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## **Teachers' Perceptions of the Effects of COVID-19 on the Remote Delivery of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy to English Learners**

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### **Abstract**

This study analyzed teachers' perception of the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on their implementation of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) when remotely teaching English learners (ELs). For teachers of ELs to succeed they must focus on equity and culturally responsive paradigms that support online instruction so that students develop the skills, knowledge and reduce the learning gap. Ultimately, when content is out of reach for ELs, the achievement gap will remain, the status of their education will not be any different than it has been for decades. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to document teachers' perceptions of the effects of COVID-19 on CRT; it concentrated on understanding the COVID phenomenon as experienced by 1st-5th grade teachers in South Texas. A conclusion of this study is that culturally responsive-sustaining education can facilitate the imbalanced education and reduce inequities, but not without having obstacles and challenges. The findings in this study will redound the importance of CRT and teachers' perceptions of the effects of COVID-19 on CRT by painting a picture of how EL educators reacted to these obstacles and responded to these challenges. This study's findings may provide baseline data to advance research on the long-term effects of COVID on English Learner education and teacher training.

**Key concepts:** COVID-19, Culturally Diverse Learners, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Diversity, English Learners

### **Introduction**

In 2020, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), reported an increase of English Learners (ELs) in the nation's public schools between 2000 and 2017. During this time the ELs had a growth a 10.1 percent, or 5 million ELs in the nation's public schools, over one million of which are in Texas. Of all ELs, Spanish was the home language of 3.7 million (74.8%), representing 7.6 percent of all K – 12 students in the nation's public-schools (NCES, 2020). Additionally, approximately 3.8 million Hispanic EL students in the public schools account for 76.5 percent of the overall EL student enrollment (NCES, 2020). Sadly, the academics of ELs has been unfavorable for different reasons and was exacerbated by school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and during these trying times schools scrambled to find solutions.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused school closures and put a spotlight on the educational inequities, teachers of culturally diverse students (CLDS) would nonetheless be able educate them with resources that promote independence through Culturally Responsive Teaching (CR) (Major, 2020). Traditionally, learning takes place in the classroom, but COVID- 19 forced educators to creatively develop CRT practices using distance education technologies.

Consequently, with educators teaching remotely using the different platforms available, new ideas had to be well-thought-out, and traditional classroom resources had to be adjusted to meet the students' needs under such stressful and demanding circumstances.

Among the CLDS are the English Learners (ELs) who are defined as having a native language other than English and who vary on English language proficiency (Saunders & Marcelletti, 2013). ELs require different forms of support to have equitable access to the English curriculum, improve their achievement, reduce their high attrition levels, and to close the academic gap (Werblow, Duesbery, & Koulidobrova, 2019).

Related to the extant academic ap between ELs and their native English-speaking peers, Fenner and Snyder (2017) discuss that the gap is correlated with social-class advantages and disadvantages rooted in racial discrimination. That is, English Learners (ELs) live in low socioeconomic status families while attending school where they have to learning English to succeed. As a result of this stressful social and academic dynamic the EL educational process is loaded with anxiety and a social class disadvantage not experienced by their monolingual peers that schools need to address (Staehr, 2014). Furthermore, with the COVID-19 pandemic school closures and the need for teachers to provide remote instruction, the racial and socioeconomic gaps broadened (Goldstein, 2020). When content is out of reach due to poor delivery online systems, the achievement gap will remain the same or worsen.

To these unfortunate circumstances, the Coalition for Educational Justice (2020), advised that as education moves toward online formats, it must provide teaching that has as its foundation principles of equity and that is culturally responsive. Hate and oppression target ELs as well as other marginalized students; therefore, educators must utilize CRT, whether online or in traditional formats, to prepare students to stand up against racism, xenophobia, and other biases. Ultimately, ELs not only need but deserve an education that embraces their culture, background, and community by forming academic connections to their lives. The inequities attached to ELs' education must addressed, and one way to accomplish this is through culturally responsive pedagogies (NYU Metro Center, 2016).

