What Factors Influence Motivation for Graduate Education?

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study, as part of program quality enhancement, investigated motivating factors of teachers choosing enrollment in an online master's degree in education in a state where legislative funding does not provide advanced degree pay. Students were surveyed at the conclusion of their program using a quantitative evaluation of programmatic and advising-related issues with follow-up qualitative responses indicating motivation for pursuit of the degree. There were 31 program completers who received the MAED Graduate Program Survey during their last graduate course, with 27 (87%) responses. Qualitative responses confirmed that motivating factors for pursuing a master's degree were mostly due to extrinsic reasons pertaining to the time and length of the program. Overall programmatic satisfaction was indicated, especially pertaining to programmatic factors such as course expectations, workload, course organization, and accessible communication between faculty and students. Additional satisfaction related to advising-related communication and access to resources and tools. While the program's cumulative action research project was noted as a strength in student responses, it was also a theme in suggesting improvement, such as more information about the project and support for research methodology. Findings have implications for teacher motivation, teacher development, and enhancement of distance education formats.

Keywords**:** *Teacher motivation, teacher development, distance education, teacher leadership, teacher education.*

Introduction

While many states in the Northeast require teachers to earn a master's degree for licensure, southern states continue to devalue advanced degrees, eliminating increased pay for teachers earning a master's degree or higher. When the United States' economy declined in 2008, many boards of education faced decreased monetary resources, school closures, and a downward change in demand for teachers. Consequently, policy makers began looking at teacher pay as one solution to correct a financial crisis.

In 2011, Harris and Sass studied the effects of teachers with master's degrees and the achievement of their students. Across 11 different studies, mostly of elementary teachers, there

was limited evidence of statistical significance that teachers with master's degrees improved student achievement. Conversely, some studies demonstrated negative significance. These findings added to the research conducted by Campbell and Lopez (2008) who found no indication that teachers with advanced degrees improved student outcomes.

Former US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan declared in 2010 that districts across the country spent nearly $8 billion annually on compensating teachers with master's degrees with little evidence that having an advanced degree made a difference in student achievement (Kiley, 2013). This national attention posed a serious dilemma for graduate teacher education programs, who have long counted on teacher pay increases as a major incentive to recruit potential students.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted at a large public research university in North Carolina. With inadequate evidence that teachers with advanced degrees improved student achievement, many southern states quickly abolished pay increases for teachers with advanced degrees. In North Carolina especially, the General Assembly moved to eliminate master's level teacher pay, providing no monetary incentive for teachers to continue their advanced education. A guaranteed 10 % raise was no longer possible (Kiley, 2013). The state, however, still compensates teachers with a 12 % salary increase for earning National Board certification. North Carolina has more National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) than any other state in the country, with nearly double more than Florida, the second ranked state with NBCTs (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2018).

The financial incentive for teachers to become an NBCT led to graduate enrollment decline in colleges of education throughout the University of North Carolina (UNC) System's 17 public institutions by 30%, between the years of 2010 and 2016 (Bonner, 2016). Since this change in policy and budget priority, the pathways for North Carolina teachers to gain higher earnings significantly narrowed. Graduate programs across the UNC System were forced to examine creative means to attract students into a program of study that required years of coursework and thousands of dollars for no financial return. That still did not stop one college of education from seeing an increase in graduate enrollment.

This study was conducted at one higher education institution to inform program-level quality enhancement. College-wide enrollment is near 29,000 students, 20% of whom are in graduate programs. The university is classified as a Carnegie-designated higher research activity institution (Indiana University School of Education, 2017). While it resides in a metropolitan area of more than 150,000 people, the institution serves mostly rural areas of the state. The university is the largest producer of teachers in the UNC System (United States Department of Education, 2017).

The College of Education employs nearly 200 faculty and staff, serving more than 3,000 students annually. The Master of Arts in Education (MAED) is a program spanning five academic departments, offering specializations for nine teaching areas. The specialization in Elementary Education is housed in the Elementary Education and Middle Grades Education Department. At the time of this study, the MAED in Elementary Education program required a minimum of 36 semester hours, with nine hours of concentration in one of five areas: a) academically gifted; b) content pedagogy; c) teacher leadership; d) early childhood; and e) teaching English as a second language.

