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Navigating Through Systems That Create Inequities: Elementary Teacher Perceptions

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NAVIGATING THROUGH SYSTEMS THAT CREATE INEQUITIES:
ELEMENTARY TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

By
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A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2023

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Sarah Rector under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Acknowledgments

This research was brought about by a single moment in time. A moment that sent a previously determined dissertation topic out the door and sent me on a path to understanding equity and seeking out what fellow teachers understood about equity. The moment that brought equity to the forefront was a day I attended my son's high school baseball game, sitting in the stands and cheering on the team. My husband leaned over and asked, "Is this field turf or grass?" I quickly replied, "It's grass. School districts can't afford turf fields." At that point, I started looking around at this very manicured baseball stadium. It was immaculate, to say the least. There was a gated entryway for money collection, a stadium full of concrete seating, sidewalks, and an abundance of bleachers easily holding 500 people. There were fans of the sport everywhere, not only families of the home team but also many community members, about 200 total. I was impressed and could not wait to see all of the various fields in the area. A few days later, we had another game. When I pulled up, I noticed a multitude of differences from the previous field, only about 13 miles away. This field did not have an entryway; you just walked up to two people with a portable table and paid your entry fees. There were only two bleachers in the overgrown grass that could hold 20 people each at best. Halfway through the game, a foul ball was hit, sailing past the backstop at a rapid speed. The netting that was there to protect the 50 attendees, we realized, was dry-rotted and let the ball go through, luckily not hitting anyone. At that point, my eyes focused more on the game and watching the ball rather than surveying my surroundings, but a spark was started, and a research plan began to brew within me.

I would like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my coach Dr.

Abstract

NAVIGATING THROUGH SYSTEMS THAT CREATE INEQUITIES:

ELEMENTARY TEACHER PERCEPTIONS. Rector, Sarah, 2023: Dissertation,

Gardner-Webb University.

This qualitative case study was designed to explore elementary teacher perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education for their students. These perceptions allow educational leaders insight into how teachers navigate systems that create inequities and what professional development may be needed to further support equitable learning in the classroom. K-5 certified teachers were interviewed twice to gather data on their understanding of educational equity and the correlation between classroom and state testing. Four findings emerged from this study: (a) educators believed that providing an equitable education would create successful adults, (b) educators gained cultural experiences by having conversations with their students, (c) elementary educators identified systems of inequity, and (d) educators believed that intentional plannings based on data would be the best way to support students. Based on these findings, I compiled a list of recommendations to help improve teacher understanding of educational equity.

Keywords: inequity, systems, instruction, teacher, elementary, equity, perceptions

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the last 70 years in American education, there has been a strong push toward equity and an equitable education for all children. Equity in education ensures that systems in place provide each child with an equal chance for success (Thought Leaders, 2019). In 1954, the segregation of children in education was deemed unconstitutional with *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka* (Lynch, 2016). In 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (National Park Service, 2016). Then, in 1975, President Ford signed into law The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which was revised to what we now call the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2017). In 2018, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) in North Carolina released an updated equity report for their 2018-2024 strategic plan. A strategic plan focuses on specific strategies and implementation initiatives to support the school system over time. The report focused on links between poverty, race, and achievement gaps. District leaders used the report as a baseline to support their new strategic plan, focusing on time in school, highly effective teachers, and access to rigor (CMS, 2019).

In the past few months, media outlets across the United States have highlighted many inequities in our country. Their discussions have focused on equity gaps in education, ethnicities, sports, health care, and the workplace (Briscoe, 2021; Daley, 2019; Duckett, 2021; Land, 2020). Aguliar (2020) noted that most of the information people obtained about equity was received through media outlets, leading me to think about equity in a different light. As I have watched and listened to our local broadcasting station discuss the many inequities in my community, I became hyper-focused on

educational inequality. I discovered that students of low-income families and students of color are the most impacted in schools across the nation. I was not surprised at this, as I have worked with Title I schools for 20 years. Title I is a program that provides federal funding to support low-achieving students, designed to meet the diverse needs of challenging academic content and performance standards. Support provided using Title I funds varies in services, including additional teachers, support staff, additional instructional time, instructional materials, class size reduction, and professional development for instructional staff (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

The researchers in CMS (2019) investigated links between diversity and poverty in schools. The 2016-2017 results showed that poverty increased in the school system, as did the influx of Black and Brown students. The data showed that schools were becoming less ethnically diverse as the poverty levels increased. The CMS researchers investigated school achievement, looking at state testing results for reading, math, and science for elementary and middle schools. High schools were evaluated by end-of-course test results on Math I, English II, and biology. The researchers also investigated schools' academic growth, graduation rates, and ACT college admissions test scores. The data suggested that students in low-poverty areas outperformed students in marginalized communities (CMS, 2019). Marginalized communities are populations based on race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, language, and immigration status and are excluded from mainstream social, educational, and economic hierarchy (Cross & Atinde, 2015; Sevelius et al., 2020).

As a result of the research findings, CMS has focused on providing students at high-poverty schools with high-quality teaching and academic experiences. The system is

working to increase advanced coursework in middle and high schools and to decrease the disproportionate out-of-school suspensions for Black and Brown students (CMS, 2019).

President Biden signed an executive order on September 13, 2021, to coordinate equity efforts across the federal government for Hispanics. This initiative is titled *The White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics* and focuses on policies addressing the systemic causes of challenges students face, supports access to high-quality teachers, and addresses racial disparities in educational funding (Ujifusa, 2021). Even with these legislative initiatives, school systems continue to struggle with providing equitable opportunities for each student.

An equitable education would provide each student with the skills and tools they need to lead a successful life regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, nationality, or socioeconomic status (Aguilar, 2013). As schools continue to provide support for an equitable education, teachers and other school personnel often do not know how to support students through systems that create inequities: academically or intellectually gifted (AIG) programs, exceptional children's programs, discipline policies, school calendars, curriculum programs, and remote learning (Aguilar, 2020). Drago-Severson and Blum-Destefano (2016) wrote,

> In order to serve all students well and to meet the mounting adaptive challenges at our doorstep, we need to help each other grow and improve our practice, and we need to embrace the unique glow and spark that resides in each of us. (p. 162)

Statement of the Problem

To meet the needs of each student, we first must realize educational equity is

lacking for students of poverty in many school districts across the country (Aguilar, 2020). Equality and equity may sound similar and are frequently used interchangeably. Equality provides groups of people with the same resources and opportunities. Equity provides each person with the exact resource and opportunity they need to reach an equal outcome (Milken Institute School of Public Health, 2018). Implementing one or the other can have drastic outcomes for marginalized groups. Figure 1 shows an illustration of equality and equity.

Figure 1

Illustration of Equality and Equity
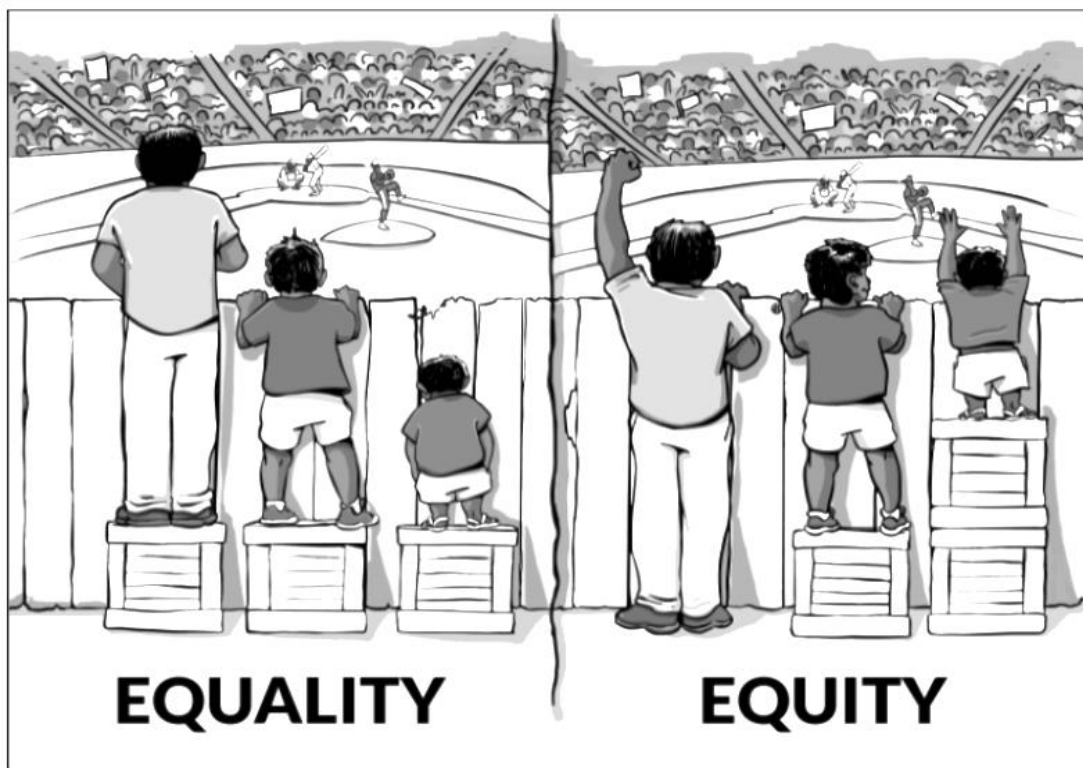
Note. The image was used with permission from Interaction Institute for Social Change | Artist: Angus Maguire. At interactioninstitute.org and madewithangus.com (Maguire, 2016)

In the first image labeled *Equality*, everyone has the same resource to see over the fence. Everyone is being treated equally, yet one person still cannot successfully see the action taking place. In the second image labeled *Equity*, each person has the resource they need to be successful. This allows each person the opportunity to see the action taking place.

School districts need more support for high-poverty families, as the current additional funding is not enough. The U.S. Department of Education (2017) noted many students of underserved groups and communities lack the resources for a quality education. Policies and laws are in place to ensure each student is provided an equitable education, and the federal government offers billions of dollars in Title I grants to support local agencies to ensure students graduate from high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). North Carolina's governor, Roy Cooper, has directed $51.4 million to provide students with access to complete postsecondary education (NC Governor Roy Cooper, 2021). While there is money being directed to postsecondary education, there is still a disconnect between the government and educators in understanding what is meant by an equitable education in our elementary schools. This study examined educator perceptions of educational equity and the potential extent of this disconnect between understanding what it means to provide an equitable education.

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study followed an interpretivist theoretical framework. Butin (2010) noted, "Interpretivism suggests that all one can do is accurately and thoroughly document the perspective being investigated" (p. 60). The interpretivist perspective assumes that the world is not waiting to be discovered but rather is an ongoing story told

by individuals, groups, or cultures (Butin, 2010). For this research, I chose to define culture as the school and the individuals as the teachers. School as a culture means that all members in the school setting adopt predictable behaviors, beliefs, and common instructional models (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). This framework supported my investigation as I looked for patterns of how teachers navigate systems that create inequities, based on participant responses during interviews.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study explored elementary teacher perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education for their students. These perceptions helped to gain an understanding of educator experiences of equity in education. The findings of this study identified how elementary educators at one site navigate systems, such as AIG programs, exceptional children's programs, discipline policies, school calendars, curriculum programs, and remote learning, to provide an equitable education for all students. This study provided insight into teacher perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education and could lead to additional research on future implementation and training needs in elementary schools.

Research Questions

This research examined the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding an equitable education. The research questions that guided this study were

1. What understandings do elementary-level educators have regarding what it means to provide an equitable education?

2. What perceptions do elementary-level educators have about their experiences in providing an equitable education?

3. How do elementary-level educators perceive the systems that may create inequities for their students?

4. How do elementary-level educators navigate reading assessments to support students?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this study.

AIG

A program designed for "students who perform or show the potential to perform at substantially high levels of accomplishment when compared with other students of their age, experiences, or environment" (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1996, para. 3).

Bias

A tendency, trend, inclination, feeling, or opinion about a social group based on unconscious stereotypes that can shape decision-making or attitudes toward an individual or group of people (Simmons et al., 2018).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Teaching that includes students' cultural references in all learning opportunities, also known as culturally relevant teaching (Burnham, 2020).

Educational Equity

Educators have the responsibility of providing a high-quality education to each student and to intentionally work towards increasing access and opportunities for students from different backgrounds, such as varying races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, nationalities, sexual orientations, ages, religions, abilities, and genders (Esmail et al.,

2017).

Family Partnership

The strengthening of the educational relationship between families and the school (Epstein et al., 2019).

Special Education

Special education, also known as exceptional children's program, is a set of services provided to students with exceptional learning needs: intellectual disability, hearing impairment, speech or language impairment, visual impairment, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, specific learning disabilities, and developmental delays (Purdue Online, n.d.).

Stereotype

A simplified, reduced, or standardized view held about a person or group of people (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Marginalized Communities

Populations based on race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, language, and immigration status denied full access to rights, opportunities, and resources that are typically available to other groups (Aguilar, 2020; Cross & Atinde, 2015; Sevelius et al., 2020).

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs or inferences that researchers hold about things that are out of their control. Researchers believe that the assumptions made about the research problem are true and that participants will answer honestly (Simon, 2011). As the

researcher, I considered the following assumptions when conducting this research: Participants will want to participate in this study and provide honest responses when being interviewed.

I believe that educators are often curious and want to participate in research that could lead to their growth, creating a reflective practitioner. The research site I recruited from had worked with me for 6 years previously and was familiar with professional development that was designed similarly to how I conducted the research. The teachers were willing to open their doors for this research and volunteered to be a part of the study.

I have supported the research site for many years, coaching many of the teachers during that time. The staff at the school site are comfortable and trusting of me. Teachers have confided in me in the past about educational needs and continued confiding in me by providing honest responses during the interview without fear of retaliation or identified disclosure of information.

I have had the opportunity to observe and coach at the school site numerous times over the past 6 years in a nonevaluative role. The teachers have grown accustomed to my visits and actively discuss areas for growth and change. They continued to welcome me and be active participants in the interview and discussion process.

Limitations

Limitations are typically elements or conditions outside of the researcher's control; these include everyday constraints such as time, capital, and access to populations of interest (PhDStudent, 2016). Limitations can be seen as a weakness of a study unless the researcher is aware of the limitation and explains how they will address

them (Simon, 2011). Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted limitations that could appear in qualitative studies using document analysis and interviews. Using the list noted by Creswell and Creswell, the limitations of this study included single research site location, participant bias, outsider intrusion, observer lens filtration, and some participants had a limited articulation of details.

I chose to conduct this research study at one site location. I limited the research to that demographic area by selecting one location. I felt my previous relationship with the school led to more honesty in the interview process and allowed me to obtain the necessary analysis documents.

My presence at the participants' site may have caused participant bias. Participant bias can happen when participants respond to the interview in a way that suggests they are only showing or telling the researcher what they think the researcher will want to hear. Having worked in the school previously as a school-based instructional coach and as a district-based curriculum coach with most of the school site staff, I believe only new teachers, those hired in the 2021 school year, had participant bias.

Anytime someone from the district office enters a school site or classroom, they may be seen as an intrusion to instruction. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted anyone at the school can be seen as out of the normal for participants and could cause them to feel anxious. Having worked with the school staff over multiple years in a nonevaluative role, staff members were welcoming and inviting. The teachers were willing participants who agreed to be interviewed and provided the necessary documents for analysis. Teachers hired more resent may have felt more worried about my presence, but they knew that they could end their participation in the research study at any time if they felt too

uncomfortable.

As the researcher, I provided details about the interviews and document analysis through a filtered lens. A filtered lens means the information written up and interpreted from the interview and data analysis is in the words of the researcher. Interpretations of this research study were recorded and reported through my lens.

Not all participants were equally articulate or detail-oriented. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that not every participant would have the same verbal skills. Some participants provided more information, while others could have omitted many details. Interview questions had clarifying questions to support participants in their articulation when more information was needed.

Delimitations

Delimitations are intentional choices researchers make about where they will draw their project's boundaries (PhDStudent, 2016). Delimitations are in the control of the researcher (Simon, 2011). This study was limited to K-5 teachers in one suburban school in North Carolina. Choosing to use one site limited the research study to a single demographic area. Schools that have similar demographics would be able to use the study as part of their future professional development around educational equity, but schools with significantly different populations will need to conduct a study in their school. This school site was chosen because of the previously built relationships between the staff and myself. By having participants who already trusted me, I was able to collect the necessary documents from teachers and have in-depth conversations about the alignment of their assessment practices without taking the time to build a relationship of trust.

Scope

This research study focused on teacher beliefs about educational equity and the systems that impact it. The study occurred in a suburban school in the piedmont region of North Carolina, with data collection taking place over the summer of 2022. Participants in the study were limited to certified teachers in grades kindergarten to fifth grade, including certified teachers who serve students out of the regular education classroom. The goal was to have up to 15 participants with representation across grade levels and at different instructional support levels. I understood that teachers felt pressure from outside sources due to testing and material collection. By conducting this research during the summer months, I believed it elevated participant feelings about pressure and a lack of time commitment for this research study.

Significance of the Study

Providing equitable learning has been at the forefront of American education in recent years, yet educational systems that create inequities still exist. These systems include AIG programs, exceptional children's programs, discipline policies, school calendars, graduation criteria, curriculum programs, extracurricular activities, and remote learning. The goal of this study was to provide the educational community with insights into teacher perceptions around educational equity and the systems that impact an equitable education for all students. Data were collected and reported in an attempt to understand how teachers perceived equity and those systems that create inequities within the educational environment.

Summary

This study focused on the beliefs teachers hold about educational equity and the

systems that impact it. For years, the U.S. government has pushed for equity in education. It has created programs and provided funding to meet the needs of challenging academic content and standards, yet many teachers and school personnel do not know how to support students and provide an equitable education. For this study, equity is defined as each student receiving what they need to be successful regardless of their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, nationality, sexual orientation, age, religion, ability, and gender (Aguilar, 2020).

The findings in this study provide insight into K-5 teacher perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education for students and could lead the educational community on the course toward meeting the needs of each student.

In Chapter 2, literature is presented on what an equitable education may look like in a classroom, with a more in-depth look at systems that may create inequities. The literature focuses on the teacher's role, classroom environments, and classroom relationships when investigating what an equitable education may look like in the classroom. The literature reviews and details the identified systems that create inequities, such as AIG programs, exceptional children's programs, discipline, school calendars, curriculum programs, extracurricular activities, and remote learning.

In Chapter 3, the research method and process are described in detail. The research design is based on an exploratory case study, a design of inquiry in which the researcher investigates two or more participants to better understand a topic, such as equity in education (McMillan, 2016). I used two data collection instruments, individual interviews and document data, to collect and describe participant perceptions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

Schools across the United States are working to provide an equitable education for each student they serve. When someone mentions equity in education, many people think about our ethnic and racial minorities or marginalized students. Marginalized students are students who, because of their race, gender, or geographical location, are economically disadvantaged on the margin of mainstream social and economic hierarchy (Cross & Atinde, 2015). There is not just one approach to equity; inequities can happen to any student or family needing additional resources. No Kid Hungry's (2020) study found that 17.9% of children in the United States do not have a reliable source for meals or quality food. There are long-term consequences for students who are food insecure when it comes to education. These consequences include low attendance rates, low reading and math scores, and a reduction in graduation (Learning Circle Software, 2021).

