Alternative Certification: A Comparison of Factors Affecting the Motivations of General and Special Educators

Kathleen A. Hogan
Augusta State University
khogan3@aug.edu

Lyndal M. Bullock
University of North Texas
Lyndal.bullock@unt.edu

Abstract

Many teacher education programs are not meeting the needs of future teachers. To adequately prepare for the projected four million teachers who will be teaching by the 2016 school year, institutions of higher education and alternative certification programs (ACPs) will need to examine the motivations that affect an individual's desire to teach in order to attract and retain competent professionals. This study compares the motivating factors affecting general and special educators' decisions to become teachers. Additionally, a comparison was made of general and special educators' reasons for choosing a nonuniversity-based ACP and what they perceived to be the strengths and weaknesses of the program. By identifying the motivating factors and strengths and weaknesses of ACPs, these programs will be able to better meet the needs of future teachers.

Keywords: *alternative certification program; general education; special education; teacher preparation*

Please contact the first author for all correspondence regarding the content of this article.

A projected 54 million students will be enrolled in U.S. public PreK-12 schools by the year 2018 (United States Department of Education [USDE], 2009). With the large number of students entering the school system, it is imperative that we have properly trained teachers to educate our nation's youth. Due to current economic conditions and the highly qualified mandate of No Child Left Behind (2001), there may be an increase in alternatively certified teachers. For example, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) the demand for special educators is expected to increase by 17% from now through 2018. However, not all newly certified teachers are entering the teaching field and teachers who have completed an alternative certification program (ACP) generally have lower attrition rates than those who completed a traditional certification program (deBettencourt & Howard, 2004; Finn & Madigan, 2001; Klagholz, 2000; Sokal, Smith, & Mowat, 2003). In addition, many teacher education programs are having difficulty meeting the needs of future teachers. To adequately prepare for the projected 4.2 million teachers who will be teaching by the 2016 school year (Hussar & Bailey, 2007), institutions of higher education and ACPs will need to examine the motivations that affect an individual's desire to teach in order to attract and retain competent professionals.

Teacher preparation of both general and special educators is continuously changing, which is due to the growing number of school reforms and changing demographics in PreK-12 school systems (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2009). Additionally, the decision to rethink the structure and practices of teacher education have arisen from (a) the complaints of graduates from teacher education programs and (b) school administrators and parents who have found irrelevance in teacher preparation programs related to the reality of teaching in a PreK-12 school (Barone, Berliner, Blanchard, Casanova, & McGowan, 1996; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006). To meet the needs of these changes, several types of ACPs have been developed. One type is to enroll in a teacher preparation program through a local university, and a second type is one in which the teacher candidate chooses to attend a nonuniversity ACP. In some nonuniversity ACPs, the student attends classes, both face to face and online, through a third party. The third party for this article refers to a local Education Service Center. The teacher candidates attend these classes full time the summer before they become the teachers of record and then on weekends throughout the first year of teaching.

ACPs tend to attract individuals because they are fast, relatively inexpensive, practical, convenient, and offer job placement. Additionally, alternatively certified teachers report being the *teacher of record* and being able to work and earn a salary while completing requirements for the program were incentives to seek an alternative route to teacher certification (Johnson, Birkeland, & Peske, 2005). Furthermore, ACPs attract career changers who are able to utilize their prior knowledge and skills in the classroom (Humphrey, Wechsler, & Hough, 2008).

Individuals often go into teaching to have a positive influence on children (Salyer, 2003; Thomas, Friedman-Nimz, Mahlios, & O'Brien, 2005) because they feel teaching would be more meaningful (Johnson et al., 2005), and due to a lack of alternative career choices (Thomas et al., 2005). Additional reasons include wanting to make a difference in society (Salyer, 2003; Schlossberg, 1984; Simmons, 2005), wanting to spend more time with family (Salyer, 2003; Schlossberg, 1984; Simmons, 2005), and fulfilling a lifelong dream (Schlossberg, 1984; Simmons, 2005).

The present study was conducted to compare the motivating factors affecting general and special educators' decisions to become teachers. The study compared general and special educators' reasons for choosing a nonuniversity-based ACP and what they perceived to be the strengths and weaknesses of the ACP. The results should be utilized to further enhance the curriculum of ACPs in order to assist in their recruitment and retention efforts. Further, we anticipate that the findings of the study may be used to help guide future development of effective ACPs. Specifically, we sought to examine three research questions: (a) What are the different motivating factors affecting the decision to become general or special educators?; (b) What are the different motivating factors affecting general and special educators' decisions to go through a nonuniversity-based ACP?; and (c) What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of a nonuniversity-based ACP?

