

Qualitative Research Proposal

An Examination of the Efficacy of Alternatively Certified P-12 Educators

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A grounded theory research design to examine the efficacy of educators who earned their certification through an alternative certification pathway. A qualitative design was chosen to examine and understand the experiences of alternatively certified P-12 educators.

Introduction

Research Problem

Traditional teacher preparation programs (TPPs) are no longer able to meet the demand in providing qualified certified teachers for P-12 schools in the United States. School districts in the United States must hire as many as 287,000 P-12 educators annually to meet the demand for teachers (Van Overschelde & Wiggins, 2020). This figure reflects the number of teachers needed to replace those who leave the profession due to retirement or career change, as well as the number of teachers needed to meet the demand due to the increase in the number of students enrolled in public schools each year. According to Bowling and Ball (2018), traditional teacher preparation programs graduate 200,000 teacher candidates annually. Assuming all these candidates choose to seek employment as educators, this still presents a shortage of over 80,000 certified teachers. In order to address this shortage, states have instituted the practice of creating alternative certification pathways (ACPs) through which teachers can earn their certification and enter the classroom.

Related Literature

Much of the research associated with alternative certification pathways focuses on teacher identity, teacher quality, and the selection and retention of teacher candidates within these pathways. Many of the candidates seeking alternative educator certification had not originally considered education as a profession (Rooks, 2018). Candidates who are seeking certification through programs such as Teach for America often report that they chose to enter those programs because of a desire to have a positive impact on their community, rather than a deep-rooted desire to become an educator (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2020). There is often a disparity of quality among the varying types of alternative certification programs. Research has demonstrated that methods course requirements of alternative certification programs are

significantly lower in alternative certification programs, compared to traditional teacher preparation programs (Curry, et al., 2018), (Matsko, et al., 2021). There is concern regarding the retention rate for teachers certified through alternative pathways. Research has shown that alternatively certified educators are twenty percent more likely to leave the profession after five years, compared to traditionally certified teachers (Devier, 2019).

Deficiencies in Literature

Studies have demonstrated that alternative certification pathways can be effective in helping to address the teacher shortage. Alternatively certified teachers constitute as much as twenty percent of classroom teachers in some school districts nationwide (Bowling & Ball, 2018). While alternative certification pathways do help address the immediate need of providing additional classroom teachers, further research is needed regarding the training provided by alternative certification programs, the efficacy of teachers in the classroom, and the length of time alternatively certified teachers choose to remain in the profession. This study will address the deficiency by examining why alternatively certified teachers chose to become educators, helping to understand their perspective regarding their level of preparedness to enter the classroom, and their perception of how their experiences may have differed from their traditionally certified colleagues.

Audience and Significance

Administrators within P-12 school systems will find this study beneficial. This qualitative study will help provide insight regarding the types of additional training that alternatively certified teachers may need to help them become successful in the classroom, and to identify strategies to lower the attrition rate of alternatively certified teachers. Additionally, the leadership within traditional teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities may

identify useful information to help develop alternative certification programs within their departments.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this narrative study will be to explore the efficacy of teachers who have been alternatively certified to teach in P-12 classrooms. At this stage in the research, an alternatively certified teacher will be defined as a teacher who earned certification without completing a Bachelor's degree in education from a traditional teacher preparation program.

Research Questions

Central question: How will the experiences of alternatively certified P-12 teachers relate the efficacy of alternative certification pathways in providing qualified educators?

Sub Question 1: How do alternatively certified teachers describe their experiences in their education and training program?

Sub Question 2: How do alternatively certified teachers describe their level of preparedness to manage a classroom, and implement curriculum?

Sub Question 3: How do alternatively certified teachers describe their identity as educators, and their relationships with their fellow educators?

Sub Question 4: How do alternatively certified teachers describe their decision to remain in, or leave the classroom?

Phenomenon of the Study

Alternatively certified teachers are needed to help address the nationwide shortage of teachers in P-12 classrooms. However, the efficacy of alternatively certified teachers must be examined to determine their level of preparedness and effectiveness in the classroom, and their level of commitment to remain in the classroom. The format and quality of alternative

certification programs vary widely. The efficacy of alternatively certified teachers should be examined to help identify best practices and strategies to help teachers succeed in the classroom, and continue their career as educators (Martin, 2020).