When schools and students had to switch to remote learning in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only about 55% of rural students in the United States had internet service. That left approximately 45% of the U.S. rural students without access to an equitable education because they could not connect to coursework. Rural students are also less likely to have access to advanced placement (AP) courses. Switching to remote learning made this problem more evident, as even fewer students had access to AP courses. Gagnon and Mattingly (2015, as cited in Learning Circle Software, 2021) reported that 47.2% of the rural school districts in the U.S. have no AP courses, compared to 20.1% of in-town school districts, 5.4% of suburban school districts, and 2.6% of urban school districts. With the switch to remote learning 6 years later, rural

districts are limited even more in providing students with educational opportunities, creating an inequitable system compared to other geographical locations.

When looking at educational equity as educators, we think about ethnic, racial minority, or low socioeconomic students, but another underserved group is also present, foster students. Foster students make up 1% of the U.S. public school system and are often unknown to many teachers due to movement between schools. Wiegmann et al. (2014) found that only 58% of students in foster care graduate high school. This research reported foster students were less likely to graduate from high school than other low socioeconomic status students, who hold a graduation rate of 79% (Learning Circle Software, 2021; Wiegmann et al., 2014).

Foster children are not the only group of students often forgotten when thinking about equity in education. Students classified as AIG are overlooked, especially our gifted English language learners (ELLs). The National Association for Gifted Children reported tens of thousands of gifted ELLs are never identified for gifted and talented programs. Sanchez (2016, as cited in Learning Circle Software, 2021) reported that often, Latino students are overlooked for placement in schools because the students are not fluent in English. The impulse for educators is not to place Latino students in accelerated programs due to their lack of knowing the English language (Sanchez, 2016). When educators overlook second-language students, these students miss out on advanced learning opportunities, creating a system of inequity.

To help combat and uncover other systems that create inequities, many school districts in North Carolina have started enlisting the support of equity teams. These teams' goals are to help uncover the best way to support groups of marginalized students.

One team examining equity in Charlotte, North Carolina, consisted of parents, students, educational leaders, church leaders, and community advocacy groups to explore school district data and monitor equity progress (CMS, 2019). As a team, their goal is to investigate data and programs in CMS to monitor progress toward educational equity. In their last published meeting in January 2021, the equity team addressed student wellness, including student discipline data. The team determined that the review and appeals process should be followed, but implementing a procedure and reporting process should occur if instructional time is missed. They also added that in-school suspension should be reinstated rather than sending students to suspension centers. Noted in their presentation was that school staff needed to be trained in restorative practices and that non-legal advocates should be allowed in discipline meetings (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education, 2021). Another group in Smithfield, North Carolina, termed their equity committee as Cultural Proficiency and Diversity Awareness (Equity) Committee. This team consisted of district educators, administrators, and other district staff working together to build a culture of equity, tolerance, and inclusiveness (Johnston County Public Schools, 2019). The team convenes monthly to investigate professional development opportunities and district programs to support building a culture of equity, tolerance, and inclusiveness among district staff. In October 2020, the team had the chance to participate in a panel discussion at the Johnston County Heritage Center and the Heritage Commission, where they discussed intentionality as the key to reducing and eradicating systemic racism in education (Johnston County Public Schools Equity Office, 2020). Even though these teams have been popping up across North Carolina and the U.S., many students still lack educational equity. The lack of equity in education is due to many

factors, including funding, high-quality instruction, access to materials, curriculum design, program identification, and discipline policies, to name a few. Before we can investigate all the different systems that create inequities, we must examine what equity may look like in the classroom, how teacher beliefs impact student learning, how classroom environments play a role in equity, and what the relationships look like in that classroom. Then we can investigate systems that play a role in establishing inequities and understand how those systems impact students.

Equitable Education in the Classroom

Students come to school with various backgrounds and experiences. The teacher's role is to build a classroom that provides each student with a positive, supportive, equitable, and rigorous experience. Aguilar (2013) noted that equity means each student gets what they need in our schools. Each student should receive the systems and structures needed to be seen, heard, and known, regardless of where they come from, who their parents are, their temperament, or what they show up knowing or not knowing (Aguilar, 2013; Scavone, 2020). Students are entitled to receive an education that provides the skills and tools they need to pursue anything they want after leaving our schools (Aguilar, 2013), yet there are gaps in providing an education of equity. Increased funding alone will not address achievement gaps, as equity is more than just a financial or pedagogical challenge (Pisoni & Conti, 2019). To navigate the systems that create inequities, we must first understand teacher beliefs about equity. Glickman et al. (2018) stated, "Instructional improvement and successful teaching are shaped by the context of one's belief about education as a system, education as an environment, and how individuals view education" (p. 95). To provide a foundation for exploring teacher ideas

about equity, I examined the literature on teacher attitudes, classroom environments, and systems that cause inequities to exist in schools.

When schools provide opportunities for an equitable education, they offer each student the individual support they need to succeed. Teachers who have the right strategies and materials to promote equity in schools help prepare students to reach their full potential. The terms *equity* and *equality* are often used interchangeably; however, the terms do not mean the same thing. Table 1 shows the differences between equality and equity.

Table 1

Equality Versus Equity

Equality	Equity
Generic	Adaptable
Group-focused	Individual-focused
Equal	Fair

Note. Information contained in this chart was retrieved from the Waterford.org website (Waterford.org, 2019).

Equality is associated with social issues and is defined as the state of being equal. When educators focus on equality, the focus is on everyone having the same rights, opportunities, and materials; however, equality does not address specific needs. Providing students with materials such as a Chromebook to take home for learning does not help students who do not have internet service.

Equity provides students with the services and resources needed to support their circumstances. When a school or district prioritizes equity, they can provide the resources needed by their students and help them overcome challenges. Providing students with

materials such as a Chromebook and giving them a hotspot or wireless network adapter will provide them with a stable internet connection, allowing them the opportunity to continue the learning process at home. When a school or district shifts the focus to equity, schools begin to support each individual student. Resources can be allotted for students to fit their circumstances. When these needs are met, the schools increase the student's social investment, leading to long-term growth for the surrounding community (Waterford.org, 2019).

Teacher Role

Teachers can provide an equitable education to students, but they need to understand their role and be willing to reflect and change for their students. Minor (2019) commented that powerful teaching is rooted in powerful listening and that our teachers need to listen to what their students are saying. Teachers must be willing to look within themselves, experience their discomfort, reflect on what and how they can change, and use that as their guiding principle to address inequities in their classroom. When teachers are committed to equity in the classroom, they find ways to provide each student the access needed to be successful. It can be tough to provide so many different resources. Teachers have to first acknowledge that there is an uneven balance that exists for ELLs, special needs students, gifted students, students of poverty or trauma, and students of color, all having a possible unconscious bias about their capacity (Safir, 2016). Often, people are labeled at birth, being categorized so others can identify them. Too often, those who are categorized end up reinforcing that label, whether it is true or not. Perceptions of people may come from a stereotype, and many of these stereotypes are conceived in the media or passed through generations as a source of cultural pride,

whether it is true or not (Howard, 2021). Educators must be aware of their bias and how they have developed stereotypes surrounding their students, reflecting on what they can do better and then live and teach by educating each student to the best of their abilities (Simmons, 2020). Minor stated, "We do not teach for what is. We teach for what can be" (p. 144). Teachers cannot guarantee outcomes, and they cannot ensure that all kids will start a business, that they will all lead their families, or that they all will contribute to their community. Still, teachers can guarantee access, ensuring that everyone gets the opportunity (Minor, 2019). To forge an equitable education and ensure each student's learning opportunity, teachers have to reflect on the stereotypes they hold about their students and adjust their thinking to allow their students to thrive.

As part of a teacher's role to educate students of all socioeconomic backgrounds, they must understand how poverty affects students. Understanding a student's environment can help eliminate stereotypes that teachers develop about their students. To understand problems students come to school harboring, such as poverty, teachers must be open to self-reflection and educate themselves on topics to support multiple student backgrounds. Research shows that low-income students or students in poverty tend to have more health and nutritional issues. They are less likely to exercise, obtain proper diagnoses, seek appropriate and prompt medical treatment, or be prescribed medications or interventions. Teachers can support students during the school day by providing opportunities that allow oxygen to enter the brain, such as stretching, recess, or physical education, helping to reduce the effects on student health (Jensen, 2013b). By reducing negative health effects, students will increase attendance, therefore increasing their learning. When students are present at school, they hear instructors use proper language

and are engulfed in literature-rich classrooms. Hart and Risley (1995, as cited in Jensen, 2013b) reported children of low-income families hear approximately 13 million words by the age of 4, whereas middle-class children of the same age hear 26 million words. Jensen (2013b) noted, "Words help children represent, manipulate, and reframe information" (p. 25). It is essential for teachers to intentionally introduce new words to build enrichment experiences for their students. Adding vocabulary building and focusing on core academic skills help students cognitively. By introducing new words at school, teachers are providing students with a much-needed education that will help their students grow and thrive regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Classroom Relationships

Students need outstanding teachers who get great results by building relationships with their students, so our classroom environments do not reflect a vision of low expectations, disconnect, and academic cynicism, yet Pate (2020) noted that students of color often experience low expectations, disconnect, and academic cynicism. These students carry a host of burdens but are unaware of all their burdens, and frequently educators are also oblivious to them (Pate, 2020). Dufour et al. (2016) noted that a student's learning capacity is not reduced by their ethnicity, native language, or economic status. The importance of teachers in setting the tone and establishing relationships cannot be understated. Researchers have noted that great teachers are known as irreplaceable and can influence students for life. Teachers labeled as irreplaceable do not fit a "particular mold," rather they have great skills when it comes to teaching and building relationships (Jacob et al., 2012).

Hattie (2009) wrote that teachers with high expectations for each student and

those who create positive relationships are more likely to have an above-average effect on student outcomes. To build positive relationships, teachers must listen to their students. Minor (2019) wrote authentic listening has three parts:

- listening to hear students

- naming what you think you heard the students say and plan a response

- making active and longstanding adjustments to the class community, teaching, or other educational operations

By listening to students, teachers make students feel as if what they are saying matters; that they are seen, heard, or valued. Teachers form relationships with students by listening, which can be powerful in allowing students to feel as if they belong (Barron & Kinney, 2021; Hattie & Clarke, 2019; Minor, 2019).

Research supports that caring and trusting relationships between students and teachers are essential for learning (Barron & Kinney, 2021; Hattie & Clarke, 2019; Mayfield, 2020; Minor, 2019). Hattie (2009) wrote, "Building relations with students implies agency, efficacy, respect by the teacher for what the child brings to the class (from home, culture, peers), and allowing the experiences of the child to be recognized in the classroom" (p. 118). Hattie continued that classrooms with student-centered teachers allow for more engagement, more respect for self and others, including fewer resistant behaviors, and higher learning outcomes. A study by Cornelius-White (2007, as cited in Hattie, 2009) focused on 119 studies and 1,450 effects, based on 355,325 students, 14,851 teachers, and 2,439 schools. He found a correlation d = 0.72 among teacher-student relationships. Figure 2 provides a representation of the research presented.

Figure 2

Teacher-Student Effect Size
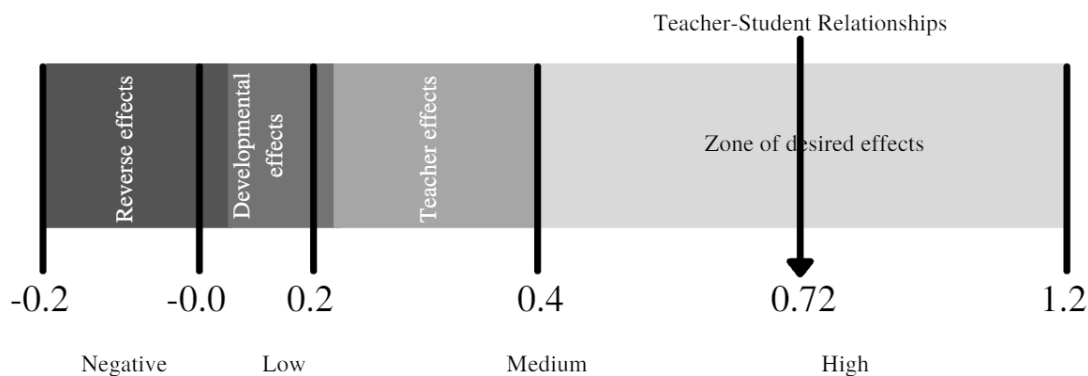
Note. This figure demonstrates the effect size of teacher-student relationships, as noted by Hattie (2009).

These data revealed that positive teacher-student relationships can build a classroom environment that supports learning. When educators create classroom environments dedicated to ensuring all students learn at high levels, they quit focusing on what students can or cannot do and move toward thinking about how they can get every child to their highest level of learning (Dufour et al., 2016). Establishing a positive teacher-student relationship begins to support building an equitable classroom where all students can thrive.

Student experiences hinge not only on teacher-student relationships but also on student-student relationships in the classroom. Equity is measurable in the outcomes and experiences of every student every day; therefore, building a positive relationship among students can increase student willingness to participate because they feel acceptance from peers (Aguilar, 2013; Scavone, 2020). By building classroom relationships in the school environment, students feel successful and seek opportunities to show their best selves (Scavone, 2020).

When teachers create a classroom community, students may feel supported academically, socially, and emotionally. Students may feel more compelled to take risks because they feel safe. Building an equitable classroom environment prepares students to become world citizens, providing them with the skills to interact, survive, thrive, and contribute (Scavone, 2020). Kriete and Davis (2017) noted that when students built connections at school, those students reported that they enjoyed school, felt like they belonged at the school, and believed that their teachers cared about them personally and as a learner.

Systems in Education That Create Inequities

To investigate equity in our education systems, we must identify systems that create inequities. Aguilar (2013) stated, "An equitable education system is one in which student achievement and learning are not predictable by race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or other such factors" (p. xiii). A study by McKown and Strambler (as cited in Society for Research in Child Development, 2009) found that children between the ages of 5 and 11 are aware that many people believe the stereotypes about the intelligence of certain racial and ethnic groups, including stereotypes about academic ability. This type of assumption is known as racial stereotyping. An example of racial stereotyping would be when someone assumes a student from another country, like India, is the most intelligent person in the classroom because they are from India, and people from India always grow up to be doctors. This assumption is incorrect and places an unacceptable bias on the student. When children are aware of these biases surrounding their own racial or ethnic group, it may affect how they respond to everyday situations, ranging from interacting with others to taking tests (Pate, 2020; Society for Research in

Child Development, 2009). Students cannot be successful if opportunities have not been created for success or if unfounded biases are placed on them (Minor, 2019).

One system that contributes to the inequities that go along with racial stereotypes is discipline discrepancies. A study by Smith and Harper (2015, as cited in Kareem Nittle, 2020) from the University of Pennsylvania Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education reported 13 southern states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia, held 55% of the 1.2 million suspensions involving students of color across the country. The Civil Rights Data Collection (n.d., as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 2016) reported, "Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students, while students with disabilities are twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension as their non-disabled peers" (para. 1). When a student is not at school because of discipline or any other reasons, their chance of dropping out increases, causing a ripple effect by increasing the chances that that student will fall into a low socioeconomic status and have to live in a low economic-status community (American Psychological Association, 2017).

The American Psychological Association (2017) reported that students from low socioeconomic households develop academic skills slower than students in high socioeconomic households, leading to a lack of placement in educational programs. Researchers have found children from low socioeconomic families and minority groups are less likely to be identified as gifted and talented but more likely to be identified for special education services by educators (Kareem Nittle, 2020). Schools strive to support all students through learning at high levels but struggle to create a system to provide

struggling learners with the support they need (Dufour et al., 2016). Systems of inequity do not change just by being identified; they change because teachers are intentional in their instruction (Dufour et al., 2016; Minor, 2019).

Identifying Multiple Systems in Education

Equity in U.S. schools continues to be a goal of our leaders. Schools often engage in activities to improve our students' learning or behavior outcomes only to realize there are discrepancies along racial lines. School leaders and educators must be cognizant of the systems that create inequities as they work to transform change around equity (Chism, 2022).

Schools nurture students' potential to learn, lead, and follow their dreams. The TFA Editorial Team (2019) noted, "Children's potential knows no race, income, ethnicity, or gender" (para. 1). Often, in the U.S., the circumstances students are born into predict their educational opportunities. Throughout history, educational equity has been a complex issue. We see these issues in the many educational equity court cases that have existed: educational court cases that started in the 1950s with desegregation, in the 1970s with disability and language equity, and in the 1980s with gender equity (Stanford University, 2011). Desegregation, disability, language, and gender equity court cases are still happening today. Many people have fought and continue to fight to make our educational systems equitable (The TFA Editorial Team, 2019). Educators need to know where inequities show up in the educational system and seek to discover the causes of those inequities. Once they are aware of these inequities, educators need to be advocates and have honest conversations to navigate these systems to do what is best to ensure each student can access their full potential (Aguilar, 2020; Chism, 2022). The classroom

teacher is often left to navigate the many educational systems that can result in inequities so each student can excel to the best of their potential.

AIG Programs. Pate (2020) suggested negative stereotypes in the American culture have hindered Brown student placement in gifted and talented programs. Analysts from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights discovered that Black, Latino, and Native American students have fewer opportunities to access advanced math and science courses. When these students have the opportunity to access advanced courses, they are more likely to be taught by instructors in their first year of teaching, who lack experience in teaching the course (Hsieh, 2014; Kareem Nittle, 2020). By these students having first-year instructors, they may not benefit from the advanced course as those teachers may be learning the material as they are teaching it. In a study by Gordon et al. (2006, as cited in Haycock & Crawford, 2008), students of Los Angeles being taught by teachers in the top percentile outperformed peers of teachers in the bottom percentile by an average of 5%. The study also found that when students of color are assigned a high-performing teacher for at least 4 years consecutively, they hold a better chance of closing the achievement gap; therefore, good quality teachers are essential for student success. Haycock and Crawford (2008) noted that marginalized students are often taught by teachers who tend to be unlicensed, out-of-field, or inexperienced, which unintentionally leads to those students falling behind. A system in which students of color are assigned to less-prepared or lower-performing teachers is an example of how inequitable systems impact students.

The American Educational Research Association found that Brown students in third grade are half as likely as White students to participate in gifted and talented

programs (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Kareem Nittle, 2020). The North Carolina Board

of Education is addressing concerns with our Black and Brown population being

identified for advanced programs, such as AIG, honors courses, or AP courses. The North

Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Division for Advanced Learning and Gifted

Education division investigated many initiatives from across North Carolina. They

surveyed districts of varying sizes and geographical locations on how they approached

equity in the AIG program. The information obtained from the school districts looked at

old mindsets and ways to move forward. In the past, the perception was AIG services

seemed to be only for a small group of students who could test well and meet traditional

norms. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported in the 2019-2020

school year that Black and Brown students accounted for almost 53% of the North

Carolina public school population; however, those students only made up 30% of the

AIG population (Fofaria, 2021; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2020a).