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were current interns for the 2009-2010 academic year and those certified within the three years prior (i.e., 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009) through a regional ACP in a large southern state. Participants were invited to participate from both general and special education, and participants for the online focus group were taken from individuals who responded positively to the invitation to participate.

A survey invitation was sent to 2,229 individuals with 187 emails returned as undeliverable. There were 491 general educators and 160 special educators who completed the survey, for a total of 651 respondents, thus providing a 32% return rate. Eight survey responses were discarded for incompletion automatically through SPSS list-wise deletion, allowing for data analysis on 643 respondents. For specific demographic information on the participants, see Table 1.

Table 1
Subject Demographics

Demographics	Number of Respondents by Category
Gender	Male: 158
	Female: 485
	(Total 643)
Age	20-29: 218
	30-39: 182
	40-49: 153
	50+: 90
	(Total 643)
ACP Status	Current intern: 117
	First year graduate: 133

Second year graduate: 107
Third year graduate: 286
(Total 643)

Upon conclusion of the online survey, the researchers contacted those who volunteered through the survey to be part of the online focus group, and seven of the participants subsequently joined the focus group. Participants of the online focus group had varied backgrounds pertaining to subject, grade level currently teaching, and previous careers, and six participants were female and one participant was male. Participants for the online focus group included: (a) bilingual kindergarten teacher; (b) high school advanced placement government and economics teacher; (c) fourth grade mathematics teacher; (d) third grade teacher; (e) fifth grade science teacher; (f) secondary remedial mathematics teacher; and (g) second grade teacher. Previous careers included publicist, business management, human capital consulting, consulting systems analyst, youth development educators, and probation officer.

Instrumentation

The instrument for the research study used a Likert scale. The quantitative portion of the survey was subdivided into three areas: (a) demographics; (b) motivating factors affecting career/program choice; and (c) views regarding participants' preparation. There were 54 questions and the first seven questions captured the basic demographic information of the participants as well as information about their current teaching experiences. The next 37 questions focused on the motivating factors affecting their decisions to become teachers and whether or not those factors have changed since becoming teachers, as well as how those factors have changed. The final 10 questions were based on gathering information regarding the participants' perceptions of their teacher preparation.

The survey instrument was sent to professionals in teacher preparation and alternative certification, and they were asked to examine the survey items for relevance and clarity. The suggestions offered were acknowledged and changes made as recommended. The researchers provided the director of the ACP with four items: (a) copy of the invitation to participate; (b) link to the informed consent via the web-based survey; (c) identification of the four groups: current interns, graduates from the 2008-2009 school year, graduates from the 2007-2008 school year, and graduates from the 2006-2007 school year; and (d) code needed to access the survey. Each group of participants received a code to ensure that only invited participants could take the survey. The information was then forwarded to participants by the program director.

The qualitative portion of the survey pertained to the participants' perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of the ACP. The results from the survey allowed the researchers to address the differences between general and special educators. Additionally, the survey included a section asking for volunteers to participate in an online focus group, which was conducted to clarify and provide more detailed answers to specific questions obtained from the quantitative data obtained from the survey.

Methodology

Quantitative data were used to address the first two research questions. The qualitative portion of the survey pertained to the participants' perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of the ACP. The results from the survey allowed the researchers to address the differences between general and special educators. For the first two research questions independent sample *t*-tests were used. Statistical significance at the .05 level was used.

Mean differences were also calculated for the first two research questions. Once the independent sample *t*-tests were conducted, the mean differences among motivating factors were measured to compare the differences between general and special educators regarding the motivating factors affecting their decisions, and the mean differences provided a comparison of the sample studied.

Qualitative data were used for the final research question in order to provide further information regarding what the survey participants perceived as strengths and weaknesses of their ACP. Online focus groups were used to gather additional information. This was developed after successful completion of data analysis from the survey. The questioning was designed to add further detail about areas of interest and statistical significance that became evident through the quantitative data analysis. Transcription of the focus group discussions was retained and at the conclusion of the online focus group the researcher hand-coded the qualitative data.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Results