The MAED program is an online program, where students complete all coursework through distance education. Admission into the program requires completion of a teacher education program and evidence of a North Carolina teaching license. While most students enrolled were from the geographic region near the university, program enrollment represented all major regions of the state. Since students enrolled in the program were also licensed teachers, the terms students and teachers are used interchangeably when referring to the participants, or respondents, in this study. Students completed the program as a cohort and within just over one calendar year over five academic terms, including summer sessions.

While the MAED is offered completely as a distance education platform, students come together to present action research conducted within their own classrooms and school communities. As part of the program, students learned about action research, developed a problem, submitted a proposal to the Institutional Review Board along with a faculty mentor, and presented their findings to their peers and program faculty when completed. Faculty and peers provided feedback for the student and engaged with each other through round table discussions during poster presentations.

Since earning a master's degree in Elementary Education would not provide any financial reward for a North Carolina teacher, the department considered phasing out concentration areas that were not viable to sustain. While the Master of Arts in Teaching, a pathway to alternative licensure, saw steady enrollment, an MAED no longer had perceived value. Marketing and recruiting efforts were minimal as the faculty shifted much of the focus to its undergraduate programs. New college and departmental leadership, however, encouraged reigniting recruitment for the master's program, especially as the university sought to enhance graduate education across all disciplines.

With new recruitment efforts, coursework was enhanced across the entire MAED program to focus on building professional capacity for leadership within the classroom, school, community, and beyond. Courses were redesigned to appeal to students who desired teacher leadership opportunities, rather than school or district administrative roles. Teacher leadership concepts were addressed in all concentration areas. Each course aligned to the four major teacher leadership competencies, defined by the Center for Teacher Quality, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and the National Education Association (2014). These consisted of: a) advocacy leadership, b) policy leadership, c) association leadership, and, d) instructional leadership.

Study Demographics

At the time of this study, four students were enrolled in the original MAED program and nearing completion. After the program redesign and intentional efforts to recruit, 36 additional students gained admission, accounting for a 900% increase in enrollment. This study sought to gain understanding of the motivating factors related to the 36 new student enrollment. Of the new group of 36 students, two left the program because of personal illness, two did not complete state-mandated testing requirements, and one student did not enroll after gaining admission. Therefore, there were 31 total students eligible to participate in this study.

All students possessed a license in Elementary Education issued by the state department of education. Of the 31 students in the study, 22 had zero to three years of teaching experience at the time of admission into the program. There were 10 of the 22 who were not practicing teachers, as they enrolled in the master's program immediately upon completion of their undergraduate degree in Elementary Education, choosing to wait until completion of the degree to pursue a teaching

position. Conversely, 21 of the 31 students were practicing teachers. Three students had four to eight years, two students had nine to 13 years, and three students had 14 to 20 years of experience.

Purpose of the Study

The program studied displayed a significant increase in master's enrollment even though there was no monetary incentive for increased salary. With the demand for teacher leadership coursework in the MAED program, it was unknown what initially drew teachers to enroll. Expanding on the findings from Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus (2013), where teachers with high levels of motivation are not satisfied with remaining professionally stagnant, this study sought to understand how teacher development and teacher motivation influenced pursuit of an online master's degree in education during a time when increased salary was seemingly obsolete. Understanding teacher motivation and teacher development in context may influence graduate education program strategy, design, marketing, recruiting, and retention in other settings.

Research Questions

To examine teacher motivation and teacher development, this study sought to answer two research questions:

1) What motivating factors influenced teachers to pursue the MAED in Elementary Education?
2) Which programmatic or student support factors contributed to overall student satisfaction?

Literature Review

The research questions for this study were drawn from a review of related literature on teacher motivation and teacher development, along with the benefits, challenges, and recommendations from findings of online distance education graduate programs. The authors' theoretical paradigm by which the review was conducted was grounded in self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Teacher Motivation

Watt and Richardson (2008) established across five studies and four different countries that teacher motivation begins at the onset of entrance into teacher preparation and throughout a teacher's entire career. Too often, however, teachers' enthusiasm can change for the worse over time for reasons related to motivation. Teachers experience high levels of occupational stress and suffer career fatigue at much higher rates than other professions (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008).
If they are not motivated intrinsically, extrinsically, and altruistically, teachers are less likely to remain committed to the profession (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallat, & McClune, 2001; Roness, 2011; Sinclair, Dowson, & McInerney, 2006).