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Division for Advanced

Learning and Gifted Education investigated nationwide best practices to mitigate the

discrepancy between student ethnicities. It looked at what programs and practices

districts and schools across North Carolina had initiated and what had worked. In

February 2021, the Division for Advanced Learning and Gifted Education compiled a

guidebook, *Call to Action: Guidebook,* that identified six critical actions and 48 practices

that offer districts of any size options to support their students (North Carolina

Department of Public Instruction, 2021). For instance, the district where this study was

conducted uses meaningful data to provide various programs to meet student needs. This

district used data from its Title I schools around the dropout rate, advanced course

enrollment and performance, teacher licensure, and assessment data to identify students close to meeting AIG program placement or who met program placement. Collaboration between the AIG department, accountability department, and instructional support personnel helped the district establish a Composer Program at Title I elementary schools to provide advanced learning opportunities for underrepresented populations of students in Grades 2-5. District data over the past few years have shown that 22% of students who were served by the Composer Program later met the criteria for AIG identification (Fofaria, 2021; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021).

Exceptional Children's Program. When it comes to the exceptional children's program, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 has advanced the classification of students who need special education services with specific reporting rules focused on collecting and using data. Some of the significant provisions created by this law included equity advancement for disadvantaged and high-need students, high academic standards instruction for all students, evidence-based intervention support, and the continuation of accountability and action expectation for low-performing schools (National Council on Disability, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The law also gave the states and school districts more authority to support these new provisions. This extra authority, Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act, required that states set challenging academic standards for all public schools in the core subjects, reading, math, science, and social studies (National Council on Disability, 2018).

To support students with learning academic standards, teachers must know what the student can do and what they will need support to learn. Part of knowing how to help students learn the standards includes knowing the resources best suited for the students

(National Council on Disability, 2018). When teachers do not have suitable materials or knowledge to support students learning of the standards, it can lead to over-classification or under-classification in the special education program. Reap and Hanrahan (2017) noted that half of the educators interviewed did not see the school systems correctly classifying special education students. This classification problem is due to the variance of school interventions and services. In the study, the researchers wrote that participants stated that resources are the most significant influence on classification rates, resources such as available personnel to service student needs (Reap & Hanrahan, 2017). Resources become even more of a problem when students come from other countries and teachers do not know how to deliver instruction to those students.

Placing ELLs in special education can present equity problems. These second-language students can be overlooked, setting them further behind in their learning if families are not engaged in the placement process. School staff may assume that the ELL families are not interested in participating in their child's education, as they do not always attend meetings or events. Often, ELL families find it hard to navigate the wordy technical letter sent by the school; this leads to miscommunication. These families have to navigate two worlds, the culture and identity they were brought up with and the culture and identity of the school system they are joining. To support ELL families, it is essential to understand their community and culture better (Urtubey, 2019).

In some Latin American countries, the term disability refers to a visible disability or medical condition. The teacher and school support personnel must understand how the families they are communicating with define disability. Creating a collaborative school-family partnership can help co-create a definition for the disability description that would

support the family's understanding and lead to the student receiving the services they

need. Lewis and Diamond (2015, as cited in Urtubey, 2019) noted,

> To provide a just education and have healthy school-family-community
>
> partnerships, educators must become aware of –and commit to addressing–
>
> inequities in their personal lives, including biases. We must address the ways
>
> we've allowed communities of color and/or people with disabilities to be
>
> marginalized. (p. 45)

It is imperative that schools and families create a trusting and communicative

partnership for the success of each student. Without creating a collaborative partnership,

students who are already behind may fall behind even more (Epstein et al., 2019).

Discipline. Discipline inequities still exist in school districts across the U.S.

School administration and teachers can support a change to provide a holistic approach

rather than a punitive approach. Punitive discipline is based on negative consequences or

punishment due to a student's negative behavior. Punitive discipline may include losing

recess, sitting in a corner, suspension, and expulsion. The goal of punitive punishment is

for students to remember the negative consequence if they do not follow the rules and

choose a different action to avoid the penalty. Punitive punishment may cause students to

comply but can also cause students to feel anger, humility, and other negative emotions

that would lead them to shut down (PLACE, 2020).

Holistic discipline approaches humanize and support students socially and

emotionally, provide cultural responsiveness, and are part of a positive behavior support

system (PLACE, 2020). Minor (2019) discussed moving from a punitive mindset to an

instructive mindset. Many teachers are too often "valued for their ability to control kids

and not for their ability to grow mathematicians, scientists, historians, or communicators"
(Minor, 2019, p. 94). To do this, teachers need to understand the effects poverty has on
students and how they can support their students.

Teachers who understand the effects of poverty are aware of the stresses on the
brains of students who live in poverty. This stress on the brain can cause a loss of grey
matter in the prefrontal cortex and white matter found in the subcortical. The brain's grey
matter is where processing takes place. The loss of grey matter plays a role in complex
cognitive tasks, social behavior, and decision-making. The brain's white matter channels
communication. The reduction of white matter can cause a loss in the reduction of self-
control (Jananbakht et al., 2015, as cited in Sanchez, 2022). When students are
disciplined, it is essential that educators understand the effects poverty plays on the brain
and the role that plays in student development.

The development of empathy can be reduced for students who live in poverty due
to stress seen in the home. Teachers can support students by providing a positive social
environment, teaching social skills, and showing students how to show empathy toward
others. When students understand how to interact in a positive social environment, they
can be more relaxed in their surroundings and build trust with others in their class. A
positive environment helps reduce conflict between students. Social conflict can persist if
students do not feel like part of the classroom environment. This conflict could arise from
students being part of a large classroom setting and feeling lost and insecure, or it could
be that they have not found someone with similar interests to their own. Teaching
students how to make connections by talking and being kind helps build empathy and
guides their social skills development (Sanchez, 2022).

Children who are stressed will show you through actions rather than tell you. Trauma researchers have stated, "behavior is the language of trauma" (Keels, 2020, p. 44). Students feel a sense of vulnerability when being disciplined punitively. This type of discipline can result in an escalation of negative behavior. When the escalation occurs, the teachers or school staff have to remember to respond neutrally and try co-regulation techniques. Doing this supports building a relationship with the student. Payne (2005) noted discipline is about forgiveness rather than change. Forgiveness allows students to feel supported without being judged; therefore, behaviors and activities can return to how they were before the outburst occurred. Payne explained this using a scale of justice with two anchors for discipline: structure and choice. Figure 3 shows a similar scale as described for discipline.

Figure 3

Discipline Scale
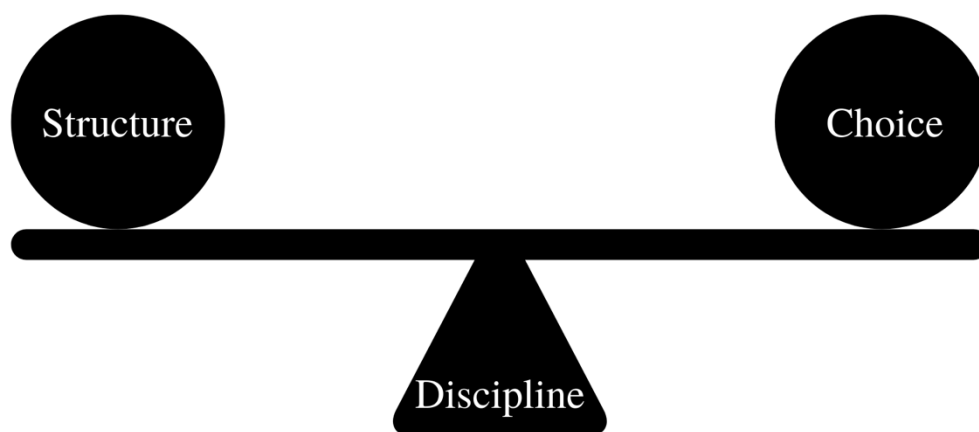
This image shows that discipline is made up of two anchors: structure and choice. When a teacher uses structure as the discipline technique, they express the expected behaviors and the possible consequences of not choosing those expected behaviors. The

choice comes into the scenario for the student as they always have the option to follow the expected behavior, or they have the choice not to follow the expected behavior. When they choose not to follow the expected behavior, a consequence will be enacted. When the teacher wants a student of poverty to follow the discipline structure they have set for the classroom, the teacher must model or explain what they want to see. For example, when a student is loudly arguing with the teacher, the teacher has to remember poverty has a culture of distrust for authority. The teacher has to remember not to argue with the student. Instead of arguing, follow a protocol of questions, either spoken aloud or written to allow the students to explain what they did and what they wanted to achieve arguing, describe four other things they could have done instead of arguing, and finally describe how they can handle the situation next time (Payne, 2005). Keeping a calm demeanor can help de-escalate the situation and get the students back on track to learning.

School Calendars. The school calendar is overlooked as a source of inequity. It is typically designed around people who can afford a vacation and the religious majority. Often, poverty-stricken families and students cannot afford to go on vacation when they are scheduled on the school system calendar. Vacations cost families the most in the summer months when most schools are out. Students are at home alone for much of that vacation time, wondering where their next meal may come from (Arriaga, 2022).

School calendars follow the religious majority and focus mainly on Christian holidays, including Christmas and Easter. School districts often use the Christian holidays and state mandates to set up each year's school calendar. Other religious denominations also want their holidays recognized (Fredrikson, 2015). Every state is different in the holidays it chooses to mark as a day to close. In 2015, Jersey City schools

included Jewish holidays, including Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, as observance closures but were still discussing the observance of any Muslim holidays (Fredrikson, 2015). When districts do not consider the religious denominations of their students, they will see an increase in student absenteeism (Pisoni & Conti, 2019). When students of other religious backgrounds are out for their holidays, they often worry about missed tests, assignments, or lessons. Many of these students live in marginalized areas and are most affected, not feeling like they have a voice to speak out (Arriaga, 2022).

When school calendars follow religious holidays or vacation schedules, student schedules can also be impacted. The closing of the school year could leave an elementary student taking a state-mandated test just after a holiday. A middle or high school student could have to wait after a break for their end-of-course assessments, or the course may be shortened to fit into a specific time frame, such as Math 1 lasting 80 days the first semester but having 100 days the second semester. In the first semester, students would receive 20 fewer days of instruction.

A student's classroom schedule is as essential as the calendar. The schedule determines how core courses are spread out throughout the day. The schedule dictates how students experience the day, whether with other students or with the classroom teacher. The schedule even affects student access to additional support and services in their day. Creating a schedule for the classroom or the school year is like assembling a puzzle. Using data to help guide the school routine will create an equitable experience for students (Pisoni & Conti, 2019).

Changing a school schedule or calendar cannot happen without data input from many stakeholders, such as principals, teachers, and families. When everyone comes

together, the student's school day is enhanced with rigor and engagement (Pisoni &

Conti, 2019). Cabelli (2021) noted creating a school calendar that reflects the cultures in

the school sends a message of importance for diversity and inclusion.

Grading. Today, schools seek to create diverse, equitable, and inclusive

environments for students. However, when it comes to grading or assessment – how

teachers evaluate, describe, and report student learning – schools rarely consider diverse,

equitable, and inclusive means for this practice. Current grading practices were created

during the Industrial Revolution, shaped by that time's cultural dynamics and

demographics. Students were placed into classrooms according to age and moved through

grades successively; it was impersonal, efficient, and standardized. Students were

provided with skills necessary for manufacturing, large-scale industry, and factory work.

Today, many school districts across the U.S. still use the same grading or assessment

system used during that time; however, today's demographics are not the same, and the

training students needed then rarely exists today. Today, important life decisions are

made about students based on grades, including course placement, athletic eligibility,

admission to college, scholarship offers, and employment. How a teacher assigns grades

can influence the school and classroom climate, causing students to take a look at

themselves and think about who they are, what they can do successfully, and whether

school is a place where they can succeed (Feldman, 2019).

School commitment to student success is dependent upon the relationships that

the child and the teachers have developed. Students have to feel that teachers care for

them and are not limiting their learning based on their home environment or previous

grade-level learning experiences. Educators have to move past doing the same style of

grading year after year; what worked in the revolutionary era of learning is no longer feasible today. Feldman (2017) noted, "Grades are the main criteria in nearly every decision [educators] make about students, including promotion or retention, extracurricular eligibility, course placement, and college admission" (p. 8). A student's grade in a course will impact how a student feels about that course. If a student does well in math always scoring As, they may continue to take math courses and grow as a mathematician because of their success based on grading. That same student may have Bs in language arts, which is not a low score, and say they dislike reading simply because of the lower grade. This same student path can be looked at differently. If this student who loved math at the beginning of the semester had failed a few tests, would they have given up? At the beginning of a course, students should not be experts in a subject, they should be able to grow over time to move their grades to be reflective of their growing knowledge. That is where averaging multiple grades becomes a problem (Heflebower et al., 2014). Teachers often average student grades over a specific amount of time. If that student had earned Fs at the beginning of the semester and then after a few weeks began to earn As, that student would leave that course with a C average. Would that student say they loved math? This is why it is crucial to employ an equitable approach to grading.

Grades have a huge impact on a student's self-concept and identity. Students come to class with a set of expectations based on previous classes (Dueck, 2020). One option to support equitable grading or assessment would be to incorporate standards-based grading. Incorporating a standards-based grading plan allows students to demonstrate what they know and can do. In standards-based grading, a failing grade is not permanent, students learn from mistakes, and they can retest to show they have

mastered a learning goal. Learning becomes less about a score and more about mastery progression. The value is placed on learning from mistakes rather than being penalized for mistakes (Vanhala, 2020). Educators must approach assessment with an emphasis on feedback that is aimed at student understanding and increased mastery, rather than a calculated grade for student performance. Providing students with feedback during multiple checkpoints along their learning path provides the key to grading equity (Hope, 2020).

Curriculum. Educational equity is about providing students with what they need to support their success, including meeting them where they are. Breaking down barriers to guide success starts with the curriculum. Adapting the content of the curriculum into a context students associate with makes the learning meaningful to students. When students see themselves in their learning, they can associate the same talk in their homes, at community events, and ultimately in their everyday environments (Garrett, 2021).

When teachers are given an official curriculum, it is designed to provide equal access for learners. Every learner gets the same material. When educators differentiate the curriculum, they are moving from equal education to one that is equitable. Teachers who provide differentiated instruction understand that each student has different learning needs, and these teachers build lessons to engage and challenge learners in their classroom (Tomlinson, 2017). To continue to build equity through the curriculum, educators also need to understand their students' cultures and identities. When educators include culturally responsive teaching practices in their classrooms, they ensure that students see themselves in lessons and know they belong in their classrooms. Culturally responsive teaching encourages student engagement, creating a safe place of acceptance,

growth, and social connections (Childers, 2020). When teachers include a student's

cultural background and differentiation in their lessons, students feel safe building

relationships. By building relationships, educators know what their students value, their

students' traditions, what students like and dislike, and the history of the students'

community. Incorporating these aspects into lessons allows students to see themselves

reflected in their studies. When we do not intentionally incorporate the students' lives

into the curriculum, we exclude what is relevant to the learner (Garrett, 2021). Garcia

(2020) discovered that 70% of students of color who attend segregated schools find it

hard to connect with students of other races (Flannery, 2021). When students have the

opportunity to engage in a curriculum reflective of peers, it allows connections to be

made and cultural understandings to be accepted (Flannery, 2021).

Children's literature has only slightly changed in the past 35 or more years. In

1985, only 1% of children's books in the U.S. used characters of ethnicities other than

White. In 2019, small strides had been made for more inclusive ethnicity representation,

with about 28% of the published children's books having students of ethnicities other

than White. When a curriculum includes books with diverse characters, it validates

students. This validation allows students to feel more academically engaged by reflecting

on their life experiences on book pages (Flannery, 2021).

Student populations evolve and change every year, so children's books must

reflect that diversity. Realizing the need to appeal to students of all ages and cultural

backgrounds, Read Across America decided to rebrand its logo with a mission to

celebrate a nation of diverse readers. Since 1997, Read Across America used Dr. Seuss's

character *The Cat in the Hat* as a way to launch school-wide reading events. Activities

and resources were provided to support the curriculum keeping students engaged in reading. This reading celebration began to change and evolve in 2016 when growing concerns surrounding the racial imagery in books written by Dr. Seuss. In 2017, Read Across America featured a new theme, Building a Nation of Diverse Readers, to support the growing need to include books that reflect our schools' students' heritage and culture (Long, 2019; Lynch, 2017). This change allowed teachers to understand the importance of including cultural books not just during the celebrated Read Across America Day but throughout the school year in all of their lessons.

Inquiry-based teaching includes project-based learning, place-based learning, and experimental learning. Using inquiry-based teaching allows students to demonstrate mastery of the standards while providing a nontraditional environment and going beyond just a textbook (Caus Gleason & Harrison Berg, 2020). Simmons (2020) recommended educators go beyond what textbooks hold as our history and introduce diverse voices and experiences through literature, storytellers, and multimedia sources for students to see themselves reflected in education. To be committed to equity, educators must include the students' families. Student families are assets to the school and classroom, as they can offer diverse voices and experiences. Across the nation, there have been decades of inequities documented in student performance in reading and math; providing diverse voices and experiences can begin to lessen these inequities (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017; Pate, 2020).

A mandated curriculum often comes from a good place and may be intended to support equity for students, but teachers have to ask questions. Are these ideas accessible to all students? Does the curriculum consider varying student abilities? Is this

motivating? Does it value the students? Then teachers have to choose a course for these questions based on the answer to each of their questions. If yes, they need to continue the current mandate. If not, they need to consider what changes are needed to make it work. To make these decisions, educators need to collect data and celebrate success or propose modifications based on a good faith attempt (Minor, 2019).

Extracurricular Activities. Extracurricular activities are not part of the school curriculum but are organized activities connected to the school, such as sports (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Participation in extracurricular activities coincides with positive development, but inequity can still exist in these activities. Research from Meier et al. (2018, as cited in Kim, 2021) links extracurricular activity with a broad range of positive outcomes for students. Sports in school are a building block that supports student chances of living a successful life. Participation in sports helps children improve academically, socially, and personally. Students need the opportunity to participate, but families cannot afford these programs many times. Middle school and high school offer no-cost sports; however, there are things athletes need in order to be successful, such as equipment. Students in poverty often cannot participate regardless of ability or interest and lose the opportunity to play (The Hamilton Spectator, 2019). Research by Snellman et al. (2015) surrounding extracurricular activities reported that "extracurricular activities help cultivate the skills, connections, and knowledge that prepare children for lifelong success, but low-income students are increasingly excluded from participation" (p. 7). A student's extracurricular activities are just as crucial to building their future possibilities as what happens inside the classroom. In the university system, student civic activities, such as Boy Scouts or volunteering at a local shelter, can grab the attention of the admission

team. When extracurricular activities are too costly for students to participate in, students may be left without an avenue to success.