The researchers sought to find the different motivating factors affecting the decision to become general or special educators. It was found that the majority of general and special educators rated similarly on all factors related to the decision to become teachers. Among general educators, being a role model ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .91$), making a contribution to society ($M = 4.47$, $SD = .84$) and self-fulfillment ($M = 4.41$, $SD = .90$) were rated with the highest means, suggesting these factors were somewhat important to very important to career changers in their decision to become teachers. Special educators rated making a contribution to society ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.03$), prior experience with children ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.06$), and self-fulfillment ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .97$) between somewhat important and very important in their decision to change careers and become teachers. The motivating factor among general educators having the least effect on the decision to become teachers was social status ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.12$), which suggests this factor was somewhat unimportant to neutral. Special educators rated social status even lower ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.18$). Figure 1 illustrates the breakdown comparing general and special educators and how they rated each factor.
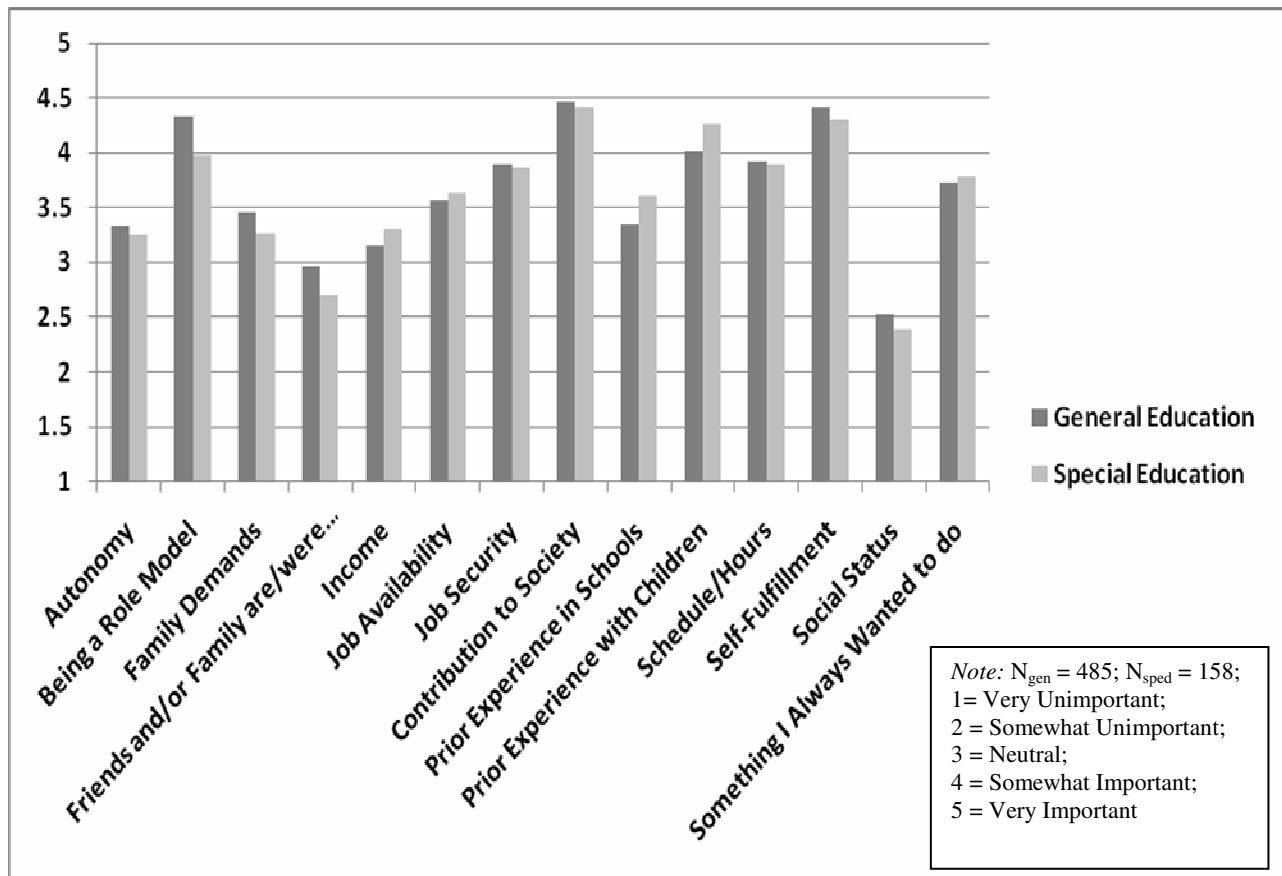
Figure 1. Comparative factors by educator category in the decision to become a teacher.

Table 2 displays mean differences highlighting discrepancies among groups for the reasons the participants chose to become teachers. Results indicated "being a role model" had the largest mean difference (.35) followed by: (a) having a family and/or friends that are/were teachers (.26); (b) prior experience working with children (-.26); and (c) prior experience working in schools (-.26). The smallest mean differences occurred with the questions related to schedule/hours and job security. The mean differences of these two factors were .03 and .02, respectively.

