UNDERSTANDING THE STATE OF EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS' SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE AFTERMATH OF REMOTE LEARNING DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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by

Ashley Rastorfer

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Abstract

This dissertation presents a qualitative research single case study to describe the state of social-emotional development of educationally-disadvantaged students at SM Elementary School (pseudonym) in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To understand the students' state of social-emotional development, students from SM Elementary School were interviewed on their lived experiences with remote learning during three specific time periods (pre-remote learning, during remote learning, and post-remote learning).

Drawing upon the purposeful criterion sampling strategy, 12 students from SM Elementary School who are considered educationally disadvantaged were selected to participate in the interviews. All students were from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and eligible for the free and reduced school lunch program. The primary form of data collection was in the form of semi-structured interviews. Demographic data

was also collected from the participants through the use of questionnaires. The analytical framework approach was used to describe the content of the interviews and then the content analysis was used to explain why the patterns or themes that emerged were important.

The study's findings provide insight into the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences that students had with remote learning. The data from this research study indicates that in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students are still struggling with overcoming obstacles and barriers to their learning, specifically in the area of mathematics and understanding important math concepts. All of the factors of disadvantage, challenges, traumatic experiences, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences that students experienced while remote learning have had long-lasting impacts on students' well-being, development of social-emotional skills, and social-emotional health and could be contributing factors to students' ability to learn and achieve in the classroom post-pandemic, especially for students who were already considered educationally disadvantaged. Strategies that educators can use to address students' feelings of fear and uncertainty, student motivation, and lack of academic achievement are also discussed.

Understanding students' social-emotional needs and their state of social-emotional development in the aftermath of a disaster, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is an important first step toward intervention and addressing the long-lasting effects that remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic may have caused. Insight into the lived experiences that students had with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic can help educators begin to understand the state of students' social-emotional development,

so they can appropriately respond to students' social-emotional needs. Students' social-emotional needs must be addressed before educators can work toward closing the achievement gap created by remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DEDICATION

To my biggest fan, my husband. Thank you for always believing in me, challenging me, and pushing me out of my comfort zone. I cannot begin to thank you enough for all the sacrifices you have made so that I can fulfill my dreams. You truly are the most selfless person I know. Thank you for all your words of encouragement and support throughout this process. You knew exactly what I needed in my most challenging moments when I felt frustrated, discouraged, and doubted myself. It is because of you that I did not give up.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the usual way of life for people and caused change in educational systems worldwide (Kolak et al., 2021). Precautionary measures were enacted to prevent the spread of infection such as lockdown restrictions, school closures, and stay-at-home orders. In fact, 1.5 billion elementary to post-secondary schools in 165 countries worldwide were forced to close in the year 2020 (Kaffenberger, 2020; Souza et al., 2020). The lockdown restrictions, school closures, and stay-at-home orders affected daily social interactions for children. Researchers, clinicians, and educators have become increasingly concerned about the impact of these measures on children and adolescents' social-emotional health (Smith et al., 2020).

The unanticipated forced school closures triggered change in the foundations of teaching and learning paradigms. Countries were forced to determine their own strategies for how to handle the pandemic and schools were left to determine how to continue educating students effectively (Caldwell, 2020). Distance education was the only alternative to face-to-face classes during the pandemic and the only way to continue to educate students (Souza et al., 2020).

For schools that were able to return to in-person learning in the fall of 2020, research indicates that distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound negative effect on the social-emotional health, achievement, academic performance, and school progress for students in elementary school through college, especially for students who are already educationally disadvantaged (Berger et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Nursey et al., 2019; Ozer et al., 2020; Pitlik, 2020; Souza et al., 2020). There are several factors that put students at

an educational disadvantage including economic status, social status, identified disabilities, limited English language proficiency, neglect, delinquency, and homelessness (Law Insider, 2023).

Since 21st-century educators were operating under unprecedented times, never having dealt with a pandemic as intense as COVID-19 before, research was lacking on the state of students' social-emotional development in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lasting effects that remote learning may have caused, especially for the most vulnerable students (Caldwell, 2020; Kaffenberger, 2020; Souza et al., 2020). The polio pandemic, spanning from 1916-1955, was the last documented pandemic that was similar to what educators experienced with COVID-19. During the polio pandemic, United States (U.S.) government officials implemented similar precautionary measures, such as quarantines, social-distancing, and school closures, to slow the spread of the disease. Public schools were forced to shut down at the beginning of the school year and students in grades three through eight continued their education remotely at home by receiving lessons through the radio (Meyers & Thomasson, 2017).

The feelings of fear, powerlessness, and unpredictability that individuals experienced during the polio pandemic were similar to the feelings that individuals experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Polio outbreaks seemed to occur in the summer months when students were not in school, but when outbreaks started occurring during the fall and spring months, communities were caught off guard. In San Antonio, Texas, a polio outbreak in the spring of 1946 closed schools at first for a couple of weeks and then for the remainder of the academic term, forcing individuals to quarantine and disrupting graduation festivities. There were misunderstandings of how the polio disease was contracted, but it was well-known that the

disease was highly contagious. The anxiety and fear surrounding contracting the virus prompted individuals to social-distance and to steer clear of crowds. Individuals navigated the threat of the virus as best they could within the constraints of their knowledge and foresight. However, the majority of individuals who contracted the disease were asymptomatic, so individuals spread the virus unknowingly. Therefore, everything became a threat (Fitzgerald, 2021).

As with distance learning during COVID-19, students and parents found flaws with the radio experience during the polio pandemic. When Chicago schools were forced to shut down in 1937 due to a polio outbreak, there was concern that interruptions to learning could be devastating to students and particularly those students who were already operating from an educational disadvantage. The shift to at-home education magnified socio-economic gaps, including disparities in access to technology (Uenuma, 2020). Not every household owned a radio and those who did were sometimes unable to tune into the right stations. In addition, students and parents found the instructional methods that were used during distance education ineffective. Many students found teachers spoke too quickly, making it difficult to write down instructions. Learning from home also made it difficult for students to focus. Without the authority of the classroom, students were easily distracted. Finally, students were unable to directly ask their teachers questions when they needed help, leaving parents to fill the role of teacher (Fitzgerald, 2021).

Besides research on the COVID-19 and polio pandemics, there have been other studies done on disasters, plagues, pandemics, and epidemics that have occurred throughout history. Responses to these disaster events have remained largely unchanged. In the past, similar precautionary measures, such as quarantines and social-distancing, have been enacted to slow the spread of disease infection, and, historically, there have been disaster situations that have

required long-term school closures. In addition, emergency remote learning has been a method that has been used in the past as a means to continue educating students during times where schools have been required to shut down for extended periods of time to mitigate the spread of a disease or when schools were damaged beyond repair from natural disasters such as tornados, fires, and hurricanes. Finally, similar feelings, such as fear, uncertainty, desperation, and powerlessness, have been reported by individuals who have survived crisis situations and data from past research studies indicates that these feelings are forms of trauma. Overall, data from all of these research studies indicated similar impacts of precautionary measures, school closures, remote learning, and trauma on an individual's social-emotional health, well-being, and development, especially for individuals from educationally-disadvantaged backgrounds (Berger et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Nursey et al., 2019; Ozer et al., 2020; Pitlik, 2020; Souza et al., 2020).

Following a disaster event, data from past research studies indicates that without the high-level of knowledge and training in the use of trauma-informed practices, the impact of an event on a students' social-emotional health, well-being, and development are far worse. In the aftermath of a disaster event, educators can use the trauma-informed model to create safe, secure, and supportive classroom environments where they can work toward addressing the traumatic stress that students experienced (Berger et al., 2018). There are lessons to be learned from past disaster events and schools that have used trauma-informed practices as an intervention to mitigate the impact of an event on a students' social-emotional heath, well-being, and development. Therefore, research from this study is pertinent to help educators gain an understanding of the state of students' social-emotional development in the aftermath of remote

learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to address a child's social-emotional needs and, ultimately, close the achievement gap that distance learning during COVID-19 caused.

Problem Statement

The state of students' social-emotional development in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic is unknown, since a pandemic as intense as COVID-19 is something that educators in the 21st-century have never navigated before. The last documented pandemic that was similar to what educators experienced with COVID-19 was the polio pandemic, which forced schools in the U.S. to close in the 1940's and 1950's due to regular outbreaks of the disease (Meyers & Thomasson, 2017). Therefore, the phenomenon in question for this qualitative single case study is to describe the state of social-emotional development of educationally-disadvantaged students at SM Elementary School (pseudonym) in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to understand the current state of students' social-emotional development post-COVID-19 distance learning in order for educators to adequately address students' social-emotional needs and ultimately, close the achievement gap that was created as a result of the emergency shift to distance learning in an attempt to provide continuity in education because of the highl- contagious nature of COVID-19.

Background of the Problem

The Gap

COVID-19 is officially the deadliest disease outbreak in recent American history, surpassing the estimated U.S. fatalities from the 1918 influenza pandemic (Pitlik, 2020). While an outbreak of this degree of intensity has not been dealt with before, plagues, pandemics, and epidemics such as smallpox, the H1N1 influenza virus, the Spanish flu, and the bubonic plague have been documented around the world for hundreds of years. Similar to all known pandemics

throughout history, the COVID-19 pandemic has been accompanied by feelings of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety worldwide (Pitlik, 2020).

There have also been other research studies done on the impact of other disasters on social-emotional development such as wildfires, mine fires, hurricanes, and earthquakes. These disasters cause a significant disruption similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the stability and consistency of everyday life (Berger et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016). Overall, data from past research studies indicates that disasters, pandemics, plagues, and epidemics have a profound effect on student achievement, social-emotional development, and interrupt educational opportunities for students, especially for students from educationally-disadvantaged backgrounds (Berger et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Nursey et al., 2019; Pitlik, 2020; Ozer et al., 2020; Souza et al., 2020).

Evolution of the Problem

In March 2020, the Governor of the state of Ohio closed schools and required instruction to go remote as a precautionary measure to limit exposure to the COVID-19 virus. All K-12 students in Ohio schools were taught remotely from March 2020 through June 2020. In August 2020, the Governor of Ohio allowed school administrators to reopen their schools in the way they felt was safest for their students (Ohio Department of Health, 2020). Schools in Ohio chose to either continue remote learning, return to in-person learning, or give families the option for students to choose remote or in-person learning. For a period of two years (August 2020 to August 2022), Ohio schools had to navigate what was best for the safety of their school communities. Some schools had to shut down and return to remote learning due to COVID-19 outbreaks among the school population or when too many faculty members were absent and the school struggled to find enough substitute teachers to cover classes.

In schools that were faced with a substitute teaching shortage, entire classrooms had to shut down and return to remote learning while other classrooms were able to maintain in-person learning. In August 2022, schools returned to some sort of "normalcy," but are still facing a teacher and substitute teacher shortage. Schools are also struggling with student attendance issues. Remote learning and COVID-19 protocols, such as social distancing and wearing masks, have weakened students' immune systems, which leaves them more vulnerable to infections (Lu, 2021). Students were at home learning away from other children for up to a period of two years. Now that students have returned back to the classroom, they are at an increased risk of getting sick until their immune systems are built back up. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of students that are absent from school. When students are absent, they miss important classroom instruction. According to the SM Elementary School Student Information System (SIS), the average attendance for K-8 students in August through May for the 2018-2019 school year (pre-COVID-19) was 95%. When students returned to school for the 2020-2021 school year (post-COVID-19), the average attendance decreased to 91%.

Recent research studies in Australia have shown an increase in the number of influenza and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) cases in children since stay-at-home orders and other public health measures have been lifted. Influenza and RSV typically peak in the winter months, but according to this study, cases are peaking earlier in the season (Lu, 2021). A recent analysis of hospital presentations show that RSV cases dropped by 98% during the winter months of 2020, when COVID-19 restrictions were in place, compared to the same period in previous years. However, RSV cases began to rise significantly in the spring exceeding the median seasonal peak in 2012 to 2019. The proportion of children that tested positive for RSV increased from less than one percent to 70% in the summer of 2020. Other Austrian states have shown

similar trends since relaxing their mask-wearing rules as well as other countries such as France. As Northern hemisphere countries ease their lockdown, there is a risk they could also see surges in RSV cases among children (Lu, 2021).

To date, the COVID-19 virus is still present, but the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has recognized the importance of in-person instruction and keeping students in school. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has worked with local health departments to adjust COVID-19 quarantine protocols and prevention strategies. The new guidance for Ohio schools is as follows: "The ODE and CDC strongly recommend that students receive the COVID-19 vaccination to protect them against contracting and spreading the COVID-19 virus. If students are unvaccinated, it is highly recommended that they wear a mask to control the spread of the virus in Ohio schools. If a student tests positive for the COVID-19 virus, it is recommended that they quarantine for five days and then wear a mask when they return to school for five days" (Ohio Department of Education, 2021a).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative single case study is to gain an understanding of the state of social-emotional development of educationally-disadvantaged students at SM Elementary School in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To gain an understanding, students will be interviewed on their experiences with remote learning. SM Elementary School is an urban, private, parochial, elementary school located in a city in the Northeastern Ohio region and has students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The target population for this qualitative study are elementary students in grades K-8 who are educationally disadvantaged. Specifically, this study will focus on students who are considered socially and economically disadvantaged. Socially disadvantaged refers to minority individuals who are subject to racial and ethnic

prejudice or cultural bias (Law Insider, 2023). Economically disadvantaged refers to students who have been deemed eligible for the free and reduced school lunch program (Law Insider, 2023). Therefore, students who come from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and are eligible for the free and reduced school lunch program will be selected as participants for this study. A student's eligibility for the free and reduced lunch program is the criteria that the state of Ohio uses in determining a student's economically-disadvantaged status (Ohio Department of Education, 2021b).

Students who are considered economically and socially disadvantaged were chosen to participate in this study because of the association between these two variables. Research indicates that racial and ethnic differences are linked to socio-economic resources. Individuals who come from a lower socio-economic status and a racially diverse background have less access to knowledge, resources, and opportunities (Anderson et al., 2004). In addition, research indicates that socio-economic deprivation and racial discrimination impact an individual's social-emotional health (Anderson et al., 2004). It has been widely documented that people who come from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds and who have less education are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, PTSD, and other mental health conditions because they lack access to appropriate healthcare (Anderson et al., 2004).

Nature of the Study

A qualitative single case study design has been chosen for this study to help gain an understanding of the state of social-emotional development of educationally-disadvantaged students in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The single case case study design selects one case to be studied in depth for a rich, deep understanding of the subject (Patton, 2015). An understanding of the state of students' social-emotional development

will be achieved by interviewing students about their lived experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this qualitative research study:

RQ 1: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally-disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School at the onset of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ 2: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally-disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School during remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ 3: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally-disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School after students returned to school from remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Significance of the Study

It is important to understand the state of students' social-emotional development in the aftermath of COVID-19 in order to address the challenges presented by remote learning. In order to begin to address the challenges presented by remote learning, educators must first address students' well-being and social-emotional development and then academic achievement. Learners who are educationally-disadvantaged must be prioritized (Ozer et al., 2020).

The work of two child development theorists (Abraham Maslow and Jean Piaget) has been monumental in explaining the importance of social-emotional learning and development for children. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, individuals must first have their physiological needs met such as air, water, and food. Then, individuals must have their social

needs met, which include feeling safe and loved, in order to build self-esteem and reach self-actualization. Self-actualization is the desire to become the most a person can be and achieve academically. If students do not have their physiological needs met, then they will not learn because their minds and bodies are distracted by sleep deprivation and hunger. In addition, for students to fully engage in learning, they must have their social needs met and know that school is a physically and emotionally safe place. One way that educators can establish a sense of security is to build positive relationships with students. Once schools address mental health and school climate challenges, then educators can work toward addressing students' higher-level cognitive needs that are outlined in Maslow's pyramid. Only when students' physiological and social needs are met are they cognitively ready to achieve academically (Bolman & Deal, 2016).

In Piaget's model of emotional development, cognitive, moral, and emotional development are all related. According to Piaget, emotional and cognitive development are parallel and complementary. Cognition provides the structure for social-emotional development and emotion provides the energy for development. Children go through stages of cognitive development and show emotional development throughout these stages through new emotional expressions and experiences. For example, Piaget suggests that infants are born with emotions as seen when an infant smiles as a response to show they are happy when interacting with someone who is familiar to them (often their mother) or as a response to something that is pleasing to them. From infancy to the age of two, children are in the first stage of cognitive development (sensorimotor stage). In this stage, children display stranger anxiety when left with someone other than their parents and start to develop their sense of self. From age two to seven, children are in the second stage of development (preoperational stage). In this stage, children start to develop what is known as social referencing or using emotional information gained from another

person to help evaluate social situations. Children in the preoperational stage are also very egocentric, focusing only on their own social-emotional needs and rarely the needs of others. From the age of seven to 11, children are in the third stage of cognitive development (concrete operational stage). In this stage, egocentrism begins to disappear and children start to develop empathy for others. Finally, once children turn 12 years of age, they enter the fourth and final stage of cognitive development (formal operational stage). When presented with social situations, children in this stage are able to start thinking abstractly and are able to apply multiple solutions and reasonings to solve problems. Children also have the ability to systematically plan for the future and reasonably hypothesize solutions to social challenges (Yan et al., 2021).

Once children reach school-age, educators play an important role in supporting students' social-emotional development as a means to improve educational outcomes for students (Berger et al., 2018). It is important that educators understand and apply the work of educational theorists such as Maslow and Piaget in order to appropriately address and support a child's social-emotional needs following a traumatic event. For example, Maslow's work refers to the importance of understanding the basic physiological and social-emotional needs of students. A students' basic needs and social needs must be addressed before learning can be successful. Piaget's research emphasizes the importance of understanding the stages of social-emotional development when working toward understanding students' experiences in the aftermath of a traumatic event (Yan et al., 2021). For example, a child in fourth grade at the age of nine or 10 years old is in the concrete operational stage of development. Children in this stage are still somewhat egocentric and do not have the developmental capability to understand the needs of others, or how a disaster event may have impacted other individuals other than themselves. Based on Piaget's theory, students in this stage would be focused on how the traumatic event

affected them, but may not consider how the traumatic event affected others who also experienced the event.

Overall, understanding students' social-emotional needs and their state of social-emotional development in the aftermath of a disaster, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is an important first step toward intervention. Teachers should be aware of students' backgrounds and experiences with the disaster event to gain insight on how to respond to the disruption and the course of action to take (Berger et al., 2018).

Researcher's Lens

The state of social-emotional development of educationally-disadvantaged students in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic is a topic of research that is of personal interest to me as a school principal. My first year as principal was the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, when the Governor of the state of Ohio forced schools to close and students to learn remotely due to the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, SM Elementary School was directly impacted (Ohio Department of Health, 2020). For a period of two years (August 2020 to August 2022), schools had to navigate what was best for the safety of their school communities. In August 2020, when the Governor of Ohio allowed schools to reopen, SM Elementary School allowed families to choose to either learn remotely or return to school five days a week for in-person learning. Even though SM Elementary School was fully open, there were situations throughout the year that required students to learn remotely. For example, SM Elementary School closed when the county in which the school is located was designated "purple" (COVID-19 spread is high risk) on the county rating scale and when there were staffing issues because multiple staff members were quarantined and there were not enough

substitute teachers to cover their classes (Ohio Department of Health, 2020). Since August 2021, all students at SM Elementary School have returned to in-person learning.

