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Abilene Christian University
School of Educational Leadership

An Exploration of the Role of Alternative Certification Programs in Teacher Preparedness

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by
Bianca A. Dugas

April 2024

Dedication

To my beloved son, throughout this journey, your unwavering support and understanding have been my guiding light. Your patience and encouragement have lifted me through the toughest of times, and for that, I am endlessly grateful. To my grandmother Jeanette and father, Darral, you instilled in me the invaluable virtues of hard work, grit, and perseverance. Your teachings have been the cornerstone of my journey, shaping me into the person I am today. To my mother, you have been my rock, my constant source of strength and encouragement. Your unwavering belief in me has propelled me forward, and I am forever indebted to you. And to my nephew Darius “DJ” Dugas, though you may no longer walk beside me, your spirit continues to guide me each day. Losing you was a profound loss, but through it, I discovered a deeper connection with God and a renewed sense of purpose. As I journeyed on, your memory fueled my determination, and I hope that you are proud of your Dr. Teedy. To my entire support system, past and present, your love and encouragement have carried me through this journey and beyond. I am grateful for each of you, and I carry your support with me always. With deepest love and gratitude.

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Heartfelt thanks go to my parents, Shawn and Keven, for nurturing and cultivating the unique individual I am today. Your love, guidance, and encouragement have empowered me to overcome any challenge that comes my way.

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Abstract

Alternative certification programs (ACPs) recently gained popularity due to their brevity and appeal to second-career candidates. However, research shows that alternatively certified teachers often need more pedagogical skills than traditionally certified teachers, leading to the possibility of experiencing challenges their first year as an educator. To address this problem, the role of ACPs in teacher preparation was investigated to identify ways to close the gaps and provide ongoing support to alternatively certified teachers. The purpose of this study was to explore the preparedness of teachers based on their experiences in their ACPs. The study was framed within Malcolm Knowles's adult learning theory to answer the following research questions: In what ways, if any, did your alternative certification program prepare you as a new teacher? What could your ACP do, if anything, to better prepare you as a new teacher? This study was a qualitative collective instrumental case study with 13 alternatively certified teachers from urban areas in Texas. The study consisted of a series of interviews for teachers to share what they learned from their ACP. The results showed that ACPs should adopt a reflective approach to the delivery and offerings within their programs to better serve novice teachers within and beyond their programs. Key considerations to ponder include individualized support, continuous professional development, mentorship support, collaborative learning communities, and flexible program structures, which are all areas of development to ensure they are fostering a community of well-prepared and capable educators.

Keywords: alternative certification program, traditional university certification, teacher preparedness, adult learning theory, pragmatic learning, educational mentorship

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In exploring the role of alternative certification programs (ACPs) in the United States, Bowling and Ball (2018) asserted that although the alternative pathway to teaching may resolve teacher vacancies, it often leads to the issue of ill-prepared teachers. Their research explored how teachers' preparation between alternatively and traditionally certified methods yields mixed results on their impact on student learning. They concluded that alternatively certified teachers bring a wealth of content knowledge but need to gain pedagogy-related skills. Their study proposed developing collaborative communities of practice to resolve this disparity between conventional and nonconventional programs to offer opportunities for mentoring and networking.

Chapter 1 introduces the understanding of alternative certification programs (ACPs) and their role in preparing teachers for the depth and complexities of their job duties. It highlights the background of alternative certification programs and any relevant vocabulary associated with the study to clarify the topic. The chapter also states the problem, the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework used, and the research questions and concludes with a summary.

Background of the Study

Alternative certification programs have been viewed very favorably in recent years, primarily due to the brevity of the program and the appeal to second-career candidates who may have work experience that provides insight into the curriculum, such as career and technical education (CTE) courses (Bruno et al., 2020). Scott et al. (2019) compared traditionally and alternatively certified technology and engineering teachers to look at the perceived preparedness of the two methods. They noticed the rise in educators taking alternatively certified pathways and noted that those teachers bring industry experience, enhancing content knowledge. However,

there was evidence that although those teachers had a solid background in the content, they lacked the pedagogical skills typically learned in a traditional certification route that would increase teacher quality and effectiveness. Their research also suggested that the lack of experience in pedagogy would lead to the teacher grappling with curriculum development, differentiation, and classroom management.