Table 2
Mean Differences among Motivating Factors for Becoming a General or Special Educator

Motivating Factor	General Educators	Special Educators	Mean Difference
Being a Role Model	M = 4.33 SD = .91	M = 3.98 SD = 1.04	.35
Friends/Family are/were Teachers	M = 2.97 SD = 1.35	M = 2.71 SD = 1.34	.26

Prior Experience with Children	$M = 4.02$ $SD = 1.15$	$M = 4.27$ $SD = 1.06$	-.26
Prior Experience in Schools	$M = 3.34$ $SD = 1.39$	$M = 3.61$ $SD = 1.41$	-.26
Family Demands	$M = 3.45$ $SD = 1.34$	$M = 3.27$ $SD = 1.45$	.17
Income	$M = 3.15$ $SD = 1.25$	$M = 3.30$ $SD = 1.20$	-.15
Social Status	$M = 2.52$ $SD = 1.12$	$M = 2.39$ $SD = 1.18$	.13
Self-Fulfillment	$M = 4.41$ $SD = .89$	$M = 4.30$ $SD = .97$	.10
Autonomy	$M = 3.33$ $SD = 1.11$	$M = 3.25$ $SD = 1.06$	.09
Contribution to Society	$M = 4.47$ $SD = .84$	$M = 4.41$ $SD = 1.03$	.07
Job Availability	$M = 3.56$ $SD = 1.23$	$M = 3.63$ $SD = 1.16$	-.07
Always Wanted to be a Teacher	$M = 3.73$ $SD = 1.23$	$M = 3.79$ $SD = 1.24$	-.06
Schedule/Hours	$M = 3.92$ $SD = 1.13$	$M = 3.89$ $SD = 1.19$	.03
Job Security	$M = 3.89$ $SD = 1.16$	$M = 3.87$ $SD = 1.16$	.02

Note: $N_{gen} = 485$; $N_{sped} = 158$

Statistical analysis was conducted using *t*-tests. Utilizing PASW software, statistical significance ($p < .05$) was calculated in four out of thirteen factors (see Table 3): (a) being a role model; (b) prior experience working with children; (c) family/friends being teachers; and (d) prior experience working in schools.

Table 3
Mean Differences in Motivating Factors in the Decision to Become a Teacher

Motivating Factor	t	df	p
Role Model	4.091	641	< .001*
Prior Experience with Children	-2.472	641	.014*
Family/Friends are/were Teachers	2.107	641	.036*
Prior Experience in Schools	-2.059	641	.040*
Family Demands	1.385	641	.167
Income	-1.314	641	.189
Self-Fulfillment	1.246	641	.213
Social Status	1.242	641	.215
Contribution to Society	.847	641	.397
Autonomy	.843	641	.400
Job Availability	-.666	641	.506
Always Wanted to be a Teacher	-.505	641	.614
Schedule/Hours	.320	641	.749
Job Security	.182	641	.855

Note: p < .05

A second area the researchers sought to understand was the different motivating factors affecting general and special educators' decisions to go through a nonuniversity-based ACP. Using *t*-tests to measure differences, results indicated the majority of general and special educators rated similarly on all motivating factors. Among general educators, already having a degree ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .92$), earning an income while teaching ($M = 4.39$, $SD = .1.01$), and the length of time to complete certification requirements ($M = 4.39$, $SD = .91$) were rated with the