Overall, the way that remote learning was organized, structured, and delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted student achievement at SM Elementary School by creating learning gaps for students. In addition, the student population at SM Elementary School has changed dramatically to include more students who are considered educationally-disadvantaged, which is particularly concerning given the profound impact remote learning had on the most vulnerable students.

Part of a school's responsibility is to ensure that students are achieving academically and to find ways to address the learning loss that occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, teachers are struggling to fill the learning gaps that remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has created. Research indicates that in order to address the academic impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on students, a teacher must first address a student's social-emotional needs and the needs of educationally-disadvantaged students must be prioritized. A student's social-emotional needs can be adequately addressed once teachers gain an understanding of how an event, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has impacted a child (Berger et al., 2018, Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Ozer et al., 2020). Once students' social-emotional needs are met, then teachers can work toward addressing the learning gaps that remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has created.

Theoretical Framework

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Framework is a social-emotional learning (SEL) framework and has been selected as the framework that will guide the research in this study (CASEL, 2022). SEL is the process through which young people

and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities; manage emotions; achieve personal and collective goals; feel and show empathy for others; establish and maintain supportive relationships; and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, 2022). This framework will be used to help understand the state of social-emotional development of educationally-disadvantaged students in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CASEL Framework is evidence-based and grounded in socio-emotional research. (Anthony et al., 2021). SEL theories can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century. For example, John Dewey (1916), an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, stressed the importance of teaching self-regulation and socially-responsible behaviors to create a democratic society. In addition, Dr. James Comer (1968) was a pioneer of the SEL movement and was monumental in his work on supporting the needs of the "whole child" (CASEL, 2022; Syeda et al., 2023), which "broadens district and school focus beyond academics to include meeting students' social-emotional, physical, and safety needs" (Ohio Department of Education, 2021c). In addition to Dewey and Dr. Cromer, many others have adopted similar philosophies in various forms (Syeda et al., 2023).

In 1994, scholars from multiple fields--including emotional intelligence, child development, prevention science, bullying prevention, and public health-- came together to identify key skills and competencies students need to successfully navigate school and life. These scholars developed SEL as an umbrella framework in an attempt to address the social-emotional issues that students face and create a common understanding and goal of student development. Based on past theories, research, and the work of these scholars, five key competencies were identified as essential in promoting healthy social-emotional development in

children: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2022; Syeda et al., 2023). Self-awareness is the ability to identify and recognize one's own emotions and strengths and have a sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence. Social awareness is the ability to show empathy and respect for others and be able to take different perspectives. Self-management is the ability to practice impulse control and self-management, set goals, and show persistence and motivation. Relationship skills refer to the ability to cooperate and communicate with others and to seek and provide help when needed. Finally, responsible decision-making is the ability to evaluate and reflect on one's behavior and take personal and ethnical responsibility for one's own behavior (CASEL, 2022; Sande et al., 2019). This group of scholars would be later named CASEL and the key competencies that constitute SEL would later be referred to as the "CASEL Five." The CASEL Five became the foundation for the CASEL Framework (CASEL, 2022).

The CASEL Framework has been influential in shaping SEL-focused policy and practice in schools in the United States. Since its founding in 1997, CASEL has become the leading national organization providing information and advocacy for SEL. This includes disseminating research surrounding the importance of SEL, reviewing SEL assessments and intervention programs, promoting SEL-focused policy, and providing professional networking opportunities for the SEL community. Many states are using the CASEL Framework and its five key competencies as the foundation of SEL-focused learning standards for pre-K to high school students. When examining K-12 SEL standards, almost every state included some variation of all five CASEL core competencies (Anthony et al., 2021). Ohio, in creating SEL standards, is one of the states that has based their SEL standards on the CASEL Framework and the five key

competencies based on the expert recommendation of the advisory board from ODE (Ohio Department of Education, 2019).

The CASEL framework, rooted in the work of Maslow (1943), further confirms the importance of giving attention to students' social-emotional needs before addressing the learning gaps that remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic may have caused (CASEL, 2022). The CASEL framework indicates that if students do not have consistently safe, structured, supportive, positive, and predictable school and classroom environments, and if they do not experience positive and prosocial interactions, they will not learn academic and social skills and they will not be motivated to demonstrate them (CASEL, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed the environment in which students learn when schools were forced to shut down and students had to learn remotely. For those students who were already at an educational disadvantage, navigating learning in a remote environment may have been especially challenging when faced with a lack of access to technology and parental support and added home stressors. Pre-pandemic, some students' home lives were already in disarray and they depended on the safety, security, routine, structure, and support that the school environment provided. In addition, in the remote learning environment, students did not get to interact in person, which can change the way that students develop key social skills such as collaboration, conversation, and emotional intelligence. For students who were already struggling with social anxiety and behavioral issues, the lack of in-person interaction was especially detrimental (Souza et al., 2020).

The CASEL organization recognizes that remote learning may have impacted each student differently depending on a variety of factors. Therefore, educators must gain an understanding of each individual student's experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to appropriately address that student's individual needs (CASEL, 2022).

Finally, the CASEL Framework further confirms the research conducted on disruptions caused by other natural disasters, plagues, pandemics, and epidemics and the profound effect they have had on the academic achievement and social-emotional development of students who are already educationally disadvantaged (Berger et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Nursey et al., 2019; Pitlik, 2020; Ozer et al., 2020; Souza et al., 2020). The CASEL Framework recognizes that like other disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated feelings of isolation, stress, and loss, especially among young children, adults, families, and communities. SEL offers a powerful means to support one another during these challenging times as communities work to address the impact of the pandemic on students' learning and social-emotional development (CASEL, 2022).

Definition of Terms

The following concepts are relevant to this study and are used throughout.

- *CASEL* is an acronym that stands for The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and is the framework that is used for this research study.
- *CDC* is an acronym that stands for the Center of Disease Control.
- *Economically disadvantaged* is a term used throughout this study and refers to students that are eligible for the free and reduced school lunch program based on their household income (Law Insider, 2023).
- *Educationally disadvantaged* is a general term used throughout this study and refers to students who are economically disadvantaged, socially disadvantaged, students with disabilities, limited English proficient students, neglected or delinquent students, and homeless students (Law Insider, 2023).
- An *event* is a general term used that refers to any disaster, plague, pandemic, or epidemic.

- *ODE* is an acronym that stands for the Ohio Department of Education.
- *PTSD* is an acronym that stands for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- *Social-emotional development* is a term used throughout this study and refers to how children start to understand who they are, what they are feeling, and what to expect when interacting with others (Help Me Grow, n.d.).
- *Socially disadvantaged* is a term used throughout this study and refers to minority individuals and women who are subject to racial, ethnic, and gender prejudice or cultural bias (Law Insider, 2023).
- *SEL* is an acronym that stands for Social-Emotional Learning.
- *Social-emotional learning* is a term used throughout this study and refers to the process through which young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, 2022).
- *SES* is an acronym that stands for Socio-Economic Status.

Limitations

There are several limitations that may impact this study: sample size, focus on a limited number of characteristics of educational disadvantage, geographical location, and a limited focus on students who are considered educationally disadvantaged. When schools were forced to shut down in the spring of 2020 and transition to remote learning, all students in Ohio (K-12) were affected. However, due to time constraints, this study is limited to the experiences of only 12 students in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth grades. The population would be better represented with a larger sample size and the inclusion of more grade levels. The characteristics of

educational disadvantage for this study were limited to social and economics. However, there are many other risk factors that put students at an educational disadvantage. With future research, multiple characteristics, such as students with identified disabilities and students from different geographical locations, should be included to represent other areas of diversity. This study is also limited to one small, private, parochial school in Northeastern Ohio. With future research, other types of schools including charter schools and public schools should be included to gain a more holistic perspective of how remote learning during COVID-19 has impacted students in various types of schools in different geographical locations throughout Ohio. Finally, this study is limited to the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences of students who are considered educationally disadvantaged. Further research is warranted with students who were not operating from a point of disadvantage to understand how remote learning during COVID-19 may have impacted them.

Summary

The remainder of the dissertation is divided into four additional sections. The next section, chapter two, is the literature review, which includes an in-depth analysis of the challenges surrounding remote learning; the importance of social-emotional learning; he impact of other disasters, plagues, pandemics, and epidemics on a child's social-emotional development; the factors that put students at risk or at an educational disadvantage during an event; the long-lasting effects that an event may have on a child; and strategies that educators can use to address the needs of students following an event. The third chapter is the methodology section which further explains the rationale for this study, design of the study, data collection procedures, and data analysis. The fourth chapter is the findings section which will discuss the results of the data as well as what was learned from the research. In this section, a discussion on limitations will be

provided including what biases and assumptions were present and what insights were gained from the research. The final section, the fifth chapter, consists of the conclusion and implications of the research, and offers explanations for why this research is necessary, particularly in the field of education.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

This literature review begins with an explanation of the difference between face-to-face and remote learning as well as the importance of social-emotional learning. The review goes on to examine the impact of other disasters, plagues, pandemics, and epidemics documented throughout history on students' social-emotional development. The literature review explains the risk factors that put students at an educational disadvantage during a traumatic event and how these factors impact a students' development and shape students' experiences during an event. A deeper examination on how geographical location, socio-economic status, and diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds put students at an educational disadvantage are included in this literature review because they are specific to SM Elementary School and its student population. Finally, the review examines the long-lasting effects that a traumatic event may have on a child and the strategies that educators can use to address the challenges students' face following a disaster event.

Search Description

The literature reviewed for this qualitative study includes peer-reviewed articles from scholarly journals, books, and internet sources (see Table 1). Peer-reviewed articles from scholarly journals were generated using the Academic Search Complete database. Within the Academic Search Complete database, several databases were selected to complete the search. These databases include Education Research Complete, Education Full Text, ERIC, Professional Development Collection, Psychological and Behavioral Science Collection, APA Psychinfo, Sociological Collection, Socindex, and Race Relations Abstract. Relevant books were selected on topics pertaining to leadership, diversity, and qualitative research. Internet resources included

websites from the ODE, ODH, CASEL, U.S. Census Bureau, and the WHO. Keyword searches were as follows: CASEL framework, distance learning, remote classes, remote learning, students, education, COVID-19 pandemic, disaster, social-emotional learning, trauma, child development, diversity, disadvantaged, and teaching.

Table 1

Types of References

Reference Types	Total
Peer-reviewed articles	28
Books	5
Internet sources	17

Difference Between Face-to-Face Learning and Remote Learning

Remote learning and face-to-face learning are two different educational instructional methods. Remote learning occurs outside of the typical classroom environment and requires learners to access educational materials using digital platforms. Information is relayed through technology such as discussion boards, video conferencing, and online assessments. Remote learning can occur synchronously in real-time or asynchronously with self-paced learning activities that take place independent of the teacher. Remote learning is flexible and convenient, allowing learning to occur anywhere and at any time. Individuals can also learn at their own pace and schedule. Online learning platforms strive to provide virtually interactive elements, such as discussion forums, virtually interactive classrooms, video conferencing, and instant messaging. Simulations or virtual reality can be used during remote learning to replicate some aspects of hands-on learning and give a feeling of the tactile experience. Remote learning requires an environment conducive to learning and self-discipline to stick to a regular routine and remove

any possible distractions as well as effective time-management skills. Online learning platforms leverage advanced communication tools to interact and communicate regularly with remote teams and remove any sense of physical distance separating them by removing any geographical or time constraints. To make the most of remote learning, learners must be digitally literate. Learners must be familiar with the online learning and communication tools and platforms that are required for use during remote learning (Souza et al., 2020).

Face-to-face learning requires learners to be physically present in a specific location where they can interact directly with instructors and peers. Face-to-face learning typically has fixed schedules and requires learners be present at specific times and locations. Face-to-face learning offers higher levels of human interaction and immediate feedback. Learners have the opportunity to engage in discussions, ask questions, and receive real-time responses from instructions and peers. Face-to-face learning also offers the advantage of hands-on experience. Learners can practice skills using physical materials under the guidance and supervision of instructors. Face-to-face learning also provides a dedicated learning environment away from the distractions of daily life. Being physically present in the classroom helps learners stay focused and engaged. Face-to-face learning allows learners to build personal connections and relationships with instructors and peers by providing opportunities to network and collaborate. Finally, learning in a physical environment does not require many technical skills. The majority of tasks during face-to-face learning require learners to listen to lectures and take notes (Souza et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 outbreak severely altered society and how education was delivered (from face-to-face to remote), which put a strain on families, teachers, and students' mental health. In most cases, children were subject to remote learning for extended periods of time. According to

the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 93% of school-aged children experienced some form of remote learning during the COVID-19 outbreak (Lassi, 2022).

Remote Learning and the Impact on Teachers

Not only were parents forced into teacher roles with little to no background and training, but the same holds true for primary and secondary school educators. Remote learning is not a new concept. Prior to COVID-19, remote learning was an instructional method used with students in primary and secondary schools who had chronic illnesses or major motor impairments that prevented them from attending school in-person. Students and educators in higher education have also been utilizing remote learning as an effective educational model prior to COVID-19. However, with remote learning in higher education, students are supported by professors and tutors who have been previously trained in remote learning methods. In addition, standardized pedagogical material and specific learning platforms that have been proven to be effective in distance learning environments are also utilized (Kolak et al., 2021; Ozer et al., 2020; Souza et al., 2020).

The remote learning that primary and secondary teachers experienced during the COVID-19 school shut downs is referred to as Emergency Remote Education or Emergency Remote Teaching, which is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. The effectiveness of distance education courses depends on Internet access, appropriate technological devices, and skilled and trained instructors who deliver course content to students. The uncertainty and the unknown surrounding the Coronavirus forced schools to shut down abruptly and without warning, which left little time for schools and educators to prepare for this structural change in learning (Kolak et al., 2021; Ozer et al., 2020; Souza et al., 2020). Schools and educators were left scrambling to get remote learning up and

running in a short amount of time without the proper training, technology, and access to the Internet, especially in impoverished, urban and rural areas (Souza et al., 2020). Data from past research studies further confirmed that teachers experienced difficulties creating, maintaining, and developing distance learning and teachers and students could not demonstrate the level of technology usage expected of them. Overall, the digital competence and skills needed in the pandemic process could not be obtained (Akcil & Bastas, 2020).

Remote Learning and the Impact on Parents of K-12 Students

Remote learning forced parents into becoming proxy educators. Parents took on advanced educational roles, monitored their child's learning behavior, helped with studies, and provided emotional and other psychological assistance. Younger children required more parental attention with instruction and emotional well-being compared to older children who have the ability to work more independently (Kolak et al., 2021; Lassi, 2022). Research indicates that the ability for students to work independently and take full responsibility for education does not happen until a student is in college, which explains why remote learning was a particular challenge for primary and secondary school students (Kolak et al., 2021).

Parents experienced increased stress, anxiety, depression, and heightened levels of unhealthy exhaustion having to balance the role of teacher along with their own personal struggles with work and home life (Lassi, 2022; Ozer et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2023). Research indicates that disasters disrupt the home environment by increasing frustration, stress, and violence (Berger et al., 2018; Lassi 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic was similar in that it disrupted family life. To mitigate the spread of the virus, precautionary measures, such as stay-at-home orders and business closures, forced some families to become unemployed or work from home, which put additional stress on the family. Some families were also trying to handle the

stress of finding childcare for their children who are typically at school during the workday. During the remote learning time period, parents also experienced increased mental stress because their children were struggling with adapting to this new learning arrangement (Lassi, 2022).

Recent studies have shown that the difficulties parents were experiencing facing the educational challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic transferred to their children. Children easily pick up on the emotional cues of others and adjust their behaviors accordingly. As a result, children experienced heightened levels of anxiety and stress which impacted their ability to learn (Lassi, 2022; Ye et al., 2023). Younger children and children from low-income homes were most impaired by mental health issues during the remote learning period (Lassi, 2022).

Remote Learning and the Impact on Students

Similar to parents and teachers, students experienced an unprecedented upheaval of their educational structure and routine and were not adequately prepared for an online learning experience (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021). This includes access to the Internet, access to technology devices, the digital literacy skills to communicate and use technological devices successfully in an online learning environment, and adequate home learning environments (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; Yan et al., 2021). Instead, students were forced overnight to adjust the best they could to online learning and to navigate online learning skills while lacking prior online learning experience (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; Yan et al., 2021). The data indicates that less than 10% of the K-12 student population worldwide had prior experience with a remote learning format (Yan et al., 2021).

Young children are especially vulnerable and are prone to the impact of remote learning during the pandemic because they have yet to develop self-regulating learning abilities and

coping skills. In addition, young children's learning process is associated with cognition, motivation, and socio-emotional factors. Therefore, remote learning can be particularly troublesome for students who have attention difficulties, boredom, technical problems, a lack of community, low motivation, and poor academic performance (Ye et al., 2023). Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (1936) confirms the difficulty young children may experience learning online due to their development stages. According to Piaget's theory, young children, from infancy to age 11, have difficulties understanding abstract and cognitive concepts. It is not until children reach 12 years of age and are in their final stage (formal operational) of cognitive development that they have the ability to think abstractly and understand the concept of abstract ideas. In face-to-face learning, teachers provide constant guidance and help explain these difficult concepts to students. In remote learning environments, this level of guidance is difficult to provide, so children are left to face learning obstacles by themselves. In addition, lower primary students lack the metacognitive skills to use various online learning functions, maintain engagement in synchronous online learning, develop and execute self-regulated lesson plans, and engage in meaningful peer interactions during online learning (Yan et al., 2021).

Regardless if remote learning was planned or due to an emergency situation, replacing face-to-face learning with remote learning using digital technologies is not the same, even though there are methodological similarities (Souza et. al., 2020). For example, teachers relied heavily on online platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet during remote learning to communicate and hold classroom discussions. Using online platforms creates communication barriers such as "virtual etiquette" or knowing when to talk. It is already challenging for teachers to get the introverts in the classroom talking when teaching in person, but now technology adds another layer to the puzzle. Students need personal support, scaffolding, and reassurance from

teachers that technology does not provide. Technology is a tool, not a teacher (Souza et al., 2020).

Schools not only provide educational activities, but they also provide social environments where students are together with their peers and teachers. Students behave based on their daily routine in the school environment and their social development is also supported in addition to their academic development. During the COVID-19 pandemic, students were forced to social distance and stay at home away from their peers, teachers, and school routines. For the first time in many of these students' lives, students experienced the limitations of staying entirely at home. These conditions have negative consequences for students' social-emotional development (Ozer et al., 2020). Remote learning leads to reduced social interactions. Data from recent research studies indicates that the isolated learning environment led to feelings of anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness for students (Ye et al., 2023).