### **Problems Associated with EL Education**

As if learning English wasn't enough, English Learners need to learn to perform well in content-area classes while simultaneously focusing on a new socio-cultural context that can be racist and segregating; thus, these students face distress and obstacles beyond their potential (de Souza & Lee, 2017). Turner and Thiede (2018) mention that these challenges cause ELs to feel alienated and cognitively overwhelmed in their classrooms; they tend to shut down to cope with culture shock. Because of the classrooms' monocultural view of the world in contemporary education, schools need to shift what and how they teach ELs (Makalela, 2015). Coady (2019) adds that most of the obstacles that block schools from achieving educational equity are state standards that guide educational practices.

According to Kemp (2020), most of the nation's schools were not prepared for the pandemic. Given the shift COVID-19 caused in education, closing the gap between online and in-person instruction has led to detect inadequate teacher training and therefore influenced negative experiences regarding distance education (Lederman, 2020). For AY 2020 and AY 2021 the pandemic also highlighted the inequities of the education of ELs, and many fear what the future holds due to the consequences of these disparities (Seale, 2020). Indicators already notice an ongoing need for teachers to do catch up work because students lag in academics. And to achieve equity during a pandemic distance learning focused on ELs is preferred because of its power to reduce the gap between them and their English-speaking peers (Seale, 2020).

Following this reasoning, teachers' perceptions on CRT in a traditional classroom has been widely explored by second language learner researchers (Bonner, Warren, & Jiang, 2018; Love-Kelly, 2020; Mette, Nieuwenhuizen, & Hvidston, 2016). But most studies were heuristic and holistic case studies (Bonner, Warren, & Jiang, 2018; Love-Kelly, 2020; Martisko, 2012). However, what was needed was an understanding of teachers' perceptions of the effects of COVID-19 on CRT and the pandemic's impact on teaching ELs remotely because it explores contextualized meaning based on the participants' knowledge of the phenomenon being researched (Creswell, 2009).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore EL teachers' perceptions of the effects of COVID-19 on CRT when remotely teaching ELs. It explored the lived experiences of 9 EL teachers in South Texas working under these taxing conditions. The study addressed the following questions:

1. How do EL teachers perceive and describe their experience with COVID-19 and its impact on their CRT?
2. What do EL teachers perceive as successes and challenges with implementing CRT?

### **Research Design - Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Phenomenological studies include explorations on the perceptions of its participants and how they construct meaning and knowledge through their interactions within the study's frame of exploration (Creswell, 2016). Phenomenologies outline the universal essence of an individual's experiences with a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the design of choice was phenomenological because it was considered to reveal the meaning of the lived experiences of nine EL teachers working under COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021.

### **School Settings and Participant Demographics**

This study utilized a purposive sampling method because it was believed that each participant would provide unique and rich information of value to the study. Purposive sampling was selected because it included a homogenous group of participants that experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The participating teachers' school district in South Texas included 29 elementary schools and had a rating of A for the 2018-2019 school year in Texas. In the 2018-2019 school year, there were 20,013 1st-5<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in their district. The district had 75.4% of their classified as economically disadvantaged, and 40.8% identified as bilingual/ESL, and comprised 98.8% Hispanic students. Two schools -school "A" and School "B"- from the same district were selected based on school demographics available on public-access school demographic information.

In the 2018-2019 school year, School A included 639 students of which 635 (99.4%) were Hispanic. In Texas, the criteria for a student to be identified as at risk of dropping out of school-based on state-defined criteria. In School A 90.6% of the students fell under the economically disadvantaged category, 74.8% were considered at risk, and 62.9% students were considered ELs. School B had 699 students of which 689 (98.6%) were Hispanic, 87.3% of were economically disadvantaged, 62.7% were considered at risk, and 52.6% were ELs.

### **Participant Sampling**

The school principals from schools A and B were contacted by their work email to inform them about the purpose of the study and of their voluntary participation. After choosing to participate, they were emailed via Google a nomination form to recommend teachers who practiced CRT. The nomination form included a definition of CRT and what that method of teaching entails. Afterwards, teachers who met the requirements were contacted to voluntarily participate and were asked for their consent to have audio and visual recordings to accurately capture each session's discussion. Nine teachers agreed to participate in the study; five teachers were from School A, and four participants were from School B. Pseudonyms were used to assure their confidentiality and anonymity.