Teachers are intrinsically motivated when they are driven by the love of teaching and desire to constantly improve (Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010). Extrinsic motivation is related to external benefits of the job, such as teacher salary, benefits, and praise or recognition from others (Roness,

2011). Altruistic motivation stems from the innate belief that teaching is a social responsibility that contributes to the growth and development of children (Roness, 2011). Teachers most often enter the profession for intrinsic and altruistic reasons (Manuel & Hughes, 2006).

When teachers experience success, however, they are more likely to have greater self-efficacy, or personal achievement and internal well-being (Bandura, 1997). Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) found that greater levels of self-efficacy had a positive relationship with pre-service teachers' intent for longevity in the education profession. Overall, pre-service and in-service teachers who have a strong sense of preparedness and success are more likely to remain in the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002). Importantly noted, however, is that pre-service teachers with unrealistic perceptions of the profession can have higher attrition rates (Hong, 2010).

Watt and Richardson (2007) developed a scale to measure factors that motivate teachers to choose the profession as a career, known as the FIT-Choice model. The FIT-Choice determines the extent to which teachers were motivated by social factors, difficulty of the career, perceptions of self, job satisfaction, and internal values and beliefs. Testing the FIT-Choice framework, Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus (2013) studied motivating factors of 221 pre-service elementary and secondary teachers. They found that the desire to work with children and adolescents was the most important factor in choosing the profession, confirming findings by Manuel and Hughes (2006) related to altruistic and intrinsic motivation.

Teacher Development

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) described six phases of a teacher's career that can be categorized into years of experience. The phases were built upon the concepts studied by Day, Stobart, Sammons, Kington, and Gu (2007). The first phase is when teachers need support and challenge, and this typically occurs during the first three years of teaching. In the second phase, usually in the fourth to seventh years, identity and teacher efficacy is developed. During years eight to 15, teachers begin to manage changes and deal with increasing tensions. In years 16-23, teachers experience work-life transitions and motivation is questioned. In the fifth phase, 24-30 years, teachers tend to struggle with staying motivated. In the final phase, 31 or more years, declining motivation is likely to occur (author, year, p. 64).

Expanding on Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, Warford (2011) posed zone of proximal teacher development, whereas teaching and learning are viewed holistically and authentically. In the traditional sense, the zone of development decreases as a learner performs tasks independently rather than with assistance. Teaching teachers with Vygotsky's paradigm would combine internal beliefs about education with reflection upon prior experiences and learning and engagement with new experiences and learning. Most importantly in the zone of proximal teacher development is the integration of theory and practice. In turn, the creation or evolution of a new professional identity would reflect progression as the zone of proximal teacher development shrinks.

Brunetti and Marston (2018) uncovered themes in trajectories of teacher development when studying 53 educators during a 10-year period. Participating teachers were categorized into three phases of career status: a) phase one, zero to three years; b) phase two, four to seven years; and c) phase three, eight to 15 years. Themes emerged in the areas of professional development and leadership that had implications for different phases of educators along the teacher career continuum.

Teachers in phase one engaged in professional development that met immediate needs, whereas phase two teachers were more likely to enhance their professional skills. Phase three teachers preferred autonomy and self-direction. Teachers in phase one were more likely to take on few leadership roles beyond the classroom. Phase two teachers tended to desire more leadership roles. Phase three teachers took more deliberate leadership responsibilities (Brunetti & Marston, 2018, p. 5).

Distance Education

Distance education has become a global issue among institutions of higher learning as competition increases among providers. Access to education is no longer limited by proximity to brick and mortar buildings. Romiszowski (2015) declared that high quality online programs should include five major components: a) accessibility, with simple and practical learning platforms; b) applicability, where students can translate theory into practice immediately; c) affordability, removing the barriers typically associated with the cost of attending a physical campus, d) acceptability among students, faculty, community; and e) accredited, adhering to standards measured by peer institutions.