In addition, motivation and academic performance are interrelated when it comes to learning at a distance. Demotivation is associated with factors such as lack of time, difficulty concentrating at home, and psychological problems and disorders (Souza et al., 2020). A recent research study conducted after remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic with higher-education students in Brazil investigated the expectations that students had with distance learning and the technological conditions required for accomplishing school activities remotely. The results of the study indicate that students had interest in maintaining their studies remotely, but required access to technology and the appropriate technological conditions to actually accomplish the tasks when learning online. The research highlights that those students in need of psychological assistance demonstrated more difficulty, less interest, and fewer technological conditions to conduct remote studies. Internet access, socio-economic circumstances,

demotivation, and influence of the home environment were the main factors for the remote studies' continuity and effectiveness. These factors present worse conditions to conduct remote studies and negatively impact the motivation to learn (Souza et al., 2020). The social disruptions that the COVID-19 pandemic created put emotional distress on students and their families. Therefore, it can be suggested that students who were remote learning in other parts of the world during the COVID-19 pandemic may have experienced similar difficulties while distance learning (Souza et al., 2020).

Lessons from past pandemic events, such as the influenza H1N1 pandemic in 2009, highlight the risk factors and impact on mental health and suggest the necessity of psychological intervention (Souza et al., 2020). For example, a research study conducted in China with individuals who contracted mild and severe cases of the H1N1 virus explored the impact of psychological health on those who had severe cases of the H1N1 virus. The study found that the psychological health of individuals with mild cases of the H1N1 virus was better than that of individuals with severe cases and that good psychological health was a protective factor for developing a severe case of the H1N1 virus. Overall, psychological health played an important role in the progression and outcome of the H1N1 virus (Fang et al., 2012).

Importance of Social-Emotional Learning

Social interaction is an essential skill that starts to emerge at a young age and is highly required in many daily life settings (Ip et al., 2017). Social-emotional learning is the process that children go through to acquire and learn appropriate social interaction skills as well as learn how to effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to develop healthy identities, understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions both at

home and at school (CASEL, 2022; Ohio Department of Education 2021c). In addition, children learn and are able to practice essential social skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-management. When students learn to notice and name their needs and emotions, they become aware of their emotions and can make wise and healthy choices about what they think, say, and do These social skills are an essential part of a child's skillset for future success so that they are able to successfully manage themselves and their relationships with others in a positive way (Ohio Department of Education, 2021c).

Adolescence is a sensitive period for brain maturation and behavioral and affective development. As adolescents become independent of their parents and make important choices regarding education and work, their social-emotional and cognitive development is challenged. To cope with the developmental tasks and challenges that are associated with this life stage, young people need to develop advanced and complex cognitive and social-emotional skills (Sande et al., 2019). Schools play a central role in supporting young people's social-emotional development, especially during the critical adolescent years. Schools should partner with families to reinforce social-emotional learning and offer students the opportunity to practice social-emotional skills (CASEL, 2022).

Schools are a natural setting to teach and learn not only cognitive but also social-emotional skills (Sande et al., 2019). All parts of the school, from the classroom to the hallway to the playground, offer students the opportunity to learn, practice, and reinforce social-emotional skills (CASEL, 2022). A safe and supportive school climate is an important condition for reinforcing students' social-emotional development. To improve young people's social-emotional health, many universal school-based programs focusing on SEL have been developed in the last decade. Recent reviews and meta-analyses have shown that such programs produce

positive effects on social-emotional health outcomes. Studies have shown significant positive effects on social-emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, academic achievement, mental health, and conduct problems (Sande et al., 2019).

Confirming the importance of SEL and equipping students with the necessary social-emotional skills for future success, the ODE launched its strategic plan, Each Child, Our Future, in 2017. This plan seeks to ensure that each child is challenged to discover and learn, prepared to pursue a fulfilling post-high school plan, and empowered to become resilient lifelong learners who contribute to society. The plan consists of one goal, three core principles, four learning domains and ten priority strategies that work together to support the whole child and enable the state-level vision and goal. One of the four learning domains is social-emotional learning. Within the social-emotional learning domain, the ODE lists self-awareness and management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as the key SEL skills that educators should focus on with students (Ohio Department of Education, 2021c). These skills are seen as essential to young people's positive development and social-emotional health (Sande et al., 2019). Ohio's strategic plan for education calls for a whole child approach that goes beyond academics to ensure students are healthy, supported, engaged, challenged, and safe. Educating the whole child means approaching teaching and learning with the understanding that the basic human needs of health, safety and support must be met first (Ohio Department of Education, 2021c).

Impact of Disasters, Plagues, Pandemics, and Epidemics on Social-Emotional Development

There have been other research studies done on the impact of other disasters on student learning and social-emotional development such as wildfires, mine fires, hurricanes, and earthquakes. Disasters are defined as events causing significant disruption to a community.

Disasters are so catastrophic and overwhelming that they go beyond an individual's ability to cope (Berger et al., 2018; Markstrom & Charley, 2003). These disasters are similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the stability and consistency of everyday life (Berger et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016). For example, the forced school closures in March 2020 caused a disruption in school routines and education. Teachers had to teach students remotely from home when they normally taught students in-person in a school environment. Teachers' workloads also increased because they lacked the resources and training on how to approach remote learning and continue educating students from home (Berger et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016).

Data from past research studies indicates that disasters, pandemics, plagues, and epidemics have a profound effect on student achievement and social-emotional development and interrupt educational opportunities for students, especially for students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds (Berger et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Nursey et al., 2019; Pitlik, 2020; Ozer et al., 2020; Souza, et al., 2020).

The Hazelwood Mine Fire Event

The Hazelwood mine fire is an example of a disaster that had a profound effect on the education, achievement, and social-emotional development of children. On February 9, 2014, burning embers from a nearby bushfire near a coal mine in a town called Morwell, Victoria in Australia forced local businesses, schools, and other community services to shut down or relocate for a duration of 45 days. The fire covered the town of Morwell and surrounding neighborhoods in ashes and smoke. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) deemed that the area was unsafe and a health hazard due to the high levels of carbon monoxide and other particulate matter in the air. The duration and uncertain health implications of this event along

with the high level of disability and educational disadvantage of the people of Mowell created both short and long term physical and psychological implications for the individuals involved. Research indicates that individuals from educationally disadvantaged communities are often the most heavily impacted and vulnerable to the short and long-term consequences of disasters. This can be attributed to the number of educationally disadvantaged individuals living in high-risk areas for disasters, their lack of access to economic resources and information, and their higher prevalence of chronic physical and mental health conditions. Children living in educationally disadvantaged communities are at an even greater risk for post-traumatic stress and other adverse outcomes. Exposure to traumatic events in childhood can further exacerbate educational disadvantage and social exclusion and put children at risk for developing psychiatric illness in adulthood (Berger et al., 2018).

This event had a profound impact on student well-being. It was reported that there was an increase in the physical and mental health vulnerabilities of the students of Mowell and an increase in frustration, stress, and violence in the students' homes. Students' sense of security was impacted when the school was relocated, and the school was forced to merge the junior and senior campuses together at the relocation site. Younger students were mixed with older students and the older students influenced the younger students in negative ways. The students' routine drastically changed both at home and at school. Some students find security in the routine of things and the students' routine was obviously disrupted. Not only did the students have to go somewhere else for school, but they also had to live somewhere else. This event added stress to the family environment (Berger et al., 2018).

Not only did this event have an impact on students' well-being, but it also had an impact on the education of the children involved. When the disaster forced schools to shut down and

relocate, the people of Mowell reported that the relocation to a site away from the event impacted students' well-being and learning in several ways including reduced quality of teaching, poor student engagement, increased student anxiety and behavioral issues, and shortening of the school day due to increased amount of time that it took for busses to transport students to the relocation site. The teachers reported that during this event the disruption to the curriculum was quite significant and that not a lot of learning occurred during that time. The disruption to learning can be attributed to reduced access to resources and technology, poorly structured classrooms, and increased classroom distractions. During this time, some students disappeared from school altogether. Overall, the teachers reported that the students did not get the quality of education that they would have received had they been able to remain in the original school location. The people of Mowell discussed closing the school down altogether until it was safe to return to school, but it was deemed that doing so would be too detrimental to the students' education due to the vulnerability of the children who attended the school. When asked about the decision to relocate instead of shut the school down completely, one of the staff members who was interviewed from the school in Mowell stated that "it was either that or shut the school down for a whole month and a half and then lose kids literally, they don't come back sometimes or it takes another three months to find them all and reengage them" (Berger et al., 2018).

Contributions to Learning Loss

There are many factors that contribute to learning loss with distance education. Factors such as support at home, materials/resources available, motivation, technology, education and digital literacy levels of parents and students, experience with distance learning, socio-economic status, geographical location (urban, suburban, rural), number of people in the household,

technology skills and study habits, and psychological state put students at high-risk and at an educational disadvantage, which ultimately affects their success and academic achievement (Berger et al., 2018; Caldwell, 2020; Sabates et al., 2021; Souza et al., 2020; Ozer et al., 2020). For example, if children do not have parents available to ask for help when needed because the parents are working, they may struggle with completing assignments if they do not understand. If there are many family members who live in the household, students may not have a quiet place to study. If students live in rural areas or in economically-disadvantaged, urban areas, they may lack access to the Internet to complete assignments online. If parents lack digital skills or have limited education, they may feel overwhelmed on how to instruct students. Many families faced economic issues and a change in work conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, including loss of income and unemployment with workplaces shutting down. Families were also dealing with an increase in responsibility for educating their child, their own health issues, and possibly loss of life due to COVID-19. These work and home stressors affect students, particularly when parents are stressed out. Due to these work and home stressors, parents may feel inadequate to help support their student's learning at home (Caldwell, 2020; Ozer et al., 2020; Sabates & Sterns, 2021; Souza et al., 2020).

These factors are intensified with children who are most vulnerable such as homeless students, those with special needs, immigrants, and English Language Learners (Ozer et al., 2020). For example, if a child is legally blind and requires Braille for literacy assignments, this may be difficult to access with an online curriculum at home. If a child is homeless, they may not have access to Internet and a computer, especially in countries where libraries were forced to close as well as schools because of the pandemic.

Overall, when students are in school, they have relatively similar opportunities to achieve. When students are out of school, they are dependent on external factors and increased dependency on home possessions, parental involvement, space, time, and resources (Ozer et al., 2020). For example, students that have the required equipment, high level of digital literacy, a quiet place to study, academic support from their family, and intellectual resources at home, perform well. Students that are faced with parents who have economic issues, no area to study, and no parent support, are at an educational disadvantage.

Research studies have compared the learning loss that happens with students during holiday breaks and natural disasters that force school closure such as earthquakes (Sabates & Sterns, 2020). Data from these past research studies indicate that distance learning creates more learning loss for students than the learning loss that happens during summer break, especially for students who are already educationally disadvantaged (Ozer et al., 2020; Souza et al., 2020). Today's third grader is losing as much as 1.5 years or more of learning by the time they reach tenth grade (Kaffenberger, 2021). Students experience even greater learning loss when they return to school because the curriculum does not adjust to their current learning level (Sabates & Stern, 2020). The short-term learning losses continue to accumulate after students return to school and turn into even greater and permanent learning losses because students fall behind and never catch up (Kaffenberger, 2021). In other words, teachers continue to teach the grade-level content and do not account for the learning loss that has occurred while students were distance learning. Without mitigation, students will lose more than one year of learning in a three-month time frame (Kaffenberger, 2021).

Geographical Location

In the early 20th century, a government-sponsored corporation called the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) created residential security maps of major American cities. The HOLC utilized four color-coded classifications for surveyed neighborhoods: best (green), desirable (blue), definitely declining (yellow), and hazardous (red) (Mitchell, 2018). The racial and ethnic diversity of the residents in a neighborhood was a primary criterion for defining a neighborhood's risk. Neighborhoods that were more racially and ethnically diverse were considered the riskiest (McGhee, 2021). Loan officers, appraisers, and real estate professionals used these maps to evaluate mortgage lending risk. Neighborhoods considered hazardous were redlined by mortgage lending institutions, which deterred lenders from investing in this real estate (McGhee, 2021; Mitchell, 2018). The practice of redlining affected peoples' access to housing loans, which ultimately determined where people could live and what schools their children could attend. As a result, neighborhoods became racially and ethnically segregated, which impacted the quality of education individuals received.

Redlining policies contributed to inequitable opportunities for individuals to purchase homes in desirable neighborhoods, which ultimately contributed to neighborhood racial and ethnical segregation and inequitable educational opportunities. For example, neighborhoods that were identified as hazardous by the HOLC were 65% racially and ethnically diverse (McGhee, 2021). Neighborhoods deemed best or desirable were 90% upper-income and contained little racial or ethnic diversity (McGhee, 2021). For the individuals who lived in the hazardous areas, credit was too expensive or difficult to obtain because mortgage lenders did not want to invest in that type of real estate. Therefore, people from diverse backgrounds could not afford to rent or buy houses in desirable areas because they could not get a home loan, so they had to remain

where they were. Other families who were not as diverse could easily obtain and afford a home loan and could choose where they wanted to live (McGhee, 2021; Pearcy, 2020).

With school funding dependent on state and local taxes, including property taxes, the quality of education for children living in at risk areas was negatively impacted. For example, when the HOLC labeled neighborhoods as desirable and at risk, they impacted property values of homes in these areas. Redlining policies forced lenders to invest less in diverse neighborhoods, which contributed to low property values in at risk areas. In comparison, schools in desirable neighborhoods had higher property values because lenders wanted to invest in these areas. The higher the property value, the more taxes individuals pay, resulting in more resources for schools in desirable areas that can provide children with a higher quality of education (McGhee, 2021; Peyton, 2020).

Where a child has the opportunity to live affects the quality of education they receive (Chen et al., 2021). For example, children who live in desirable neighborhoods have access to schools with greater resources that can provide a higher quality of education. Children that live in less desirable neighborhoods with lower property values, attend schools that have less resources and therefore, their quality of education is negatively impacted (McGhee, 2021).

The individuals who implemented the redlining policies in the 1930's are gone and cannot be held accountable today, yet the effects of these policies still remain. For example, underperforming schools continue to be located in at risk areas redlined by HOCL policies, and schools that are located in low-income areas continue to receive less funding and resources for students.

Socio-economic Status and Racial/Ethnic Diversity

Individuals with a lower socio-economic status or from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds are at heightened risk for long-standing social-emotional impacts following a disaster. Poverty and racial/ethnic minority status are ongoing stressors that continue to put individuals at an educational disadvantage and these stressors are enhanced with additional trauma. Poverty is the single most debilitating mental and physical health factor affecting individuals of any racial/ethnic group, making those living in lower socio-economic areas more vulnerable to disaster events. Individuals from lower socio-economic status and diverse backgrounds are especially vulnerable to contaminating conditions that compromise health and well-being. Living in a lower socio-economic area means less access to resources and appropriate physical and mental health care to deal with the aftermath of disasters (Markstrom & Charley, 2003). While remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, access to appropriate technology equipment and the Internet were crucial. Individuals living in impoverished areas have less access to the technology required for distance learning, which can worsen the conditions to conduct remote studies (Souza et al., 2020).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Not only do disasters have an impact on academic achievement, but they also have a profound impact on student well-being and social-emotional development (Berger et al., 2018). For more than three decades, research examined how Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which can develop in children as a result of experiencing natural and human-made disasters, impacts child development and academic performance. The brain changes significantly when a child experiences a traumatic event, affecting the normal development of their cognitive, social, behavioral, physical, and emotional skills (Berger et al., 2018; Nursey et al., 2019). PTSD can

develop as a result of trauma and is a common diagnosis following a disaster in conjunction with other disorders such as anxiety and depression (Markstrom & Charley, 2003; Nursey et al., 2019). PTSD can cause attention, memory, and processing issues as well as issues with executive functioning skills such as planning and problem-solving, which can have an impact on student achievement. Students who experience a traumatic event and come from homes who are economically disadvantaged are at greater risk for delayed development of skills and developing PTSD (Nursey et al., 2019). For example, students experienced stressors, such as frustration and anxiety about the disruption of the normal school routine during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other disruptions include decreased attendance, poorly structured classrooms, increased distractions, and reduced access to resources and technology (Berger et al., 2018). All of these disruptions, along with the feelings of frustration and anxiety that students experienced, are forms of trauma and can affect students' well-being and social-emotional development, ultimately affecting student learning and achievement once students return to the classroom.

In some disaster events, people lose their lives. For a child, loss of a family member, while stressful and emotionally painful, is a normal life experience (Markstrom & Charley, 2003). However, when loss is compounded by exacerbating circumstances of a disaster, bereavement can become traumatic. Not only must individuals deal with the trauma, but they are also engaged in the grieving process (Markstrom & Charley, 2003). The COVID-19 pandemic was a disaster event where people lost their lives. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the total number of global deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic now exceeds 3.3 million (World Health Organization, 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, children may have experienced a close family member or someone they knew dying from the COVID-19 virus. Children may have had experience with someone they knew in the hospital, or someone being

sick from the virus. Children also may have been affected by the mere uncertainty that people can die and are dying around the globe from the virus. All of these feelings and experiences further contributed to the trauma that children experienced during the pandemic by creating additional anxiety and stress for students and can have an effect on students' social-emotional health (Tumen, 2020).

Strategies to Address Learning Loss

In order to address the challenges presented by remote learning, educators must first address students' well-being and social-emotional development and then academic achievement. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, an individual must first have their physiological needs met such as air, water, and food. Then, they must feel safe and loved in order to build their self-esteem and reach self-actualization, which is the desire to become the most they can be and achieve academically (Bolman & Deal, 2016). Ultimately, schools play a major role in improving these educational outcomes for students following a traumatic event (Berger et al., 2018). Understanding the impacts of a disaster, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is an important first step to intervention and responding to students' needs following a disaster event (Berger et al., 2018). Teachers should be aware of students' backgrounds to gain insight into how to respond to the disruption and the course of action to take. If teachers know this, then they can respond appropriately to the students' needs (Berger et al., 2018). For example, teachers must understand a student's sense of stability when their school routine was interrupted and they had to learn remotely. The student may have experienced anxiety about this interruption and even be dealing with anxiety about returning to school and how learning will look after learning from home for a period of time. Understanding students' backgrounds requires personal qualities such as proactive communication, relationship building, resilience, positivity, support, and calm and

wise leadership (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016). It also requires an increased staff awareness of the importance of monitoring student behavior and maintaining stable routines, school engagement, and looking for opportunities to increase students' emotional and behavioral self-regulatory skills (Berger et al., 2018).

After teachers address students' basic needs, such as safety, well-being, and their social-emotional needs, then they can begin to address students' academic needs. Teachers need to identify specific learning losses and remedial progress that address these learning needs and learners who are educationally disadvantaged must be prioritized (Ozer et al., 2020).