### **Data Collection - Interviews**

The study's interviews were phenomenological. Valle and Halling (1989) found that data collection in phenomenological studies should consist of interviewing 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenology. For Boyd (2001), a study should include between two and ten participants for a phenomenological study. In this study there were nine participants who were recruited consistent with the sampling procedures previously defined. The purpose of these in-depth interviews was to describe the participants' shared meaning of the phenomenon under exploration (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). For this reason, an interview questionnaire was developed containing 17 items focused on the following areas: 1) Teacher Perceptions; 2) Timing of School Closures; 3) Distance Learning; 4) Challenges, Barriers, and Supports; (5) Final Question. The interviews protocol was hybrid with items selected from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) Survey, and the Dreyfus' Teacher Perceptions' Survey. The AIR (2020) survey involved a nationally conducted representative survey meant to better understand how school districts and charter management organizations were responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dreyfus' (2020) survey focused on assessing teacher perceptions of CRT. Because Dreyfus' survey is limited, AIR's survey was added. Both sources agreed to allow the use of their protocols for this study.

The interview protocol included open-ended questions that allowed for future questions that emerged from participant responses. All participants were interviewed on Zoom for about 180 minutes divided in two sessions. The first Zoom session lasted about 60-90 minutes. During this session, participants were asked to answer open-ended questions of their CRT when remotely teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Follow-up Zoom sessions lasted about 60-90 minutes and during this session. Membership checks were conducted of the first session to clarify and verify the accuracy of their responses.

The study's observational data came from the audio and video recordings from Zoom that allowed to observe teachers for cues needed to support the transcriptions and their statements. Recordings facilitated a complete record of what was seen and heard during interviews allowing for a better construction of participants' lived experiences in this exploration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). To establish trustworthiness of the interviews' interpretations, each participant was consulted to clarify and verify their response accuracy.

### **Systematization of Data Analysis and Data Display**

During the data analysis process, textural description included the following: (a) experiences of the participants; (b) structural description of their experiences; and (c) an overall essence of the experience. Doing this, lead to finding meaning from the participants' responses to the research questions. Zoom allowed recording participants' responses so that transcription organization and analysis were more efficient (Janghorban et al., 2014). Additionally, during the data collection process, memoing was used to document developing research theories (Creswell, 2013), and it involved capturing the thoughts and conclusions after each interview. Lastly, the data analysis process was facilitated by the MAXQDA software, which facilitated the creation of data displays and boxed displays to organize the data for a more thorough analysis. In this study, data was presented in box displays because they helped organize the extensive theoretical conceptualization expressed in the participant responses; they also helped present inferences and helped (Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013). The boxed displays included text frames within a box to highlight important participant narratives.

The data analysis entailed using Creswell's (2013) version of Moustaka's (1994) phenomenological analysis to generate themes. The process comprised: a) Description of Personal Experiences, b) Data Horizontalization, c) Clustering and Thematising, d) Identify Invariants Constituents and Themes, and e) Textual and Structural Description, and Essence.

### **Evidence of Quality and Trustworthiness**

The study's credibility was established through member checking where each participant received an interpretation of their responses during the interview conducted in the first session to clarify and verify the accuracy of their responses. Using the participant feedback aided a better understanding of the participants' responses. Data transferability ensured by including detailed descriptions of the data with a full description of the investigation. Doing this ensured that a full description of the phenomenon was used to compare the data within the investigation with emerging data from teacher accounts. The data focused on answering the research questions and was aligned to the methods of data collection. The reasoning for selecting participants and the problem of the study were discussed to ensure that mistakes were avoided in conceptualizing the study, data collection, interpreting findings, and reporting results. To avoid mistakes, there was also a code and recode procedure throughout the data analysis process to determine dependability. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, there was ongoing reflexivity to ensure trustworthiness of the study's design. This kept the study's drive to keep the teachers' perceptions transparent.

## **FINDINGS**

In this section, teacher nominations, interviews, and recordings were used to present an analysis of its qualitative data. The data analysis was thematic approach.

### **Settings**

#### **School A**

Table 1 presents the demographics of both schools in the study.