Redding and Smith (2016) suggested that the differences in the training requirements of alternatively certified teachers versus traditionally certified teachers provide insight into why high turnover rates of alternatively accredited teachers continue to increase. They argued that the brevity of ACP coursework and minimal training create barriers for alternatively certified teachers to experience success as first-year teachers, decreasing teacher quality. Consequently, they proposed that there is reason to believe the ACP method of attaining teaching credentials insufficiently prepares first-year teachers. However, there are significant differences within ACPs, including the length of the course work and program content offered, such as classroom management or curriculum. Investigating the role of ACPs in teacher preparation will help school districts envision how to close gaps and provide ongoing support to alternatively certified teachers to increase their capacity and improve effectiveness.

Marszalek et al. (2010) argued that there is a division between those who see teaching as skillful work requiring specific preparation and those who see teaching as something that most intellectually able people could do, raising questions about the necessity of teacher licensure requirements. The researchers noted that those who take an alternate approach to licensure claim that quality teaching necessitates solid content knowledge. The other required skills are attained through practical experiences. Thus, the supporters of alternative licensure paths into teaching

contend that traditional accreditation programs hinder quality teachers with solid subject matter experiences in teaching.

According to Scott et al. (2019), there is a significant need for qualified educators, and alternative route programs can close the teacher shortage gap. Although studies have been conducted, there are limitations in the research as it needs to determine if alternative route programs or traditional pathways best prepare effective teachers (Scott et al., 2019). Ilmer et al. (2005) recommended that research on alternative certification programs will help identify teachers' interpretation of preparedness and help alternate certification programs identify the level of support needed to ensure teachers are prepared based on their understanding of preparedness. Gaining a clearer understanding of what teachers need to be successful through the teachers' lens will drive the initiatives of ACPs to ensure that teachers have what they need to be successful. Uncovering what teachers deem necessary for their success will improve ACPs, the curriculum, delivery methods, and ongoing support levels.

Statement of the Problem

According to Malow et al. (2007), the lack of preparedness is causing concern for educators because of the rising number of teachers gaining licensure through alternative programs and the belief that those are the teachers who experience the most significant challenges. Their research expounded on the popularity of alternative certification programs and why districts elect to hire teachers from these abbreviated programs. Malow et al. (2007) suggested that school districts select this method of obtaining teaching credentials because newly alternatively certified teachers are more willing to work in urban and difficult-to-staff campuses as the teachers' lack of experience and novelty are less attractive at more high-performing schools. In addition, the certification issue becomes more compelling because every state has at

least one alternative certification pathway, so evaluating the outcomes of this preferred method is relevant in gaining a deeper understanding of why this group of teachers is not committing to their newly attained careers as evidenced by Haj-Broussard et al. (2016), who found research from studies interested in the retention rates of alternatively certified teachers who stay and complete the program. Their research showed that 3-year retention rates ranged from 74% to 92%, according to the ACP programs studied. They also found that on a national level, 50% of teachers left the profession within the first 5 years, posing a teacher turnover issue that impacted the state of education at a national level (Haj-Broussard et al., 2016). Some research has suggested that alternative programs with specific rigorous criteria required for acceptance into their program can produce effective teachers who perform just as well as their traditionally certified counterparts (Boyd et al., 2007). Research has implied that teachers trained by alternative route programs are just as effective, while other research yields findings that show educators prepared by traditional programs outperform alternatively certified teachers (Scott et al., 2019).