Schools often try to include clubs as a way to support students outside of the curriculum. The most significant factor for schools to provide clubs or sports activities is their budget. Schools are often plagued with the pressure of tightening a school budget, increasing test scores, and focusing on core subjects (i.e., English language arts, math, science, and social studies). This pressure gives little room for extracurricular activities that may be seen as frivolous, so money is shifted away from the school allocations. The burden for these activities is placed on the families. This leads to other consequences for students, such as poor grades, drug experimentation, and dangerous neighborhood interactions (Snellman et al., 2015).

Another group of students overlooked for extracurricular activities are disabled students. In 2013, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights provided guidance for educators on inclusionary athletic activities. This guidance was designed to support educators in understanding the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provided equal opportunities for disabled students to participate in extracurricular activities (Hash & Menendian, 2013). The guidance included suggested activities for inclusion that could best support a specific disability. Students with hearing impairment could prosper in track events where they could be provided visual signs or waiving two-handed tag requirements in competitive swimming for students missing a hand. Supporting disabled students in extracurricular activities allows them to grow motor skills and social skills and gain confidence (Hash & Menendian, 2013).

Remote Learning. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to life the inequities of

remote learning. Caus Gleason and Harrison Berg (2020) noted that students who had internet service could access the basic needs of daily life and remote learning requirements. These students had devices, the Internet, and a supportive learning environment, while other students did not. Patterns emerged during the pandemic. Researchers noticed a pattern among students who had the same demographics, such as being of the same race and income level and having the same zip code. This pattern showed a continuation of systems of inequities, as students living in certain areas did not have access to the materials they needed. Caus Gleason and Harrison Berg concluded that the public education system continues to have laws, policies, and structures that exclude and limit many students due to race, class, language, and special needs.

A survey from The University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research reported the pandemic's aftermath showed striking differences in online learning based on student race (Binkley, 2021). Among the survey's reported fourth-graders, almost half of White students were learning fully in-person, with just over one-quarter learning online, while 60% of Black and Hispanic students were learning entirely remotely (Binkley, 2021). Students in school had less learning loss than students who completed all their lessons remotely. Many Black and Hispanic students who had to learn remotely did not always have access to support, computers, the Internet, or transportation to receive school work packets, causing a greater learning loss (Mundy & Hares, 2020).

Researchers continue to look for ways to disrupt the old patterns and seek new ways to bring about instructional equity. What worked for most students was not good enough during the pandemic. New learning structures are needed, and routines can

support instruction to meet each student's needs. Education will not become equitable by accident; to become equitable, schools have to shift to a collective effort and be intentional about changing practices (Caus Gleason & Harrison Berg, 2020).

In a 2020 meeting of the North Carolina State Board of Education, Board Chairman Eric Davis argued that board and state education leaders needed to take aggressive action to address discrimination and racism experienced often by people of color (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2020b). Davis said, "The pandemic has revealed in undeniable clarity the vast inequities that are embedded in our society, and the underlying systemic racism sustains them" (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2020b, para. 3). He added that our schools are also showing this same problem, and it diminishes the education of all children in the state. Davis added, "Progress removing inequities and racism requires change, and change requires learning. And we are in great need of all three: urgent progress, systemic change, and deeper understanding through learning – particularly from those who have different life experiences" (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2020b, para. 5). In his final remarks, Davis went on to say that to make the needed changes, it would take intentional, determined, relentless commitment and work from everyone to achieve greater equity and educational opportunity for every student (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2020b).

Summary

This chapter focused on literature to provide a more in-depth look into equitable education in classrooms across the county. The first section focused on the role of the teacher. Educators must move from an "individual understanding of racism, sexism,

classism and sexual orientation to understanding structural inequality at macro levels and working toward equity and access" (Hardee et al., 2012, as cited in Esmail et al., 2017, p. 4). Many educators may say they understand diversity and equity, but that experience primarily relates to ethnicity. Many instructors believe equity and equality are the same. This literature review presented much about diversity and equity that can support an educator's perception. Esmail et al. (2017) noted, "To truly change thinking around diversity and leadership, we must engage in deep meaningful experiences that induce transformational learning" (p. 5).

The next section focused on classroom relationships. This section set the stage for the importance of establishing a classroom environment where each person feels welcome and safe. Hattie's (2009) research showed that student outcomes significantly increased by teachers building positive relationships with students. To build a positive relationship, teachers have to listen to students and make them believe that what they are saying matters and that they are seen, heard, and valued.

In the last section, educational systems that create inequities were identified. These systems included AIG programs, exceptional children's programs, discipline, school calendars, curriculum programs, extracurricular activities, and remote learning. Many of these systems are unknowingly created due to stereotypes or biases people unconsciously hold. A majority of the systems tend to affect students from low socioeconomic groups. Still, other groups, including race, ethnicity, religion, sex, nationality, or disability, are also affected by the different systems.

The research method and process for this study are described in Chapter 3. A description of the participant selection process and steps for gathering data are outlined

and thoroughly explained. The research was conducted through the case study method, with additional reasoning for conducting interviews and collecting documents being detailed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teacher perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education and to examine the systems that are in place that are potentially contributing to educational inequities. In this qualitative research study, I collected data using methods appropriate for case study research: interviews and document collection. This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What understandings do elementary-level educators have regarding what it means to provide an equitable education?

2. What perceptions do elementary-level educators have about their experiences in providing an equitable education?

3. How do elementary-level educators perceive the systems that may create inequities for their students?

4. How do elementary-level educators navigate reading assessments to support students?

Research Design

Qualitative research is the process of exploring and understanding the meaning ascribed by individuals or groups to a social or human problem. This type of research allows a researcher to collect data from a participant's setting, build from particulars to a general theme, and support interpreting the meaning of the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The strength of qualitative research is that the research can be examined in detail and that the data are based on participant experiences (Anderson, 2010). I chose to conduct this research using the qualitative process. This process allowed me to collect

data about participant classrooms through interviews and to document collections to look for themes that may surface.

A case study is a research method used by interpretivists in which the researcher develops a detailed analysis of a case that is bound by time and activity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Case studies allow the researcher to describe people's actions within the context of their environments by using a variety of data collection techniques over the time frame selected for the study (Byrne, 2001; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) recorded the definition of a case study in two parts: the scope and the features. Yin described the scope as

1) A case study is an empirical method that

   a. investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when

   b. the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident. (p. 15)

The second part of the definition is the features; Yin noted,

2) A case study

   a. copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and one result

   b. benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis, and as another result

   c. relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion. (p. 15)

This two-part definition of a case study supports inquiry into a topic through design, data

collection, and data analysis.

For this research, I explored multiple cases, with the participating teacher perceptions of equity being the focus of the study. The case studies show the perceptions and describe teacher understandings of what it means to provide an equitable education. The case studies also showed how educators perceive assessment, which is one system in education that creates inequities, and how students are supported through that system.

Using an exploratory case study approach allowed me to conduct individual interviews with each participant. Heyl (2001) noted that interviews help gather rich, detailed data from participants, allowing the researcher to hear how they interpret their experiences directly. When conducting interviews, Heyl noted four guidelines that researchers should set for conducting interviews:

1. listen well and respectfully, develop an ethical engagement with the
    participants at all stages of the project;

2. acquire a self-awareness of our role in the co-construction of meaning during
    the interview process;

3. be aware of ways in which both the ongoing relationship and the broader
    social context affect the participants, the interview process, and the project
    outcomes; and

4. recognize that dialogue is discovery and only partial knowledge will ever be
    attained. (p. 370)

I set and worked toward achieving these guidelines so the participants felt empowered to tell their stories. These guidelines helped when writing the interpretation of the data by staying true to the teacher perceptions that were collected and by keeping

my views out of the research narrative.

To continue my data collection efforts, I collected reading assessment documents from the participant teachers. The assessment documents allowed me to explore how teachers navigate scoring practices and state-required tests in reading. Exploratory case studies are often used when a defined outcome is not present but helps identify future research (Baxter & Jack, 2008, as cited in Conde, 2021). This case study aimed to explore K-5 teacher perceptions of equity and the impact of reading assessment used in the classroom through an exploratory investigation of the classroom iReady scores' alignment to state test scores. This case study provides a description of the teachers' reading assessment practices as described by the participant. These descriptions are followed by an analysis of the data from the state reading tests and show any present themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through interviewing and document collection of teacher perceptions of equity in their classrooms, I was able to provide a detailed description of both the summative reading assessment within the classroom and the alignment of state reading tests.

In investigating the best qualitative research method, I considered other research styles, including ethnography and phenomenology. I decided that using ethnography to research teacher perceptions was not a good fit as ethnographic studies often tend to be an in-depth analysis of a group over a significant amount of time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In my current employment situation, I cannot be emersed in a school setting for an extended amount of time, as an ethnographic study would require a year or more.

Another research design I investigated for this study was phenomenological research. In this research method, the researcher would describe lived experiences of

individuals as described by the teacher participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After thinking through the best way to approach equity research, I knew that I wanted to include document collection and an interview. Phenomenology culminates the experiences of multiple participants who have experienced the same phenomenon. Not all participants may have experienced the same phenomenon, as they may not have formative or summative assessment testing practices.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to collect data from the classroom through interviews and document collection. I conducted two interviews. In the first interview, I asked the participants 12 open-ended questions, 10 of which were related to equity. In the second interview, I asked seven open-ended questions about iReady reading data and state testing alignment. I developed the interview questions through my equity research. To validate that the questions would provide the answers I sought, I conducted a pilot test of each question. The pilot test was conducted with three teachers not connected to the study site. I discovered that two questions had to be reworded for clarity in conducting the pilot test, and five questions had to be adjusted from yes/no questions to open-ended questions to elicit a more descriptive perception. The document collection consisted of the participants' student iReady reading data and state-mandated reading test scores. Following the interviews and document dissemination, I transcribed and analyzed the data collected, looking for patterns, themes, and distinctive perceptions (Butin, 2010). Some patterns I thought would emerge were the lack of understanding of the difference between equity and equality, the lack of professional development around equity, the lack of participant knowledge to support students culturally, and a misunderstanding of

reading assessment alignment between classroom data and state tests. Findings are detailed in Chapter 4. My hypothesis is detailed in Chapter 5.

In the past, I have worked with this Title I school in multiple ways: initially as the school coach to help lead professional learning communities by guiding data-driven instruction and as an instructional coach to model district initiatives, and later I was promoted and remained connected to the school as a district-level coach continuing to support the school on an as-needed basis. During this support phase, I visited the school monthly and conversed with staff through emails. Since beginning the doctoral courses in the past 2 years, the school administration and other personnel have supported any project or research needed to complete coursework. Based on the relationships I have developed within the school and my nonevaluative role, I felt the staff would want to support this qualitative study's research and welcome me into their classrooms. The teachers already trusted me and knew I would protect any responses provided during the interview.

The research conducted had limited to no interference in the classroom. This school has had previous professional development using debriefing through questioning, so I did not feel the interviews would disrupt instruction; in addition, the discussions took place in the summer when no students were in the building.

Steps of Data Collection

Case study researchers gather qualitative data by conducting an in-depth analysis of a process of one or more individuals through documentation, archival records, interviews, observations, and artifacts (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). For this study, I visited one site and conducted two interviews with multiple teachers over the course of the summer. The goal was to have up to 15 participants, of which I was able to

secure 11 volunteers.

Obtaining Participants

        The participants for this study were recruited from one Title I elementary school

in a suburban school district in the southwestern piedmont region of North Carolina,

using a purposeful selection process to best support my understanding of the research

questions. I chose to use this school because of my previous history of supporting this

school. Creswell and Creswell (2018) referred to this selection of a school and teachers as

a nonrandom sampling. This nonrandom selection process is often used in qualitative

studies as it allows a researcher to utilize specific criteria (Creswell & Creswell, 2018;

Readingcraze, 2020). Creswell and Creswell referred to this type of process as a

purposeful selection because the participants can support the researcher in understanding

the topic. Patton (2002, as cited in Readingcraze, 2020) defined purposeful sampling as,

        The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich

        cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can

        learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry,

        thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights

        and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations. (p. 230)

        My first step in this process was to complete the district approval form. I

submitted the required Google form, letting the district know that a research study would

be taking place. In this Google form, I provided details of the study. The district granted

approval for the study to take place. Once I had IRB approval to proceed with the

research, I emailed the school site principal to gain permission to conduct research at the

school site. I had worked with the school for the past 6 years and felt that the principal

would agree with my presence at the school and allow me to send a recruitment email to conduct interviews with the certified teachers at the school. I created a permission to recruit email for the principal (see Appendix A) requesting permission to use the site as part of this research. Once the principal replied to the permission to recruit email and granted access to the teachers, I sent a recruitment email (see Appendix B) for interested participants to respond to indicate interest. The recruitment email was sent to all of the school's 24 certified teachers. I interviewed every certified teacher who responded that they were willing to participate. My goal was to have up to 15 certified teachers representing multiple grade levels and discipline areas. This representation would have allowed for a more diverse view in looking at equity in multi-aged classrooms in an elementary school. Since the first email did not recruit at least 15 participants, I resent the same email to the people who did not respond in an attempt to gain additional participants. I did not receive any additional responses from the second email.

Setting

This study occurred in one Title I elementary school in the southwestern part of North Carolina, and that school will be known as the study site for this research. The school averages 340 students and boasts a teacher-to-student ratio of 1:14. The school is considered a neighborhood school, meaning many students live within walking distance of the school. The free and reduced lunch percentage is 99.1. Table 2 displays the ethnic breakdown of the school.

Table 2

Research Site Ethnicity Breakdown

Ethnicity	Percent represented
White	56.3%
Hispanic	25.7%
African American	9.5%
Asian	4.9%
Two or more races	3.4%
Pacific Islander	0.3%

The school student population is predominately White, at a little more than half the population. Approximately one third of the school population is Hispanic, with the remaining four ethnic groups representing the smallest combined percentage of the student population. The ethnic enrollment makeup of students has remained consistent for the past 7 years.

Performance scores prior to 2021 averaged approximately 30%, but in 2021, the school score grew to 69%. This is accredited to each student being provided a Chromebook, and those students who needed internet access were provided a hotspot. This growth was also credited to the teachers, as they continued to hold regular classes virtually and called student families to make sure students logged in if they missed a class.

The school has 23 full-time classroom teachers and one part-time teacher; the majority are female, although there is one male teacher. The 24 certified teachers consist of 16 regular education classrooms, one literacy teacher, one math teacher, one academically gifted teacher, one ELL teacher, one art teacher, one music teacher, one physical education teacher, and one exceptional children's teacher. Yin (2018) recommended that a case study can examine multiple cases around a focused topic to

draw cross-case conclusions. By using this site, I explored multiple cases supporting similar classroom structures and expectations set by the principal and examined the topic of equity perceptions.

Rationale for Target Population

The rationale for choosing this Title 1 school was my previous relationship with the staff at the site due to my time there as both a site-based coach and district-based coach. I had worked with the school for 8 years, and the teachers have consistently been willing to help as needed in any project and answer questions honestly without fear of retribution, as my role has always been nonevaluative. Working with people who already trust you can be advantageous, as most have no reason to embrace an outsider (Rock, 2001). This school has been used for lab sites in the past, and the staff are used to being observed, video recorded, and interviewed with debriefing. Lab sites in the district provide staff development opportunities, as staff from other schools are able to watch certain aspects of a lesson and then debrief with the school's staff and ask clarifying questions as needed. Although I felt most teachers at the school would welcome the research, I had to be mindful of participant relationships, as equity can be a challenging topic (Butin, 2010). If the participant did not feel comfortable with any questions or providing the needed documents, they could choose not to answer or ask to end their part of the research study and have their collected data destroyed.

Protecting Participants

Ethical issues should be anticipated when collecting data. I have protected my research participants, developed a trusting relationship, promoted the integrity of the research, and avoided misconduct and impropriety that could reflect negatively on the

school or district (Israel & Hay, 2006, as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

After acquiring 10 participant teachers, I sent a follow-up email through their school email addresses and provided more detailed information about the research (see Appendix C). This follow-up email contained the informed consent letter. The email also contained a link to a Google Form (see Appendix D) that gathered the best way to conduct the summer interviews and allowed them to accept the informed consent letter. By sending the follow-up email, I ensured that only certified teachers were selected, as their feedback is most relative to the study. I reminded the participants of their role and rights in the research process using the informed consent letter at the beginning of the first interview. The teacher's role in the study was to participate in two audio-recorded one-on-one interview sessions that could take up to 1 hour each. They also had to provide me verbal permission to pull their reading reports for iReady information, mClass information, or end-of-grade (EOG) test scores. Certified teachers in Grades K-2 use mClass and iReady for reading testing, and certified teachers in Grades 3-5 have EOG and iReady reading assessments. I used these data types as artifacts for assessment review in participant interviews. Participants were notified that if at any time they were uncomfortable with the interviews, they had the right to withdraw and request that their data be destroyed without penalty. Participants were assured that all data, audio recordings, and interview transcripts would be kept confidential. All materials collected were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my closet and on a password-protected computer. All digital media, testing data, and printed materials will be disposed of 3 years after the final defense. At that time, all hard copy data, such as assessment data, notes, and transcripts, will be deposited in a secured and locked recycle bin located at the district

central office and shredded by a professional shredding company.

Data Collection

When determining the best way to answer the four research questions, I chose to use two data collection tools often used in qualitative research. The tools included field document collection and interviews (Butin, 2010; Janesick, 2016; Yin, 2018). I decided to use these two research tools because both provided the needed data to document teacher perceptions of equity in the classroom.

Document Collection. Document collection was the means by which I collected teacher reading summative assessment alignment to state reading assessments, as that was one system that research showed led to inequity. By collecting iReady reading data, end-of-year reading data, and mClass reading reports, I was able to analyze similarities and differences by asking specific questions about reading assessment practices during the interviews.

iReady is a Grade K-8 online adaptive assessment program created by Curriculum Associates that adjusts to pinpoint student needs based on their response patterns and answer choices (Curriculum Associates, 2014). I chose to use this documentation as all students in Grades K-5 at the site had taken this reading assessment. Teachers used the data received from the program to make instructional decisions for their students. Often, teachers used the instructional pathway designed by the program to support core instruction.

mClass reading is a state-mandated reading assessment given to students in Grades K-2. Amplify Education (2022) created this program to measure phonemic awareness, phonics skills, fluency skills, vocabulary skills, and reading comprehension. I

chose to use this document, as this was the state-assigned assessment to show student end-of-year proficiency levels.

The state EOG reading test is given to students in Grades K-8. This assessment is given to students as a way to measure their proficiency in the mastery of grade-level standards (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). I chose to use this document, as this was the state-assigned reading assessment to show student end-of-year proficiency levels.

Yin (2018) noted that by collecting documentation data, the researcher is able to review the data to draw conclusions repeatedly. He continued that documentation data are unobtrusive, meaning the data are already there and no one has to create something as a result of the study. The data collected are specific, containing exact names and details, allowing the researcher to investigate similarities and differences.