Intrinsic motivation has been found in multiple research studies to correlate with long-term teacher retention (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2013; Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007). Johnson, Stewart and Bachman (2013), however, found, that students who enrolled in online courses did so for extrinsic reasons. This may be related to the idea that millennials prefer flexibility and are more experienced with technology (Alton, 2017). These findings also align with Romiszowski's (2015) notion of accessibility and affordability, as well as perceived schedule flexibility.

Winner and Paxton (2016) found, in a survey of 350 distance education students at one university in Malawi, the benefits of online distance education were to increase access and affordability for students, as well as the decreased fee schedules that on-campus students traditionally pay. The authors also acknowledged some challenges, including poor communication between students and faculty, lack of clarity in course materials, and delay of feedback on class assessments. They also noted lack of speed in university-level student registration, potentially inhibiting desired increased access.

Findings from Winner and Paxton (2016) confirmed what Koh and Hill (2009) determined students from a large United States university expressed they desired: a) to interact with their peers, b) to receive speed feedback from faculty members, and, c) to manage time effectively. Similar challenges, noted in poor communication and lack of course understanding, were also evident. Furthermore, Koh and Hill (2009) recommended that universities who offer distance education programs provide opportunities for meaningful group work with peers, while also adapting teaching methods that support online collaboration.

Boyle, Kwon, Ross and Simpson (2010) concluded that students in distance education programs who have opportunities for peer mentoring and engagement are more likely to support student retention. Students who worked in pair or cohort groups were motivated to continue their studies. Particularly, this strategy worked for students from historically disadvantaged subgroups. Students with extrinsic motivation, and who also had greater autonomy, demonstrated greater performance (author, year, p. 538).

Methods

The overall methodology used for purposes of program quality enhancement was a mixed method explanatory sequential design, where quantitative data were collected first with follow-up qualitative data to provide explanation to responses (Creswell, 2015). Qualitative data from a questionnaire distributed to students enrolled in their last course of the program were analyzed using theoretical sampling and constant comparative methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To employ theoretical sampling, data were coded as theories emerged. Additionally, similarities and differences were compared among the data to establish patterns and trends in responses.

The instrument, MAED Program Survey (See Appendix), was developed by the MAED program faculty and vetted by graduate students from within and outside of the MAED program prior to distributing to students. A Likert scale was used throughout the quantitative portion of the survey. Descriptive statistics were analyzed to calculate frequency, means, and percentages of responses. The qualitative responses were analyzed for consistency with the data collection. Coding schemes (Mertler, 2016) were used to group similar types of data to assimilate patterns and themes for each response. As each theme emerged, responses were quantified in frequency tables, as appropriate, to provide additional triangulation of the data.

Sample size included 27 of 31 possible participants. Convenience sampling (Mertler, 2016) was the most appropriate for this study to obtain targeted perceptions of all students who completed the MAED program. All 31 students were invited to participate. There was neither incentive nor penalty for student participation.

Limitations

With 27 respondents, the sample size is not large enough for generalization to the entire population (Mertler, 2016). Because the study accounts for perceptions of students' motivating factors at the time of program completion, rather than perceptions at the time of admission, responses may have varied if the study were conducted prior to completing the program. Qualitative responses added value to quantitative data; however, focus groups, with opportunities for further investigation and clarification of responses, may have provided additional understanding of student perceptions.

Results & Analyses

Of 31 program completers, 27 (87%) responded to the survey. Students completed the survey at the conclusion of their last course. The survey was voluntary, free of penalty if students chose not to complete. All 27 respondents finished the survey and all questions were answered.

Research Question 1

Which motivating factors influenced teachers to pursue the MAED in Elementary Education? To answer the first research question, Question 11 from the survey was analyzed for patterns and themes in the qualitative responses. Table 1 demonstrates six major themes that emerged, grouped by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The frequency of responses indicated 117 total mentions related to the established themes. Of the 117 total mentions, 49 mentions (41.9%) were categorized as extrinsic factors. There were 39 mentions (33.3%) related to intrinsic factors and 29 mentions (24.8%) that could be intrinsic or extrinsic.