Considering the weight of such claims regarding stricter licensure requirements minimizing teachers' availability, it is alarming that such evidence does not exist (Boyd et al., 2007). According to Redding and Smith (2016), upon identifying which of the two approaches has a more significant positive impact on student outcomes, policymakers can create a framework favoring that approach. The framework can then identify the resources needed to create stricter guidelines for preparation programs or minimize the requirements to increase the appeal and grow the teacher candidate pools. The problem is that some alternatively certified teachers have difficulty fulfilling their duties due to inadequate training (Bruno et al., 2020). This is partly due to the fact that alternative certification programs allow their participants to begin

teaching prior to completion of their certification requirements (Yin & Partelow, 2020).

McBrayer and Melton's (2018) research showed that educational sectors experience grave challenges, including high teacher attrition rates and staffing challenges, specifically from those that took an alternative route to teacher preparation. In their literature review, they found data that showed an increasing shortage of highly effective teachers, with 50% of new alternatively certified teachers leaving the field within 5 years, resulting in \$2.2 billion in cost for public schools (McBrayer & Melton, 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this collective instrumental case study was to explore teachers' preparedness based on their experiences in their ACPs in Texas. The study was framed within Malcolm Knowles's adult learning theory, first proposed in 1968 and updated in 1984 (Knowles et al., 2020). Malcolm Knowles's 1968 adult learning theory focuses on the best practices to adapt education to the learning needs of adults and determine if adults learn differently from children. He identified a framework that suggested that the life experiences of adults inform their learning processes. Knowles's 1984 adult learning theory components include self-direction, life knowledge experiences, goal orientation experiences, content relevancy experiences, and response to external motivators.

Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: In what ways, if any, did your alternative certification program prepare you as a new teacher?

RQ2: What could your alternative certification program do, if anything, to better prepare you as a new teacher?

Rationale

Darling-Hammond et al. (2002), in reviewing previous research 20 years ago, noted there is limited research measuring teacher preparation programs' effects, as every state has its process for recruiting and licensing teacher candidates. States' autonomy in their processes causes a lack of uniformity, making it challenging to identify measurable quantitative data for analysis to find a correlation between teacher preparation and student outcomes. By exploring existing alternative certification programs, districts, school campuses, and leaders can use this information to make informed decisions about teacher certification programs and address their strengths and weaknesses based on teacher fellows' experiences as novice teachers. Scott et al. (2019) conducted research for similar reasons, as there was limited research on whether alternative route programs met the needs of special education teachers. The suggestion was that the teachers' perception of the program was relevant to their experiences and outcomes, hence the need for deeper research on the impact of alternative certification programs (Scott et al., 2019). The study may not have given campuses definitive reasons why teachers leave education prematurely. However, it provided a basis for consideration when evaluating first-year teachers' experiences, which may help schools and leaders find ways to retain teachers. The theoretical framework of their study, social learning theory, stretched the notion that the program itself can be one of many predictors of teacher success but a pivotal factor, as the learning experiences from their preparation programs can serve as a factor when measuring how effective teachers feel they are in the classroom (Scott et al., 2019).

Definition of Key Terms

Alternative certification program (ACP). An alternative certification program is a means to meet the high demands of the teaching field, possessing a sense of brevity in duration

(Bruno et al., 2020). ACPs involve engaging students in the academic setting immediately or shortly after entering the ACP. ACPs tend to have a sense of field-based training and attract a more diverse applicant population. ACPs have grown in population significantly, with research noting that men tend to be attracted to ACPs, as well as those with prior work experience in math and science career paths (Morettini, 2016).

Andragogy. Andragogy is the technique and manner of teaching adult learners (Smith, 2010).

Collaboration. Collaboration is the action of working with someone or a group of individuals to produce or create something (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

Content relevancy. Content relevancy refers to the new learning connecting to the learners' lives and what they already know and making it real-world applicable (Luukkonen, 2003).

Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). CAEP advances equity and excellence in educator preparation through evidence-based accreditation that assures quality and supports continuous improvement to strengthen P–12 student learning (CAEP, 2024).

Curriculum. Curriculum is learning goals and skills created by the district or teacher, with scholars, educational standards, subject matter, and interests in mind (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Goal orientation. Goal orientation is the individual disposition toward developing or validating one's ability to achieve one's goals (Morganson & Woods, 2022).