highest means, which suggest these motivating factors were somewhat important to very important in their choice of a nonuniversity-based ACP. Special educators rated already having a degree ($M = 4.61$, $SD = .90$), earning an income while teaching ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.14$), and the length of time to complete certification requirements ($M = 4.48$, $SD = .87$) as somewhat important to very important in their choice of teacher certification programs. The motivating factor among general educators having the least effect on their choice of a nonuniversity-based ACP was the availability of ongoing mentoring ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.26$), which suggests this factor was somewhat unimportant to neutral. Special educators rated this area similarly to general educators ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.30$). Further information regarding the decisions for general and special educators in choosing a nonuniversity-based ACP is found in Figure 2.
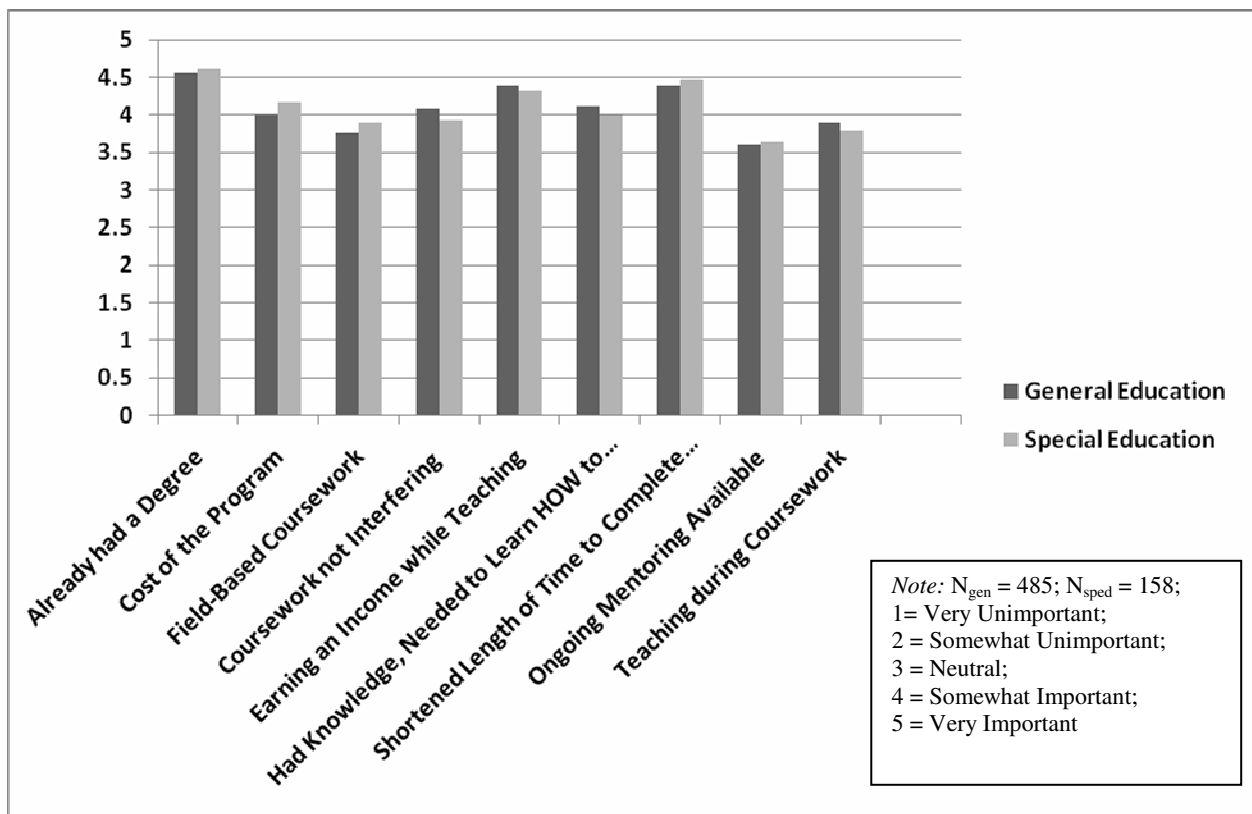

Figure 2. Comparative factors by educator category in choosing a nonuniversity-based ACP.

Mean differences were also used as a method of examining differences between general and special educators' decisions in choosing a nonuniversity-based ACP (see Table 4). Results indicated having coursework not interfering with other time commitments had a mean difference of .18, followed by the cost of the program with a mean difference of -.17. The smallest mean difference occurred with the factor related to ongoing availability of mentors with a mean difference of -.02 (see Table 4).

Table 4
Mean Differences in Choice of NonUniversity-Based ACP

Motivating Factor	General Educators	Special Educators	Mean Difference
Coursework not Interfering with other Commitments	M = 4.09 SD = 1.11	M = 3.92 SD = 1.24	.18
Cost of Program	M = 4.00 SD = 1.11	M = 4.17 SD = 1.05	-.17
Had Knowledge, Needed to Learn *how* to Teach	M = 4.11 SD = 1.09	M = 3.99 SD = 1.07	.11
Earning an Income During First Year of Teaching	M = 4.39 SD = 1.01	M = 4.32 SD = 1.14	.07
Teaching during Coursework	M = 3.89 SD = 1.16	M = 3.80 SD = 1.20	.09
Ongoing Mentoring Availability	M = 3.61 SD = 1.26	M = 3.64 SD = 1.29	-.02

Note: N_{gen} = 485; N_{sped} = 158

 Further analysis was made to determine the motivation for choosing a nonuniversity-based ACP. Utilizing PASW software, statistically significant differences were not found in any of the factors (see Table 5).

Table 5
Motivating Factors for Choosing a Nonuniversity-based ACP

Motivating Factor	t	df	p
Cost of Program	-1.685	637	.317
Coursework not Interfering with other Commitments	1,683	637	.105
Field-Based	-1.321	637	.614

Coursework

Length of Time to Complete Certification Requirements	-1.162	637	.243
Had Knowledge, Needed to Learn How to Teach	1.148	637	.609
Teaching during Coursework	.876	637	.175
Earning an Income While Teaching	.681	637	.115
Already had a Degree	-.635	637	.287
Ongoing Mentoring Availability	-.197	637	.496

Note: N = 640

In the final area of the study we explored what the general and special educators perceived to be the strengths and weaknesses of the nonuniversity-based ACP. Several themes emerged from the qualitative data regarding the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the participants' ACP, which showed not to be directly related to the level of preparedness the teachers felt.