Table 1  
*Participating School Demographics*

School	Student Enrollment	At-risk students	Economically Disadvantaged	LEP
A	639	74.8%	90.6%	62.9%
B	699	62.7%	87.3%	52.6%

### Teacher Nomination

Kirkland's (2020) identification protocol was used as a guide on the nomination form. Participating teachers had a clear understanding of cultural diversity and embraced their learners' communication style because it reflects cultural values and leads to developing learning behaviors; they evaluated the textbooks and curriculum for their strengths and weaknesses to promote CRT for their quality; they knew about current events and media portrayals of diverse ethnic groups to counteract those influences in the classroom; and they created a classroom environment where cultural scaffolding is routinely used to teach. Seven teachers included teaching artifacts displayed around the classroom seen like advocacy for diversity and focused on differentiation of materials. Table 2 shows the results for the teacher nomination forms based on Kirkland's protocol.

Table 2  
*Teacher Nomination Form Results- Kirkland (2020)*

Characteristics of CRT	Frequency	Percent
Has a clear understanding of cultural diversity	9/9	100%
Embraces their learners' communication style because this reflects cultural values and leads to developing learning behaviors	9/9	100%
Focuses on differentiation of materials	7/9	78%
Evaluates the textbooks and curriculum for its strengths and weaknesses to promote CRT for not only its quality but its relevance for ELs	9/9	100%
Includes teaching artifacts displayed around the classroom seen as advocacy for diversity	7/9	78%
Knows about current events and media portrayals of diverse ethnic groups so that they can counteract those influences in the classroom	9/9	100%
Creates a classroom environment where cultural scaffolding is routinely used like using students' cultures and experiences to teach.	9/9	100%

### Participants' Profile - School A

The principal at School A recommended seven teachers, of which five agreed to participate in the study. For this group, the years of teaching experience was between ten years and twenty years. The interview protocol began with questions that focused on why the participants chose to become teachers and their educational background. The questions gave an insight of each participant. Table 3 is a brief profile of each teacher with their pseudonyms.

Table 3

*School A Teacher Participants*

Pseudonyms	Teaching Experience	Current Grade Level
Elaine	10 years	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade
Isabelle	11 years	5 <sup>th</sup> grade
Jocelyn	15 years	1 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Jennifer	11 years	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Samantha	20 years	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade

**Participants' Profile - School B**

The principal at this campus recommended six teachers of which four agreed to participate in the study. Like School A, School B included teachers with different backgrounds and experience. The teachers with their pseudonyms are shown in table 4.

Table 4

*School B Teacher Participants*

Pseudonyms	Teaching Experience	Current Grade Level
Nathalie	25 years	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade
Pamela	15 years	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade
Catherine	7 years	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Sara	32 years	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade

**Results**

The first research questions focused on how teachers perceive and describe their experience with COVID-19 and its impact on their CRT when remotely teaching ELs. The second research question focused on how teachers perceived their successes and challenges with implementing CRT when remotely teaching ELs. Data analysis revealed five themes from the in-depth interviews.

Of the nine teachers participating, eight addressed how they perceive and describe their experience with COVID-19 and its impact on their CRT. Table 5 below shows the theme that emerged from the teachers' interviews. The select edited vignettes below table 5 illustrate how and why some teachers perceived CRT in remote classrooms during the pandemic.

Table 5

*CR as a Facilitator in Remote Classrooms*

Themes	Frequency	Percent
CRT facilitated engagement in a remote classroom.	8/9	89%

***CRT facilitated engagement in a remote classroom.*** Teachers believed that CRT was beneficial in traditional classroom and when remotely teaching. The rationales varied from giving students a sense of belonging, forming connections to lessons, and engaging students by making them feel comfortable. Ultimately, student participation relied on the teacher's facilitation of learning opportunities and the class environment. The teachers indicated their understanding that engagement and CRT are intertwined. The following vignettes illustrate how teachers perceived CRT and engagement in remote classrooms.

**Elaine** focused on the importance of empowering her students through CRT to promote engagement during her lessons. She explained,

If you're not talking to them, culturally, or with what they know they won't be engaged. They won't be empowered. That's where we get like the blank screens or just a blank stare. That's when students decide to leave the group chat or just stay on mute. It [CRT] helps support the student engagement during each lesson. They have to feel that they connect to our lesson at least a little bit.

**Jocelyn** perceived that CRT allowed her students to engage in her lessons because they felt a sense of belonging. She understood that engagement was very important but creating an environment of belonging was just as important and facilitated the engagement in her class. She noted,

There will be a sense of belonging and they will want to share their stories. I mean that itself it develops the language, ... the expressive language for them and improves literacy skills. There's going to be more opportunity to read when you're sharing stories that they're familiar with, you know, with their culture, so it engages them.

