letter



Jan 30, 2023

Claire Smith
50 Acacia Ave.
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Claire,

On behalf of the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants, I am pleased to approve your proposal entitled *Teachers in Elementary Schools...Do they have what they need?* (IRBPHP Initial IRB Application #[11071]).

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,

Michaela George, Ph.D.
Chair, IRBPHP
Cc: Katie Lewis

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants

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