The main themes that emerged regarding the strengths of the participants' ACP included: (a) the availability of resources; (b) practical applications of coursework; (c) knowledgeable and supportive instructors; (d) ability to work while training and receiving pay; (e) quick rate of completing the requirements; (f) flexibility of class times; and (g) networking opportunities. The main themes that emerged from the qualitative data regarding the weaknesses of the ACP included: (a) content not being specific enough; (b) coursework being repetitive; (c) lack of communication to participants from the ACP staff; (d) lack of student teaching; (e) lack of observations and feedback when observations did occur; (f) lack of knowledge about differentiating instruction; and (g) program being unorganized.

Job placement, classroom management, mentoring, and lesson planning were top themes among program strengths and weaknesses. These three items were rated based on the participants' feelings about their preparedness in each of these areas among others. The quantitative data showed that in the area of classroom management 35.5% of participants felt they were very satisfied with their preparedness and only 1.4% indicated they were very

dissatisfied. Additionally, in the area of lesson planning 25.2% indicated they were very satisfied and 3.3% indicated they were very dissatisfied with their preparedness in lesson planning.

Qualitative Results

Research question one examined differences in the reasons why general and special educators chose to become teachers. The first questions posed to the focus group were to gain a better understanding of the answers reported in the quantitative portion of the survey. The researchers were interested in knowing what motivated these individuals to become teachers, as well as their thoughts on serving as role models. The themes that emerged included fulfilling a dream, having a passion for children, and not being able to get a job in their field.

Additionally, the researchers wanted more information pertaining to the reasons individuals chose a nonuniversity-based ACP. The quantitative portion of the survey suggested a reduced workload was an important reason to choose a nonuniversity-based ACP. The focus group participants suggested time constraints and money were the reasons for going through a nonuniversity-based ACP. Three participants said they already had two degrees and did not want to obtain another degree and needed to start earning money immediately. An area that emerged from this portion of the focus group was the stigma placed on ACPs in general.

The final section of the focus group was related to the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the ACP program. The quantitative results suggested job placement, classroom management, mentoring, and lesson planning were both strengths and weaknesses of the program. The researchers wanted the focus group participants to elaborate on how these were either strengths or weaknesses, and the results suggested there was not much assistance in job placement and getting a job in education is dependent on who one knows. There were mixed conclusions made about classroom management, but most agreed this was a weakness of the program. The focus group participants stated there were not enough real-life examples, and many participants mentioned this is something one perfects the longer one teaches. Additional weaknesses were raised by the focus group through comments related to their preparedness. Focus group participants stated they did not feel prepared: (a) in ways to relate to and teach their students; (b) how to play teacher politics; (c) the amount of additional time teaching takes; and (d) the importance and role of assessment. About half the participants saw lesson planning as a strength and the other half saw it as a weakness. Those who mentioned lesson planning as a strength stated they were provided several references for lesson planning. The ideas that emerged regarding the weaknesses were the lesson plans were not realistic, and only the formal lesson plans were shown.

Mentoring was also another area with mixed conclusions. Generally, participants agreed they had good mentors from the ACP, and if they did not feel they had adequate mentors they felt good about their district mentors. Since the most positively favored area was mentoring, the researchers closed with asking what skills are needed for a good mentor. Answers varied, but the most common response was participants wanted mentors who taught the same subject and/or grade level. Additional responses included wanting mentors who: (a) provide encouragement; (b) are available to discuss ideas; (c) take an active interest in their mentee and their class; (d) offer

suggestions; and (e) develop a relationship with their mentee. One participant said the following of her mentor, "She has made me a better teacher through her encouragement and support."

Summary

The literature indicates people become teachers: (a) to be a positive influence on children (Salyer, 2003; Thomas et al., 2005); (b) to make a difference in society (Salyer, 2003; Schlossberg, 1984; Simmons, 2005); (c) to spend more time with their family (Salyer, 2003; Schlossberg, 1984; Simmons, 2005); and (d) to fulfill a lifelong dream (Schlossberg, 1984; Simmons, 2005). Data from this study revealed both general and special educators rated making a contribution to society and self-fulfillment as important elements for becoming teachers. Results from this study indicated general educators went into teaching to be role models, whereas special educators went into teaching because of prior experience with children. These results are somewhat surprising considering the common presupposition that general educators are primarily motivated by prior experiences in schools and/or with children as well as factors that did not involve children.