Summary

In conclusion, the literature review indicates that disasters, pandemics, plagues, and epidemics, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have a profound effect on students' social-emotional well-being and academic achievement, especially for those students who are educationally disadvantaged. The literature review discusses stressors such as frustration and anxiety that students experience when their normal school routine is disrupted. These stressors have a negative impact on students' social-emotional well-being. The research indicates how to begin to address the academic impact that disasters have on students by first addressing students' social-emotional needs.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter will explore the methodology of this study and will begin with a discussion of the methodological approach and research design. After a restatement of the research questions, the research setting and sample will be described. An explanation of the participant selection process, description of the sample group, and the process for collecting and analyzing the data will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with considerations for the trustworthiness of this study by discussing issues of ethics, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Research Design

To understand the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I chose the qualitative research method. I chose this method for this study because qualitative research is about understanding how and why something exists in the world and answers questions about things that cannot be measured in a numerical way (Patton, 2015). For this study, the feelings and experiences that educationally disadvantaged students had while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be measured numerically. Interviews were used to gain insight into students' experiences with remote learning. In qualitative research, to understand how something has affected a person, the researcher must ask questions to find out about that person's experiences and hear their stories (Patton, 2015). The interviews were transcribed and analyzed to look for patterns or themes in the students' responses to identify ways that remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the students' social-emotional development.

Students who are educationally disadvantaged were selected from SM Elementary School to participate in this qualitative case study. Students were considered educationally disadvantaged based on their diverse racial/ethnic background and eligibility for the free and reduced lunch program. According to the 2022-2023 Non-Public Data System (NPDS), which is a web-based data collection system that collects information about students in non-public school districts on the basis of race and ethnicity, free and reduced lunch eligibility, and students with disabilities, SM Elementary School has a population of 66 students who are both male and female in kindergarten through grade eight. Out of these 66 students, 29% (19 students) are from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Black, Asian, and Multiracial) and 39% (26 students) are eligible for the free and reduced school lunch program (Ohio Department of Education, 2014-2022).

Research Questions

The research questions that this qualitative study is seeking to answer are:

RQ 1: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School at the onset of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ 2: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School during remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ 3: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School after students returned to school from remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Setting

SM Elementary School is a private, parochial school located in the Northeastern Ohio region and is considered to be part of an urban school district. According to NPDS data, enrollment at SM Elementary School has dramatically decreased from 87 students (K-8) in the 2014-2015 school year to 66 students (K-8) for the 2022-2023 school year (Ohio Department of Education, 2014-2022). The decline in student population is consistent with the decline in the city population that the school resides in. In 2021, the city had a recorded population of 47,669 people and in 2015, the city had a population of 48,865 people (US Census Bureau, 2021). As the city population has declined over the last several years, so has SM Elementary School's student population.

Demographics

Over the last several years, the demographics of the student population at SM Elementary School have become increasingly diverse. In 2015, it was reported in the NPDS that the majority (79%) of SM Elementary School's student population classified themselves as White/Non-Hispanic and 21% of the student population came from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Black/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic, and Multiracial). In 2021, a quarter (25%) of the student population came from diverse racial and ethnical backgrounds and classified themselves as Black/Non-Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Multiracial. In 2022, 29% of the student population come from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Out of SM Elementary School's total population of 66 students, seven students classified themselves as Black/Non-Hispanic, two students classified themselves as Hispanic, and 10 students classified themselves as Multiracial (Ohio Department of Education, 2014-2022). The change in the demographics of the student population at SM Elementary School is consistent with the change in the demographics of the

U.S. population. Over the last several years, there has been rapid change and growth in the foreign-born U.S. population. The change in the demographics of the U.S. population has been reflected in school systems such as SM Elementary School (Apple, 2011; Mourino-Ruiz, 2017).

State Scholarships

There has also been an increase in the number of students at SM Elementary School who are eligible to receive state scholarships. The Ohio Department of Education Expansion Scholarship allows students to attend private school if their family's income is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines and the EDChoice Traditional scholarship allows students to attend private school if they reside in a failing school district and that district is on the designated failing school list. In 2022, it was reported in the NPDS that 41% (27 students) of SM Elementary School students were able to attend school on Ohio Department of Education EdChoice Scholarships based on income level and/or their residence in a failing school district (Ohio Department of Education, 2014-2022; Ohio Department of Education, 2023c). In 2014, it was reported in the NPDS that only 15 % (13 students) were eligible for the EDChoice Scholarship (Ohio Department of Education, 2014-2022). In July 2023, the Governor of Ohio signed a law to make every child in Ohio eligible for the EDChoice Scholarship (Ohio Department of Education, 2023c).

Free and Reduced Lunch

The percentage of students at SM Elementary School who are eligible to receive free and reduced lunch has also increased. It was reported in the NPDS that in 2015, 35% of students received free and reduced lunch. In 2022, the number of students that received free and reduced lunch increased to 39% (Ohio Department of Education, 2014-2022). The growth of families eligible for lunch assistance and state scholarships are reflected in the change in the city

dynamics that SM Elementary School is located in and the high percentage of households that meet poverty guidelines. SM Elementary School is in a city where manufacturing jobs have been replaced by small businesses that include coffee shops, art galleries, and diners. The median household income is 37,009 dollars, which is below the national average of 70,784 dollars. 24.4 percent of household incomes fall below the poverty line. Children under 18 make up 40 percent of the poverty (US Census Bureau, 2021).

Overall, SM Elementary's student population has become more diverse due to a decline in enrollment, an increase in diversity of the student population, an increase in students eligible for state scholarships, and an increase in the number of low-income students eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Sample

From SM Elementary School's total population of 66 students, criterion sampling, which is a form of purposeful sampling, was used to select 12 students that are considered educationally disadvantaged. For this study, the criteria used to define a student as educationally disadvantaged was their diverse racial and ethnic background and eligibility for the free and reduced school lunch program. All of the students who were selected to participate in this study met both criteria. These two criteria were selected based on the predominant characteristics of educational disadvantage of the overall student population at SM Elementary School. If some of the other criteria that put students at an educational disadvantage, such as identified disabilities, homelessness, neglect, or delinquency, were selected I would not have enough students to draw from for a sufficient sample size. Participants in this sample classify themselves as Hispanic, Black, or Bi-racial. The sample was composed of both male and female students (five females and seven males). I chose a heterogenous sample to capture multiple perspectives on the

experiences that students had with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Patton, 2015). Remote learning may have impacted male and female students differently. Students ranged in age from nine to 14 and were from the fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth grades. One student was selected from the fourth grade, three students were selected from the fifth grade, four students were selected from the sixth grade, and four students were selected from the eighth grade. No participants from the seventh grade were selected for this sample because none of the students in this grade met the defined criteria. The purpose of this qualitative single case study is to understand the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students at SM Elementary School in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, no participants were selected for this sample from kindergarten, first, second, or third grade because these students were not enrolled in school during the 2019-2023 time period so they did not experience remote learning.

In chapter five, Designing Qualitative Studies, of Michael Patton's book, Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, Patton (2015) describes two different types of sampling: random sampling and purposeful sampling. Patton (2015) explains that random sampling is primarily used in quantitative research and purposeful sampling is the preferred sampling strategy for qualitative research. In qualitative research, selecting participants on purpose rather than randomly can actually lend insight into the question that the research is trying to answer (Patton, 2015). The research question that this study seeks to answer is: What is the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Therefore, students who are educationally disadvantaged and who have had direct experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic were selected as a sample to be interviewed. Further, the use of

criterion sampling selects cases that meet a predetermined set of criteria which have particular importance to the study (Patton, 2015). For this study, students were selected based on their gender, diverse racial and ethnic background, eligibility for the free and reduced lunch program, and grade level. The intent of this study is to gain insight into the experiences that students had with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Insight into the students' experiences help gain an understanding of students' state of social-emotional development. Research indicates the impacts of a disaster is an important first step to intervention and responding to students' needs following a disaster event (Berger et al, 2018).

Sources of Data

Interviews can provide insight into the experiences that educationally disadvantaged students had while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and can lead to understanding the state of social-emotional development in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Patton, 2015). Therefore, for this qualitative case study, the primary source of data is in the form of semi-structured interviews. Demographic data of the students was also collected in the form of questionnaires.

Questionnaires

Demographic data about the participants in the study was collected through the use of a questionnaire on Google Forms (see Appendix A). Questions about the students' age, grade, and race/ethnicity were included. A link to complete the questionnaire was emailed to the 12 participants selected for the study to complete on their iPads. I followed up with the participants to ensure they had completed the questionnaire prior to conducting their interview. A total of 12 questionnaires (one from each participant) was collected.

Interviews

One-on-one, in-person interviews were conducted with the 12 participants. The Google Meets platform was only used as a tool for recording and transcribing each interview. I set up the Google Meets meeting to automatically record and transcribe in advance so that I could reference the interviews after they were conducted. A separate Google Meets meeting was created for each student. The link for each meeting was accessed on my personal computer. Recording and transcribing reduced personal bias and ensured that what the individuals said during the interview were exactly as they said it and not as I heard it. I also took notes on the participants' responses to the questions during the interview and made note of any non-verbal communication that happened during each interview, such as rolling eyes, lack of eye contact, and fidgeting. In addition, I wrote a personal reflection in a journal of how I felt before, during, and after each interview.

When analyzing the data, it was important to take into account both verbal and non-verbal communication cues because both tell the story of the experiences of the participants (Patton, 2015). Any non-verbal cues that were observed and noted during the interviews helped to explain the students' attitudes and feelings about remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The journal entries after the interviews helped me reflect on emerging findings and assisted me in identifying any themes and commonalities across interviews when I analyzed the data.

The interviews were semi-structured and the topics and issues that I addressed during the interviews were specified in advance using an outline (guide) (see Appendix B). The interview guide was divided into three sections (pre, during, post) and asked students to share their experiences with remote learning and COVID-19 before schools closed and instruction changed

to remote learning, during remote learning, and when students returned to school after remote learning. The topics for the interviews were as follows: (pre-remote learning) background, (during remote learning) distance learning, social-emotional, inequities, (post-remote learning) return to school, and closure. The background section focused on the students' initial feelings and reactions when they heard that schools were going to close due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that they would be forced to learn remotely. The distance learning section focused on the students' experiences with distance learning and how they felt learning from home. The social-emotional section focused on any general feelings or emotions the students experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The inequalities section focused on students' access to resources to complete remote learning and how access to these resources influenced their experiences with remote learning. The return to school section focused on how students felt when they were able to return to school after the forced school closures and the challenges surrounding returning to in-person learning. Finally, the closure section allowed students to share any other experiences with remote learning that they felt were pertinent to this study. The sequence and wording of the questions were determined during the interview.

All questions were open-ended to allow participants to share about their experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using this approach ensured each interview was organized and focused and reduced the chances of veering off topic. In addition, the semi-structured interview approach allowed participants to freely share their thoughts and feelings about remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Patton, 2015). I chose to use this approach and the number of participants to ensure that the research was manageable, yet purposeful. As Patton (2015) mentions in chapter two, Strategic Themes and Qualitative Inquiry, of his book, Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, qualitative research typically focuses

on relatively small samples to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth (Patton, 2015). Further, the number of interviews I chose was considered sufficient when I began to hear the same comments come up repeatedly during the interview process. At this point, I knew that I had reached data saturation. In qualitative research, data saturation is the point in the research process where enough data has been collected to draw necessary conclusions and any further data collection will not produce value-added insight (Patton, 2015).

All students had the opportunity to draw their responses to the interview questions at any time throughout the interview process. However, all of the participants verbalized their responses to the interview questions and none of them opted to use the drawing option. I was aware that some students (particularly younger students) may have difficulties verbalizing their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences with remote learning during COVID-19 due to their limited vocabularies. Other students may want to express more about their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and emotions with remote learning. Sometimes, children want to say more about an experience and describing the experience with words is not enough for them. Drawing is a natural and safe alternative for children to freely express themselves. For children, their drawings are detailed and reflect the world around them (Al-Sayyed, 2020). I planned to use the semi-structured interview guide when asking questions pertaining to the children's drawings to ensure consistency. I wanted to make sure that all participants were asked the same questions during the interview process.

Data Collection

Demographic data was collected in the form of charts and graphs using Google Forms. When I analyzed the data, the charts and graphs helped me to visually see the student population that was represented by the sample (age, grade, race/ethnicity). The Google Meets platform was

set up to automatically record the interviews and the interviews were saved on the computer so that I could reference the recordings later. Since the participants were under the age of 18, I created a parental consent form (see Appendix C) that their parents signed which allowed them to participate in this study. The consent form was signed by the parents of the 12 students selected to participate in this study and returned prior to conducting the interview. In addition, since all students who participated in this study are over seven years of age, the child must also give assent to participate in the study (see Appendix D). If a parent consents, a student can still refuse to participate in the study. However, if a student assents and the parent does not consent, the parent consent form will ultimately decide if a student participates because all the students are under the age of 18. Finally, I obtained written permission in the form of a letter to conduct the study with SM Elementary students and on school premises from the SM Elementary School principal prior to selecting students for the study and conducting interviews.

Participants were informed prior to starting the interview that the interview would be recorded and what they said would be transcribed. I included a section on the parental consent form where I informed parents and participants that students would be participating in interviews that asked them about their experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and that the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The Google Meets platform also informed the participants that the interview would be recorded and asked the participants to agree to recording before the interview began. At any point before or during the interview, the participant had the right to withdraw from the study and I informed the participants of this right prior to starting the interview. I scheduled and conducted in-person interviews during the school day with each student and the interviews were held in a private conference room. The conference room was free of distractions including noise and anything that might have been visually

distracting on the walls. Limiting distractions helped to ensure that students were focused on the interview and answering the interview questions and maximized the quality of the data collected. The interviews occurred in the staff conference room, which is different from a traditional classroom, to ensure that participants were comfortable and more relaxed during the interview process and to reduce the connotations surrounding how students are expected to behave in a classroom in front of their teacher. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

Since the data collection methods relied heavily on technology (Google Forms, Google Meets, Internet), technological issues were considered. If any technological issues arose, the questionnaire on Google Forms could be printed for students to complete or the students could write down the answers to the questions on paper. The interviews could be recorded on Google Meets using alternative methods, such as an iPad or cellular device, written down and transcribed manually, or rescheduled once technological issues were resolved.

Data Analysis

I used the analytical framework approach to describe the data and the content analysis approach to analyze the data. The analytical framework approach focuses on processes, issues, questions, and sensitizing concepts (Patton, 2015). I chose this approach because the issue that I was focused on was the state of students' social-emotional development in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. First, I used the analytical framework approach to describe the content of the interviews. Then, I used the content analysis approach to explain why the patterns and themes that emerge were important (Patton, 2015). I used inductive coding when analyzing the data for patterns and themes, so the codes were not known ahead of time (Patton, 2015). Rather, the codes emerged based on the recurring words that appeared across all of the interview responses and then these codes were transformed into the patterns and themes.

When several sources of data confirm patterns and themes, this helps to establish credibility and confirm theories (Patton, 2015). I listed the participants' names, the questions, and the participants' responses to the questions on a spreadsheet, read the responses, and circled recurring words that appeared across the interviews to identify commonalities. The participants' names were fictitious to maintain confidentiality.

Ethical Considerations

To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, the names of the participants were changed when coding and transcribing the interviews and when organizing the data collected on the spreadsheet. I was the only collaborator on the Google Form, so only I was able to view the demographic data collected. Access and completion of the form was limited to individuals with whom I shared the link. The transcriptions and recorded Google Meets interviews were stored on my personal computer, which was secured with a login and password. Research involving human subjects also required filing a Human Subjects Review form with Ashland University and the form was approved before conducting the research. My research, ethics, and compliance training also needed to be current because I was conducting a qualitative study with children. The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) provides training in the ethical treatment of human subjects while conducting research and a certificate is obtained after the training is complete. I completed the CITI training in September 2020. My CITI Conflicts of Interest training is valid through September 17, 2024 and my CITI Social and Behavioral Research training is valid through September 2, 2026 (see Appendix E). Written permission from parents to conduct this study at the school with students and a form requesting each student's written assent to participate in this study was

also collected. In addition, written permission from the SM Elementary School principal to conduct this study with students on school premises was obtained.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four criteria that should be applied to qualitative research to assess the integrity and rigor of the study. The four criteria include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Patton, 2015).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the researchers, if the reader believes the research to be correct, and if the methods that the researchers used are believed to be accurate. The major way that qualitative researchers seek to understand perceptions, feelings, and knowledge of people are through in-depth and intensive interviewing (Patton 2015). This study used interviewing as the primary method of data collection. All of the interview question were open-ended to allow participants to share freely their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. I conducted three pilot interviews with students that were not officially in the study that were in the same age range and grade band of the participants to ensure that there were no issues with the interview questions and that the questions had merit, were of high-quality, and were at the students' cognitive level. The interview was semi-structured, which kept participants on track, but also allowed the participants to speak freely on their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences. I minimized any potential bias in the interview question design by preparing an interview guide in advance that I used with all participants. The interview guide listed the topics, issues, and questions to be explored during the course of the interview and helped to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry were pursued with each person interviewed (Patton, 2015). Finally, I was

aware that sharing thoughts, feelings, and emotions about remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic could be a sensitive topic for some students. Establishing rapport with the participants and a comfortable and safe interview environment was crucial to fostering open and honest communication about the students' experiences with remote learning (Patton, 2015). I explained the expectations to each participant before starting the interview. Each participant was informed of the purpose of the interview, that everything that they said would remain confidential, that they had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time, and that I was there to be a listener, learner, and observer. As an outsider researcher, the students in this study did not know me. Being an outsider researcher helped with the objectiveness of the study because I did not have any connections to the school or relationships with the students. Students may have felt like they could be more honest and open with me since I was someone that was not familiar to them (Patton, 2015).

In this study, children were asked to recall their experiences, thoughts, and emotions with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic from three years ago. Some of the participants were in their first years of schooling when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. For example, the participants in this study that were in fourth grade were in kindergarten during remote learning. Even though students were young and this event happened several years ago, COVID-19 is considered a traumatic event for children because of how abruptly and significantly their school routine and structure changed. For children, the abrupt school closures turned their worlds upside down. Children were used to a routine and structure of going to school, socializing with friends, and interacting with teachers. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country, children were forced to stay-at-home and learn remotely due to the uncertainties surrounding the virus. When children are confronted with a traumatic event, they may not have the ability to cope with the

experience, but they do remember emotions, images, and situations that caused them to be upset. Children do not always understand fully what is happening, but they do feel differences and sense changes (Child Health and Development Institute, 2023). Based on past research of students' recollection of trauma, all of the topics and questions in the interview guide were focused on recalling how students felt and what they experienced before, during, and after remote learning.

In addition, Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development confirmed that the students that were interviewed theoretically were in the concrete operational and formal operational stages of cognitive development and had the mental capacity and capability to think logically about their experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and verbalize their experiences with an event. The participants in this study ranged from age nine to 14 and were either entering the later part of the concrete operational stage or were in their final stage of cognitive development (formal operational) (Yan et al., 2021).