Interview. Interviews are a means to collect relevant data from individuals effectively and in a controlled manner. I used a one-on-one approach to conduct the interviews for this research and provided the participants with a confidential space to share their experiences and respond honestly to the questions. The participants were interviewed twice individually through their choice of face-to-face, via video call using Google Meet, or by phone. These confidential interviews allowed the teachers at the site to tell me what they perceived about educational equity rather than stating something they thought others would want to hear, which often happens in a focus group with multiple people (Butin, 2010). Participants were asked open-ended questions during each interview to elicit their views and opinions of equity in education. I asked the main question and, if indicated, a follow-up or clarifying question. Each interview lasted

approximately 30 minutes. The interviews took place on a day and time of the

participant's choice. The participants booked their times through Doodle, a free online

scheduling tool. I believed the teachers would be willing to interview for a maximum of 1

hour if given a choice of time and day. The first interview had 10 questions related to

equity (see Appendix E). These questions were used to answer the first three research

questions. The second interview had five questions related to assessment (see Appendix

F). These questions were used to answer the fourth research question. Table 3 shows how

the interview questions aligned with the research questions that they aimed to support.

Table 3

Alignment of the Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Question 1: What understandings do elementary-level educators have regarding what it means to provide an equitable education?

Interview Questions
- What do you see as the purpose of education?
- What do you believe equity is in education?
- How do you ensure all students feel seen in your class?
- What cultural experiences do you provide to your students?

Research Question 2: What perceptions do elementary-level educators have about their experiences in providing an equitable education?

Interview Questions
- When or how do you as a teacher learn about people of other ethnicities?
- How do students identify themselves or see themselves represented in your lessons?
- How do you create opportunities for students to see themselves in your lessons?
- How do you ensure all students are provided an equitable education?

Research Question 3: How do elementary-level educators perceive the systems that may create inequities for their students?

Interview Questions
- Where do you see equity in education?
- What systems do you see in education that create inequities?

Research Question 4: How do elementary-level educators navigate reading assessments to support students?

Interview Questions
- Describe your classroom assessment practices.
- Describe how the iReady test aligns or does not with the state reading test.
- How do you support struggling students through iReady assessments?
- How do you support struggling students through state reading assessments?
- I noticed in the assessment documents you let me pull that…can you tell me why you think that is?

The interview questions were crafted to gain additional insight into teacher

perceptions about equity or inequities in education with a focus on assessment. Each

question was framed to solicit feedback from the participant in an interview and could not

be observed directly using a classroom observation. Some of the information in these

questions allowed the participant to provide historical details from past class experiences.

The interview questions were grouped by how they would support the research question; however, depending on the response provided by the participant, the interview questions also supported other research questions. In looking at the weighted areas of the questions, most questions fell under Research Question 2 regarding teacher perceptions. This representation is due to this qualitative research project being centered on elementary teacher perceptions.

Steps of Data Analysis

The analysis of the data took place in five parts. These five parts were considered research tips by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and include organizing the data, looking at the data, coding the data, generating themes, and representing the themes.

Organize and Prepare the Data

Once the teacher had confirmed participation in the study, I collected the reading document data from iReady, mClass, and EOG assessments and began to disseminate for similarities and differences. During the interviews, I took notes and recorded the participant and myself using a voice recorder on my personal iPhone. I transcribed the voice recording using my personal computer and iPhone. I uploaded my written notes, the transcribed type-ups, and the voice recordings to a folder labeled Class A, Class B, Class C, Class D, Class E, Class F, Class G, Class H, Class I, and Class J on my personal computer.

Investigate the Data

To investigate the data, I read through the transcriptions of the interviews and investigated what the teachers said. I further investigated any comments in the margin of

ideas related to the research questions that occurred. Second, I reread the data collected and added additional notes on general observations, commonalities, or significant differences from the interviews.

Code the Data

To code the data, I looked at notes from the investigation step. I organized the themes that emerged from the interviews using those notes. Similar items were marked using multiple colored highlighters to help provide visual organization. I then labeled categories using participant language, called in vivo terms (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Formulate a Theme

When formulating a theme, I crafted a description from the information assimulated when coding the research. In the description, I included a non-identifying description of the teacher, including the amount of time they had been teaching, and a narrative of the interview.

Create a Representation of the Themes

In the final step, I created a representation of the themes uncovered. The themes that emerged from the study included (a) educators believed that providing an equitable education would create successful adults, (b) educators gained cultural experiences by having conversations with their students, (c) elementary educators identified systems of inequity, and (d) educators felt that intentional plannings based on data would be the best way to support students. Each theme is revealed throughout the Chapter 4 narrative to report the findings of the analysis. The representations include tables or figures to show data related to teacher perceptions of equity.

Ethical Considerations

  All interview notes and audio recordings have been kept private and confidential, and all participant information has been protected to preserve confidentiality by being stored in a locked cabinet in my home and on a password-protected computer. All materials and data will be disposed of 3 years after the final defense.

Summary

  This chapter provided detailed information about the qualitative research method. This qualitative research took place in the participant's setting, where I collected assessment documentation and interviewed educators to capture their perceptions surrounding equity. This study took place in the summer and involved 10 certified volunteer teachers. The teachers were interviewed twice by selecting their choice of day and mean of communication, either face-to-face, via Google Meet, or by phone, for up to 1 hour during each interview. Chapter 4 includes the data collected and an interpretation of those data, while Chapter 5 focuses on how this study contributes to the literature on equity in education and provides recommendations for further research.

Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative case study aimed to explore teacher perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education while focusing on one identified system of inequity: reading assessments. Participant perceptions helped support an understanding of how teachers at one elementary school site perceived, experienced, and navigated systems that may lead to inequity in an educational setting. Qualitative data were collected through two separate one-to-one interviews and through document collection and analysis of reading assessment scores. This study investigated these ideas through an interpretivist theoretical framework, meaning that as the researcher, my role was to provide details as described by the case study participants.

This chapter provides the data and findings to answer the four research questions:

1. What understandings do elementary-level educators have regarding what it means to provide an equitable education?

2. What perceptions do elementary-level educators have about their experiences in providing an equitable education?

3. How do elementary-level educators perceive the systems that may create inequities for their students?

4. How do elementary-level educators navigate reading assessments to support students?

Data collection for this qualitative case study included two separate one-to-one interviews with 10 certified teachers who gave permission for me to access their reading assessment data. Two of the teachers who volunteered were not classroom teachers but supported students in other areas. This chapter describes the data related to each research

question from the interviewed teacher perceptions. The findings are organized by the research question and related interview questions, identifying and describing the themes that emerged.

**Summary of the Setting and Data Collection Process**

This study was conducted in a single Title I elementary school located in the southwestern part of North Carolina. I completed the district-required Google form document to obtain permission to conduct this research. After being granted permission to conduct the research from the district, I reached out to the school site via email, asking the principal if I could complete the case study at the school (see Appendix A). Once the principal granted permission for me to use the school as a research location, I sent a recruitment email to the 24 certified teachers on staff (see Appendix B). Through the recruitment email, I was able to obtain 10 participants. I sent the recruitment email a second time to try to gain additional participants but did not receive a response from the second email. The 10 volunteer participants then received a follow-up email that contained a more detailed purpose of the research being conducted and the informed consent form (see Appendix C). Attached to the informed consent email was a digital copy of the consent form in a Google format (see Appendix D). This digital copy allowed the teachers to digitally sign that they received the informed consent letter and that they were assured of confidentiality surrounding them as participants in this case study. Once I received the digitally signed Google form back, I began to access participating teacher reading assessment data. To keep the identity of the participants safe, they are referred to as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E, Teacher F, Teacher G, Teacher H, Teacher I, and Teacher J throughout this case study.

I accessed each participating teacher's assessment data through our district's iReady and mClass platforms; teachers in Grades 3-5 provided their EOG class scores. Different reading data documents were obtained for participants in grades kindergarten to second and third to fifth. For teachers in Grades K-2, I selected their mClass reading assessment and iReady reading diagnostics. For teachers in Grades 3-5, I selected their iReady diagnostics and EOG reading assessments. To analyze the participants' K-2 testing data, I looked at each student's score on their mClass and iReady reports to see where they scored in relation to proficiency. For students in Grades 3-5, I looked at each student's iReady report score and EOG score to investigate proficiency. When examining the data, I focused on items that did not align or had conflicting proficiency scores. For example, if a K-2 student did not meet proficiency in mClass and iReady, the data aligned; however, if the student scored low proficiency in mClass but high proficiency in iReady, I marked the data as a talking point in the interview with that participant. I used this same process with the data for students in Grades 3-5. If a student met proficiency for iReady and met proficiency for the state EOG, the data aligned, but if the student met proficiency in iReady but did not meet proficiency on their EOG, I marked the data as a talking point to discuss in the interview with the participants. All data that aligned were not mentioned or discussed in the interviews. Data that were marked for discussion because they showed conflicting data between the two data pieces were noted using the student's initials and their scores. This process allowed me to discuss the misalignment of the two pieces of data with the participating teachers and collect their perceptions of why they felt the tests did not align or why they felt the student scored the way they did. There were two separate interviews to collect data for this case study. The first interview

questions corresponded with the first three research questions. These questions focused on educational equity perceptions (see Appendix E). During the first interview, I also collected each participant's years of teaching experience. Figure 4 reports the number of years of teaching for each participant.

Figure 4

Participant Years of Teaching

Participants' Years of Teaching

Teacher	Years Teaching
A	9
B	10
C	11
D	5
E	21
F	26
G	14
H	12
I	5
J	9
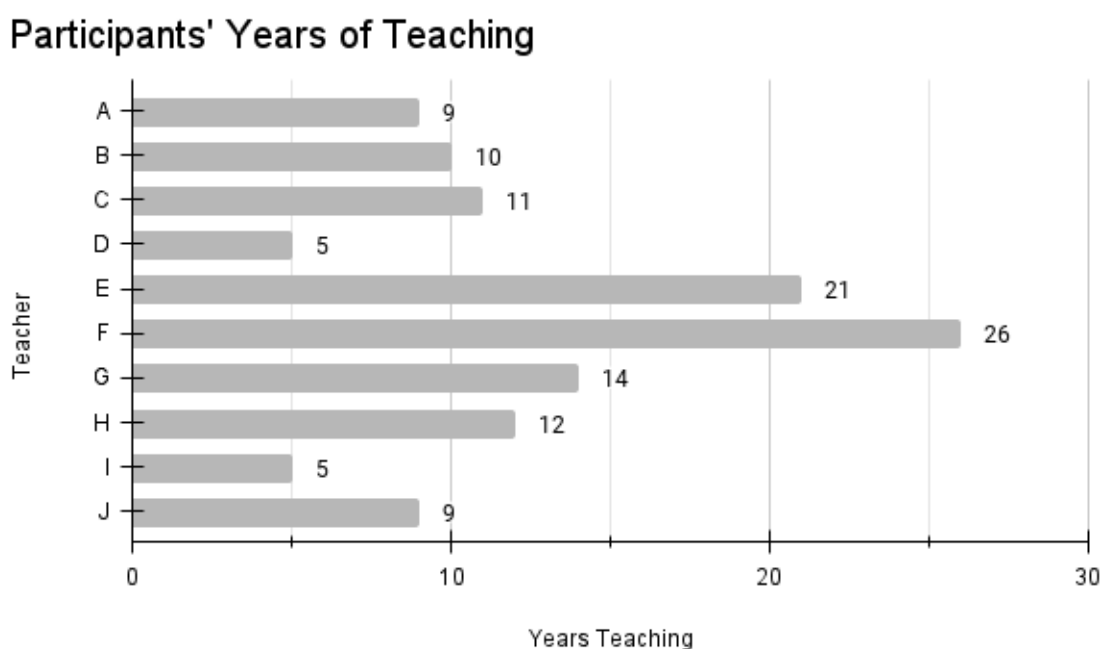
The majority of the participants had 10 years or more of teaching experience. None of the teachers were beginning teachers, with the lowest amount of teaching experience being reported at 5 years.

In the second interview, the questions discussed were related to assessment (see Appendix F). The assessment questions focused on assessment equity and participant perceptions of the data I disseminated for the interview. In each interview, I only discussed two to three data conflicts that stood out in the assessment discussion. These

data conflicts were related to student proficiency scores. In Grades K-2, I looked for discrepancies with proficiency between mClass and iReady reading data. In Grades 3-5, I investigated data conflicts related to student proficiency between iReady and state EOG assessments. I felt that mentioning only two to three data points would lead to a more productive conversation about why the teachers thought the conflict occurred, without having the participants feel overwhelmed by the amount of data being presented to them.

Findings

The findings of this study pertain to teacher perceptions of educational systems of inequity, with a focus on reading assessments. To report these findings, I chose to use what Yin (2018) referred to as a question-and-answer format. In a question-and-answer format, the researcher will report multiple case study interview responses to the same question set (Yin, 2018). After the research questions, I provided a narrative of the data as I interpreted each participant interview. Additionally, I presented any themes that emerged during the data analysis phase. Themes were developed by hand-coding the transcribed notes from the interviews. The themes included (a) educators believed that providing an equitable education would create successful adults, (b) educators gained cultural experiences by having conversations with their students, (c) elementary educators identified systems of inequity, and (d) educators felt that intentional plannings based on data would be the best way to support students. When looking for patterns, I used an interpretivist lens, reporting participant responses to the interview questions on what I understood to be their beliefs and perceptions related to educational equity. The first question asked in the interview did not relate to the research questions but rather provided data about the years of service for the participant. These data also provided the

opportunity to remove any first-year teachers from the study, had they volunteered to

participate. The next 15 questions were designed so participants felt free to share their

ideas and beliefs surrounding what it means to provide an equitable education through

systems of inequity. The interview questions were not presented in any specific order in

relation to the research questions and were designed to build on each other and help keep

the interview flowing. For reporting these findings, I organized the questions to align

with the research question they support. Table 4 lists the research questions and the

correlating interview questions.

Table 4

Research Questions and Correlating Interview Questions

Research questions	Interview questions and number alignment
What understandings do elementary-level educators have regarding what it means to provide an equitable education?	2. What do you see as the purpose of education? 3. What do you believe equity is in education? 7. How do you ensure all students feel seen in your class? 8. What cultural experiences do you provide to your students?
What perceptions do elementary-level educators have about their experiences in providing an equitable education?	6. When or how do you as a teacher learn about people of other ethnicities? 9. How do students identify themselves or see themselves represented in your lessons? 10. How do you create opportunities for students to see themselves in your lessons? 11. How do you ensure all students are provided an equitable education?
How do elementary-level educators perceive the systems that may create inequities for their students?	4. Where do you see equity in education? 5. What systems do you see in education that create inequities?
How do elementary-level educators navigate reading assessments to support students?	1a. Describe your classroom assessment practices. 2a. Describe how the iReady test aligns or does not align with the state reading test. 3a. How do you support struggling students through iReady assessments? 4a. How do you support struggling students through state reading assessments? 5a. I noticed in the assessment documents you let me pull that…can you tell me why you think that is?

The interview questions were aligned with the research questions that supported my interpretation of participant responses during the interviews to gain additional insight into teacher perceptions about equity or inequities in education with a focus on reading assessment. Each interview question was grouped by how it would support the research question. This representation allowed the research questions to be fully explored but caused the representation of the interview data to be out of order. For example, when Research Question 1 is discussed, I will reference Interview Questions 2, 3, 7, and 8.

Research Question 1: What Understandings Do Elementary-Level Educators Have Regarding What It Means to Provide an Equitable Education?

To collect perceptual data to answer Research Question 1, I asked each participant four questions related to education and equity. These questions included Interview Questions 2, "What do you see as the purpose of education"; 3, "What do you believe equity is in education"; 7, "How do you ensure all students feel seen in your class"; and 8, "What cultural experiences do you provide to your students?"

Interview Question 2. What Do You See As the Purpose of Education?
Teachers were asked to share what they saw as the purpose of education. I asked this question to get an idea of what the teachers perceived as the purpose of education, and each teacher reflected on what they saw as their purpose as an educator in students' lives. Table 5 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred in the course of 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 5

Question 2 Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 2 coded response	Number of times it occurred
Successful adult citizens	7
Achieve life goals	3
Educate	4
Navigate to world	3

As participating teachers described what they felt the purpose of education was, there were seven times among the interviews when Teachers B, C, E, F, G, H, and I mentioned they felt education's purpose was to help students to be successful or productive citizens or contributors to society. Teacher F stated, "I believe education is to make builders of communities, as well as to equip students not just to be lifelong learners, but to contribute to society as productive citizens." Teachers A, C, and H added that education's role was to support students in pursuing dreams and achieving life goals. Teachers A, B, I, and J mentioned that providing equal opportunities in teaching subjects and providing learning opportunities were the roles education needed to provide. Teachers G, H, and I felt the purpose of education was to support student navigation of the world. Teacher G stated, "I see teaching children how to learn about the world themselves to help them navigate the world. So when they go out into the world, they know how to learn from the world."

Interview Question 3. What Do You Believe Equity Is in Education? Teachers were asked to share what they believed equity was in education. I asked this question to get an idea of what the teachers perceived as equity in education, and each participating teacher reflected on what they felt students should receive for education to be equitable. Table 6 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred

in 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 6

Question 3 Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 3 coded response	Number of times it occurred
Treated equally	6
Individual needs met	7
Opportunity for success	2
Instilling a hard work ethic	1

Teachers A, C, D, E, F, and H described equity in education as being treated equally and stated that students had the right to receive a quality education. Teacher D stated, " I believe that it's [equity in education] providing all students with the same opportunity to receive a quality education." A large majority, Teachers C, D, E, F, G, I, and J, also commented that for students to receive an equitable education, their individual needs needed to be met. Teacher G commented, "Equity in education is giving students the ability to succeed, providing them with whatever they need in order to succeed." Two participants, Teachers E and H, mentioned providing a student the opportunity to be successful in their educational studies. Teacher B added that for students to be provided an equitable education, the teacher had to help instill a hard work ethic.

Continuing with interview questions to support Research Question 1, I have rearranged the original sequence of questions that were presented from the interviews. The reorganization of the question sequence does not affect the data presented. The next interview question that aligns with Research Question 1 is Question 7.

Interview Question 7. How Do You Ensure All Students Feel Seen in Your Class? Teachers were asked to share how they ensured all students felt seen in their class.

I asked this question to understand how teachers support students in being seen as a part of their classroom culture. When teachers responded to this question, most answered that they thought building relationships in class was the best way for students to feel seen. Table 7 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 7

Question 7 Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 7 coded response	Number of times it occurred
Relationship building	9
Morning Meeting activities	4
Pictures around the room	1
Intervention group time	1

Nine participants, Teachers A, B, C, D, E, G, I, and J, agreed that relationship building was the best way for students to feel seen in the classroom. Teacher G stated, "Having a relationship with the student, but also encouraging them to have relationships with each other and to get to know each other and to talk to one another helps them feel seen [in the classroom]." When I asked for additional details on how participating teachers build relationships with their students, most said they did this through conversations and allowing students to talk about themselves during class. Four teachers, Teachers C, E, H, and J, added that they had planned cooperation and speaking activities to support comfortable sharing during their morning meetings. Teacher F, who teaches younger children, added she felt having individual pictures of students hanging around the room helped the students feel seen and included. Another opportunity one teacher, Teacher J, felt helped students feel seen was giving the students time to meet with the

teacher during intervention time.