Highly qualified teacher. A highly qualified teacher is a teacher candidate with at least a bachelor's degree who has attained full licensure for teaching in their state of residence and evinces content knowledge in the subject they teach (Redding & Smith, 2016).

Instruction. Instruction is the content presented through the collaboration amongst educators, scholars, and subject matter in the context of the subject being taught in an educational setting (Redding & Smith, 2016).

Novice teachers. Novice teachers are educators with 5 years or less of educational training experience (Kim & Roth, 2011, p. 4).

Pedagogy. Pedagogy is the art or science of teaching which incorporates instructional tactics and processes (Simpson Steele et al., 2020).

Self-direction. Self-direction is to direct or manage something, such as one's work or study for or by oneself (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

Teacher attrition. Teacher attrition is described as teachers quitting the field of education to work in other industries outside of education. Teachers tend to leave their respective fields due to a lack of initiative and effective response to the teachers' needs (Kutsyuruba et al., 2017).

Teacher candidate. A teacher candidate is a student participating in an educational program to become a teacher. However, the individual has not yet earned credentials to be fully certified to teach.

Traditional certification programs. Traditional certification programs are an educational pathway to attaining teaching credentials by completing the required coursework prior to receiving full rights to serve as a teacher (Bruno et al., 2020). Traditional certification programs tend to rely on rigor in teacher preparation characterized by subject matter expertise, emphasis on both academic and field experiences to prepare for the professional educational setting, and the university's selectivity of constituents in their program (Bowling & Ball, 2018).

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the study. Chapter 2 comprises a review of literature related to teacher certification pathways. Chapter 3 covers the research methodology, inclusive of methods employed during the study, data collection, sample description of the research participants, and an explanation of the steps of the procedures. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study. Lastly, Chapter 5 summarizes the study, presents conclusions based on the findings, and suggests implications for practitioners and for future studies.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this collective instrumental case study was to explore the literature related to teachers' views of their preparedness based on their experiences in alternative certification programs (ACPs) in Texas. This chapter explores the following topics: the history of teacher preparation, theoretical framework, alternative certification programs versus traditional university programs, mitigating factors for teacher retention and attrition, and student achievement.

The literature was collected using a series of databases from Abilene Christian University's online library database, Margaret and Herman Brown Library, and EBSCO. The examination of recent literature began by locating articles with keywords such as *alternative certification*, *teaching*, *novice teachers*, *teacher preparation*, and *traditional certification*. The searches were then truncated to include alternative certifications in each article. The abstract of every article was read in its entirety, and any article proven to be noteworthy was further skimmed for the specific keywords described above. Articles relevant to the topic were saved on a USB and sorted and tiered by relevancy to the topic.

Theoretical Framework

Adult Learning Theory

According to Cox (2015), andragogy endorses the connection between coaching and adult learning theory, emphasizing the role of experience in learning and how it affects learning needs. Malcolm Knowles's idea of andragogy is based on a constructivist knowledge style that encourages adults to reflect on their experiences to create new learning informed by previous understandings. Knowles is a seminal writer who coined the term andragogy and the theory of adult education toward the end of World War II. He used this term to explain his theory of adult

education around 1967 (Cox, 2015). Knowles described six characteristics of adult learners that are deemed to impact how adults engage in education: the need for what they are learning to be real-world applicable and self-directed, to possess lots of former life and work experience, to learn in their own timing, to have a purpose of learning, to be life-centered in their approach to learning, and to be able to respond to external motivators (Cox, 2015)

Henschke (2011) noted that Malcolm Knowles is well renowned for his extensive background in adult education and effectively tested his adult learning theory in other workplace settings such as corporate sectors, healthcare, government, religious sectors, and higher education, to note a few. The key component of Knowles's adult learner theory is that it is most effective when learner-centered. Henschke (2011) noted that the learner must be guided by a facilitator who can show mastery of the subject matter and engage the learners in their learning.