The children in this study who ranged in age from nine to 11 (fourth, fifth, and sixth graders) were theoretically in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development and had the ability to think logically about concrete events (Yan et al., 2021). Theoretically speaking, remote learning was considered something that was concrete to them. For these participants, remote learning was not something that was abstract or hypothetical, which children at this stage do not have the cognitive capacity to think logically about. In the concrete operational stage, children's thinking is organized and they have the capacity to feel empathy. Since children in this stage are still a little egocentric in their thinking, the thoughts they shared are unique to their own experiences (Yan et al., 2021).

The children in this study who were 12, 13, and 14 years of age (sixth graders and eighth graders) were theoretically in the formal operational stage of cognitive development. The study participants that were considered to be in this final and most advanced stage of cognitive development theoretically had an increased ability to think logically about situations and apply reasoning to explain why an event may have occurred. They could think abstractly about ideas, hypothesize multiple solutions to problems, think scientifically, and systematically plan for the future (Yan et al., 2021). Due to the advanced nature of this stage of cognitive development, participants that were in this stage were developmentally ready to think more critically about their lived experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and offer deep insight into their thoughts, feelings, and emotions related to this event.

It is important to be aware that Piaget acknowledges that some children may go through the cognitive developmental stages at different ages. Some children may also show characteristics of more than one stage at a given time. However, Piaget suggests that cognitive development always follows this sequence of stages (Yan et al., 2021). For this study, it was assumed that the participants were "typical" and were in the stages of cognitive development that were suggested for their age range.

Dependability

Dependability refers to data collection and procedures performed in the study (Patton, 2015). In this study, purposeful sampling was used to select the 12 students to be interviewed on their experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These 12 students were selected based on the characteristics required for the sample (experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and eligible for the free and reduced lunch program). Purposeful sampling helps to reduce selection bias by ensuring

that the sample is representative of the population (Patton, 2015). However, utilizing the purposeful sampling technique introduces investigator bias because it is highly subjective. Purposeful sampling relies heavily on the researcher's judgement of what individuals are best suited to be selected for the sample. Often, the researcher selects participants based on who can provide the best information to answer the research question (Patton, 2015).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to how the data is checked and analyzed. This can be documented through a clear coding schema that identifies the codes and patterns identified in analyses (Patton, 2015). In this study, the analytical framework approach was used to describe the content of the interviews to the reader and then the content analysis was used to explain why the patterns or themes that emerge are important. The interviews were recorded and automatically transcribed using the Google Meets platform and then analyzed. Recording and transcribing reduces personal bias and ensures that what the individuals said during the interview is captured verbatim, reducing the potential for researcher interpretation and bias during this stage (Patton, 2015). Inductive coding was used when analyzing the interview responses, which means that the researchers did not go into the analysis with a predetermined set of codes or patterns. Rather, the codes and patterns emerged based on recurring words that came up in the interview responses. In addition to the interviews, the personal reflections written after the interviews and the notes on non-verbal cues were reviewed when analyzing the data. The personal reflections helped to confirm the patterns and themes that emerged from the interview responses and the notes on non-verbal cues were used to help explain the feelings, thoughts, emotions, and experiences that students had with remote learning. When several sources of data confirm patterns and themes, this helps to establish credibility and confirm theories (Patton, 2015). After analyzing all of the

data, I used member checking to review the preliminary results with all participants and their parents to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences. Since I interviewed children, I validated with their parents that what they shared about their experiences with remote learning were aligned with what their parents perceived as what actually happened when students were learning at home. Validating the results with the participants and their parents helped to enhance the trustworthiness of the study and the credibility of the results (Patton, 2015).

Transferability

Transferability refers to if the findings from the study could be applicable to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Patton, 2015). This study was limited to the perspectives and experiences of 12 students who were considered to be educationally disadvantaged in fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth grade from one private, parochial school in Northeastern Ohio. It is difficult to make generalizations of the entire population (K-12) affected by the COVID-19 school closures based on the limitations of this sample and the sample size. This study only provides a "snapshot" into the perceptions and experiences that 12 students had with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, all educators in all types of school settings can still benefit from this research and apply the results of this study to their own context. Insight into the experiences that students had with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic can help educators begin to understand the state of students' social-emotional development. Understanding the state of students' social-emotional development and their social-emotional needs is the first step to addressing the long-lasting effects that remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has caused.

Summary

This chapter described this study's qualitative research design, process, setting, sample, sources of data, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students at SM Elementary School in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the focus of this study was to hear from 12 students at SM Elementary School who had first-hand experience with the COVID-19 pandemic forced school closures and remote learning. The students' experiences led to insight and understanding of the state of students' social-emotional development.

CHAPTER IV

Research Findings

This chapter will explore the findings of this study and will begin with a review of the purpose of this study, methodological approach, research study design, and research questions. Then, the demographics of the participants selected as a sample for this study will be described. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of the themes that emerged after transcribing and analyzing the interview data.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study is to gain an understanding of the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students at SM Elementary School in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To gain an understanding, 12 students (five females and seven males) ranging in age from nine to 14 in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth grades from SM Elementary School who were considered educationally disadvantaged were interviewed about their experiences with remote learning. All students who participated in this study were from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Hispanic, Black, or Bi-racial) and eligible for the free and reduced school lunch program.

During the semi-structured interviews, students were asked open-ended questions about their experiences, feelings, thoughts, and emotions during three different time periods: (1) pre-remote learning, (2) during remote learning, and (3) post-remote learning. In the pre-remote learning section, students were asked open-ended questions about their initial feelings and reactions when they heard that schools were going to close due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that they would be forced to learn remotely. In the during remote learning section, students were asked questions about their experiences with remote learning, how they felt learning from home,

their access to resources to complete remote learning, how access to these resources influenced their experiences with remote learning, and their general feelings and emotions about the COVID-19 pandemic. In the post-remote learning section, students were asked questions about how they felt when they were able to return to school after the forced school closures, the challenges surrounding returning to in-person learning, and the challenges they are still experiencing because of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, the intent of the study is to gain insight into the experiences that students had with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic to help gain an understanding of the students' current state of social-emotional development. Understanding the students' state of social-emotional development and responding to their needs is the first step toward intervention following a traumatic disaster event (Berger et al., 2018).

Research Questions

The qualitative research method is the basis for this case study design. The primary source of data is in the form of interviews, which help gain insight into the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and emotions that educationally disadvantaged students had while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Insight into students' experiences leads to understanding the state of the students' social-emotional development in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The overall research question that this qualitative research study answers is: What is the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic? This general research question is broken down into three separate research questions that focus on

three different time periods of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The three specific research questions are as follows:

RQ 1: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School at the onset of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ 2: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School during remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ 3: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School after students returned to school from remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Study Participants

Purposeful, criterion sampling was used to select the twelve students (see Table 2) from SM Elementary School who were interviewed for this qualitative case study. Students ranged in age from nine to 14 and were from the fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth grades. There was one student that was nine years old, two students who were ten years old, two students who were 11 years old, three students who were 12 years old, and four students who were 14 years old. One student was in fourth grade, three students were in fifth grade, and four students were from sixth and eighth grades respectfully. All students who participated in the study were considered educationally disadvantaged based on two criteria: (1) diverse racial and ethnic background and (2) qualification for the free and reduced school lunch program. Two students identified themselves as Hispanic (16.7%), four students identified themselves as Bi-Racial (33.3%), and six students identified themselves as Black (50%). There were five female participants and seven

male participants. There were no participants selected to participate in this study from the seventh grade because none of the students from SM Elementary School's student population met the defined criteria. In addition, no participants were selected from the kindergarten, first, second, or third grade because these students were not yet enrolled in school when schools were forced to close in 2020 so they did not experience remote learning. All names are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

All of the students who participated in this study attended schools that utilized a "hybrid approach" to remote learning, where students were expected to complete assignments both online and on paper. However, the majority of assignments were expected to be completed online. Two students (James and Alex) were already attending an online public school called K-12 during the remote learning period. All students already had Internet access at home prior to remote learning and were assigned a laptop or Chromebook from their school that they took home to use during remote learning. All students used the Google Classroom and Zoom remote learning platforms while remote learning.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Grade	Race
Martin	Male	14	8th	Black
Nancy	Female	14	8th	Black
Wayne	Male	14	8th	Black
Jane	Female	14	8th	Bi-Racial
James	Male	9	4th	Hispanic
Alex	Male	12	6th	Hispanic

Tim	Male	12	6th	B-Racial
Lily	Female	11	6th	Black
Cassie	Female	12	6th	Black
Laura	Female	10	5th	Black
Mike	Male	10	5th	Bi-Racial
Adam	Male	11	5th	Bi-Racial

Emergent Themes

The interviews of the 12 participants were transcribed and analyzed to look for patterns or themes in the students' responses to identify ways that remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the students' social-emotional development. The analytical framework approach is used to describe the content of the interviews and the content analysis approach is used to explain why the patterns and themes that emerged are important. Inductive coding was used when analyzing the data for patterns and themes, so the codes were not known ahead of time (Patton, 2015). Rather, the codes emerged based on the recurring words that appeared across all of the interview responses. These codes were transformed into the patterns and themes. For example, when reviewing the responses to the question about how students felt when schools were shutting down, the words "happy" and "sad" were common words that appeared across all the students' responses. These words were transformed into the first theme of this research study: Students felt a wide range of emotions from "happy" to "sad" when they first heard the news that schools were shutting down. When reviewing the responses to the question regarding what students are still struggling with in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the common word that appeared across all the students' interview responses was

"math," which turned into theme six of this study: Students expressed a sense of struggling the most with understanding math concepts in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The spreadsheet was divided into three sections, which aligned with the three different research questions (pre, during, and post-remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic). Each of the participants' names, the questions, and the participants' responses to the interview questions in each of the three sections were listed on the spreadsheet. I read the participants' responses to each question and circled recurring words that appeared across all 12 interviews to identify commonalities. The data analysis generated six major themes:

Pre-remote learning:

- *Theme 1:* Students felt a wide range of emotions from "happy" to "sad" when they first heard the news that schools were shutting down. Martin said that he felt "excited to get out of school." Nancy said that she felt "happy because I did not have to leave the house" and Jane said that she felt "happy because I could stay at home and not wake up early." Other students reported feeling sad when they first learned that schools were shutting down because of the COVID-19 virus. Alex said that he was "sad because I have to leave my teachers and friends and I like my teachers." Lily also said that she felt "sad because I could not see my friends," and Laura said that she felt "sad because I love school and seeing my teachers and friends." Once students learned that they would have to learn from home and actually complete schoolwork, their feelings seemed to change from feelings of "excitement" and "happiness" to feelings of "anger." Nancy said that she felt "mad when I learned I had to do stuff at homem," and Tim said that he was "happy I got to stay at home until I found out I had to do work."

During remote learning:

- *Theme 2:* Students felt adequately equipped for remote learning with technological devices and resources such as the Internet and computers. In addition to technology, students reported that they had all of the textbooks, workbooks, and other supplies required for remote learning. However, technological issues impacted students' ability to complete remote learning successfully.
- *Theme 3:* Students reported other challenges associated with learning from home such as distractions, understanding the concept of remote learning, and lack of parental support, which put them at a disadvantage. Overall, nearly all students expressed a preference for in-person learning over remote learning.
- *Theme 4:* Students were able to vividly recall their thoughts, feelings, and emotions when they heard the words COVID-19 and pandemic. Several students recalled distinct memories and shared specific stories about their experiences with COVID-19. Mostly, students shared that they felt "sad" and "scared" about the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, Martin said that he felt "sad because he could not go places and had to stay home." Nancy said that she felt "scared because people were dying." Jane also said she felt "scared" because she "lost her dad to COVID. He had diabetes and then got COVID. I was scared it would happen to my mom because of her health." Alex said he felt "scared I was going to get COVID." Students also shared how COVID-19 and the forced lockdowns helped them to build positive relationships with their families and identified specific strategies for self-care if a pandemic like COVID-19 should occur again in the future.

Post-remote learning:

- *Theme 5:* Students were most excited to see their friends after remote learning. However, students still experienced challenges and hesitations about returning to school full-time.
- *Theme 6:* Students expressed a sense of struggling the most with understanding math concepts in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the subjects of reading, writing, and math appeared to be the content that was focused on the most during online learning and subjects such as social studies and science received the least attention. Specials such as physical education, music, and art were non-existent while students were home remote learning.

Research Question 1

The first research question focuses on the onset of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were asked questions surrounding their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences when they first heard that schools were closing and they had to stay at home and learn remotely. The questions the students were asked in this section include:

- What do you recall when you first heard schools had to shut down and you had to learn from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What grade were you in during this time?

Theme 1: Emotions Associated with School Closure and Remote Learning

When asked how students felt when they first learned schools had to close due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students felt a wide range of emotions from “happy” to “sad”. At first, students reported that they were “happy” and “excited” that schools were being forced to shut down. Alex said in his interview that he “liked the idea of staying at home and not having to

attend school." Martin, Nancy, Wayne, Jane, Tim, and Mike all stated in their interviews that they were "excited to get out of school and not leave their house." Jane said in her interview that she was looking forward to "not having to wake up early" and Alex stated that he looked forward to "staying at home doing nothing." Mike said in his interview that he was "looking forward to seeing his family and not worrying about his family like he did when he was at school."

Some students reported that they felt "sad" when they first heard the news of schools being forced to shut down. Alex, Lily, Cassie, and Laura all reported feelings of "sadness" in their interview responses due to a variety of reasons such as "not being able to see their teachers and friends, boredom from staying at home doing nothing, and loving school and their teachers." Lily said in her interview that she had "stuff planned with her friends for the future" and that she "felt sad because she and her friends would no longer get to carry out those plans." Lily recalled in her interview how she felt when she first received the news of her school shutting down. Lily stated that she remembered crying and immediately called her friends as soon as she got home. Her friends were unaware of the school closures at the time and were "in shock." Cassie also reported feeling "shocked" in her interview when she first learned schools were being forced to shut down and she had to learn from home. When I asked her how she felt when she first received this news, her eyes widened and she screamed out, "No!"

However, when the students learned that they would have to learn from home and actually complete schoolwork, their feelings seemed to change from feelings of "excitement" and "happiness" to feelings of "anger." When Nancy heard that she would have to complete schoolwork at home, she stated in her interview that she was "mad when I learned I had to learn stuff at home." Similarly, Tim stated in his interview that he was "happy" when he learned schools were forced to shut down "until I found out I had to work at home."

Research Question 2

The second research question focuses on the time when students were at home learning remotely *during* the COVID-19 pandemic, and students were asked questions about their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences learning from home, their access to resources to complete remote learning, and general feelings and emotions that students experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions the students were asked in this section include:

- Tell me about your experience with remote learning.
- What were the challenges with remote learning?
- What were the "good things" about remote learning?
- What part of your house were you in when you completed your remote learning assignments?
- How did you complete your assignments?
- What kinds of assignments did you have to complete?
- What did it feel like learning at home versus learning at school?
- How did you feel about COVID-19 and the pandemic in general?
- What resources did you use while remote learning?
- Were there any issues with any of the resources?

Theme 2: Technological Issues

Students felt adequately equipped for remote learning with technological devices and resources such as the Internet and computers. However, technological issues impacted students' ability to complete remote learning successfully. All of the students interviewed reported that they had Internet access at home prior to remote learning. The students reported that their schools did offer mobile hotspots for students who did not have Internet access. All of the

students also reported that their school equipped them with devices such as Chromebooks, laptops, and iPads so that they could learn remotely from home. In addition to technology, the students reported that they had to "empty their lockers" and take all of their textbooks, workbooks, and supplies home in anticipation of needing these items while learning from home.

The students who were interviewed reported that although they were equipped with all the technology resources they needed to learn remotely, there were issues with the technology that made it difficult to successfully meet the remote learning expectations. Specifically, the students reported issues with their computers, Zoom, and the Internet. The issues surrounding computers pertained specifically to computers not being adequately charged and breaking. Nancy stated in her interview that she would have to "stop and charge her computer." James said in his interview that he "dropped his computer and broke it" and was without a computer for a period of time while he was waiting for his computer to be fixed.

Martin, Nancy, Jane, and Lily all reported issues with the Internet in their interviews. All four of these students stated in their interviews that "the Internet cut out" which made it difficult to complete and turn in their assignments online and join the required Zoom meetings. Lily said in her interview that her "Internet crashed" and she was "late to my Zoom meeting because of Internet connection issues." Martin, Nancy, and Mike all reported issues with Zoom in their interviews. Martin stated that he had difficulties accessing Zoom to attend scheduled meetings because "the link and code to join the Zoom meeting did not work." Nancy said in her interview that Zoom was "poor quality because of the number of students who were accessing the Internet and joining Zoom all at once." Mike mentioned in his interview that he had issues with the mute button during Zoom calls. Mike said that the Zoom meetings were difficult because "I was on mute and could not hear and then I could not unmute to ask questions during the meeting."

Theme 3: Remote Learning Challenges

Students reported other challenges associated with learning from home, such as distractions, understanding the concept of remote learning, and lack of parental support, which put them at a disadvantage. For all of the students interviewed, the different people in their households, including siblings, were ordered to either work or learn from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For some students, all of the people that were home with them at the same time was a distraction to their learning. For example, Jane stated in her interview that "my three younger siblings were also at home learning, which was a distraction." Alex said in his interview that "all my brothers were learning at home too, so it was loud." Tim said, "it was loud, but [he] tried to tune it out."

All students mentioned that they had a dedicated space to work remotely and learn online such as the den, kitchen, bedroom, and living room. All of the students had their own dedicated work space such as a desk or table, where they would sit to complete assignments. However, some of these spaces were shared with siblings and other family members, which was distracting for students. As Mike stated in his interview, "I had two sisters at home and adults. I had to hide under my bed or in my closet when I was on Zoom calls so it was quiet." When asked about issues with the home learning environment, Martin said, "it was as quiet as it could be I guess." Nancy said in her interview that it was "loud in the den with my brothers and dogs."

Other students mentioned in their interviews that they struggled with the concept of remote learning. At school, students had the opportunity to raise their hands and ask their teachers questions if they did not understand something. In a virtual environment, students did not have the option for an immediate response from their teacher if they did not understand something, which presented a particular challenge for students. As Laura stated in her interview,

“I couldn’t talk to teachers. I had to figure things out myself.” Alex said in his interview that if he had questions when completing assignments, he had to email the teacher, but “email takes teachers too long to respond.”

Students with younger siblings also learning remotely in the household reported that their younger siblings required more support from their parents to complete online learning assignments, which took time away from them if they also required help. Lily said in her interview that her “mom had to help her younger brother and could not help her.” Similarly, Laura said in her interview that “learning from home was hard because I did not know some answers to some questions and I didn’t have help. My mom, God dad, and God mom were little help because my sister was also at home learning.” Some parents struggled with balancing supporting multiple children at home learning. As Cassie mentioned in her interview, “it was hard because my brother and I were both confused at the same time and my mom was trying to help us both.”

Overall, nearly all students expressed a preference for in-person learning over remote learning. Students shared that remote learning was “different, complicated, and long.” When asked questions regarding the challenges associated with remote learning, Adam said in his interview that remote learning was “hard because you had to stare at a screen for nine hours.” The difficulties surrounding remote learning were reflected in the grades the students’ received during the time that they were learning online. Jane said in her interview that she “did not get good grades” during the time she was learning at home and she mentioned that she was “worried about passing” because the teacher “skipped ahead in content” and she “did not understand.”