Table 1. *Motivation factors to pursue MAED*

Theme	Frequency	Intrinsic (I)/Extrinsic (E)
Accredited University	15	E
Life-long Learning	28	I
Loyalty to University	11	I
More Professional Options	29	E/I
Recruiting Strategies	3	E
Time & Length of Program	31	E

Note. Frequencies are number of times mentioned across total responses.

The most common theme related to the time and length of the program as a motivating factor, with 31 mentions (26.5%). The second most common theme was 29 mentions (24.8%) related to pursuit of more professional options (which could be extrinsic or intrinsic), followed by the desire for life-long learning, with 28 mentions (23.9%). The least common themes included accredited university with 15 mentions (12.8%), loyalty to the university with 11 mentions (9.4%), and strategies related to recruiting (3 mentions, or 2.6%).

Time and length of the program included responses such as, "completely online" and "completed in one year." Responses from this theme related to extrinsic motivating factors (Boyle et. al, 2016; Johnson et. al, 2015) also aligned with Romiszowski's (2015) criteria for universities offering distance education programs. One particular respondent highlighted interest in the program since it was "for practicing teachers and is done in a year."

Mention of additional opportunities for professional roles outside of the classroom could be considered extrinsic (Roness, 2011) related to career advancement or intrinsic and altruistic (Manuel & Hughes, 2016) for the sake of broadening impact on other adults and students. These responses also related to extrinsic examples included, "[will] carry me well into any avenue of education," "eventually be a Curriculum Specialist," and "more options down the road." Intrinsic examples in this category were categorized by responses such as, "teach pre-service teachers...[to] provide the newest teaching strategies [that] promote student growth," and "the opportunity to better myself as an individual and as an educator." Improving oneself confirms the findings of Bruinsma and Jansen (2010). This overall notion of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) was also present as an implicit analysis of responses.

One respondent could be categorized as a Phase 4 teacher (Brunetti & Marston, 2018; Day et. al, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The student, by nature of years of experience was ready for a change in career, specifically to "get out of the classroom," upon admission into the program, aligning with career fatigue (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). The student further clarified that "after my first semester I remembered how much I just love learning and education." This aligns to the Warford (2011) model of zone of proximal teacher development, where new experiences and learning provide catalyst for reflection about internal beliefs and values.

Responses related to accreditation included national rankings of programs such as, "top 10 for online" and "reputable university." Loyalty to the university involved "loved [the university] as much as I did in undergrad," and "both my husband and I attended [the university] and have had successful careers." Key recruiting strategies mentioned were "[my] student teacher…shared with me about this new program," and "[program director] came into one of my classes to speak about this program."

Research Question 2

Which overall programmatic or student support factors contributed to overall student satisfaction? To answer this research question, the authors analyzed quantitative responses using descriptive statistics of frequency and aggregated mean percentages for questions one, two, three, five, and six from the MAED Program Survey. Questions two, three, and five related to overall programmatic factors, including overall course expectations contributing to value of education and course organization to make workload manageable. Questions one and six related to student support factors, such as advising-related communication and access to resources and tools. Tables 2-6 represent quantitative analyses for each associated question. Data were compared with qualitative responses to question nine, strengths of the program, and question 10, suggestions for improvement.

Table 2. *Satisfactory ratings of advising-related communication*

Scale	Frequency (n =27)	Mean %
Very satisfactory	19	70.4
Satisfactory	7	25.9
Neither satisfactory nor dissatisfactory	1	3.7
Dissatisfactory		
Very dissatisfactory		
Total	27	100

Note. Question 1 from MAED Program Survey: From the time you applied for the program to the day you started classes, the communication from the graduate program letting you know what to expect next was…

Table 3. *Extent of course expectations and value to education*

Scale	Frequency (n =27)	Mean %
All courses exceeded expectations	12	44.4
Most courses exceeded expectations	13	48.1
Some courses exceeded expectations	1	3.7
Few courses exceeded expectations	1	3.7
No courses exceeded expectations		
Total	27	100

Note. Question 2 from MAED Program Survey: Overall, how did the courses meet your expectations in terms of value to your education?