**Catherine** also added that students want to be heard and the simple action of facilitating that opportunity along with CRT influenced her students to become engaged in the lesson. She stated Some of these kids, I'm sure they feel unheard sometimes. I'm sure they feel like nobody really knows what's going on with them, and so, some of them slip through the cracks. Yeah, I think anything that targets their culture is something that would be helpful.

**Isabelle** expressed her use of acknowledging individual accomplishments and facilitating discussions with students to keep them engaged in her CRT. She mentioned how this differentiated form of attention opened possibilities for her teaching online. She mentioned

I think virtually right now the number one thing that works in our class are like incentives, you know, recognizing students, giving shout outs, and praising them.

**Nathalie** also perceived the classroom environment to be vital to ensure student comfortability and engagement.

Getting them to speak [the students] has changed because now they have to speak to us through the computer and they are spotlighted. I call them my movie stars, because they have spotlights on them and they're like, "okay now I'm the movie star." At the beginning, they were a little timid to share but as we started gaining more knowledge about the student and they started forming friendships and bonds, their way of expressing themselves just it's grown in numbers.

The focus of research question 2 was on what bilingual teachers perceive as successes and challenges when implementing CRT. Table 6 presents the common themes that emerged from the voices of the participants.

Table 6

*CRT Curriculum, Technology, and Home-based Interference*

Themes	Frequency	Percent
CRT in a remote classroom was facilitated by forming connections to the curriculum	7/9	78%
Technological features facilitated CRT in remote settings	7/9	78%
CRT in a home environment entailed elements that were out of the teachers' control	9/9	100%

***CRT in a remote classroom was facilitated by connecting it to the curriculum.*** A common theme that emerged from the teacher responses indicated that seven out of nine participants believed that a benefit of having students learning remotely included the ability to bring lessons to life with objects obtained from the home setting and forming connections to their experiences; it promoted authentic learning. The responses indicated that students were readily able to take part in scavenger hunts in their homes to make the learning experiences more meaningful and giving students an opportunity to be heard through relevant connections to the curriculum.

**Jennifer** reflected in these terms,

They make that kind of connection to science or social studies whenever it's hard to do the hands on. Some of those kids are like 'oh yeah, I already have this' so they get their stuff and they bring it and they show, and you know they get to show off. They feel like they're adding their value to the lesson. During the winter storm I had a student actually take a picture of his generator and bring it in. He said, "I guess, this is a generator that we have." They were excited with that, so I do feel it is very important to include or try to include that because they make the connection.

**Sara** indicated that nothing had changed just because she was teaching CRT online. It was important for her to facilitate the opportunities that promoted making connections to EL students' strengths.

I am able to provide more contextual learning to students for them to make connections and take ownership of their learning from one another. The students are able to make real world connections. It [CRT] helps to provide teaching methods that connect with students' real life and interests. For example, this Christmas we recreated virtual feasts gatherings and celebrations in Google meets. Well, it [CRT] helps them understand different perspectives appreciate each other's strengths and it builds on empathy

**Isabelle** also agreed that CRT allowed her to make connections to the academic content.

It definitely helps a student feel more connected and be able to make those connections, based on what you are teaching. For example, this week, I'm doing Ellis Island immigration, immigration in social studies. Immigration is one of those things that's like huge here. A lot of their parents are immigrants, so making that connection to what they go through, I think it's super important for them to be successful, and I guess feel confident and build everything else from there, so yes, definitely, it is very helpful... You get more participation, because they've been there, they felt that they've seen their parents or they've gone through it, so, yes, being sensitive to their culture and understanding, actually understanding.

**Elaine** also pointed out that connecting to her ELs' lives proved to benefit her CRT.

I see myself as I try to incorporate a lot of things that they are aware of, and that they see in their day to day lives. I'm glad that I do know more or less where they come from, or where they live and the type of families that they come from. I feel like the interaction that I give to them has to be something, I don't want to say at their level, but at their background knowledge in order for them to be able to interact to the best of their abilities. I tend to form connections to what I'm teaching and what they're used to at home.