Theme 4: Memories and Stories Associated with COVID-19

In the interviews, students were able to vividly recall their thoughts, feelings, and emotions when they heard the words *COVID-19* and *pandemic*. Mostly, students shared that they felt "sad" and "scared" about the COVID-19 pandemic. Martin shared in his interview that he felt "sad" because "I had to stay home and not go places." Nancy also shared in her interview that she "felt sad because of social distancing and I could not see my friends." Alex also "felt sad because I had to stay at home when I was used to going out and now, I have to stay at home and do nothing." Lily shared in her interview that she could not see her grandparents due to the stay-at-home orders and said she "felt sad I could not see my grandparents and that was hard."

Nancy said she felt "scared because people were dying." Alex said in his interview that he was "scared because I thought I was going to get COVID." A student in particular lost her father due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Jane shared in her interview that "I lost my dad to COVID-19. He had diabetes and got COVID. After he died, I was scared it would happen to my mom too because of her health." Several students experienced their close family members falling ill to the COVID-19 virus and were sick themselves. James shared that "on Thanksgiving, everyone got sick. My mom had to stay in her room because she had COVID, so my dad had to cook the Thanksgiving meal. When he was done cooking, he got sick with COVID and so did I."

Alex shared in his interview that he went to great lengths to research the words *COVID-19* and *pandemic* when he first heard them because he was so "tense." Alex said, "I thought I might catch it. COVID? What does that mean? I felt lost at first. Like it was a made-up word, so I looked it up online."

Several students also shared the impact of COVID-19 and the forced lock downs on building relationships with their families. With precautionary measures, such as stay-at-home

orders and forced school closures, parents, siblings, and other family members were at home with these students. Jane shared in her interview that “my mom and me got closer in our relationship because my mom was home too.” Similarly, Alex shared in his interview that learning at home “felt good because I got to spend time with my family.” Cassie also mentioned in her interview that while forced to stay home, she was able to “spend time with my mom.”

Lily mentioned in her interview, several key strategies to help students get through feelings of loneliness if a pandemic should occur again in the future. She warns future students, “Don’t be alone. Be active. Draw, color, to get emotions out. Clean your room. Nap. Watch a movie. Spend time with family. Stay in contact with people.” Lily and Laura also alluded to the importance of “going outside” and “playing boardgames” as ways to keep busy and address feelings of isolation, sadness, and loneliness.

Research Question 3

The third research question focuses on students’ thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences when students learned schools were safe to re-open and students were able to go back to school *after* remote learning. Interview questions in this section also focus on the challenges and difficulties students are still experiencing after remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions that students were asked in this section include:

- How did you feel once you learned that remote learning was over and it was safe to return to school?
- What were some of the challenges with going back to school?
- What did you look forward to the most about going back to school?
- What challenges are you still dealing with today because of remote learning?

- Is there anything else about COVID-19, the pandemic, or remote learning that you feel is important for your teachers, principal, or me to know?

Theme 5: Emotions, Challenges, and Hesitations Surrounding the Return to School

When students were asked what they looked forward to the most about going back to school, the majority of students stated that they were most excited to see their friends after remote learning. Lily recalled in her interview the moment her teacher told her on Zoom that remote learning was over and that students were able to return to school. She said that she "squealed" and she and her friends "pretended to hold hands and jumped up and down virtually." Other things students looked forward to was getting back into the school routine, seeing their teachers, and sitting at their desks.

Despite the students' excitement, they still experienced challenges and hesitations about returning to school full-time. In their interviews, Martin and Wayne expressed that "people looked different" because they "had to wear masks." Alex mentioned in his interview that "it was weird being back at school after so long." James said that it was "noisy in class" and that he "missed being on the computer where [he] could mute everyone," adding "at school, the only way I could get people to be quiet would be to tape their mouths shut."

Theme 6: Students are Struggling to Understand Math Concepts

Students expressed a sense of struggling the most with understanding math concepts in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, students mentioned struggling with algebra, multiplication, division, solving equations, and subtraction. Alex explained why he thought he struggled with math concepts after returning to school from remote learning stating, "when schools shut down, we stopped in the middle of third grade with content and did not learn the rest. When schools re-opened, the teacher jumped right into fourth

grade without teaching us the rest of third grade. Now that I am in fifth grade, I do not know much." To help students learn the concepts they missed while learning online, Nancy suggested in her interview that teachers "teach slower and review instead of jumping right in."

Overall, the subjects of reading, writing, and math appeared to be the content that was focused on the most during online learning and subjects such as social studies and science received the least attention. Specials, such as physical education, music, and art were non-existent while students were home remote learning.

Summary

In this chapter, the key findings that emerged from the student interviews are identified and described as they relate to the three research questions which focus on the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences of students during three specific time periods of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These time periods include pre-remote learning, during remote learning, and post-remote learning. At the onset of remote learning, students felt a wide range of emotions from "happy" to "sad when they first heard that schools were shutting down. However, once students learned that they would have to learn from home and complete schoolwork, their feelings seemed to change to feelings of "anger." While students were remote learning at home, students felt adequately equipped with technological devices and other resources; however, technological issues impacted students' ability to complete remote learning successfully. Besides technological issues, students also experienced other challenges, such as distractions, understanding the concept of remote learning, and lack of parental support, which put them at a disadvantage. Overall, nearly all students expressed a preference for in-person learning over remote learning. Students were able to vividly recall their thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, and experiences when they heard the words "COVID-19" and "pandemic." Overall,

students felt “sad” and “scared” about the COVID-19 pandemic. Students also shared how COVID-19 and the forced lock downs impacted their personal relationships with families and identified specific strategies for self-care if a pandemic like COVID-19 should happen again in the future. Finally, upon returning to school after remote learning, students were most excited to see their friends, but still experienced challenges and hesitations about returning to school full-time. To date, students are still struggling with understanding math concepts in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The next chapter presents the discussion, conclusion, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions for Future Research

This chapter provides an overview of the study's findings based on the three research questions that frame this study. It also includes a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and future recommendations to address students' social-emotional needs in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study is to gain an understanding of the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students at SM Elementary School in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior research indicates that distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound negative effect on the social-emotional health, achievement, academic performance, and school progress for students in elementary school through college, especially for students who are already educationally disadvantaged (Berger et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Nursey et al., 2019; Ozer et al., 2020; Pitlik, 2020; Souza et al., 2020). Since 21st-century educators were operating under unprecedented times and had never dealt with a pandemic as intense as COVID-19 before, research is lacking on the state of students' social-emotional development in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lasting effects that remote learning may have caused, especially for the most vulnerable students (Caldwell, 2020; Kaffenberger, 2020; Souza et al., 2020). Researchers, clinicians, and educators have become increasingly concerned about the impact of precautionary measures, such as forced school closures, lockdown restrictions, social distancing, stay-at-home orders, and remote learning, used during the

COVID-19 pandemic and their impact on children and adolescents' social-emotional health (Smith et al., 2020).

As a principal of a school that was directly impacted by the forced school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is part of my responsibility to ensure that students are achieving academically and to find ways to address the learning loss that occurred because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also part of my responsibility to support teachers in addressing the learning gaps in the classroom. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, Ohio's governor forced all schools to close and all students (K-12) to learn remotely. Therefore, the findings from this study are applicable to all types of school settings and educators in a variety of positions (administrators, teachers, support staff) can benefit from this research and apply the results of this study to their own context and situations.

It is important for educators to gain insight into the state of students' social-emotional development in order to understand students' social-emotional needs and, ultimately, close the achievement gap that distance learning during COVID-19 caused. Based on prior research, in order to begin to address the challenges presented by remote learning, educators must first address students' well-being and social-emotional development and then academic achievement (Ozer et al., 2020).

To gain insight into the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences that students had while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, 12 students, who are considered educationally disadvantaged from SM Elementary School, were interviewed about their lived experiences with remote learning during three different time periods (pre-remote-learning, during remote learning and post-remote learning).

This chapter provides an overview of the study's findings based on the three research questions. It also includes a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and future recommendations to address students' social-emotional needs in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discussion of the Findings

What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic? This was the overall research question that this study was seeking to answer. The data from this research study indicates that in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students are still struggling to overcome obstacles and barriers to their learning, specifically in the area of mathematics and understanding important math concepts. All of the factors of disadvantage, challenges, traumatic experiences, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences that students experienced while remote learning had a long-lasting impact on students' well-being, development of social-emotional skills, and social-emotional health and could be contributing factors to students' ability to learn and achieve in the classroom post-pandemic, especially for students who were already considered educationally disadvantaged.

Research Question 1 Discussion

RQ 1: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School at the onset of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

At the time when schools were first forced to shut down and learning had to go remote, students associated the school closures with the feelings, thoughts, and emotions of past experiences with short-term school closures due to inclement weather or unplanned events such

as gas leaks. Students lacked experience with situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic that forced schools to close for an extended period of time and forced students to learn remotely. The sudden upheaval of the students' school routine created feelings of uncertainty for students, which caused students to feel underlying emotions of frustration, anxiety, sadness, and hopelessness. When schools were first forced to shut down, students had no idea what school would look like for them moving forward or how learning would continue. For students, the underlying feelings they experienced at the onset of remote learning manifested themselves in the form of anger.

Research Question 2 Discussion

RQ 2: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School during remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

During remote learning, students experienced a variety of different challenges such as access to the Internet and technological devices, distractions in the home environment, difficulties understanding the concept of remote learning, and lack of parental support. In addition, students experienced various forms of trauma such as the loss of a parent due to COVID-19, fear of contracting the COVID-19 virus, and reduced social interactions due to COVID-19 precautionary measures such as social distancing and stay-at-home orders, creating additional feelings of anxiety and stress for students. All of these factors impacted students' well-being, social-emotional development, motivation, and academic achievement including the development of the essential social-emotional skill of self-management, which is the ability to practice self-motivation.

Research Question 3 Discussion

RQ 3: What was the state of social-emotional development of educationally disadvantaged students (K-8) at SM Elementary School after students returned to school from remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Schools in many states across the nation, including Ohio, are now experiencing the long-term consequences of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic on student achievement. Low state test scores and data from school state report cards indicate that students have yet to return to pre-pandemic achievement levels in the areas of reading and mathematics. Math achievement is of particular concern in the state of Ohio; while reading achievement has mostly returned to pre-pandemic levels, math has not made the same progress and continues to remain one to one and a half years behind (McClory, 2023).

Research indicates that the remote learning challenges, traumatic events that students experienced, and reduced social interactions created by remote learning and COVID-19 precautionary measures had consequences on student motivation and students' social-emotional health and development. Social interaction and peer relationships are especially crucial during adolescence when students are developing, learning, and practicing essential social-emotional skills. In addition, factors during remote learning such as changes to instructional strategies and teaching methods, parents' attitudes toward mathematics, and lack of parent-teacher communication contributed to a lack of mathematical skills and math achievement in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. All of these factors may help explain the math achievement gaps and the lag in returning to pre-pandemic math achievement scores that schools are currently experiencing across the nation because all of these challenges and forms of trauma that students experienced while remote learning continue to pose learning

challenges even though remote learning is over and students have returned back to the classroom.

Discussion of Themes

Six themes emerged from the interview data gathered from students at SM Elementary School:

(1) Students felt a wide range of emotions from “happy” to “sad” when they first heard the news that schools were shutting down. However, once students learned that they would have to learn from home and actually complete schoolwork, their feelings seemed to change from feelings of “excitement” and “happiness” to feelings of “anger.”

(2) Students felt adequately equipped for remote learning with technological devices and resources such as the Internet and computers. In addition to technology, students reported that they had all of the textbooks, workbooks, and other supplies that were required for remote learning. However, technological issues impacted students’ ability to complete remote learning successfully.

(3) Students reported other challenges associated with learning from home such as distractions, understanding the concept of remote learning, and lack of parental support, which put them at a disadvantage. Overall, nearly all students expressed a preference for in-person learning over remote learning.

(4) Students were able to vividly recall their thoughts, feelings, and emotions when they heard the word COVID-19 and pandemic. Several students recalled distinct memories and shared specific stories about their experiences with COVID-19. Mostly, students shared that they felt “sad” and “scared” about the COVID-19 pandemic. Students also shared how COVID-19 and the forced lockdowns helped them to build positive

relationships with their families and identified specific strategies for self-care if a pandemic like COVID-19 should occur again in the future.

(5) Students were most excited to see their friends after remote learning. However, students still experienced challenges and hesitations about returning to school full-time.

(6) Students expressed a sense of struggling the most with math concepts in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the subjects of reading, writing, and math appeared to be the content that was focused on the most during online learning and subjects such as social studies and science received the least attention. Specials, such as physical education, music, and art were non-existent while students were home remote learning.

Pre-Remote Learning

Theme 1: Students Experienced a Wide Range of Emotions Prior to the Implementation of Remote Learning

All of the students that were interviewed reported that they felt a wide range of emotions from “happy” to “sad” upon first learning the news that Ohio’s governer was forcing schools to close due to uncertainties surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Students reported that they felt “happy” because they were going to be able to stay at home and spend time with their families and “sad” that they would not be able to see their friends or teachers. The feelings that students first experienced can be associated with similar feelings that students have when they hear that school is closed for a “snow day” or another “unplanned event” such as inclement weather, power outages, and gas leaks. When students were first told that schools were shutting down and they would have to stay at home, students (and teachers) had no idea what remote learning was

actually going to look like or how it would be implemented due to the fact that schools had a day's notice that they were being forced to close and had little time to plan.

Once schools and teachers had time to make a plan for remote learning and the plan was implemented and underway, there was a change in how students felt about the unanticipated forced school closures. Students reported in the interviews that their feelings changed from ones of "happiness" and "sadness" to feelings of "anger." Students shared in the interviews that they felt "angry" when they learned that they would be expected to learn from home and complete schoolwork and that this time off of school would not be unstructured as they experienced in the past when schools were forced to close for other unplanned events.

Data from past research studies identifies anger as a secondary emotion, which is an emotion fueled by other emotions. For example, if someone is physically hurt, they may express that they are angry because this emotion is easier to express than physical pain. Since anger is an easier emotion to feel, it can distract someone from the feelings that they are actually experiencing (primary emotions). Therefore, individuals may express that they are "angry" when they are actually feeling emotions such as frustration, uncertainty, or intense feelings of sadness and hopelessness. Frustration is the most triggering of the primary emotions. Frustration is often felt when individuals feel helpless or out of control. Over time, an individual's feelings of frustration can build until that individual is in an angry state (New Hope Ranch, 2023).

Up until the point of the COVID-19 pandemic, students only experienced short-term (one to five days) school closures due to unplanned events. Students had no point of comparison to what they were experiencing when schools were forced to close long-term (six or more days). When schools first learned that the governor ordered that schools shut down and students learn remotely, there was uncertainty about how learning would continue and what learning would

look like for students. Similar to teachers, students in the 21st-century had never experienced a pandemic as intense as COVID-19 before. Feelings of frustration, uncertainty, sadness, loneliness, and helplessness could be attributed to the uncertainty students felt about the future of their school routine and learning. These feelings may have manifested themselves in the form of anger, which students reported feeling in their interview responses. Students first reported in their interview responses that they felt sad and lonely because they had to stay at home and could not see their friends and teachers. Then, students reported feeling angry once they found out that learning would be taking place at home. Students may have actually been feeling sad, lonely, helpless, frustrated, and uncertain about their futures, and they may have been expressing these underlying feelings in the form of anger.

During Remote Learning

Theme 2: Technological Issues Impacted Students' Ability to Complete Remote Learning Successfully

Overall, students felt adequately equipped for remote learning with technological devices and resources such as the Internet and computers. Students also felt that they had all of their textbooks, workbooks, and other supplies that were required for remote learning. However, technological issues impacted students' ability to complete remote learning successfully. Students reported in the interviews that they already had Internet services at home prior to remote learning, but experienced issues with their Internet connectivity. The issues that students experienced with the Internet impacted their ability to submit assignments online and join the required Zoom meetings. This caused students to miss important content and class instruction. In addition, some students also reported issues with their Chromebooks breaking. In these situations, students had to wait an extended amount of time (up to a week) for their

Chromebooks to be fixed or to receive a new Chromebook. Not having access to a computer for an extended amount of time caused these students to miss assignments and instruction.

Data from past research studies indicates that the effectiveness of distance education courses depends on Internet access and appropriate technological devices (Kolak et al., 2021; Ozer et al., 2020; Souza et al., 2020). Based on the interview responses from this study, students seem to be prepared with the resources needed to meet expectations and complete assignments in a virtual learning environment. Students also seemed motivated and were willing to complete the required tasks. For example, Jane and Adam both mentioned in their interviews that it was important to them that they "get good grades" while learning online. Nancy mentioned in her interview that she was "worried about passing because of skipped content."

Data from past research studies indicates that motivation and academic performance are interrelated when it comes to learning at a distance. Similar to the study conducted with higher-education students in Brazil on the expectations students had with distance learning and the technological conditions required for accomplishing school activities remotely, students at SM Elementary School had interest in maintaining their studies remotely, but experienced difficulties accessing technology and lacked the appropriate technological conditions to accomplish remote learning tasks. The study with students in Brazil found that Internet access was one of the main factors that influenced the continuity and effectiveness of remote learning and students' motivation to learn (Souza et al., 2020).

Self-management is one of the five key competencies identified as essential in promoting healthy social-emotional development in children. Self-management includes the ability to practice motivation (CASEL, 2022; Syeda et al., 2023). As the data in this study indicates, students were motivated to complete assignments during the remote learning period, but after

experiencing issues with technology that cultivated feelings of frustration and formed a barrier to learning, students' motivation could have been impacted. Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (1936) further confirms that young children's learning process is associated with cognition, motivation, and socio-emotional factors. Therefore, remote learning could be particularly troublesome for students who experienced technical problems. As a result, students may have experienced a lower level of motivation during the remote learning period (Yan et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2023).

The technological difficulties students experienced while remote learning may have impacted their development of the self-management skill. Not having strong self-management skills could be the reason why students experienced difficulty with learning and achievement after returning to the classroom from remote learning. When students show behavioral difficulties, it is not that they want to be difficult, but rather that they lack the skills to manage their emotions and feelings in that situation. It is up to the adults in their lives such as teachers to teach students the skills they are lacking so they are equipped to manage their feelings and emotions in future situations.

According to past research studies, student motivation was a major issue in education long before remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the leading problems for teaching is maintaining students' motivation for learning. After being forced to adapt to new learning environments and methods, students have now returned to the classroom and a sense of "normalcy" has been established. Teachers have picked up where they left off while failing to recognize that their students are struggling to adapt to a speed that they have not experienced in almost a year due to remote learning. Data from past research studies indicates that it has been difficult for students to get back into the routine and connect with what used to motivate them to

learn. In addition, students are struggling with sustaining their attention for longer periods of time (Yang, 2022). While remote learning, students experienced shortened periods of time where they were required to learn. Most students were not expected to learn online the entire school day and had the opportunity to take "breaks" during the online learning period. Students mentioned in their interviews that they had to attend school online "half of the day" or "one to two hours per day." Students said that remote learning was "flexible" and "Zoom lessons went faster than school lessons." Other students said that they "got done early" because they "worked fast." Once students completed the required assignments for the day, they had the rest of the day to themselves. Students mentioned in their interviews that they took "naps, spent time with family, or went outside" after completing online schooling.