Research showed that individuals are drawn to ACPs because they are fast, inexpensive, practical, convenient, and offer job placement (Johnson et al., 2005). According to our research, the factor influencing the decision to attend a nonuniversity-based ACP was essentially the same for both general and special educators. The results of this current study have similar results to the current literature on why individuals are choosing ACPs.

Overall, there are differences in the factors affecting general and special educators as they relate to teaching and their ACP program. These differences are few, yet they are noteworthy. The differences are similar with the findings of previous research in choosing ACPs and why people decide to change careers and become teachers. The main difference found in the current study pertains to being a role model for children. When asked why individuals chose a nonuniversity-based ACP, the principal differences found between general and special educators were the program cost, which was more important to special educators, and coursework not interfering with prior time commitments, which was more important to general educators.

Since the 1980s ACPs have had a place in the preparation of future teachers, but with the inception of No Child Left Behind's (2001) highly qualified mandate, these programs are becoming more widely accepted for teacher certification. It is important we adapt ACPs to meet the needs of future educators. The current study identified similar aspects to findings from the literature for individuals who are becoming teachers and choosing the traditional or ACP route to teacher certification. In the present study new ideas and themes also emerged, which will help build the current line of research to effectively prepare future teachers through ACPs.

Implications

Understanding the reasons individuals are entering the teaching profession and the reasons they are choosing the alternative certification route may assist in the recruitment and retention efforts of ACPs. Furthermore, providing curriculum that fosters the motivating factors

that affect the teaching decisions of general and special educators may help to increase the recruitment and retention efforts for the ACPs.

Data from the current study revealed that general educators are becoming teachers to be role models for their students. Additionally, special educators are becoming teachers because they have prior experience working with children. ACPs should take into consideration the psychological aspect of being a role model when preparing curriculum for future general educators. Furthermore, ACPs may need to adapt to the experiences that special educators have with children when preparing future curriculum, which could focus on role model characteristics and what it means to be a role model, as well as focusing on more specific information related to working with children, especially children with special needs.

A second implication of the findings is related to the choice of a nonuniversity-based ACP. In order for ACPs to continue in assisting with teacher shortages and producing quality teachers there should be an understanding of the reasons individuals are choosing this route, as well as staying updated on the strengths and weaknesses and how these relate to teacher preparedness. The consensus from general and special educators was, for those who chose a nonuniversity-based ACP, the reasons they went into an ACP were they already had a degree, they could earn an income while teaching, and the ACP was the quickest way to earn teacher certification. These are areas the literature indicated as reasons individuals go through ACPs and should not be disregarded in the development of future ACP requirements. For successful recruitment and retention, ACP program coordinators should be aware of these factors. Curriculum changes should be reflected by the areas that teacher candidates see as strengths and weaknesses. The results of this study showed job placement, classroom management, mentoring, and lesson planning were both strengths and weaknesses of the program. Since these were seen as a weakness for some of the teaching candidates it is important for the ACP to address the needs of their students when developing curriculum, such as surveying students on these items. The survey results implied only 35.5% of participants were very satisfied with their preparedness in classroom management, implying that there needs to be some curriculum revisions in order for their future teachers to be successful, thus possibly ensuring their retention in the field. The survey results revealed that only 25.2% of participants were very satisfied with their preparedness in lesson planning, once again noting that some type of curriculum revisions may be needed.

Recommendations

The potential for further study is considerable. One recommendation is to survey more than one ACP in order to gain a better understanding of the differences in the motivating factors for becoming and remaining teachers in different areas in the United States. This information may assist in the recruitment and retention efforts of ACPs according to the region in which they operate.

A second recommendation for further research is to analyze the data according to gender and number of years teaching, which may further define the differences in motivating factors related to becoming and remaining teachers, and in choosing a nonuniversity-based ACP. The further analysis may assist ACP programs in future curriculum development. Additionally, ACPs

are more likely to attract males and minority individuals (Edelen-Smith & Sileo, 1996; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2001; Roth & Lutz, 1986) and the information gleaned from this further data analysis will help ACPs continue in their recruitment efforts. Further data analysis comparing the number of years teaching may assist ACPs with their curriculum development by allowing the researcher to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the program from year to year. Finally, comparison of years teaching can also provide ACPs with information on how and where to recruit future ACP candidates.

A third recommendation for further research should focus on the mentoring aspect of ACPs. The focus group discussed mentoring in great detail, and it has become a topic of interest when focusing on teacher preparation and is becoming more widely used and accepted (i.e., Darling-Hammond, 1990; Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Jacobi, 1991; Johnson et al., 2005; USDE, 2004; Walsh & Jacobs, 2007). The information gleaned from this research would enable ACPs to provide the quality mentors that ACP interns desire/need in order for these future teachers to remain in the classroom.

