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Teacher's Perception of Budget Cuts in Affluent and Non-Affluent School Districts

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Abstract

Teachers in school districts all over the country struggle with budget cuts. Resources are often insufficient, particularly in non-affluent schools. Based on the work of Mead on socialization, it was hypothesized that, teachers in poor school districts would perceive budget cuts to be significantly more detrimental to educational outcomes than teachers in affluent schools districts. To test this hypothesis a cross-sectional survey was conducted with 59 teachers from both affluent and non-affluent schools. A comparison of means test did not confirm the hypothesis.

Background

In today's educational system teachers in school districts all over the country struggle with budget cuts ever since the recession, which ended in 2009. At least 31 states provided less state funding per student in the 2014 school year than in the 2008 school year (Leachman 2016). Resources are often insufficient in non-affluent schools and teachers in those types of schools should have more of a reason to be concerned about budget cuts. These budget cuts may affect the teachers' performance and the students' education.

History

America spends over $550 billion a year on public elementary and secondary education in the United States. States and local governments typically provide about 44 percent each of all elementary and secondary education funding. The federal government contributes about 12 percent of all direct expenditures. The share of education funding that federal, state, and local governments provide has changed significantly over time. Today, states play a large and increasing role in education funding, a trend that emerged in the 1970s when state spending first overtook education spending by local governments. (Prek-12 Finance Overview 2015) Education is usually one of the last budget areas to be cut but most districts today are suffering declines in both state and local funding. In 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years, many school districts were able to cut their expenses with minimum impact on students but subsequent years most districts have had to make cuts that affect the students more directly. These cuts included laying off teachers (which increases class size), cutting extracurricular activities, and eliminating summer school, field trips, and support services for students.

Theory

Mead's theory of the development of self and the process of socialization provide insight into how schoolteachers might perceive school budget cuts differently. Mead argues that the self is active and reflects social interaction and social experience (Dillon 258-259). With secondary socialization even the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of adults are influenced by group dynamics and the social environment. For example, teachers in different types of school districts experience a different social context and it is likely, therefore, that teachers working in a non-affluent school have developed views and attitudes differently than teachers working in affluent schools.

Methods

The hypothesis is teachers in poor school districts would perceive budget cuts to be significantly more detrimental to educational outcomes than teachers in affluent schools districts.

Independent Variable: the affluence level of teacher's school. Three measures were used, the type of school district they teach in, the average household income of the district, and the typical class status of their students.

Dependent Variable: A ten question index on the perception of budget cut consequences. For each item respondents selected a number from 1 to 10 with 1 being not harmful and 10 being extremely harmful indicating their perception of the impact of budget cuts in their school.

Control Variables: teacher's gender, ethnicity, teaching experience, their salary and the grade they teach.

Research Methodology

The methodology used for this research was quantitative, using a cross-sectional survey. Quota sampling was used. The questionnaire was sent out by email to teachers both in affluent and non-affluent school districts.

Results

Table 1: Group Statistics for Type of School

Group Statistics

	Which of the following best describes the type of school in which you teach?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PerceptionofBudgetCuts	Urban	22	78.9545	18.53819	3.95236
	Suburban	27	78.3704	16.94595	3.26125

Table 2: Independent Samples Test for Type of School and Dependent Variable

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
PerceptionofBudgetCuts	Equal variances assumed	.428	.516	.115	47	.909	.58418	5.07653	-9.62849	10.79684
	Equal variances not assumed			.114	43.168	.910	.58418	5.12415	-9.74849	10.91684

Table 3: Group Statistics for Household Income

Group Statistics

	With regard to typical household income, which type of school district do you work in?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PerceptionofBudgetCuts	Average or middle income	20	76.3000	18.50775	4.13846
	Low income	28	82.0714	13.97863	2.64171

Table 4: Independent Samples Test for Household Income and Dependent Variable

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
PerceptionofBudgetCuts	Equal variances assumed	1.455	.234	-1.232	46	.224	-5.77143	4.68592	-15.20370	3.66084
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.176	33.701	.248	-5.77143	4.90973	-15.75247	4.20961

Table 5: Group Statistics for Class Status of Students

Group Statistics

	How would you characterize the class status of most of your students?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PerceptionofBudgetCuts	Middle class	24	75.2083	19.25341	3.93009
	Lower class	25	81.9200	15.28867	3.05773

Table 6: Independent Samples Test for Class Status of Students and Dependent Variable

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
PerceptionofBudgetCuts	Equal variances assumed	.608	.439	-1.354	47	.182	-6.71167	4.95603	-16.68191	3.25857
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.348	43.868	.185	-6.71167	4.97949	-16.74802	3.32468

Table 7: Advanced Hypothesis Testing

Group	Independent Variable Values	Mean	Significance
Under $80,000	Urban Suburban Average or Middle Income Low Income Middle Class Lower Class	76.1 71.4 71.6 79.3 67.9 79.4	.58 .28 .13
Over $80,000	Urban Suburban Average or Middle Income Low Income Middle Class Lower Class	91.0 80.8 79.4 85.1 80.4 84.8	.32 .41 .54
0-11 years working	Urban Suburban Average or Middle Income Low Income Middle Class Lower Class	81.1 80.7 70.0 83.5 71.8 84.0	.96 .14 .14
12 and above years of working	Urban Suburban Average or Middle Income Low Income Middle Class Lower Class	77.2 77.7 77.4 80.9 75.9 80.0	.94 .58 .55

Conclusion

The basic and advanced hypothesis test results did not support the hypothesis that teachers in non-affluent school districts perceive budget cuts to be significantly more detrimental to educational outcomes than teachers in affluent school districts.

As expected, teachers in non-affluent areas were on average more critical of budget cuts, however, the difference was not significant. This is partly attributable to a relatively small sample size. In future studies I would recommend a larger sample size. I would also want to get more of affluent school teachers because I mostly received results from non-affluent school teachers.

Perhaps the averages are high for both groups but for slightly different reasons. All teachers experience different things in their own classroom than other teachers in the same school. The teachers in non-affluent school districts may be responding to how deep the cuts go in an already difficult situation but the teachers in affluent school districts might be reacting to the shock of cuts that they have not faced in the past.

For future studies I would like to add a few more independent variables including, the condition of the school, and if parents are involved if so to what extent. This will show what kind of school it is.

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