Interview Question 8. What Cultural Experiences Do You Provide to Your Students? For the final interview question aligned with Research Question 1, participating teachers were asked to share the cultural experiences they provided for their students. I asked this question to learn how teachers provide students with cultural experiences. Participant responses to providing cultural experiences spanned four areas. Table 8 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 8

Question 8 Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 8 coded response	Number of times it occurred
Multicultural days	5
Inclusion of names	3
Morning Meeting activities	3
Curriculum	6

The cultural experiences provided to the students by the interviewed teachers varied from curriculum integration to adding multicultural celebrations associated with specific holidays. When asked about specific curriculum experiences, Teacher I noted that they study civil rights, Hispanic contributions, early settlement, and Native Americans. When discussing a multicultural day, Teacher A mentioned students brought in food or did a traditional dance from another country and told about some of their cultural traditions. Teacher E mentioned they looked at books and video clips and wrote biographies on cultural holidays.

Three teachers, Teachers A, C, and F, talked about the importance of using names

familiar to students as a cultural experience. Teacher C mentioned that the text they use to tell about cultures used "traditional White American names" and that a majority of their students did not have a "typical White American name." When planning, the PLC team tries to pull culturally relevant text that includes "different names, different cultures, and different family situations."

Morning Meeting was another time that three of the teachers, Teachers B, D, and F, said that they provided cultural experiences. Morning Meeting is a time in the day, usually first thing in the morning, when the teachers and students engage in a greeting, morning message, shared discussion, and group activity. They said the shared discussion was a great time to allow freedom for the students to discuss a part of their culture. Teacher D added that this time allowed students to see things from different perspectives and empathize with others.

When investigating Research Question 1, the data focused on the understanding that elementary teachers held regarding what it means to provide an equitable education. The data from the interviews led me to conclude that elementary educators have an understanding that to provide students with an equitable education, they need to support students by providing equal treatment as well as meeting individual needs to support learning. To support equal treatment, teachers mentioned that it was essential to follow the mandated curriculum. Educators said they offer multicultural activities on specific days to support meeting individual student needs. In the next section, Research Question 2 explores the experiences elementary teachers employ to provide an equitable education.

Research Question 2: What Perceptions Do Elementary-Level Educators Have About Their Experiences in Providing an Equitable Education?

To answer Research Question 2, I asked each participant four questions related to teacher experiences in providing an equitable education. These questions included Interview Questions 6, "When or how do you as a teacher learn about people of other ethnicities"; 9, "How do students identify themselves or see themselves represented in your lessons"; 10, "How do you create opportunities for students to see themselves in your lessons"; and 11, "How do you ensure all students are provided an equitable education?" The questions from the interview protocol that aligned with the second research question focused on the teachers' learning about people of other ethnicities, providing opportunities for students to see themselves represented in class lessons, and ensuring equity in lessons.

Interview Question 6. When or How Do You as a Teacher, Learn About People of Other Ethnicities? I asked teachers about how they learned about people of other ethnicities to understand how teachers gain information about people whose ethnicities may differ from their own. Asking the participants how they learned about people of other ethnicities, Teachers A, B, C, E, F, G, H, I, and J said they learned the most through conversations with their students. Table 9 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 9

Question 6 Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 6 coded response	Number of times it occurred
Student conversations	9
Culture days	3
Television and social media	2
Book studies	3

The interview participants mentioned student conversations nine times when they discussed how they learned about other ethnicities. Teachers A, B, C, E, F, G, H, I, and J noted that students discussed family activities and they had class-wide discussions about those activities so everyone could learn or relate while adding to the conversation. Three participants, Teachers B, C, and H, brought up the previously mentioned culture days, saying that families went all out with authentic food and traditional dresses. Teacher D and Teacher E both commented that they learned the most about other ethnicities through television and social media articles. Three of the teachers, Teachers D, E, and F, mentioned that the school had done a book study on poverty. During the book study, Teacher D reflected on how she learned to have conversations about education with parents who are in poverty. Teacher F commented on how the book study taught her to think about how parents of different cultures perceive education in different cultures.

Interview Question 9. How Do Students Identify Themselves or See Themselves Represented in Your Lessons? The next question in the interview focused on how students see themselves or people like them in classroom instruction. I asked this question to get an idea of how the participants present lessons so students feel represented. Participant responses to how they use lessons to help students identify themselves showed that teachers often use the curriculum to support the representation of

the students. Table 10 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 10

Question 9 Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 9 coded response	Number of times it occurred
Curriculum inclusion	8
Multicultural name inclusion	2
Personal connections	4

Eight teachers, Teachers A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and J, commented that using the curriculum to include student representation was how they supported students seeing themselves in lessons. Teacher A commented that it was important to take the curriculum provided by the district and the state standards and use those as ways to support students. Teacher A added that using texts that have similar backgrounds, ethnicity, and names helps students see themselves reflected in lessons. Another teacher commented that they often changed characters' names in math problems and other texts when she could, so students saw names similar to their own.

Four teachers, Teachers D, F, G, and I, commented that establishing personal connections helps when planning lessons for the students. Teacher G said, "I try to keep their interest in mind when planning, especially for social studies and science." Teacher F commented that when planning, she reflected on the *All About Me* inventory she had students fill out at the beginning of the year so she could plan lessons that were special to the individual students.

Interview Question 10. How Do You Create Opportunities for Students to See Themselves in Your Lessons? For the next interview question aligned with Research Question 2, teachers shared how they create opportunities for students to see themselves reflected in classroom instruction. I asked this question to learn how the teachers create opportunities for students to see their cultures in lessons. To create opportunities for students to see themselves in lessons, Teachers A, B, D, E, F, G, H, and J commented that they would plan those lessons intentionally. Table 11 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 11

Question 10 Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 10 coded response	Number of times it occurred
Intentional planning	8
Morning meeting collaboration	2

Eight of the teachers, Teachers A, B, D, E, F, G, H, and J, interviewed quickly said they were intentional when planning lessons to help the students see themselves reflected in their lessons. Teacher F commented she was intentional through lesson planning and using whole group lessons as a way to help students reflect, but that sometimes she pulls students one-on-one so they can delve deeper into conversations students may need to have. Teacher A encouraged students to ask questions and express their opinions during lessons.

Two teachers, Teacher C and Teacher I, commented that during Morning Meeting, students had time to collaborate and learn from one another. Teacher C

commented that she uses Morning Meeting as a way for students to have a safe space for them to open up and share about themselves. Teacher I said that she liked using open-ended questions so students could express themselves in an almost role-play-like situation. Teachers C and Teacher I commented that they felt this collaboration among students helped students feel seen and heard.

Interview Question 11. How Do You Ensure All Students Are Provided an Equitable Education? The final interview question aligned with Research Question 2 focused on ensuring an equitable education for students. I asked this question to understand how teachers support students in obtaining an equitable education. The participants varied over four areas when asked how they ensure an equitable education: treated equally, interventions, learning from students, and providing what students need to be successful. Table 12 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 12

Question 11 Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 11 coded response	Number of times it occurred
Treated equally	4
Interventions	4
Learning from students	2
Provide what they need to be successful	1

To provide an equitable education, four teachers commented that students should be treated equally, and four teachers commented that students needed to be provided interventions so everyone gets what they need. When I asked further questions about being treated equally, Teacher B commented that they did not want students to see or feel

favoritism in the classroom. Teacher B commented, "I'm not going to like someone more because they are an AIG student or composer. I don't treat someone differently because they are EC."

When discussing interventions helping to provide students with an equitable education, Teacher B continued that as teachers, they have to fill the educational holes students have and that everyone has to get what they need to be successful.

Two teachers, Teacher C and Teacher I, commented that it is essential to know your students to provide them with an equitable education. When I prodded more into their comments about knowing your students, Teacher I commented, "As a teacher, one has to know the student's dynamics and to do that, you ask lots of questions and use what you learn to plan equitable lessons."

Research Question 2 focused on the experiences elementary teachers employ to provide an equitable education. The interview data led me to conclude that elementary educators had varied views on providing an equitable education. Most educators agreed that student conversations allowed them to incorporate activities that would showcase student culture in their classroom. A few teachers said they used what was offered in the mandated curriculum to provide cultural experiences. In the next section, Research Question 3 explores how educators perceive systems that may create inequities for students.

Research Question 3: How Do Elementary-Level Educators Perceive the Systems That May Create Inequities for Their Students?

To answer Research Question 3, I asked each participant two questions related to teacher perceptions of systems that create inequities. These questions included Interview

Questions 4, "Where do you see equity in education"; and 5, "What systems do you see in education create inequities?" These questions focused on where the participants see equity in education and the educational systems they perceive to create inequities for students.

Interview Question 4. Where Do You See Equity in Education? The first interview question that aligned with the third research question dealt with teacher perceptions of where equity exists in education. I asked this question to learn where or when teachers see equity in education. During the interview, participant responses to where they saw equity in education spanned four areas: standards-based grading, involving the community, teaching methods, and small group instruction. Table 13 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 13

Question 4 Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 4 coded response	Number of times it occurred
Standards-based grading	2
Involving the community	2
Teaching methods	4
Small group instruction	2

Each interview elicited a direct response to the question of where teachers see equity in education. Teachers were divided equally into three areas – standards-based grading, involving the community, and small group instruction – with teaching methods having slightly more discussion. For teaching methods, Teachers C, D, F, and J commented that equity was in their lessons and the small group support they provided.

Teacher C said she stopped pushing homework as hard as she once had. Teacher F commented that she found that the enrichment model she used was good for AIG students and ESL students. Teacher J added that through small groups, teachers can meet student needs and provide equity in the classroom.

For standards-based grading, Teacher B and Teacher C commented that this was one way they saw this past year that took teacher bias out of grading. Teacher B said, " I see equity in education with standards-based grading because students are scored on their understanding of a standard. It takes out factors such as teacher bias or giving someone credit for just completing an assignment." Teacher C commented that she was excited to see a shift to standards-based grading, as using rubrics would help with equity.

Involving the community was another way two teachers saw equity in education. Teacher H commented that Title I nights, parent newsletters, school websites, and outreach programs at the school help provide equity in education. Teacher A noted the importance of involving community members and making sure they feel like a part of the school's vision, which helps build an equitable relationship between the home and school.

Another area Teacher D and Teacher J brought up was the need for small groups to provide equity in education. These teachers both noted that small groups help meet student needs, therefore creating equity in the classroom. Teacher D commented that in small group instruction, she could work one-on-one with each student to meet their needs. Teacher J mentioned that small group instruction was the best time to meet and provide students with the learning they needed.

Interview Question 5. What Systems Do You See in Education Create

Inequities? The other question aligned with Research Question 3 focused on educational

systems. I asked this question to understand what systems teachers see in education that

create equity. In the interview, participant responses were broad to what systems they

saw in education that create inequities. Table 14 shows the coded responses mentioned

and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are

the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned

a keyword or phrase.

Table 14

Question 5 Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 5 coded response	Number of times it occurred
Standardized testing	2
Grading	1
Pull-out interventions	2
Labels	1
Funding	3
Family dynamics	2

Each teacher had a different perception of what they felt was a system of inequity.

Teacher A and Teacher G commented they felt standardized testing was an inequitable

system. Teacher A felt there was a lot of focus on standardized testing and that was

because the schools were graded by the state, but when you have students from so many

different backgrounds, it was not fair to measure student success through an EOG test.

Teacher G noted that dialect often affects how students score on the state mClass reading

assessment. She added that at the school, they had received professional development on

scoring students of different ethnic groups and felt they did a good job of supporting

students through testing but said that she had to fight the "caught you" urge to score them

incorrectly.

Teacher C mentioned the grading system as a system of inequity and that the move to standards-based grading would help alleviate that system. She commented that giving zeros for homework was hurtful and that moving to standards-based grading could help with equity. Teacher C also mentioned identifying students with labels such as AIG, ESL, or EC was a problem. She stated, "I don't like labels, I think they are hurtful."

Pull-out interventions, such as ELL classes and exceptional children's classes, or reading and math intervention classes were a system brought up by Teacher D and Teacher F. Teacher D explained that pull-out programs are conducted in small groups. She noted the issue was some students required assistance from multiple intervention specialists on more days than what was currently allotted. As a result, students were unable to participate as often as she would have liked in the support groups due to time constraints. Teacher F noted the criteria to get into these programs could be hindering placement, which was a problem.

Providing adequate funding to schools was a problem mentioned by Teachers B, E, and H but for different reasons. Teacher B said, "This whole debate with teacher pay is an injustice for veteran teachers." Teacher E stated, " Not all schools are given the same amount of funding, and that leads to discrepancies." Teacher H mentioned not all students had an equal chance to participate in after-school programs due to transportation concerns and the ability to afford the sporting equipment.

Another system Teacher I and Teacher J mentioned was family dynamics, meaning the low socioeconomic status of the student living conditions. Teacher I commented that many families have inequity and that carries over to the school. Teacher

J commented that family backgrounds could lead to inequity. She added she saw less of a problem with family economic status in lower elementary, but by middle school, it was especially bad, and money and race of families were a big factor.

This question ended the first interview session with the participants. I asked each participant if they wanted to add or mention anything to our discussion. All of the participants replied no. At that point, I thanked them for their time.

When investigating Research Question 3, the data focused on how elementary educators perceived systems that may create inequities for students. The interview data led me to conclude that elementary educators could identify various systems that create inequities, including standardized testing, placement for pull-out interventions, family dynamics, grading, student placement labels, funding, and after-school activities. In the next section, Research Question 4 explores how elementary educators navigate one identified system of inequity, reading assessments.

Research Question 4: How Do Elementary-Level Educators Navigate Reading Assessments to Support Students?

To answer Research Question 4, I asked each participant five questions about how they navigate reading assessments to support students. These questions included Interview Questions 1a, "Describe your classroom assessment practices"; 2a, "Describe how the iReady test aligns or does not align with the state reading test"; 3a, "How do you support struggling students through iReady assessments"; 4a, "How do you support struggling students through state assessments"; and 5a, "I noticed in the assessment documents you let me pull that…can you tell me why you think that?" These five questions took place during the second interview session. I have labeled each question

with the letter a to distinguish the second interview question set from the first interview question set.

Interview Question 1a. Describe Your Classroom Assessment Practices.

Participants described how they use assessments to guide classroom practices. The first interview question asked was, "Describe your classroom assessment practices." I asked this question to understand how teachers use or prepare for classroom assessments. Table 15 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 15

Question 1a Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 1a coded response	Number of times it occurred
Planning	10
iReady - formative	8
Standards driven	6
mClass/EOG - standardized	5

Planning was the overarching theme mentioned in every interview. Planning was broken up into three areas – iReady formative assessments, standards-driven, and standardized testing with mClass or the EOG. Teacher A mentioned that in PLCs, the focus was making sure assessments were aligned with instruction, adding the importance of planning with the end in mind to create lessons based on standards. These standards are what are tested through assessments. Participants mentioned formative and standardized assessments as ways to gather data to guide classroom practices.

In the classrooms, iReady was the formative assessment used to gather data to guide instruction. Using iReady data to guide instruction for small group instruction was

mentioned in eight interviews by Teachers B, C, D, E, G, H, I, and J. Teacher C mentioned they give the iReady assessment three times a year and that the formative assessment provides a report to let them know what standards the students have mastered and what standards they need support with. Teacher I said, "Once I get the [iReady] information, then I can start pulling small groups and really dive into what students don't know and then go from there."

After using the summative data from iReady, Teachers C, G, I, and J said they use the data to create classroom lessons and small group plans to help students prepare for the formative state assessments: In grades kindergarten through second, the test is mClass, and in Grades 3-5, the test is the EOG. When discussing summative assessment, Teachers A, C, D, I, and J mentioned state standardized testing. The EOG tests grade-specific standards. Teacher I and Teacher J both commented they planned around the grade-level standards; this way they could help the students obtain proficiency by the end of the year.

Interview Question 2a. Describe How the iReady Test Aligns or Does Not Align With the State Reading Test. Teachers described how they perceived the alignment of the iReady test to the state reading assessments. The second interview question asked was, "Describe how the iReady test aligns or does not align with the state reading test." I asked this question to understand how teachers see the alignment between iReady and state testing. Table 16 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 16

Question 2a Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 2a coded response	Number of times it occurred
Standards are aligned	8
Standards are not aligned	2
iReady adapts – state tests do not	1
Stamina difference	3

In eight interviews, Teachers B, C, E, F, G, H, I, and J commented that they felt the iReady test aligned with the state reading assessments. They said that the iReady test was based on standards and provided data to support student acquisition of the same standards that are tested by the state tests.

Teacher A was undecided if iReady aligned with the state reading test. She said, "There are pieces that align and there are pieces that I do not think align. It [iReady] is set up differently than what the students see on end-of-grade testing." Teacher D said the iReady test did not align because she felt iReady aligned more with Common Core National Standards than the North Carolina State Standards. She added that the extra standards tested in iReady do not support student learning. This teacher also commented that the iReady test does not align due to the adaption nature of the test. The iReady test self-adjusts as students take the test. When a student misses an answer, the test will adjust to best support the student and find a level of knowledge. The state test does not adapt, and it is issued on grade-level standards only.

Another alignment difference mentioned was stamina. When students take a test, they have to be able to sit and concentrate for a specific time allotment. Teachers A, D, and H mentioned stamina being a concern between the two tests. Teacher D noted that the most significant difference with the iReady test was that students can take a break at

any time and that the test provides them with brain breaks. The state tests do not offer the luxury of brain breaks; students are only allowed to take a few scheduled breaks simultaneously with their testing peers without interacting or moving. Brain breaks are activities that are not related to the testing material; often, it is a short game built into the iReady platform lasting no more than 2 minutes.

Interview Question 3a. How Do You Support Struggling Students Through iReady Assessments? The participants responded to how they support struggling students in two significant ways. The third interview question asked was, "How do you support struggling students through iReady assessments?" I asked this question to understand how teachers support students through the iReady testing. Often, struggling students are associated with exceptional children. This question was asked to elicit participant descriptions of struggling in whatever fashion they chose to describe as a struggling student. The teachers provided a few additional ways they support students. Table 17 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 17

Question 3a Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 3a coded response	Number of times it occurred
Testing accommodations	1
Teach testing skills	5
Proximity	1
Small group instruction	6

Teacher A mentioned she followed the students' individualized education plans and followed the modifications needed to support students with individualized education

plans. She continued to add that she supported struggling students through iReady by making sure their testing modifications were turned on in the iReady platform and that the student understood the directions.

Half of the teachers, Teachers A, D, F, G, and J, said they teach various test-taking strategies to help struggling students with the iReady assessment. Some of these strategies included using scratch paper, stop and jot, educated guesses, and unique acronyms. Teacher A said she taught students to "attack the test." These attack the test skills included annotating text, using scratch paper, and stopping and jotting unknown vocabulary words. Teacher D commented that she observes them during the iReady test and makes notes of ideas she can teach them during small group instruction to help her students with test-taking skills. Teacher J mentioned she changed the term assessment when taking tests to "show what you know," and students did not feel as stressed taking an assessment.