Theme 3: Students Experienced Challenges Learning from Home

Students reported other challenges associated with learning from home, such as distractions, understanding the concept of remote learning, and lack of parental support, which put them at a disadvantage. Overall, nearly all students expressed a preference for in-person learning over remote learning. The challenges that students reported during the interviews align with the factors that past research studies have identified as contributors to learning loss with distance education. Data from past research studies indicates that these factors put students at high-risk and at an educational disadvantage, which ultimately affects their success and academic achievement once students return to school (Berger et al., 2018; Caldwell, 2020; Sabates et al., 2021; Souza et al., 2020; Ozer et al., 2020). In addition, past research studies indicate that in addition to access to the Internet, the influence of the home environment is another main factor impacting the continuity and effectiveness of remote studies and students' motivation to learn (Souza et al., 2020). Students in this study experienced a two-fold

disadvantage-- lack of access to the Internet and the influence of the home environment. The CASEL framework further confirms the importance of students having consistently safe, structured, supportive, positive, and predictable school and classroom environments. If students do not experience positive and prosocial interactions, they will not learn academic and social skills, and they will not be motivated to demonstrate them (CASEL, 2022). For students already operating under an educational disadvantage pre-pandemic, lack of access to technology, lack of parental support, and additional home stressors in a remote environment could be especially detrimental to their motivation to learn and achieve.

In the interviews, students reported that one of the challenges is that they did not understand the concept of remote learning. Data from past research indicates that students had little to no experience with remote learning prior to schools shutting down due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, therefore, were not adequately prepared for an online learning experience (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021). Students that participated in this study were also not "mentally" prepared to handle remote learning successfully. According to past research, young children have yet to develop self-regulating learning abilities and coping skills that are required for remote learning (Ye et al., 2023). Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (1936) further confirms the difficulties that students reported with understanding the concept of remote learning. Students in this study ranged in age from nine to 14. The oldest students that participated in this study were only 10 or 11 when remote learning took place, so none of the students that participated were in Piaget's formal operational stage. Only when students are in the formal operational stage (beginning at age 12) do they have the ability to think abstractly and understand the concept of abstract ideas. The participants in this study, as such, still required constant teacher support, guidance, reassure, and scaffolding that they were not able to receive in

the remote learning environment (Souza et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2021). The importance of constant teach support, guidance, and reassurance is supported in the students' interview responses. Students reported in the interviews that remote learning was challenging because their teacher was not there in "real-time" to support them with learning the content and answering their questions. Instead, the students reported that they had to teach themselves and attempt to figure out assignments that they did not understand on their own. If the students had questions, they reported that they had to email back and forth with their teachers and wait for responses, which was very time consuming.

Theme 4: Students Had Distinct and Specific Memories and Stories Surrounding the COVID-19 Pandemic

Students were able to vividly recall their thoughts, feelings, and emotions when they heard the word COVID-19 and pandemic. Several students recalled distinct memories and shared specific stories about their experiences with COVID-19. Specifically, one student lost a parent to COVID-19 and several students reported that they fell ill to the COVID-19 virus or that their family members fell ill from the virus. Other students reported that they felt "worried" that they would contract the COVID-19 virus or that their family members or people they knew would contract the virus. Mostly, students shared that they felt "sad" and "scared" about the COVID-19 pandemic due to the forced lock downs and social distancing precautionary measures that were enacted because of the uncertainties surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Students shared in the interviews that these measures caused them to feel alone because they had to stay at home and they could not see their friends or other family members that were not living in their households. Students also shared how the forced lockdowns and stay at home orders enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic helped them to build positive relationships with their families

and identified specific strategies for self-care if a pandemic like COVID-19 should occur again in the future.

Research indicates that all of the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences that students shared that they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic are forms of trauma that effect students' well-being, social-emotional development, and academic achievement. Experiencing traumatic events causes a person's brain to physically change, which affects the normal development of cognitive, social, behavioral, physical, and emotional skills (Berger et al., 2018; Nursey et al., 2019). Research indicates that students who experience traumatic events and are from economically disadvantaged homes are at greater risk for impact on social-emotional development and delayed development of social-emotional skills (Berger et al., 2018; Nursey et al., 2019). This is particularly concerning given that students who participated in this research study are primarily from economically disadvantaged homes.

The aftereffects of the trauma events students experienced during COVID-19 could present themselves once students return to the classroom and impact student learning and achievement. Past research indicates that PTSD, anxiety, and depression are common diagnoses following a disaster event (Markstrom & Charley, 2003; Nursey et al., 2019). Therefore, educators should be aware of and understand the experiences students had during the COVID-19 pandemic and watch for warning signs of PTSD, anxiety, and depression, which can develop as a result of the trauma. Specifically, PTSD can cause attention, memory, and processing issues as well as issues with executive functioning skills such as planning and problem-solving (Markstrom & Charley, 2003; Nursey et al., 2019).

Students specifically mentioned in the interviews that they felt "worried" that they were going to contract the virus or that people they knew were going to contract it. It was apparent in

the interviews that students were aware that people were dying because of COVID-19. One student was directly impacted by COVID-19 and lost their dad to the virus. Research indicates that when loss is compounded by exacerbating circumstances of a disaster, bereavement can become traumatic. Not only must individuals deal with the trauma, but they are also engaged in the grieving process (Markstrom & Charley, 2003). All of these feelings and experiences further contributed to the trauma that children experienced during the pandemic by creating additional anxiety and stress for students and can have an effect on students' social-emotional health (Tumen, 2020).

Post-Remote Learning

Theme 5: Students Were Most Excited to See Their Friends

In the interviews, students shared thay were most excited to see their friends after remote learning. For the first time in many of these students' lives, students experienced the limitations of staying entirely at home for an extended period of time. The uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 virus forced schools to shut down and students to learn remotely. Students were also forced to social distance and stay at home away from their peers and teachers. For students, these restrictions significantly disrupted their routine of school and impacted the ways that students typically interacted with their peers. Research indicates that social isolation and remote learning can change the ways that students develop key social skills such as collaboration, conversation, and emotional intelligence. Some social learning, such as emotional expression and regulation, collective problem-solving, and building social bonds, happen more effectively only when students are given the opportunity to socialize with their peers (Souza et al., 2020).

Overall, the conditions that students' experienced due to COVID-19 restrictions could have negative consequences for students' social-emotional development (Ozer et al., 2020). For

example, research indicates that remote learning leads to reduced social interactions, which can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness (Ye et al., 2023). The students' interview responses further confirm how the COVID-19 restrictions impacted students' social-emotional health and development. Several students who were interviewed expressed feelings of loneliness when schools shut down, and everyone was forced to stay at home and learn remotely because they could not go anywhere or see anyone. One student specifically recalled their feelings of loneliness and shared self-care strategies to address this feeling should an event like the COVID-19 pandemic arise again in the future. In the interview, this student specifically mentioned that people should "not be alone." Instead, people need to spend time with other people in the household and find ways to "keep busy" with activities.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was already known how important it was for young people to develop supportive, positive peer relationships, especially during the critical adolescent years (defined as age 10 to 24). During adolescence, physical changes (puberty), coupled with social and contextual changes (entering middle school), prompt explanation of learning about social relationships with peers and adults. During this time period of child development, relationships with peers become increasingly significant. At the onset of adolescence, children enter into the social world of middle school and begin to spend more time outside the home in the presence of their peers. By late-adolescence, children are spending most of their time with same-age peers. The physiological changes that are happening in the body as a result of entering puberty facilitate this social transition and children are more willing to take social risks and become more sensitive to social feedback, including social evaluation, acceptance, and rejection. The physical changes associated with puberty also create a window for young people as they learn how to operate their new sexually maturing bodies, ways that others react and respond to

their new physicality, and how to interact with the social world around them (Suleiman et al., 2023).

Even when students returned to school after remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing restrictions and mask requirements still remained to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. In the classroom, students were mandated to stay six feet apart from each other, wear facial coverings at all times, except for when they were eating or drinking, and all sit facing one way, usually toward the teacher. In the interviews, one student mentioned that their teacher got creative with social distancing and provided each student with a yoga mat that they could sit on, socially distanced, so at least the students were comfortable and safe. Other students that were interviewed alluded to the COVID-19 precautionary measures and restrictions that were in place upon their return to school and explained how their friends and teachers looked different wearing masks, how students could not be close to one another, and how masks made breathing challenging, especially for students with asthma. In the classroom, masks and social distancing measures impacted the ways that students and teachers expressed themselves and interacted with each other. Teaching and learning with facial masks created their own social and communication challenges including difficulties reading and expressing facial expressions and difficulties recalling spoken sentences (Khandelwal & Apodaca, 2022).

Theme 6: Students Are Still Struggling with Math Concepts

Based on the interview responses, students expressed a sense of struggling the most with understanding math concepts in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the 2022-2023 Ohio state school report card, nearly half (53%) of Ohio students are proficient in math. This is a slight increase from what was reported for the 2021-2022 school year, but still lagging behind pre-pandemic scores when 61% of students in Ohio

were reported to be proficient in math on the 2018-2019 school report card. Low math scores are part of a national trend. Ohio was one of 43 states to see decreases in fourth-grade mathematics scores and one of 51 states to have declines in eighth-grade math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Henry, 2023).

In addition to falling behind in math, students struggled with reading and writing, prompting a change in how these subjects are taught. Recently, Governor DeWine called for a renewed focus on literacy and the way we teach reading in the state of Ohio. As part of the Governor's proposed budget, all Ohio children will have access to a curriculum that is aligned with the evidence-based approaches of the Science of Reading. The Science of Reading refers to the pedagogy and practices proven by extensive research to effectively teach children how to read. There is a great deal of research about how we learn to read, and learning to read begins with a solid foundation of phonics. Other essential early literacy skills include phonemic awareness, vocabulary, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. The governor's budget directs the Ohio Department of Education to lay out a plan that is informed by research and evidence to ensure that all Ohio students have the best opportunity to master the skill of reading. Research indicates that the earlier a child is reading on grade level, the better that child will do in later grades and in life.

Governor DeWine also signed a set of laws strengthening dyslexia support for Ohio children. Ohio recently passed HB 436, which requires Ohio public schools to screen students for dyslexia. The Dyslexia Support Law requires all kindergarten through third grade teachers, as well as teachers providing special education instruction to children in kindergarten through grade 12, to complete professional development on identifying characteristics of dyslexia and understanding pedagogy for the instruction of students with dyslexia. The Science of Reading

and the passing of the dyslexia law are part of the governor's larger Read Ohio initiative, which is a statewide effort to improve literacy skills for all ages, this includes the implementation of curriculum aligned with the Science of Reading in K-12 schools. Governor DeWine states that his recent lobby for childhood literacy is based on the data that "40% of Ohio third graders are not proficient in reading" (Ohio Department of Education, 2023b).

To date, there has been less emphasis on the subject of math in the state of Ohio. This is concerning since the latest state testing and report card data indicates that Ohio's language arts scores have returned to pre-pandemic levels, but math scores have yet to make the same progress. Vladimir Kogan, a political science professor at the Ohio State University, analyzed the results from Ohio's state tests and found that students remain one to one and a half years behind in math. Students are testing at a proficiency rate that is between 10 and 15 percentage points lower than prior to the pandemic in most tested grades (McClory, 2023).

Based on the data from recent research studies, there are several factors that may explain the decline in math scores and lack of improvement post-pandemic. Some of these factors include teaching and instructional strategies, parents' attitudes toward mathematics, and communication with the teacher (Doz & Doz, 2023; Pirrone et al., 2022).

Teaching and Instructional Strategies

Recent research studies confirm that students felt a radical change in the way mathematics was taught while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Typical instructional methods, such as solving problems on the blackboard or whiteboard, or participating in hands-on math labs using manipulatives, are proven to be effective instructional strategies utilized by teachers when students were in-person learning at school. However, these strategies were not possible and, therefore, not implemented when students were remote learning

(Doz & Doz, 2023). In addition, researchers confirm that remote learning complicated math instruction because it made it difficult for teachers to guide students over a screen or spot weaknesses in problem-solving skills (Gilreath et al., 2023).

Research suggests that the instructional strategies and teaching methods used during remote learning affected how well students learned mathematical content. Researchers are now suggesting that the low test scores and lack of improvement in math may be attributed to the depth of mathematical skills that students are lacking (Doz & Doz, 2023). In the interviews, students confirmed that when they returned to the classroom after remote learning, they struggled with mathematical concepts and skills such as subtracting, borrowing, multiplication, division, and solving equations. The main reason students reported struggling was because of the instructional strategies that teachers used during remote learning. Students reported that the teachers did not teach math concepts "in detail" while they were learning from home. Rather, the majority of students reported that math instruction was self-directed and completed offline. The students said that they received math instruction primarily through textbooks and workbooks and were expected to complete worksheets and other paper and pencil assignments.

Parents' Attitudes Toward Mathematics

Research has suggested that environmental factors such as parents' attitudes toward mathematics can affect how well a child learns math when learning at home (Doz & Doz, 2023). Research studies indicate that, in general, parents were more likely to read with students than practice math during remote learning. Parents' focus on reading over math may be attributed to parents' lack of understanding and confidence teaching math concepts, which may be traced back to their childhood experiences with learning math when they were in school. With the adoption of Common Core, the educational standards that the majority of states (including Ohio)

have for teaching math and English to K-12 students, the way students learn math has shifted from memorization to conceptual. No longer are students expected to just memorize their math facts, formulas, and procedures. With the introduction of Common Core, students need to be able to apply and synthesize math concepts and skills in greater depth. This new way of learning math is different than how parents were taught (Gilreath et al., 2023).

In addition, research indicates there are stereotypes surrounding the subject of math. Stereotypically, math is a subject that individuals struggle with and do not prefer. Further, there is a stereotype that males are better at math than females. Research has shown that when compared to boys, girls are less likely to choose careers related to mathematics and girls have less confidence and lower self-esteems with math (Gilreath et al., 2023). Brain research is now showing that messages picked up from their parents about math and their parents' relationships with math can change students' math learning and achievement. Children easily pick up on the emotional cues of others and they adjust their behaviors accordingly. As a result, children can experience heightened levels of anxiety and stress, which can impact their ability to learn (Gilreath et al., 2023; Lassi, 2022; Ye et al., 2023).

Research studies have shown that math anxiety (MA) has been linked to factors such as teaching methods and the influence of parents. MA is the apprehension that one has about the capacity to do mathematics. MA evokes feelings of panic, embarrassment, flurry, avoidance, failure, and fear, which prevents solutions, learning, and success with mathematics (Pirrone et al., 2022). Based on research, high levels of MA hinder math performance and negatively effects a person's math self-efficacy, which affects an individual's belief in their ability to solve math-related tasks, lowers their enjoyment in mathematics, lowers their effort toward math, and promotes avoidance of math-related activities (Doz & Doz, 2023).

Communication with the Teacher

Due to the change in instructional strategies, students experienced reduced social interaction with peers and teachers while remote learning. Research suggests that the lack of social interaction was a major problem that affected student learning. Some students felt they could not learn mathematics effectively without face-to-face interactions (Doz & Doz, 2023). In the interviews, students reported the challenges surrounding communication while learning at home. Since the majority of math instruction was offline, independent, and self-directed, students reported that they had to use email as a method of communication with their teacher if they had questions, which was challenging because of the amount of time it took to get a response. Research indicates that remote learning makes communication less personal and makes time management more difficult. The absence of fast feedback and reliance on digital platforms while remote learning impacted the effectiveness of teacher-student communication (Doz & Doz, 2023).

Overall, remote teaching and instructional strategies, the attitudes of parents toward the subject of math, and teacher-student communication during remote learning could have affected students' attitudes and emotions toward the subject of math, ultimately, affecting students' academic performance in the classroom in the aftermath of remote learning and causing the decline in math test scores and struggles with closing the math achievement gap in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Doz & Doz, 2023).

CASEL Framework Lens

Data from past research, the CASEL Framework, and the Systems Theory further confirm the findings of this study and the crucial role that the learning environment has on a child's social-emotional development. Lessons from past disaster events indicate the importance

of maintaining school routines and school engagement as well as providing opportunities to increase social and behavioral self-regulatory skills regardless of school setting should a school be forced to relocate or shut down for an extended period of time (Berger et al., 2018). In addition, the CASEL Framework emphasizes the importance of establishing equitable learning environments and coordinating practices across several key settings including the community, family, school, and classroom. The CASEL Framework believes that community, family, school, and classrooms are all part of broader systems that work together to shape students' learning, development, and experiences. Inequities, such as race, ethnicity, and social class, are deeply ingrained in the majority of these systems and impact social-emotional learning and development (CASEL, 2022). The Systems Theory of organizational development supports the idea that an organization is part of a single, unified system of interrelated parts. Each part of the overall system is dependent on the others and cannot function optimally without them (French & Bell, 1999; Ramage & Shipp, 2009). When the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close and students to learn remotely, all of the systems within the school organization were affected.

Community

The community is part of the broader organizational school system. Community partners are important because they provide support and services to schools and families based on community needs (CASEL, 2022). Some examples of community partners include before and after school programs, health care providers, and local businesses. During the forced school closures and remote learning period, students and families did not have the opportunity to connect with the community due to COVID-19 government restrictions. Businesses were forced to shut down and students and families were forced to stay-at-home. Parents, who typically relied

on schools for childcare during the day, had to figure out what to do with their children who were not in school, which added stress on families. Families and students who relied on mental health or other health services as a means of social-emotional support had to go without for an extended period of time. In the aftermath of COVID-19, students and families are still struggling with mental health and obtaining the help required to support their mental health needs. There are extensive waiting lists for mental health services and individuals are waiting long periods of time to see mental health professionals.

Family

Social-emotional learning and development is most effective when families and schools work together (CASEL, 2022). During the forced school closures and remote learning period, students spent the majority of time with their families due to stay-at-home orders. Travel restrictions prevented socialization with family members outside of the primary household. In addition, COVID-19 restrictions created a barrier between school and family. Social-emotional learning is most successful when schools and families establish two-way communication, build a relationship based on trust, and form partnerships to meet educational goals (CASEL, 2022). During the COVID-19 remote learning period, schools relied heavily on families to take on the role as teacher and support students' learning with little to no background or training. In addition, families were trying to balance their work and personal lives and navigate issues such as childcare and their own health and wellness. All of these experiences created additional stress and anxiety that transferred to students (Lassi, 2022; Ye et al., 2023).