**Technological features facilitated CRT in remote teaching.** Seven teachers believed that a benefit of having of students learning remotely was the ability to empower all students by using the technology's features, such as breakout rooms, and the ability to give individualized attention. The responses indicated that students were more inclined to participate or speak when instruction was differentiated using these tools.

**Nathalie** focused on the tools that empowered her students during remote teaching. She made sure to discuss the microphone and the power that it had for encouraging her students to have a voice.

Nathalie found that the microphone facilitated this for her in her remote classroom.

I believe that just the microphone and the little hand empowers them tremendously because they can raise their hand and they know that they're automatically going to be called at the next available moment. Being able to use their voice by with the microphone is empowerment. They will still unmute the microphone and answer. That's huge empowerment, because in a traditional classroom we might have a classroom of 20 beautifully behaved students, yes, but all of them are shy so nobody wants to respond. This way everybody is responding everybody wants to share. It's got its pros and cons, but we figured out the tweaks to make it productive and use it to our advantage.

**Jennifer** highlighted her use of breakout rooms, which is something that a traditional classroom does not offer. She was able to conduct her CRT in a different manner with the technological feature.

I think the biggest thing that I would say, would be different that I'm able to do now is pull in those students in a breakout room and they know that nobody else is that classroom. In a traditional classroom, we can pull in a small group but there's other people still hearing them where they can still see them. I'm able to really just target all my attentions to one.

**Samantha** found breakout rooms to help her create learning opportunities for her students. She was able to differentiate her instruction just as a CRT would do and found that students were able to work on their collaboration skills in breakout rooms. This technological feature opened teaching possibilities for her in her remote classroom.



Since 60% of my students are performing below grade level, I am meeting in small groups to be able to meet their needs at their level, so I will do whole group with third grade curriculum and then put them in breakout rooms, so I can be able to service the kids at their levels. In the breakout rooms, we're always synergizing and talking with each other. That helps a lot.

**Pamela** shared similar perceptions about breakout rooms and strongly agreed that they facilitated CRT. It was up to her to provide the learning opportunities, but this technological feature accentuated her lessons.

During remote instruction, being able to include everyone's cultural background to the lessons can be a challenge in the beginning because the interaction is minimal. I promote breakout rooms because they are in small groups of 3 or 4 students and can unmute themselves and conversations can happen. The teacher can get an idea of the student and their environment based on the answers.

***CRT in a home environment involved elements beyond the teachers' control.*** All teachers believed that their districts provided students with the technology and software needed to succeed academically, but the home environment caused difficulties during teaching. The teacher responses indicated their understanding and sensitivity to their students' home environment.

**Jennifer** reflected that her EL students came from families that struggled meeting their needs during the COVID pandemic, so their focused on was on meeting family needs rather than on school instruction.

Our students tend to go through certain family situations like certain things that they're struggling with. Things like you know the home environment sometimes even just the basics, like the running water, electricity.

**Elaine** further explained that her EL students' household had many distractions that caused the students to lose interest in the lessons presented from a computer screen.

Honestly, I believe that the most pressing challenge would be that our students might not be in the best area to learn, and I mean physically. Yes, they might have the materials. Yes, they might have a Chromebook or an iPad that has been issued from this school, but their surroundings might still be loud where they might have siblings running around in the background or yelling parents in the background, doing what they need to do throughout the day. And so, all of those would be distractions that they have at their household that brings challenges to their attention and to their ability to focus and learn, and I think that is like the biggest concern when trying to teach these children that are remote.

**Jocelyn** indicated that distractions on the Chromebook and the home environment complicated her implementation of CRT.

The challenges of the child and what skills they need to improve, so that's very hard right now with remote learning. In the computer there's a lot of distractions for them, you know. The [distractions come from] background noise where sometimes there are siblings around or sometimes it's just the overall, you know that everybody's there.

**Pamela** found that EL students' comfortability at home affected their ability to focus on the learning opportunities.

Many things have changed because we do not have the students' full attention because of the different environments that they are in. The challenges that I have is that the students are not learning in their normal school environment therefore there is a lot of interruptions on each individual child depending on the place they are at. I see some of the students are very comfortable at home that they are constantly walking around. There are loud televisions in the background or music and students want to participate and are on screen, but their setting is not the best. Most parents continue their regular life, and the students are adapting to learning from home but it's not at their 100% full instruction as they would have in the classroom.