Table 4. *Ease of contact with instructors*

Scale	Frequency (n =27)	Mean %
Always	20	74.1
Usually	5	18.5
Sometimes	1	3.7
Rarely		
Never	1	3.7
Total	27	100

Note. Question 3 from MAED Program Survey: Were you able to easily contact your instructors when you had a question about the class?

Table 5. *Organization of classes for workload management*

Scale	Frequency (n =27)	Mean %
Always	7	25.9
Usually	15	55.6
Sometimes	5	18.5
Rarely		
Never		
Total	27	100.0

Note. Question 5 from MAED Program Survey: Were your classes organized in a way that made the work load manageable?

Table 6. *Access to available resources and tools*

Scale	Frequency (n =27)	Mean %
Always	24	88.9
Usually	3	11.1
Sometimes		
Rarely		
Never		
Total	27	100.0

Note. Question 6 from MAED Program Survey: Were you able to access available resources and tools to assist you during the duration of the graduate program?

Programmatic factors, such as expectations of courses adding value to education (question two, Table 3), communication with faculty about the courses (question three, Table 4), and organization of classes related to workload management (question five, Table 5) indicated overall satis-

faction. Of the 27 participants, 25 (92.5%) responded that all or most courses exceeded expectations in terms of value added to their education. Conversely, two participants (7.4%) indicated that only some or few courses exceeded expectations.

Responses to question nine, strengths of the program related to programmatic factors, included 56 total mentions of instructional quality and communication with the faculty. Example responses included, "[faculty] are very supportive and were always available," "knowledgeable and caring professors," and "valuable content." There were 13 mentions of action research related as a strength of the program. Responses included, "strength of learning about research" and "structure of the action research project was excellent." These findings triangulate with the acceptability among students and faculty and applicability of theory into practice (Romiszowski, 2015), as well as the value of communication and feedback from faculty (Koh & Hill, 2009; Winner & Paxton, 2016).

Additional responses to question nine related to strengths of student support factors were also mentioned, such as cohort design and advising-related services like admission and communication about registration. Examples of responses were "communication and ease of the online setup," "workload, for the most part, was balanced and manageable," and "collaboration and relevance." These findings relate to distance education students' desires for interaction with peers and collaboration (Boyle et. al, 2010; Koh & Hill, 2009; Winner & Paxton, 2016).

Question 10 provided students with opportunity to suggest program improvements. Contrary to action research as a strength noted by participants, it was also an area for challenge. Example responses included "more information on the action research project," "action research courses were…very intense," and "better preparation for research." Students also indicated the need for more interaction with faculty and peers through online format, such as Skype or SABA meetings. This again confirmed the need for interactions and collaboration (Boyle et. al, 2018; Koh & Hill, 2009; Winner & Paxton, 2016).

Discussion

The results from this mixed method study have provided programmatic insight for continuous improvement. Students possessed a variety of reasons why they chose to pursue an advanced degree. Most of the students were in the novice phase of teacher development, which confirms findings from the literature that novice teachers engage in professional learning to meet their immediate needs (Brunetti & Marston, 2018), possibly explaining the extrinsic motivating factors for pursuit of the master's degree.

Students in later stages of teacher development tended to experience a sense of rejuvenation. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) contended that teachers seeking renewal should find "challenge and be challenged throughout their careers" (p. 67). The challenge for students in this study will be to maintain the spirit of renewal throughout their professional trajectory.

As teachers progress throughout the professional educator continuum, they yearn for a future of opportunities, either to help them inside their classrooms or prepare them for advanced educator roles, as found in this study. As the zone of proximal teacher development shrinks (Warford, 2011), teachers experience greater self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). This was confirmed in the study by teacher desire to improve their skills as an educator and as a student.