Conclusion

Adequately preparing the four million or more teachers needed in the next few years will be a tremendous endeavor. Current research finds ACPs are quite popular and will continue to increase their enrollment year after year, indicating their importance in meeting the needs of future teachers, as well as preparing quality alternatively certified teachers. Teacher education programs and ACPs must focus on the needs of the teachers, which is the foundation of a solid education for our children (Roth & Swail, 2000; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). This study provided information regarding the motivations to become a teacher, as well as perceived strengths and weaknesses of one current ACP program, and this information can assist in effectively recruiting and retaining future teachers.

References

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2009). *Innovation and reform in teacher preparation*. Washington, DC: Author.

Barone, T., Berliner, D. C., Blanchard, J., Casanova, U., & McGowan, T. (1996). A future for teacher education. In J. Sikula, T. Buttery, & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education.* New York, NY: Macmillan.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2009). *Occupational outlook handbook, teachers—special education projection data.* Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos070.htm

Darling-Hammond, L. (1990). Teaching and knowledge: Policy issues posed by alternative certification for teachers. *Peabody Journal of Education, 67*(3), 123-154.

Darwin, A., & Palmer, E. (2009). Mentoring circles in higher education. *Higher Education Research and Development, 28*(2), 125-136.

deBettencourt, L. U., & Howard, L. (2004). Alternatively licensing career changers to be teachers in the field of special education: Their first-year reflections. *Exceptionality, 12*(4), 225-238.

Edelen-Smith, P., & Sileo, T. W. (1996). The alternative basic certification program in special education: In search of quantity and quality in special education. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 19*(4), 110-123.

Finn, C., & Madigan, K. (2001). Removing barriers for teacher candidates. *Educational Leadership, 58*(8), 29-31.

Humphrey, D. C., Wechsler, M. E., & Hough, H. J. (2008) Characteristics of effective alternative certification programs. *Teachers College Record, 110*(4), Retrieved from http://policyweb.sri.com/cep/publications/AltCert_finalTCversion.pdf

Hussar, W. J., & Bailey, T. M., (2007). *Projections of education statistics to 2016* (NCES 2008-2016). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, United States Department of Education.

Jacobi, M. (1991). Mentoring and undergraduate academic success: A literature review. *Review of Educational Research, 61*(4), 505-532.

Johnson, S. M., Birkeland, S. E., & Peske, H. G. (2005). *A difficult balance: Incentives and quality control in alternative certification programs.* Retrieved from http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/Balance.pdf

Klagholz, L. (2000). *Growing better teachers in the garden state: New Jersey's "alternative route" to teacher certification.* Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

Korthagen, F., Loughran, J., & Russell, T. (2006). Developing fundamental principles for teacher education programs and practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 22*(8), 1020-1041.

No Child Left Behind: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001. (2001). A report to the nation and the Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education, President Bush Initiative. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/nclb/index/az/index.html

Rosenberg, M. S., & Sindelar, P. T. (2001). *The proliferation of alternative routes to certification in special education: A critical review of the literature.* Arlington, VA: The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education: The Council for Exceptional Children.

Roth, R. A., & Lutz, P. R. (1986). *Alternative certification: Issues and perspectives*. Charleston, WV: Appalachian Education Laboratory.

Roth, D., & Swail, W. S. (2000). *Certification and teacher preparation in the United States.* Honolulu, HI: Pacific Resources for Education and Learning. Retrieved from ERIC Database. (ED 450082).

Salyer, B. (2003). Alternatively and traditionally certified teachers: The same but different. *National Association of Secondary School Principals: NASSP Bulletin, 87*(636), 16-27.

Schlossberg, N. K. (1984). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory.* New York, NY: Springer.

Simmons, S. A. (2005). Shortcuts to a meaningful career. *Action in Teacher Education, 27*(1), 36-44.

Sokal, L., Smith, D. G., & Mowat, H. (2003). Alternative certification teachers' attitudes toward classroom management. *High School Journal, 86*(3), 8-16.

Thomas, K. R., Friedman-Nimz, R., Mahlios, M. C., & O'Brien, B. (2005). Where are they coming from? Beyond the demographics of individuals seeking an alternative route to mathematics and science teacher licensure. *Action in Teacher Education, 27*(1), 15-25.

United States Department of Education (2004). *Alternative routes to teacher certification.* Washington, DC: Author.

United States Department of Education. (2009). *The condition of education: 2009.* Washington, DC: Author.

Walsh, K., & Jacobs, S. (2007). *Alternative certification isn't alternative*. Washington, DC: Thomas B, Fordham Institute.

Wright, S. P., Horn, S. P., & Sanders, W. (1997). Teacher and classroom context effects on student achievement: Implications for teacher evaluation. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education, 11*(1), 57-67.