Review of Literature

Teacher Quality

There are many types of alternative certification pathways and programs being utilized by school districts in the United States. Studies regarding the format and quality of these pathways and programs have revealed there is little uniformity regarding the length of the programs, the content taught within the programs, and the level of preparedness to enter the classroom provided by the programs. Mawhinney and Rinke (2020) examined the experiences of participants who had earned their certifications through Teach for America programs. Their research determined that the Teach for America candidates routinely reported feeling underprepared to enter the classroom having completed Teach for America's five-week preparation boot camp. These boot camps provided significantly less of the pedagogical content, core curriculum, and classroom management training provided by traditional teacher preparation programs.

Matsko et al. (2021) examined the quality of alternative certification pathways utilized by public schools in Chicago. They examined the level of preparation offered by the programs, the mentoring offered to the participants, and the readiness of participants to enter the classroom. Their research revealed that only 10% of the alternative pathway programs required the same level of methods courses as traditional teacher preparation programs. Traditionally prepared teachers within their study reported being significantly more prepared to manage a classroom

and teach common core principals than did teachers who had completed an alternative certification pathway.

Teacher Identity

Research into teacher identity and teacher morale for alternatively certified teachers illustrates that often the perception of identity for an alternatively certified teacher, and the level of acceptance among their peers may differ greatly among schools and school systems. Monk (2015) examined the effect that curriculum standards and accreditation requirements have on enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs, and the impact on students who were required to seek an alternative pathway to become an educator. Mawhinney and Rinke (2020) discovered that the identity of these teachers often depended on the environment of the school or school system in which they were employed.

Participants often reported wanting to conceal their background as alternatively certified teachers, to prevent being viewed or treated differently by their colleagues. Goldhaber and Walch (2014) examined the academic standards and performance of alternatively certified teachers. They determined that students who had completed a Bachelor's degree in an unrelated field, but had earned a Master's degree in education were more likely to feel adequately prepared as an educator and more confident regarding entering the classroom.

Selection and Retention

Selection and retention are issues of concern regarding alternative certification pathways. The academic requirements for alternative certification programs are typically less rigorous compared to traditional teacher preparation programs (Monk, 2015). While this does provide a pathway for more educators to be available to meet the demand for teachers, the incoming teachers may not have as strong of an academic background, especially in literacy and math

skills, compared to traditionally certified teachers (Bowling and Ball, 2018). Additionally, research has demonstrated that alternatively certified teachers are more likely to leave the profession within five years, compared to traditionally prepared teachers (Van Overschelde & Wiggins, 2020).

Methods

Study Design

A grounded theory design will be used to analyze the data and develop a hypothesis regarding the efficacy of alternatively certified teachers. Grounded theory is helpful in allowing for the data collected within the study to shape a hypothesis, rather than being used to prove or disprove an existing hypothesis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Study Population

The participants for this study will include P-12 educators who have completed or are currently enrolled in an educational and/or training pathway that leads to alternative certification as an educator. There are approximately 35 public P-12 school systems in North Alabama. Each system will serve as a potential source of a study participant. The Central Office of each school system will be contacted regarding identifying participants for the study. The administrators will be asked to send survey and contact information to alternatively certified teachers within their school system. Participants will be compensated with gift cards for their participation in the study. Twenty-five participants will be selected to complete the interview process. The participants will be selected randomly from those who expressed interest in participating in the study.

Data Collection and Measures

The data collected for this qualitative study will be gathered from interviews conducted with participants. The interviews will be conducted in-person, unless prohibitive distance or participant preference necessitates conducting the interview via Zoom, or similar platform. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend that qualitative interview protocols consist of open-ended questions, with the inclusion of prompts to encourage the participant to elaborate on their answers. Participants will be asked about their reasons for becoming an educator and seeking an alternative certification pathway, a description of the pathway they have experienced, their perceived level of preparation to manage a classroom and implement curriculum, to describe the experiences within the classroom, and to explain their reasons to remain in, or leave the classroom. A copy of the interview protocol is listed below.

Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Interviewer: Brandon Brooks

Participant:

Interview Location:

Instructions: Each educator will be presented with the following interview questions. The interview will be recorded for use in analyzing data. The interviews may be conducted in person, or via Zoom (or similar platform).

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed about your experiences as an educator, and your experiences working along an alternative pathway to teacher certification. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness, and understand the perspectives and experiences, of

alternatively certified teachers in addressing teacher shortages. I will be asking questions about your background, your experiences in the classroom, the alternative certification pathway you are working toward, the support you receive from your school, and your plans as an educator. The interview will last no longer than one hour.