While recruiting was mentioned the least, student supports were importantly noted, such as structure of courses, communication from the time of application to admission, and registration for courses. Students also mentioned the need for collaboration and peer interaction, providing

implications for program improvement, where faculty can expand opportunities for collaboration virtually. Student responses indicate potential for targeted marketing, catering to the different stages of teacher development (Brunetti & Marston, 2018; Day et. al, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Institutions of higher education may benefit from the findings of this study by using the data on intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motivation to maximize the needs of master's level students, while also catering to their desires for pursuit of higher learning. For example, schools of education may include intentional structures for collaboration among graduate students, even those engaged in distance education. An opportunity to celebrate the work of action research, as highlighted in the findings of this study, may provide a unique project-based, but empirical, outcome for students who become change agents in their field based on findings they uncover during the process. Pragmatic implementation of advising-related supports, such as frequent communication from time of application through matriculation and beyond would help universities create and foster engagement of students from the beginning to the end of the graduate education process. Furthermore, encouraging ongoing and frequent communication between faculty and students would elicit and build the sense of community that graduate students in education desire from their university.

Implications for Future Research

With a convenience sample, there is a need for replication (Mertler, 2016), since the size of the sample is not deemed representative of the generalized population. Future studies may produce more robust findings if researchers employ a pre- and post-survey to compare student perceptions and expectations before enrolling in a program and after completion. Following up with student responses via focus groups and interviews may further triangulate data, adding to the overall findings. Additionally, since self-efficacy was an implicit finding, there is a need to further investigate self-efficacy related to teacher motivation and teacher development in the context of this particular study. This study, however, provides insights on where to strengthen the MAED program, while considering the motivating factors of students at different stages of development. A recruitment and retention plan may help identify targeted strategies supported by the findings of the study. Finally, employing the FIT-Choice test (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2013) within the context of this study may further add to empirical findings for teachers earning master's degrees.

Conclusion

In an era where master's degrees are not valued by legislative support of advanced pay, teachers possess a need to pursue lifelong learning for either intrinsic or extrinsic reasons. While intrinsic reasons are necessary for longevity in the profession (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2013; Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007), extrinsic motivation should not be ignored, especially for online distance education programs (Johnson et. al, 2013). Teachers who come to the profession with a sense of preparedness are motivated to continue. Opportunities to learn provide a sense of renewal, with hope for professional expansion, whether inside or outside of the classroom.

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Appendix

MAED Program Survey

1. From the time you applied for the program to the day you started classes, the communication from the graduate program letting you know what to expect next was:
    i. Very Satisfactory
    ii. Satisfactory
    iii. Neither satisfactory or dissatisfactory
    iv. Dissatisfactory
    v. Very Dissatisfactory

   Explain your response:

2. Overall, how did the courses meet your expectations in terms of value to your education?
    i. All courses exceeded expectations
    ii. Most courses exceeded expectations
    iii. Some courses exceeded expectations
    iv. Few courses exceeded expectations
    v. No courses exceeded expectations

   Explain your response:

3. Were you able to easily contact your instructors when you had a question about the class?
    i. Always
    ii. Usually
    iii. Sometimes
    iv. Rarely
    v. Never

4. Did you feel prepared for the work load that the master's program required?
    i. Extremely prepared
    ii. Very prepared
    iii. Prepared
    iv. Slightly prepared
    v. Not at all prepared

   Explain your response:

5. Were your classes organized in a way that made the work load manageable?
    i. Always
    ii. Usually
    iii. Sometimes
    iv. Rarely
    v. Never

   Explain your response:

6. Were you able to access available resources and tools to assist you during the duration of the graduate program?
    i. Always
    ii. Usually
    iii. Sometimes
    iv. Rarely
    v. Never

7. How well did our MAEd with a concentration in Teacher Leadership prepare you to be a teacher leader?
    i. Well above average preparation
    ii. Above average preparation
    iii. Average preparation
    iv. Slightly below average preparation
    v. Far below average preparation

    Explain your response:

8. What did you learn about the variety of professional roles teacher leaders could pursue?

9. What do you feel were some of the strengths of this program?

10. What suggestions do you have for ways we could improve our program?

11. What was your motivation for choosing to pursue a master's degree and why did you choose this program?

12. How has your view of teacher leadership changed over the course of your work in our program?

13. What are the most important skills you believe are necessary to be an effective teacher leader?

14. What did you learn about how teacher leaders apply advocacy leadership in the classroom, school, community, and profession?

15. What did you learn about how teacher leaders apply policy leadership in the classroom, school, community, and profession?