School

Schools are natural settings that offer students the opportunity to reinforce social-emotional learning and practice social-emotional skills. Students practice social-emotional skills

most effectively in school climates where they feel safe, supported, engaged, and respected (CASEL, 2022). For students, COVID-19 turned their school routine and sense of safety and security upside down. Those students whose home lives were already in disarray prior to the forced school shut downs relied heavily on the stability and predictability of the everyday school routine. In addition, students lacked experience with long-term school closures and were not prepared to handle remote learning. All of these experiences that students went through during the COVID-19 remote learning period cultivated feelings of instability, uncertainty, and frustration.

Classroom

In the classroom, students have the opportunity for social interaction with their peers and teachers and the opportunity to learn and practice relationship skills that are crucial for future success (CASEL, 2022; Ip et al., 2017). COVID-19 restrictions and remote learning instructional strategies and teaching methods made it difficult for students to build relationships and to interact and collaborate with their teachers and peers. Students develop relationship skills when given the capacity to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem solve, negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing cultural and social demands, and seek and offer help when needed (CASEL, 2022). It is difficult for teachers to give students the opportunity to practice relationship skills in these different capacities while remote learning on a computer through Zoom, especially with the technological challenges and other distractions that students experienced while learning at home.

Conclusion

The data from this research study indicates that in the aftermath of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, students are struggling to learn and achieve specifically in the area of

mathematics. From the onset of remote learning, students began experiencing feelings of frustration, anxiety, sadness, and hopelessness due to feelings of uncertainty when their worlds were turned upside down and the consistency and predictability of their everyday school routines were abruptly disrupted. When students were in the trenches of remote learning, these early feelings were magnified as they navigated challenges associated with lack of access to the Internet, issues with technological devices, disruptions in the home environment, understanding the foreign concept of remote learning, lack of parental support, traumatic events, and reduced social interactions. Prior research further confirms that all of these challenges students experienced at the onset of and during remote learning have an effect on students' well-being, social-emotional development, and development of key social-emotional skills, including a student's motivation to learn, ultimately impacting students' ability to learn and achieve even after students return back to the classroom from remote learning. All of these challenges only further contribute to missed academic skills, concepts, and learning gaps for students, especially for students that are already operating at an educational disadvantage. In the aftermath of remote learning, schools across the nation, including Ohio, are currently experiencing the after effects of remote learning as indicated by low state test scores and low academic performance on state school report cards. Overall, the data indicates that students are struggling to return to pre-pandemic achievement levels, particularly in the area of mathematics.

Implications for Schools

Lessons from past pandemic events and past research indicates that understanding students' social-emotional needs and social-emotional state following a traumatic event is an important first step to psychological intervention. It is important for educators to understand students' social-emotional state to be able to respond appropriately to their social-emotional

needs and to ultimately close the achievement gap created by remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Berger et al., 2018; Souza et al., 2020). The thoughts, feelings, emotions, and traumatic events students experienced while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic are barriers to academic success and impact students' ability to focus, stay motivated and engaged, and learn once they return to the classroom (EmpowerU, n.d.). The needs of students who were already operating at an educational disadvantage pre-pandemic should be prioritized because these students were already academically behind before the pandemic and remote learning just further compounded any existing inequities (EmpowerU, n.d.; Ozer et al., 2020).

Addressing Feelings of Fear and Uncertainty

The data from this research study is significant in planning for future events that may cause schools to shut down for an extended period of time. The data from past research indicates that disaster events can destroy or damage school infrastructure because they prevent students from attending school for an extended period. Disaster events can also threaten students' sense of safety, security, and normalcy due to the upheaval of their everyday routine of going to school, which creates feelings of fear and uncertainty for students. Humans are wired for survival, which means that our brains respond at a subconscious level to fear and stress. The growing fear and uncertainty that students experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic pushed students (and educators) into an automatic fear response, causing decreased focus and rising levels of stress hormones that sent students into "flight, fight, or forget it" mode. A student's response to a perceived threat triggers a protection response, which causes students to avoid, shut-down, and stop engaging, disrupting their ability to learn and putting them behind academically

(EmpowerU, n.d.). A rapid and safe return to school after a disaster event such as the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial in maintaining a stable support system for students (Miller & Hui, 2022).

In preparation should an unexpected school closure arise again in the future, schools should take a proactive approach and provide more training for teachers on how to adjust curricula and support students in a virtual learning environment so that teachers and students feel better equipped and prepared for remote learning (Miller & Hui, 2022). In addition, teachers might consider using a blended learning, or hybrid learning, approach in the classroom where teachers use both face-to-face and online activities for learning so that students are comfortable using the technology if they are ever forced to learn from home again. As Mike stated in his interview, "I am comfortable now online learning and using my Chromebook." Now that students have experienced remote learning, students are familiar with using technology to learn. The continuity of continuing to use technology to enrich and support learning could be helpful in ensuring the technology skills that students are now equipped with are not lost should schools be forced to shut down again for an extended amount of time.

The idea of a "flipped classroom" is gaining increased attention in the educational community. A flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning, which aims to increase student engagement and learning by having students complete reading at home and engage in real-time problem-solving during class time. A flipped classroom is structured around the idea that lecture or indirect instruction is not the best use of class time. Instead, students prepare themselves with the background knowledge needed for the lesson prior to class through readings and other teacher-assigned activities, and class time is spent engaging in activities that require higher-order thinking skills. Higher-order thinking skills include critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking. These higher-order thinking skills are

crucial to developing 21st-century learners and preparing students for success beyond high school if they go to college and when they eventually enter the workforce (The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, 2023).

Addressing Student Motivation

Relationships are a critical component of motivation. Humans are social beings with minds designed to learn from other people. When students lose important relationships with teachers and peers, they are less likely to be motivated to learn. The COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning significantly disrupted important social connections for students, resulting in a decrease in students' motivation to learn (Bauld, 2021). Past research further confirms the importance of social interaction and the central role that schools play in supporting students' social-emotional development. For students, school is often the space where they spend a lot of time socializing with teachers and their peers. Schools are natural settings that provide students with social opportunities to reinforce social-emotional learning and offer students the opportunity to practice social-emotional skills (CASEL, 2022).

Building positive relationships are crucial to academic development. Since the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning removed crucial one-on-one time for teachers and students to get to know each other well, teachers must find ways to show students that they know them. This begins with an understanding of each student's needs and abilities. Teachers can show understanding by giving students regular feedback on their performance in the classroom, frequently checking in with them to see what they need, and giving them extra emotional support. These actions create positive rapport with students and make them feel supported. Research shows that when teachers build good rapport with students, students are motivated to

do well in school. In the aftermath of remote learning, the importance of educating the "whole child" (both academically and socially) became even more apparent (Bauld, 2021).

Addressing the Underlying Causes of Post-Covid-19 Mandated Distance Learning's Impact on Lowered Academic Achievement

It is critical for students to enter a positive, safe, and supportive learning environment each day in order to fully achieve. Schools must find ways to address the challenges that students are currently experiencing with their social-emotional well-being and health as a result of what they experienced while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges that students are dealing with are barriers that are standing in the way of a student's learning and are prohibiting students from reaching their full potential in the classroom.

In July of 2023, Ohio's governor announced the *Future-Forward Ohio* strategic plan, which is the state's plan to help students recover from the academic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the plan, schools are encouraged to apply for the Stronger Connections Grant to receive funding to improve student wellness and mental health. Some of the allowable activities that schools can use this grant funding for include school-based mental health services, trauma-informed classroom management, professional development and training for staff on mental health, and building school and community relationships. The Stronger Connections Grant is the state's commitment to ensuring students are safe and have the resources they need while addressing the mental and physical health needs that are critical to ensuring that students are ready to learn and are successful in the classroom and later on in life (Ohio Department of Education, 2023a).

The implementation of a social-emotional learning (SEL) program is one way schools could choose to use the funds provided by the Stronger Connections Grant. SEL programs

provide a curriculum that fosters emotional intelligence and character development through engaging and participatory lessons foundational for future growth and are appropriate for children of all ages (preschool-12). Strong SEL programs lead to improved student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. Research suggests that when students have supportive relationships and opportunities to develop and practice social, emotional, and cognitive skills across many different contexts, academic learning accelerates. Participation in SEL programs is linked to decreased emotional distress and enhances young people's coping skills, resiliency, and emotion identification, which can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. In addition, SEL can increase a student's sense of safety and support and help create better relationships with teachers. SEL can also help teachers build and maintain stronger relationships with students (CASEL, 2022).

Lessons for Leadership

Data from this study and past research studies highlight the importance of ensuring students' social-emotional needs are met and that students feel supported, so they can reach their full academic potential. With high-stakes testing and performance ratings on school state report cards, school leaders feel pressure to drive academic outcomes. The expectation that schools are high-achieving causes school leaders to put pressure on teachers to ensure all the content standards are covered and students are adequately prepared to perform well on state tests. However, it is important for school leaders to take a step back and examine the issue of student achievement from a holistic point of view. School leaders must understand that in order for their school to reach a high level of academic achievement, students' social-emotional needs must first be met. School leaders play a critical role in establishing a school culture that is align with and supportive of this new way of thinking (Schneider, 2000).

In my educational leadership experience as a school principal, I found that the first step to establishing a supportive school culture is for school leaders to make an intentional and active commitment to the importance of social-emotional health and development and lead with purpose. School leaders can communicate their commitment to school staff by intentionally putting policies, procedures, programs, and resources in place that support students' overall social-emotional well-being. Some of the measures that I have implemented and found to be effective include:

- Aligning the importance of social-emotional health with the mission and vision of the school. Part of the mission and vision of the school where I am principal is a commitment to form students who are stewards of service and live the Gospel virtues. In order for students to live the virtues, they must be equipped with the social-emotional skills that allow them to do so. For example, one of the five key competenciesthe CASEL Framework identifies as crucial to social-emotional development is relationship building skills (CASEL, 2022). When students are equipped with relationship skills, they learn how to appropriately interact with others around them and practice courtesy, generosity, respect, and kindness, which is the Catholic virtue of justice.
- Aligning social-emotional learning and skills to current systems, programs, and practices that are already established as part of the school culture. For example, our school already has both a Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) system and Virtues in Practice (VIP) program in place. Our PBIS system rewards students for following the expectations in each of the common areas of our school including the cafeteria, playground, classroom, church, hallway, and restroom. Our VIP program selects a different virtue for students to focus on each month and at the end of the month, a student is selected that

exemplifies that virtue. We have aligned the five key social-emotional skills that CASEL identifies with our VIP program. For example, the virtue of justice and empathy relates to the social-emotional skills of relationship building and social-awareness. When students are equipped with relationship building and social-awareness skills, their overall behavior improves, which affects their ability to follow the PBIS expectations.

- Being creative with school funding to address students' social-emotional needs. Faced with a limited school budget, limited resources, lack of mental-health professionals in the school, and an increase in the number of students who have social-emotional needs, our school created a new position and hired a "resiliency coach" to meet with students both whole group and individually. The resiliency coach is trained and certified in mindfulness and resiliency practices. The resiliency coach visits each classroom (preschool-5) once a week to teach social-emotional learning lessons and students (preschool-12) that are displaying particular behavioral challenges can be referred for individual coaching sessions by their parents, teachers, or themselves. During the coaching sessions, the resiliency coach and student work together to address the student's social-emotional needs and identify and develop resiliency practices that address those needs. The resiliency coach began working with just elementary school staff and students and, since then, expanded services each year to include both the middle school and high school. To leverage the resiliency coach's services campus-wide, the administration set the expectation from the beginning that both teachers and students should be participating in the whole group social-emotional lessons in the classroom. This helped to create a "common language" around social-emotional learning and equip teachers with the knowledge and skills required to lead the resiliency practices with their students. When

the program first started, the resiliency coach was teaching whole group social-emotional lessons twice per week and now teachers are responsible for teaching one of the lessons so that the resiliency coach is available to meet with middle and high school students.

- The addition of the Compassion, Acceptance, Resilience, Empathy (CARE) Team to our already established Response to Intervention (RTI) policies and procedures. Whereas the RTI team focuses on students with academic challenges and struggles, the CARE Team focuses on students who are displaying behavioral challenges in the classroom. Similar to RTI, stakeholders, which include the principal, resiliency coach, teacher, student, parent, and intervention specialist, meet to discuss the behavioral challenges that the student is experiencing and select interventions that will be implemented to address the behavior. The team meets regularly to check-in on the student's progress and after four to six weeks, the team assesses the data and determines if the interventions have been successful. If the interventions have not been successful, the student is referred for a more formal behavioral evaluation that is performed by the school psychologist.
- Incorporating social-emotional learning and our resiliency coach into discipline policies and procedures that are outlined in the school handbook. If a student continues to display behavioral challenges in the classroom despite intervention efforts, that student is placed on a "behavior contract." The behavior contract defines clear and specific behavioral expectations that the student must adhere to while attending our school. In addition, the contract documents the behavioral interventions that have been put in place to support the student and the students' progress with these interventions. One of the required interventions for all students who are placed on a behavior contract is a referral to see the

resiliency coach for weekly coaching sessions. The student, parent, principal, and teacher meet to discuss the child's behavioral progress on a monthly basis.

Suggestions for Future Research

The data indicating that students are still struggling to get back to pre-pandemic levels of achievement particularly in the area of mathematics is particularly concerning to me in my role as principal of a school. Research indicates that administrators and schools across the nation are experiencing similar struggles and concerns. Since motivation and engagement are the two driving forces behind a student's ability to learn, future research to understand how remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic affected a student's motivation and engagement is crucial. Data from this research study and past research studies indicate that remote learning affects a student's motivation and engagement due to a variety of factors and challenges such as access to the Internet and technological devices, distractions in the home environment, difficulties understanding the concept of remote learning, lack of parental support, and reduced social interactions. All of these factors impact a student's well-being, social-emotional development, and motivation, which ultimately affects a student's ability to learn and achieve once s/he returns to the classroom. What students experienced while remote learning could be the reason why students are still struggling to make academic gains in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

* Indicates required question

1. Age *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 9
- ◯ 10
- ◯ 11
- ◯ 12
- ◯ 13
- ◯ 14

2. Grade *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 4th
- ◯ 5th
- ◯ 6th
- ◯ 8th

3. Race/Ethnicity *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Black
- ◯ Hispanic
- ◯ Bi-racial

Appendix B

Interview Guide/Questions

Section I- Pre-COVID-19 Remote Learning

Background

1. What do you recall when you heard that you were not coming to school the next day in March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What grade were you in when schools were forced to shut down?

Section II- During COVID-19 Remote Learning

Distance Learning

3. Tell me about your experience with distance learning.
    a. What were the challenges?
    b. What was successful?
    c. Where did you study?
    d. How did you complete your assignments?
    e. What assignments were you expected to complete?
4. What did it feel like to be attending school from your home or other places?

Social-Emotional

5. What feelings/emotions did you experience throughout the pandemic?

Inequalities

6. Tell me about the resources (textbooks, computers) and your experience with learning during the pandemic?

a. How did the resources (Internet connection, computer access/malfunctions, lack of a quiet place to study, etc.) influence your experiences with remote learning?

Section III- Post-COVID-19 Remote Learning

Return to School

7. How did you feel once you learned that you would be returning to school?
8. What were the challenges associated with returning back to school?
9. What did you look forward to the most about returning back to school?
10. What challenges are you still dealing with?

Closure

11. Is there anything else about your experience during remote learning that you feel is important for your teachers/principal to know about?

Appendix C

Parental Consent Form

Research Study Consent Form

"Understanding the State of Students' Social-Emotional Development in the Aftermath of Remote Learning Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic"

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Mrs. Rastorfer is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Ashland University and is conducting a research study to help understand the state of students' social-emotional development in the aftermath of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Your child is being asked to participate in this study because he/she has experience with remote learning when schools were forced to close and students learned remotely in the spring of 2020.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, the following will occur:

1. Your child will complete a questionnaire on Google Forms that asks them questions about their demographics (age, grade, racial/ethnic background).

2. Your child will participate in a one-on-one, in-person interview with Mrs. Rastorfer that will be conducted at your child's school in a private classroom and will be scheduled during the school day. Interviews will last approximately 30-45 minutes. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed using the Google Meets application.

3. During the interview, your child will be asked questions about their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences with remote learning during three specific time frames (pre-remote learning before schools shut down, during remote learning, and post-remote learning when students returned back to school).

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. If your child is uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions at any point during the interview process, they are free to decline to answer the question(s).

2. Your child is also free to not participate in the interview, or stop the interview at any time.

3. Confidentiality: No names or other identifying information will be collected, shared, or published. This research is anonymous. Anything your child shares

during the interview will remain confidential. The Google Meets recordings/transcripts of the interview will only be used for the purposes of this study and will be securely kept and remain confidential.

D. BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to your child from participating in this study. However, the information that your child provides about their lived experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic can help educators begin to understand the state of students' social-emotional development and their social-emotional needs. Understanding the state of students' social-emotional development and their social-emotional needs is the first step to addressing the long-lasting effects that remote learning during the COVID-9 pandemic has caused.

E. COSTS

There will be no costs associated with participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS

If you have any comments or concerns about participation in this study, you should first contact the researcher (Ashley Rastorfer) through email at rastorfer.ashley@myspartans.org or by phone at 419-524-2572 extension 4101. However, if for some reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact Dr. Rick Breault, Chair of the Ashland University Human Subjects Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may contact Dr. Breault through email at hsrb-au@ashland.edu or by phone at 419-289-5922. You may also contact Dr. Judy Alston, dissertation advisor, through email at jalston@ashland.edu or by phone at 419-289-4142.

H. CONSENT

A copy of this consent form will be emailed to you for your records.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. Parents and students are free to decline to be in this study about "Understanding the State of Students' Social-Emotional Development in the Aftermath of Remote Learning Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic," or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study, or have your child participate, will have no influence on your present or future status as a parent or student.

By signing below, you AGREE to allow your child to participate in this study.

Printed Name/Signature of Parent/Guardian	Date
Printed Name/Signature of Student	Date
Printed Name/Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date

Appendix D

Student Assent Form

Research Study Student Assent Form

Hello! My name is Mrs. Rastorfer and I am a student at Ashland University. I am doing a study to learn more about students' thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am asking for your help because I want to understand how you felt and the experiences you had with remote learning.

If you agree to be in this study, you will complete a questionnaire on Google Forms that will ask you questions about your age, grade, and racial/ethnic background. Then, you will be interviewed and asked questions about how you felt about remote learning and your experiences with remote learning (1) before school shut down and learning went remote, (2) during remote learning while learning at home, and (3) after remote learning when you returned back to school.

You will be interviewed one-on-one and in-person in a private classroom at school during the school day. Your interview will last 30-45 minutes. Your interview will be recorded so that I can review it later. The interview recordings, your name, and anything you share during the interview will be kept private and will not be shared with anyone.

You can ask questions about this study at any time. If you decide at any time not to finish, you can ask me to stop. If there is a question that you do not want to answer, you do not have to answer it.

Choosing to participate or not participate in the interviews will have no positive or negative impact on your grades or general standing in your schoolwork.

The questions I will ask are only about what you think, your experiences, and your feelings. There are no right or wrong answers.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in the study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign this paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don't sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

Your signature: _____ Date _____

Your printed name: _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent: _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent: _____ Date _____