Teacher B stated she used proximity, such as sitting with a student or having them sit at a particular table. She said, "I have had to sit with kids or have them sit beside me so they can focus. I try to get them to take iReady seriously and not just click on the screen to get it over with."

Another way Teachers C, E, F, G, H, and I mentioned they helped students was by using data they received after the test to create small instructional groups. They used these small groups to reteach or remediate based on student needs. Teacher C said, "iReady is really good about giving us next steps for what they [students] need." Teacher E commented that she broke the data down to see what students struggled with the most. Teachers H and I both said they used the data from iReady to group similar-scoring

students in reading groups. Then they work on the skill the students in that group need to be proficient.

Interview Question 4a. How Do You Support Struggling Students Through State Reading Assessments? Participant responses to how they support struggling students with state reading assessments were heavy on test-taking strategies. The fourth interview question was, "How do you support struggling students through state reading assessments?" I asked this question to understand how teachers guide students through state testing.

Table 18 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 18

Question 4a Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 4a coded response	Number of times it occurred
Test-taking strategies	8
Build stamina	3
Intervention groups	3

To support struggling students through state testing, eight teachers, Teachers A, B, C, D, F, G, H, and I, said they use test-taking strategies. The teachers used a variety of test-taking strategies, including teaching vocabulary skills to figure out word meaning, scratch paper annotation, stop and jot, marking out wrong answers, using practice workbooks, and unique acronyms. Teacher A said, "Vocabulary is always a struggle. We spend a lot of time teaching students how to break apart words and how to use context clues." Teacher B stated she taught her students the CHAMP strategy. CHAMP is an

acronym to help students remember to <u>c</u>heck the text, <u>h</u>ighlight the text, <u>a</u>lways take time to read, <u>m</u>ark out incorrect answers, and <u>p</u>ick the best answer. The beginning of each underlined word spells out CHAMP. Teachers C, D, G, and H all said they provided multiple practice tests so students could become familiar with how the state test would look.

Another strategy three teachers, Teachers C, D, and H, used to support students through state testing was to help them build stamina. They focus on stamina at the beginning of the year by reading in class for an allotted amount of time, then slowly increasing the time over months. Teacher C stated,

> We work on sitting quietly and doing an activity for a small amount of time, about
> 20 minutes. We build up that amount of time until we get to about 45 minutes that
> kids can sit, read a selection and work on questions.

Teachers A, E, and J mentioned that they used intervention groups as a way to support struggling students with state testing. Teachers worked on missing reading skills and testing interventions in these intervention groups. Teacher A mentioned her grade-level team met in PLCs to form student groups and discuss state testing data. She added her grade-level team used those data to create groups, often even having students visit groups in other classes. Teacher A said,

> As a grade level, we always come together and analyze our data. This way, we
> know where our students are at, where they are expected to be, and what we need
> to do to get them where they need to be.

Teacher E mentioned that she did the same as she had with the iReady test; she narrowed it down to where the student was struggling the most and then found an intervention to

focus on the skill needed. Teacher J stated she used wordlists to support students through mClass testing. The wordlists contained common words students see in texts. Students used these word lists to study at school and home to help them learn to read words they struggled with.

Interview Question 5a. I Noticed in the Assessment Documents You Let Me Pull That…Can You Tell Me Why You Think That Is? The participants responded to why they felt students scored one way on the iReady test compared to the state test. The fifth interview question presented was, "I noticed in the assessment documents you let me pull that…can you tell me why you think that is?" I asked this question to understand how each teacher perceived why students score differently on iReady tests and state tests. There were various responses, with ELLs being the most common replies to a difference in scores. Table 19 shows the coded responses mentioned and the number of times the item occurred during the 10 interviews. Coded responses are the repeated patterns that occurred during the interviews when the participants mentioned a keyword or phrase.

Table 19

Question 5a Coded Response and Occurrence

Question 5a coded response	Number of times it occurred
English Language Learner	10
Vocabulary	5
Rushes through the reading	2
Test anxiety	3
Home life	3
Stamina	1
Guessing	1
COVID	1
Gave up	1

All participants said the main difference in the score reflected in iReady compared

to the score reflected in the state test was attributed to the student's English language status. When students take iReady, the assessment adjusts to meet the student where they are academically. The state test does not adjust and is based on grade-level standards and readability. Teachers A, B, D, G, and I specifically mentioned vocabulary was often a problem for second-language learners. Teacher A commented she was not sure that the ESL student understood the meaning of the words on the test. Teacher B said, "Vocabulary is a big thing for my [ESL] student." Teacher D said,

> When it comes to ESL students, they just don't have as much familiarity with things that come across in text on the EOG. Whereas iReady is a short passage with pictures that they can relate to and figure things out.

Teacher G commented that her student was an ESL student, and her vocabulary score was that of a kindergartener rather than an end-of-year second grader. Teacher I noted that her student was an ESL student and commented, "We all know that vocabulary impacts comprehension and things like that." Each teacher felt with limited English language vocabulary knowledge, ESL students scored lower on assessments.

Two teachers commented that the students in question did not like to read. Teacher F stated, "That student doesn't like reading. Math comes easily for him, and he prefers math. When it comes to reading, he just didn't take his time." When referencing another student mentioned, Teacher F commented, "This one again didn't take his time and rushed, he really does normally excel in reading." Teacher H said her student does not like to read and rushes as well. She said she had a hard time finding materials the student did enjoy.

Teachers C, E, and H commented that testing anxiety was the reason for

conflicting test scores for their students. Teacher C stated her student was a high-performing student but that he was very nervous when it came to testing. She said, "He was afraid of not passing, and his nerves got to him." Teacher E said that her student was "intimidated by the computer" and usually did well when he was sitting with her. Teacher H commented that her student was multilingual and had testing anxiety in reading. Teacher H added, "I tried to work with her all year, on her anxiety, by using different strategies, but on test day, there is always more anxiety than usual."

Teacher F and Teacher G mentioned that the student's home life could have also impacted the difference in the scores. Teacher F said her student had experienced a lot in her life. She said, "She's an ESL student and has a lot to juggle at home. Her puzzle pieces that she's dealing with are different." Teacher G commented that her student had moved frequently and the student was not familiar iReady, which was why she did better on the state reading assessment than on the iReady assessment.

Teacher D noted stamina was different for iReady than it was for state testing. iReady had built-in breaks that contained fun game activities, whereas the state test had two 3-minute breaks that were to be completed in silence. Teacher D stated, "That student is an ESL student and she gave it her all, but the EOG passages are long and her stamina had something to do with it." The same teacher commented about another student I asked about: "I'll say it again, stamina was a problem. In the beginning of the test, I could see her working hard, but it's a long test and by the end, she was done."

Teacher E mentioned guessing becomes more prevalent as students begin to see their peers finish early, and they get nervous about finishing. She said when anxiety sets in with the student, two actions happened: The student either gave up and started marking

answers to get finished, or they just stopped working altogether, and the unanswered questions were automatically scored as incorrect.

Teacher F noted that COVID led to many students having unstable social-emotional problems. These students were struggling with just being at school and experiencing a different pace than what they had been used to for over 2 years, which was impactful and caused a difference in the test scores. She said, "These students have only been potty trained a few years. There's a lot of social and emotional changes. And I believe COVID impacted their development."

Teacher H had a student who scored higher than grade level on the iReady assessment but barely met the score needed to pass the state reading assessment. Teacher H responded that the student just gave up on the state test. She said, "She [the student] just got tired and gave up. She knew she had to read so many pages and answer the questions, so she marked answers as quickly as possible."

After the last interview question, I asked each participant if they wanted to add or mention anything to our discussion. All of the participants replied no. At that point, I thanked them for their time.

When investigating Research Question 4, the data focused on how elementary teachers navigate reading assessments to support students. The data from the interviews led me to conclude that elementary educators feel the best way to support students through reading assessments was by intentionally planning instruction based on data from both formative and summative assessments. In the next section, research questions are synthesized through my interpretation of the data described by the participants.

Emerging Themes

I have chosen to synthesize the emerging themes using the data collected from all the interviews. I have compacted the coded responses from the previous section to support the research questions. Table 20 displays the significant themes that emerged that helped support answering the research questions in this qualitative case study.

Table 20

Research Question and Theme Correlations

Questions	Coded responses Key concepts	Theme
Research Question 1: What understandings do elementary-level educators have regarding what it means to provide an equitable education?	Successful adult citizens Treated equally Individual needs met Relationship building Multicultural days Curriculum	Overall, elementary educators' understanding of providing an equitable education included creating successful adult citizens, providing equal treatment, meeting individual needs, following mandated curriculum, and incorporating multicultural days.
Research Question 2: What perceptions do elementary-level educators have about their experiences in providing an equitable education?	Student conversations Curriculum inclusion Intentional planning	Elementary educators had different views on providing an equitable education. Still, the majority agreed that having conversations with their students was the best way to gain cultural knowledge and incorporate it into lessons.
Research Question 3: How do elementary-level educators perceive the systems that may create inequities for their students?	Teaching methods Standardized testing Pull-out intervention	Elementary educators identified systems that create inequities as standardized testing, placement for pull-out interventions, family dynamics, grading, student placement labels, funding, and after-school activities.
Research Question 4: How do elementary-level educators navigate reading assessments to support students?	Planning Standards are aligned Teach testing skills Small group instruction Test-taking strategies Vocabulary	The overwhelming theme of how elementary educators support students through reading assessments was based on intentional planning based on data from formative and summative assessments.

When answering Research Question 1, a majority of the educators perceived providing an equitable education as one in which the education system creates successful adult citizens. To accomplish this equitable education, they felt students should receive equal treatment while also having their needs met. Building relationships was a top priority to meet student needs mentioned by the participants. To continue to provide an equitable education, teachers followed the mandated state curriculum while incorporating multicultural days to celebrate the various backgrounds of students.

When answering Research Question 2, educators provided experiences for students to receive an equitable education through having conversations about themselves and their cultures. Using those conversations, they can include different aspects of student culture or their interests in lessons taught in the classroom. Teachers expressed that through these conversations was how they learned about their students. They use what they have learned to intentionally plan lessons, so students feel valued or represented in the classroom. Intentional lesson planning was seen as the most prevalent way to incorporate student ideas and make students feel seen in the classroom by most participants.

When answering Research Question 3, teachers perceived systems of inequities for students in various ways. They named standardized testing, placement for pull-out interventions, family dynamics, grading, student placement labels, funding, and after-school activities as inequitable systems. To navigate these systems, they felt they had to employ teaching methods that support students. Small group instruction was a method mentioned by some teachers to support student learning. They also added that changing the grading system from a point system to a standards-based one supported student

growth and proficiency. Teachers also identified different areas where funding inequities existed, such as teacher pay, school funding, and the ability to afford after-school activities.

When answering Research Question 4, all 10 participants overwhelmingly stated that they have to plan intentionally using data provided by formative and summative assessments to navigate reading assessments and support students. I deduced that participants felt lessons aligned with standards are considered essential for students to perform well on state reading assessments. Some teachers formed small groups to focus on specific standards and test-taking skills, while others focused on developing vocabulary skills, particularly for ELLs.

Summary

This chapter focused on the data interpreted from the interviews conducted to support an understanding of elementary teacher perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education. Participants were kindergarten through fifth-grade certified teachers from one Title I elementary school in North Carolina. The participating teachers have varying years of teaching experience. An interpretivist theoretical framework was used to relay the information provided during the interviews. The data documented from the perceptions provided by 10 elementary educators were provided patterns to answer the four research questions. Themes that emerged included (a) educators believed that providing an equitable education would create successful adults, (b) educators gained cultural experiences by having conversations with their students, (c) elementary educators identified systems of inequity, and (d) educators felt that intentional planning based on data would be the best way to support students. This study provided insight into

teacher perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education. Chapter 5 focuses

on how this study contributes to the literature on equity in education and provides

recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

This qualitative case study aimed to explore elementary teacher perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education for their students. These perceptions allow educational leaders insight into how certified teachers view and navigate systems that create inequities and what professional development may be needed to further support equitable learning in the classroom. Often, the terms equality and equity are used interchangeably but they have different meanings. Equality means everyone is provided the same resources, while equity provides each person with the resources they need (Milken Institute School of Public Health, 2018). In the interviews, many teachers described equity as being treated equally and eluded that for students to receive an equitable education, their individual needs had to be met. Teacher B noted equity as instilling value and a hard work ethic in students. When students receive an equitable education, they have the skills and tools they need to lead a successful life (Aguilar, 2013). The need to understand how teachers perceive equity in education has grown with recent media coverage of equity gaps in education, ethnicities, sports, health care, and the workplace (Briscoe, 2021; Daley, 2019; Duckett, 2021; Land, 2020). This chapter includes my interpretation of the results based on the data provided by the participants and describes how the findings support or add to the literature on educational systems of inequity. This chapter concludes with the implications of the study, a discussion of the limitations and delimitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Research questions that guided this study and supported gaining an understanding of teacher perceptions of equity included

1. What understandings do elementary-level educators have regarding what it means to provide an equitable education?

2. What perceptions do elementary-level educators have about their experiences in providing an equitable education?

3. How do elementary-level educators perceive the systems that may create inequities for their students?

4. How do elementary-level educators navigate reading assessments to support students?

Based on participant responses, I have deduced that educators navigate systems of inequities through four themes: (a) providing an equitable education to create successful adults through equal treatment and meeting individual needs, (b) gaining cultural experiences by having conversations, (c) perceiving systems of inequity, and (d) using intentional planning based on data to support students. This theory for understanding how teachers navigate systems of inequity is tied to an interpretivist perspective, meaning I met with elementary educators at their choice of location, in person at the school or via Google Meet, to hear their perceptions of equity based on interview questions I presented to them. These themes were formulated based on patterns in the responses from the participants interviewed, with a focus on the majority of similar responses. These themes provide an understanding of how teachers navigate systems of inequity as I interpreted the data from Chapter 4.

Discussion of the Results

Research Question 1

For the first guiding research question, I wanted to discover, "What

understandings do elementary-level educators have regarding what it means to provide an equitable education?" This research question examined the various understandings teachers in kindergarten to fifth grade have about providing an equitable education.

The themes that emerged among participating teachers at the study site indicated they felt they needed to create or lead students on a path to becoming successful adults. To help students become successful citizens, educators need to provide skills to students that help them interact, survive, thrive, and contribute (Scavone, 2020). The teachers felt that to create contributing adults, students needed to be provided an education that supported equal treatment of everyone and that equal treatment would include meeting each student's individual needs. Aguilar (2013) noted equity was each student, regardless of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation, would receive the systems and structures they needed to be successful. The Waterford.org (2019) research showed when educators focused on equality, the focus was on everyone having the same rights, opportunities, and materials and that equality does not address specific needs. The participating teachers added that they would also need to meet individual student needs, so I felt their view of the term *equality* was potentially confused with the term *equity*. The Waterford.org (2020) research also showed that for equity to happen in the classroom, teachers had to provide resources needed by their students that would help them overcome their individual challenges. The teachers who participated in this study said they followed the state- and district-mandated curriculum to provide students with an equitable education. Following the state- or district-mandated curriculum offers students equal access to grade-level material information. It is up to the educator to differentiate instruction so that each student has the opportunity to understand grade-level instruction and meet their

Teachers participating in this study said that by listening to their students, they could incorporate a variety of activities, including activities related to cultural days or holidays, so students could showcase their heritage. Students having the opportunity to discuss their culture openly could dispel any stereotypes formed by media outlets (Howard, 2021).

Research Question 3

The third guiding research question focused specifically on "How do elementary-level educators perceive the systems that may create inequities for their students?" This research question guided the investigation of the various systems of inequity teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade may identify that impact their students obtaining an equitable education. The participants identified multiple systems of inequity, including standardized testing, placement for pull-out interventions, family dynamics, grading, student placement labels, funding, and after-school activities. These identified systems are reflected in the research.

One major theme emerged when discussing the systems of inequity with the teachers in the study. The participants navigated these systems through intentional planning and stated many times in their interviews that they had to plan intentionally to navigate systems of inequity that existed in their classrooms. Small group instruction was the most mentioned method to meet the needs of each student in the second interview when discussing reading assessments.

In looking at each of the systems of inequity mentioned in their responses, teachers mentioned standardized testing made students feel anxious. Standardized testing requirements carry intense pressure and expectations because the value of the test

determines if a student will pass or fail the grade (Bhattacharya, 2022). Grades have a huge impact on student self-concept and identity. A pass or fail sets an expectation for the student's future learning career, often causing the next teacher or class to form a certain standard for the student (Dueck, 2020).

Pull-out programs such as exceptional children's or AIG programs can create inequities because they may not have correctly identified or may have hindered student placement based on a student's spoken language (Pate, 2020; Sanchez, 2016; Urtubey, 2019). When mentioning pull-out programs, labels are often placed on students. Labels are the way school faculties identify a student. The teachers mentioned this system as potentially inequitable in reference to exceptional children's, AIG, and ELL. I chose to keep it separated as a system as other labels exist, such as color and religion. Labeling can create a preconceived idea of the student's capabilities and may not allow a child to reach their full capability (Brocks Academy, 2013).

Participating teachers listed family dynamics as creating a potential inequity in that students move from place to place. Still, the literature has shown it is the teacher's role to understand the socioeconomic background of the students they teach and to adjust instruction accordingly (Jensen, 2013b). Moving from place to place could be a part of the working lifestyle of the parent or a sign of poverty.

Grading was noted as a system that creates inequity. The teachers claimed that numeric grades only measured one single thing with no information to provide standards of proficiency. They said that by using standards-based grading, they used a progression and could see the student's mastery of a standard over time. Grades are about students attaining a certain score at a certain moment. Grades that happen at that moment set into

motion essential decisions about a student's future, whether for course placement, athletic eligibility, college admission, scholarship offerings, or employment (Feldman, 2019). Standards-based grading places value on a progression of learning through mistakes and growth to obtain mastery (Vanhala, 2020).

Funding was identified as a system that created equity, and participating teachers said that schools were not provided the funding they needed to support teachers and students. The literature shows that states have created programs and provided funding to meet academic needs, but the funding is not enough to meet student needs (Ujifusa, 2021).

Lastly, after-school activities were an additional system that participating teachers identified as a system of inequity, saying that students often could not afford the equipment or stay after school because they did not have a ride home. The literature supports that after-school activities can be a system of inequity. Research by Snellman et al. (2015) showed that when extracurricular activities are too costly, students do not participate, causing a loss in skills cultivation, connections, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Research Question 4

For the fourth guiding research question, I wanted to better understand, "How do elementary-level educators navigate reading assessments to support students?" This research question investigated teacher interpretations of the correlation of district and state reading data in kindergarten through fifth grade.

The theme that surfaced among the teachers participating in this study regarding their support of students through state reading assessments was that they had to plan

lessons using data from summative and formative assessments intentionally. They plan

these lessons together in their grade-level professional learning communities to discuss

commonalities, share ideas, and create an instructional course of action for their students.

Educators should ensure all students are learning at high levels, so teachers need to focus

on what students can and cannot do so they can move each student to the highest level

possible (Dufour et al., 2016).