Do I have your permission to video record our conversation?

If Yes: Thank you. Please feel free to ask me to stop the recording at any time.

If No: I appreciate you letting me know. Would it be acceptable for me to make an audio recording of our conversation, or would you prefer that I only take notes during our conversation?

Before we begin, I will define some terms that may be used during our interview. We will be discussing alternative certification pathways for educators. For our conversation, an alternative certification pathway is any pathway toward teacher certification, other than completing an accredited teacher preparation program at a college or university. You will also be asked about support provided by your school or school system. This is referring to any support or training offered by the school or school system, in addition to the professional development sessions required of all educators.

Do you have any questions, or concerns before we begin?

Interview Questions
<p>1. Opening Question: Tell me what led to your decision to become an educator.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">○ How long have you been teaching in this capacity?</p>
<p>2. Will you please describe the alternative certification pathway you are working toward?</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Please describe your educational background, prior to being hired for your current position.
<p>3. How do you describe the role and responsibility of a classroom teacher?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How have your opinions, or perspective changed now that you have experience within the classroom?
<p>4. Tell me how your experiences in the classroom may have met or deviated from your initial expectations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Describe a typical school day in your classroom.
<p>5. Tell me about your experiences developing and implementing curriculum within your classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you feel that your prior education and training prepared you for this responsibility? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If Yes, proceed to next question ○ If No, what additional training and educational opportunities do you feel would be beneficial?
<p>6. Tell me about your experiences with classroom management and classroom discipline.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you feel that your prior education and training prepared you for this responsibility?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If Yes, proceed to next question ○ If No, what additional training and educational opportunities do you feel would be beneficial?
<p>7. Tell me about some of your most rewarding moments in the classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What makes these moments seem significant?
<p>8. Tell me about some of your most challenging moments in the classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What makes these moments seem significant?
<p>9. Describe the support you receive from your administrators as you work through your alternative certification pathway.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Describe the support/mentorship you receive from your colleagues.
<p>10. What assurances would you provide to a parent concerned that their child is not being taught by a certified teacher?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How do you feel your experiences working toward an alternative certification pathway have impacted or affected your efficacy in the classroom?

11. Do you anticipate still being in the classroom five years from now?

- If Yes, what factors have contributed to your decision to continue your career as an educator?

- If No, what factors have contributed to your decision to leave the classroom?

Closing Instructions: Thank you for your time, and for your willingness to participate in this study. Should I encounter any areas which require further clarification, I will contact to schedule a brief follow up interview. If further information comes to mind that you would like to share for inclusion in this study, please let me know.

Data Analysis

Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend a layered, procedural process regarding data analysis. I will initially review and transcribe each interview after it has been conducted and include any notes I made during the interview. As more interviews are conducted, I will examine the data for general ideas that are common among many participants. I will then code the data and organize it into themes. Expected code data will most likely include themes such as alternative certification, career change, level of preparation, classroom experiences, first-year teacher, and leaving profession. Additional coded data will be assigned as surprising codes, which could not be anticipated by reviewing prior research, and codes of unusual or conceptual

interest that may interest the reader. Having analyzed and reviewed the data, I anticipate being able to form a hypothesis regarding the efficacy of alternatively certified educators.

Mechanisms to Assure the Quality of the Study

I am an educator who completed a traditional teacher preparation program, and currently work as a staff member in a university-based teacher preparation program. I acknowledge that my background and experiences may shape my analysis of the research findings. Creswell and Creswell, (2018) recommend utilizing multiple strategies to ensure the validity of the study. I will utilize a peer debriefer to review the study and provide input. Additionally, I will utilize member checking, and provide participants of the study with a final report and conduct a follow up interview to solicit their input regarding the findings.

Discussion

Ethical Considerations

Participants may be reluctant to go on record regarding any perceived weaknesses they feel they demonstrate as an educator, or with any mistakes they have made in the classroom. Additionally, participants may be hesitant to provide a critique of the mentoring and training provided by their school or school system. The names and identities of the participants will be kept confidential. All interview transcripts, notes, and other pertinent documents will be stored within a password protected folder on my personal computer.

Limitations of the Study

The study will reflect data obtained from a relatively small sample of twenty-five participants. All participants will be educators from school districts within North Alabama. It may be difficult to determine if the data regarding the experiences of the participants can be

reproduced within a larger sample of participants, from a more diverse demographic of school systems, and types of alternative certification programs.

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