## Discussion of Findings

The first five questions for the teacher in-depth interviews were designed to provide insight into teachers' perceptions and descriptions of their experience with COVID-19, to shed light that the pandemic had on their CRT. Most participants strongly agreed that using CRT during the COVID crisis facilitated engagement in a remote classroom with ELs, and in this regard CRT focuses on the forgotten students, the alienated ELs, who have the learning capacity to be successful but have been sidelined with their learning opportunities jeopardized because of inequities in our school systems (Major, 2020).

The goal of CRT should be to bridge students' cultural heritage and what teachers are offering in the classroom, which creates a stronger sense of engagement in the curriculum, which is especially critical for ELs (Byrd, 2016). This study's participants demonstrated how they encouraged their EL students to utilize their native culture to form connections to the academic curriculum when implementing CRT in remote teaching.

The teachers also proved how and why CRT, when skillfully implemented, plays a major role in promoting EL engagement in remote education. They discussed how EL student engagement influences their academic success, including engagement in remote teaching during stressful times. By doing this, teachers using CRT were able to address the cultural divides and to level the playing field in an educational system that tends to exclude minorities from the curriculum, ELs included (Anderson & Jaeger, 2015; Boon & Lewthwaite, 2015; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Sanders, Rodrigues, & Li, 2016).

The second list of questions of the interview protocol related to the study's question number two. Teachers were consistent when outlining the home-based challenges out of their control. When analyzing the challenge listed by the participants, the interviews were consistent with Lederman (2020), who found that given the short turnaround caused by COVID-19, closing the gap between online and in-person instruction resulted in negative experiences with remote teaching. Participants also found themselves working around what Lederman highlights as negative experiences during their remote teaching. For instance, Sara, a study participant, indicated, "closing educational gaps in an effort to prepare the student is also a concern, but right now trying to meet the students emotionally is important. They're going through a lot right now." Covey's (2004) circle of control is important to understanding situations such as what the Sara and other participants experienced. According to Covey (2004), problems faced by individuals fall under three categories known as direct, indirect, and no control. Direct control involves an individual's own behavior and indirect control is influenced by the behavior of others. In this study, teachers had no control of the problems they encountered with their students' home environment because the home environments included many situations teachers were unable to work through, especially the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on the ELs' home environments. In these types of demanding times, if teachers understand that there are situational factors impeding their effective implementation of CRT, they need to adapt their teaching and tailor more suitable learning opportunities that fit their students' individual conditions, but with the caveat that there will be challenges that are unsurmountable despite their efforts.

Despite the challenges perceived by participants of students' learning environments, teachers reflected that CRT was an important pedagogical practice to teach their EL students. Research has identified that CRT facilitates knowledge acquisition, skills, and engagement (Major, 2020). The Coalition for Educational Justice (2020) also emphasized that CRT depends on teachers' perceptions because teachers make student affirmation of cultural identities a reality by using culturally relevant resources and learning and academic success begin with the teachers' use of cultural backgrounds as a starting point. The findings of this study indicate that, despite challenges and hardships they faced, teachers were de facto able to teach their students with their appropriate implementation of CRT supported with the available technological features.

### **Future Research on CRT in EL Education**

The findings of this study confirm the influence CRT has on EL student engagement and shared the importance of understanding the experiences of bilingual teachers about remote teaching during a pandemic. The experiences of the teachers in this study provided insight into the importance of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), and barriers that deterred teachers from utilizing CRT to its fullest. Nonetheless, future research on this topic may advance the field and assist on improving delivery of instruction online. First, researchers can study the long-term effects of implementing CRT online when teaching ELS. For instance, one may consider following-up on the teachers of this study to inquire about their perceptions of the academic progress of their ELs once schools resume face-to-face teaching after the pandemic has been controlled. A second option is to engage CRT teachers in an action research plan with blended instruction, where teachers impart instruction part of the time and face-to-face and part of their instruction is online either synchronous or asynchronous. Lastly, because the pandemic caused abrupt major shifts of delivery formats, it seems reasonable to investigate from the teachers' perspectives the theoretical and practical knowledge that would benefit teachers who may face crises comparable to those caused by the COVID pandemic.

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