These intentional lessons often focus on vocabulary skills, as the students who

need support are often low-income students who have not had adequate vocabulary

exposure. Children from middle class families are exposed to 26 million words by the

time they start school, whereas students of low-income families hear half that amount

(Hart & Risley, 1995, as cited in Jensen, 2013b). It is essential that teachers in each grade

level intentionally introduce new words and build vocabulary to help students succeed.

The teachers in this study reported that they meet regularly with students during

their small groups to discuss the progress the students are making and to adjust plans

accordingly. This feedback given to the student is part of their intentional planning. The

educator knows exactly what they will say to students and has documented it in anecdotal

records. By providing students with multiple feedback checkpoints, the teachers support

that student's path to success (Hope, 2020).

Implications of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, educators navigate systems of inequity to the

best of their ability. I hypothesized that educators would not understand the differences

between equity and equality. This hypothesis was accurate as the teachers who

participated in this study defined equity as equal and everyone getting what they needed.

Many times, these two terms are used interchangeably, but they have very different meanings. Equity means everyone receives the resources they need to be successful, and equality means everyone receives the same exact resource.

Educators believe that providing an equitable education creates successful citizens for the future. To develop proficient or successful students, educators must be up to date with current research on teaching students of low socioeconomic status, second-language students, and struggling students. I hypothesized that there was a lack of professional development around equity. This is partially true, as three of the 10 participants had mentioned training or book studies related to equity or equitable practices in their interviews. The program all teachers in K-5 at this school site use, iReady, is up to date on the most current reading instruction research for instruction that addresses phonological awareness, phonics, automatic recognition of high-frequency words, vocabulary development, and development of reading comprehension skills and strategies.

The participating teachers felt the best way to understand a student's culture is by having classroom conversations. They saw having conversations with students as a way to get to know students. Conversations may uncover family traditions, values, and dynamics, but they may not give someone a proper understanding of the culture. This conversation could reinforce stereotypes or a generalization about a particular culture, such as if a student from Asia celebrates Christmas, then all students from Asia celebrate Christmas. I hypothesized there would be a lack of knowledge to support students culturally. Since participating teachers said that they learned cultural knowledge from conversations, this hypothesis may be considered as correct. Taking what a student says

into account when teaching to add interest and let them know you are listening can grab a student's attention and help them feel seen in the classroom, but teachers have to do their research to learn more about the culture as a whole rather than one playground conversation. By learning more about the culture, they do not risk sharing untrue and offensive information with other students of that culture or in the class.

Educators who participated in this study said that planning intentionally was the best way to support students through reading assessments. I hypothesized there would be a misunderstanding of reading assessment alignment between classroom data and state testing. This hypothesis was not accurate; nine participants said the data they used in classroom summative practices helped align with state testing. One teacher said it did not. This misalignment was due to an operator error of the iReady program in changing between North Carolina state standards tabs and Common Core tabs. All teachers said they use data to guide their instruction.

Recommendations for Practice

There are a few recommendations for practice that surfaced from conducting this study and may contribute to a deeper understanding of equity and equitable teaching practices. I have named three recommendations that I felt could be implemented: training around equity, poverty discussions, and teacher reflection.

Training Around Equity

School sites can use site-based coaches or administrators as equity coaches to help develop a deeper understanding of equity and equitable teaching. Aguilar (2020) offered insight into the world of equity. First, the book helps the coach uncover what equity is and builds a background for why transformational coaching could be used to support

educators. Aguilar then moves to in-classroom coaching and how to approach

conversations with educators respectfully so they can grow their students to be the

successful adults they envision. Training from this book will support classroom coaching

efforts between coaches and educators when engaging in open conversations around

equity. Coaches and teachers can use frameworks provided in the book to explore biases

and teacher-student interactions. Exploring these interactions between teachers and

students can help teachers create equitable learning opportunities for each student in their

classrooms.

Poverty Discussions

Having conversations about students who live in poverty allows educators who

may not have experienced poverty themselves a glimpse into their students' lives. Author

Eric Jensen (2009, 2013a) has written a series of books to help guide educators on their

journeys to *Teaching With Poverty in Mind* and *Engaging Students With Poverty in Mind*.

These two books can be used as a PLC discussion book study to have conversations

around poverty, best instructional strategies for low-income students, and how to engage

learners to feel empowered about their learning. Having these conversations in the school

setting allows teachers to understand and confront their own stereotypes and biases

surrounding students in poverty.

Teacher Reflection

It is often easy to name all the things learners cannot do and simply provide them

with more worksheets to cover the problem. There is a good chance that will not work.

Being a reflective teacher changes our inter-dialog from what a student is doing wrong to

how I can adjust my teaching so I can reach this student. Reflection removes the blame in

instruction, allowing you to focus on what is in your control. When reflecting, it is best to start small, investigating one part of the lesson you noticed a student may not have understood. The plan, intentional planning, uses a learning structure you know can support your struggling student. Then reflect after the lesson. Did everything you hoped would be learned by the student go well, or did they continue to struggle? Lastly, make adjustments, try something different if you need to, and continue to build your learning and empower your learners. Scavone (2020) wrote a guide to support being an equitable teacher by increasing engagement through planning and reflection. Taking time during a PLC to read and discuss this support guide can set teachers on a path of reflection.

Limitations

Limitations are elements outside of the researcher's control and can be seen as a weakness of a study unless the researcher is aware of the limitation and explains how the limitation will be addressed (Simon, 2011). Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted limitations often appear in qualitative studies using document analysis and interviews. Limitations of this study included single research site location, participant bias, observer lens filtration, and some participants had limited articulation of details.

This research was limited to one Title I elementary site location. This research was limited to one demographic area by selecting one school site location. Having a previous positive relationship with the school provided me the opportunity to question teachers in this school, leading to more honesty in the interview process and allowing me to obtain the necessary access to analysis documents.

My presence at the participants' site may have caused participant bias. Participant bias can happen when participants respond to the interview in a way that suggests they

are only telling the researcher what they think the researcher will want to hear. Having worked in the school as a school-based instructional coach and district-based curriculum coach with most of the school site staff, I believe new teachers hired in the 2021 school year could have had the most participant bias. I did get asked as I exited the room for a few participants, "Is that what you needed?" I replied, "Yes, thank you for letting me interview you."

As the researcher, I provided details about the interviews and document analysis through an interpretivist filtered lens. An interpretivist filtered lens means that the information written up and interpreted from the interview and data analysis was presented in the words of the researcher as described by the participant. Interpretations of this research study were recorded and reported through my lens as I looked for patterns in the data.

Not all participants were equally articulate or detail-oriented. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that not every participant would have the same verbal skills. Some participants provided more information, while others could have omitted many details. Interview questions had clarifying questions to support participants in their articulation when more information was needed. The results of this study were contingent on each participant's understanding of the questions asked and their ability to provide honest answers. I assumed the responses provided by the participants were accurate and truthful.

Delimitations

Delimitations are intentional choices that are within the researcher's control about where they will draw their project's boundaries (PhDStudent, 2016; Simon, 2011). This study was limited to 10 certified participants in kindergarten through fifth grades in one

suburban Title I school in North Carolina. Using one site limited the research study to a single demographic area. Schools with similar demographics would be able to use the study as part of their future professional development around educational equity. Schools with significantly different populations will need to conduct a study in their school. I chose this site because of the previously positive built relationships between the staff and myself. By having participants who already trusted me, I collected the necessary information and documents from teachers about equity and their assessment practices without taking the time to build a relationship of trust.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on elementary teacher perceptions of equity in education. The results of this study were obtained from a sample size of 10 elementary school educators from one Title I site in the southwestern part of North Carolina. The following recommendations for future research can be made to further examine teacher equity in education: increase demographic location, compare Title I and non-Title I schools, separate each grade level for individual studies, and add an observational piece to a study.

Increasing the demographic location by conducting research in other schools and other school districts could help gain a wider view of teacher perceptions. This recommendation could be conducted in a combination of public or private K-12 schools; multiple elementary, middle, or high schools separately; or as a mass collective.

Expanding the case study research as a comparative analysis to investigate teacher perceptions of equity in Title I schools and non-Title I schools would broaden the grade-level demographics. This comparative analysis could provide significant similarities and differences for equity in the public, charter, and private educational sectors. Separating

the grade levels for a comparative case study could help determine if specific grades provided more equity in the instructional setting.

By separating the classrooms, for example, to a lower elementary (K-2) and upper elementary (3-5) comparative research case study could provide a more in-depth analysis of equity in specific grade levels. This style of comparative research study could also be separated into elementary and middle, middle and high school, or any other combination.

Adding an observational piece to observe classroom equity practices could add more insight into equity practices in the classroom. This observational practice could take place in any classroom K-12, in the public, charter, or private sectors. Many of the elementary participants had mentioned Morning Meeting as a time of day when they incorporated equitable lessons. Observing this practice could increase the data reported on equity and guide future professional development practices surrounding educational equity.

Summary

To meet the needs of each student, we first must realize educational equity is lacking for students of poverty in many school districts across the country (Aguilar, 2020). There is a disconnect for educators in understanding what is meant by an equitable education in our elementary schools. This study examined educator perceptions of educational equity and the potential extent of this disconnect in understanding what it means to provide an equitable education.

This qualitative study followed an interpretivist theoretical framework. The interpretivist perspective assumes that the world is not waiting to be discovered but rather is an ongoing story told by individuals, groups, or cultures (Butin, 2010). This framework

supported my investigation as I looked for patterns of how teachers navigate systems that create inequities, based on participant perceptions during interviews. These perceptions helped to gain an understanding of educator experiences of equity in education.

The findings of this study identified how elementary educators at one elementary site navigate systems of inequity to provide an equitable education for all students. Based on the findings of this study, a generalization may be made that educators are aware of the systems that can create inequity. The participants in the study overwhelmingly agreed that to navigate these systems, they had to intentionally plan instruction around data. The findings in this study supported the current literature surrounding educational equity and added additional insight to the literature. More research in a broader demographic area and additional school sites would support additional teacher perceptions of equity in education, leading to a more diverse research study. I made three recommendations to support teachers in their understanding of educational equity: (a) training around equity, (b) poverty discussions in PLCs, and (c) teacher reflection.

The findings of this research have shown how 10 elementary educators in one elementary site perceived equitable education. These findings included (a) educators believed that providing an equitable education would create successful adults, (b) educators gained cultural experiences by having conversations with their students, (c) elementary educators identified systems of inequity, and (d) educators felt that intentional plannings based on data would be the best way to support students.

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    Sage Publications, Inc.

Appendix A

Permission to Recruit Email

(*Date*)

Re: NAVIGATING THROUGH SYSTEMS THAT CREATE
INEQUITIES: ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

Dear: Principal █████

I am writing to let you know about a voluntary research opportunity surrounding teacher
perceptions of equity with a focus on assessment for your certified teachers. This study is
being conducted by Sarah Rector, a doctoral candidate at Gardner-Webb University.

Participation includes allowing two one-on-one interviews. The total time your teachers
will be involved in the study will be around two hours; this includes two one-hour
interviews.

If you choose to allow your teachers to participate in this study, please know that all
school identification information will be kept confidential. I will also blind copy you in
on all emails sent to volunteer teachers.

Please reply that you are willing for your teachers to participant.

Thank you for your consideration, and once again, please do not hesitate to contact me if
you are interested in learning more about this Institutional Review Board approved
project.

If you have questions about the study, contact:
Sarah Rector
EdD Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
XXXXX
srector@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Michelle Bennett
Faculty Research Advisor
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
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mbennett1@gardner-webb.edu

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

(*Date*)

Re: NAVIGATING THROUGH SYSTEMS THAT CREATE
INEQUITIES: ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

Dear: Certified Teachers

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a voluntary research
study about teacher perceptions of equity with a focus on assessment. This study is being
conducted by Sarah Rector, a doctoral candidate at Gardner-Webb University.

Participation includes allowing two one-on-one interviews. The interviews will be
conducted over the summer with your choice of day,time, and interview method; face-to-
face, via Google Meet, or phone. The total time you will be involved in the study will be
around two hours; this includes two separate one-hour interviews.

If you choose to participate in this study, please know that your information will be kept
confidential.

Once you reply that you are a willing participant, a follow-up email will provide
additional information.

Thank you for your consideration, and once again, please do not hesitate to contact me if
you are interested in learning more about this Institutional Review Board approved
project.

If you have questions about the study, contact:
Sarah Rector
EdD Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
XXXXX
srector@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Michelle Bennett
Faculty Research Advisor
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
XXXXX
mbennett1@gardner-webb.edu

Appendix C

Follow-up Email for Participant

(*Date*)

Re: NAVIGATING THROUGH SYSTEMS THAT CREATE
INEQUITIES: ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study about teacher perceptions of equity. I wanted to provide you with additional details about the research being conducted. We will also review these details in our first one-to-one interview. Please copy and paste the link in your search bar to schedule your two interview sessions.
https://forms.gle/D87FjXMGscXPqmfL8

Purpose
The purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education. For this research, equitable education is defined as each student receiving what they need to be successful in the classroom. The findings of this study may identify how educators navigate assessment systems, such as reading assessments, to provide an equitable education for all students. This study may provide insight into teacher perceptions of what it means to provide an equitable education with a focus on reading assessments, leading to additional research on future implementation and training needs of educational equity in elementary schools.

Procedure
What you will do in the study: In this study, you will be interviewed twice using questions related to equity and assessment for up to one hour each. During the interview, you will be audio recorded. You may skip any questions in the interviews that cause you discomfort. You can also stop the discussions at any time.

Time Required
It is anticipated that the study will require about two hours of your time: up to one hour for each interview.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality
All data collected from interviews and assessment documents will be kept private and confidential. All digital information will be kept in a locked nonshared file on my personal computer. All hard copies of data and notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. All digital data collected, including audio recordings and notes, will be deleted three years after the final defense. All hard copy data will be shredded and deposited in a recycle bin.

<u>Data Linked with Identifying Information</u>
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number (or pseudonym.) The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study has been completed, and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. All audio collected in the study will be deleted from my phone and computer hard drive. Your name will not be used in any report.

<u>Risks</u>
There are no anticipated risks in this study.

<u>Benefits</u>
There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help the educational community to understand how elementary teachers feel about equity in their classrooms. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

<u>Payment</u>
You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

<u>Right to Withdraw From the Study</u>
You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your audio will be destroyed.

<u>How to Withdraw From the Study</u>
- If you want to withdraw from the study, tell the interviewer to "stop the interview, and that you wish to withdraw." There is no penalty for withdrawing.
- If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact Sarah Rector, XXXXX

<u>Future Research</u>
Data collected from this research will be made available to other parties for the purpose of further research through the published final dissertation. No names or identification of participants or site location will be included in the data.

<u>If you have questions about the study, contact:</u>
Sarah Rector
EdD Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
XXXXX
srector@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Michelle Bennett
Faculty Research Advisor
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University

(910) 619-1588
mbennett1@gardner-webb.edu
XXXXX
mbennett1@gardner-webb.edu

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.

Dr. Sydney K. Brown
IRB Institutional Administrator
Gardner-Webb University
Telephone: 704-406-3019
Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

<u>Voluntary Consent by Participant</u>
I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me. I agree to participate in this study.

_____ Date: _____
Participant Printed Name

_____ Date: _____
Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix D

Google Form

NAVIGATING THROUGH SYSTEMS THAT CREATE INEQUITIES: ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

This form is being used to collect participant contact information for two interviews being conducted by Sarah Rector. By submitting this form you are digitally signing that you are a willing participant in this study and you have read the email sent on ##/##/##. This email contained the informed consent letter that is required by the International Review Board. We will also review this form during the first interview.

If you have questions about the study, contact:
Sarah Rector
EdD Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
(704) 915-2070
srector@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Michelle Bennett
Faculty Research Advisor
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
(910) 619-1588
mbennett1@gardner-webb.edu
 (910) 619-1588
mbennett1@gardner-webb.edu

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* Required

1. Email *

   _____

2. Name *

   _____

3. Grade Level *

    Mark only one oval.

    ( ) Kindergarten

    ( ) 1st

    ( ) 2nd

    ( ) 3rd

    ( ) 4th

    ( ) 5th

    ( ) AIG

    ( ) EC

    ( ) ML

    ( ) Art

    ( ) Music

    ( ) PE

    ( ) Literacy

    ( ) Math

4. Do you give me persission to pull your assessment data? K-2: mClass and iReady, *
    3-5 EOG scores and iReady

    Mark only one oval.

    ( ) Yes

    ( ) No

5. Interview 1: Equity – How would you like to participate in the first interview? *

    Mark only one oval.

    ( ) Face-to-Face

    ( ) Google Meet

    ( ) Phone

6. If you chose phone, please list your phone number below.

    _____

    Click or copy/ paste the link below to select a date and time for Interview 1: Equity
    https://doodle.com/meeting/participate/id/bk5Qzn5e

7. Interview 2: Assessment – How would you like to participate in the second   *
    interview?

    Mark only one oval.

    ( ) Face-to-Face

    ( ) Google Meet

    ( ) Phone

8. If you chose phone, please list your phone number below.

    _____

    **Click or copy/paste the link below to select a date and time for Interview 2:
    Assessment**
    https://doodle.com/meeting/participate/id/aMj8jOPb

You have reached the end of this collection form. Sarah Rector will reach out to you through your school email with confirmation of the day and time of each interview. By clicking submit you are digitally signing your willingness to participate in this research study.

Appendix E

Interview Protocol 1: Equity

Navigating Through Systems That Create Inequities: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions

Interview Protocol 1 - Equity

Questions	Notes
1. How long have you been teaching?	
2. What do you see as the purpose of education?	
3. What do you believe equity is in education?	
4. Where do you see equity in education?	
5. What systems do you see in education create inequities?	
6. When or how do you as a teacher learn about people of other ethnicities?	
• Follow-up question: What did you learn?	
7. How do you ensure all students feel seen in your class?	
• Follow-up question: Give an example of how students see themselves in your class?	
8. What cultural experiences do you provide to your students?	
• Follow-up question: What more you tell me more about _____?	
9. How do students identify themselves or see themselves represented in your	

lessons?	
10. How do you create opportunities for students to see themselves in your lessons?	
11. How do you ensure all students are provided an equitable education?	
• Follow-up question: Give me more details about_____?	
12. Our interview session is now complete. What do would you want to add or mention to our discussion?	

Appendix F

Interview Protocol 2: Assessment

Navigating Through Systems That Create Inequities: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions

Interview Protocol 2 - Assessment

Questions	Notes
1. Describe your classroom assessment practices.	
• Follow-up question: What more can you tell me about …?	
2. Describe how the iReady test aligns or does not with the state reading test.	
• Follow-up question: What more can you tell me about …?	
3. How do you support struggling students through iReady assessments?	
• Follow-up question: What more can you tell me about …?	
4. How do you support struggling students through state reading assessments?	
• Follow-up question: What more can you tell me about …?	
5. I noticed in the assessment documents you let me pull that…can you tell me why you think that is?	
• Follow-up question: What more can you tell me about …?	
6. Our interview session is now complete. What do would you want to add or mention to our discussion?	