Elements of Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory, often referred to as andragogy, is derived from the notion that adults have specific learning requirements to ensure that any given curriculum or skill is retained (Henschke, 2011). The biggest component in the success of learning is based on the learning environment in which the learner is acquiring knowledge. Andragogy suggests that adult learners learn best in collaborative environments and take a problem-based approach. Malcolm Knowles, the creator of the adult learning theory, divided the theory into six main characteristics: self-directed/autonomous, utilizes knowledge and life experiences, goal oriented, relevancy oriented, highlights practicality, and encourages collaboration (Henschke, 2011).

The notion of adult learning being self-directed/autonomous refers to the learner being vigorously involved in the learning process. The learner drives the outcomes of their learning experiences by creating goals and choices as to how they will attain those goals. Overall, the

learner takes ownership of their learning with the support of their facilitators and has a wealth of autonomy in the process. Cox (2015) suggested that adult learning theory necessitates a great deal of coaching to yield the highest outcomes of the learning experience. Transformative learning occurs when the learner engages in constant dialogue and reflection to reach the desired learning objectives. Cox (2015) proposed a direct connection between andragogy and transformative learning and further enhanced the notion that the connection between the two is through coaching. The definition of coaching is multifaceted, but Cox (2015) summed up coaching as the means by which the facilitator helps the learner learn rather than teach them, and words such as collaborator, alliance, and egalitarian help to describe the coaching relationship.

Another characteristic of adult learners includes the use of knowledge and life experiences, which refers to the learners' ability to connect past experiences to conceptualize the current knowledge base and activities. The curricula within an ACP program must allow for the learner to experience opportunities to make such connections to enhance the relevancy of the learning experiences. Cox (2015) suggested that adult learners have a wealth of prior life and work experience that can catalyze experiential learning, which involves four modes of learning: "Concrete experience that arouses feeling, reflective observation that involves reflecting on and describing the experience and feelings, abstract conceptualization that can be aligned with critical thinking, and active experimentation where the outcomes of thinking are put into action." (pp. 29–30). The notion of experimental learning is relevant to the idea of andragogy because this idea of learning necessitates an experimental coaching cycle, which deepens the relevance of coaching and its role in the adult learning process.

Adult learning is goal oriented, and this characteristic refers to the learner's motivation for learning and the goals set by the learner toward attaining the desired knowledge. Adult

learners tend to react to external motivators such as higher pay or better job titles. However, there is often a high level of intrinsic motivation for why they pursue this level of new learning. Ilmer et al. (2005) conducted a study analyzing the first-year experiences of urban teachers in an alternative certification program and looked at what motivated the teachers to join a Limited License to Instruct (LLI) program. They narrowed the participants' responses into seven themes including: "opportunity for certification, salary, opportunity for certification plus Master's degree, job stability, encouraged by others, chance to work at own pace, and personal computer/laptop incentive" (Ilmer et al., 2005, p. 6) The idea of why they are seeking this new endeavor and the goals they set forth helps to affirm the notion that adult learners learn when they are ready and when they have a need to learn (Cox, 2015). Part of the success of the adult learner is predicated on whether the learning outcomes have been identified coupled with relevant learning activities that aid in the learning objectives being met by the prescribed timeline set by the learner and/or facilitator (Cox, 2015). Adult learning is also relevancy oriented, which connects to the aforementioned description of goal orientation, as the adult learner must find the assigned tasks relevant to the prescribed goals set. Relevance has been proven to be a leading factor in the retention and success of adult learners. Ilmer et al. (2005) also reviewed the participants' perceptions of the online coursework and found that certain online modules yielded more positive responses than others, with descriptors such as informative, helpful, and relevant being the leading causes for success in those specific modules.

Adult learning highlights practicality, which is a characteristic of andragogy that emphasizes the importance of the adult learners' learning modality to include theoretical concepts that can transcend into real-world applications. The learning must foster experiences that yield practicality intertwined with the theoretical knowledge acquired. The connection

between the new information and the real-world applicability was observed in Cox's (2015) study as the researcher sought to identify how the role of the coach maneuvers the curricula-based outcomes in conjunction with the real-world or life connections.

The last characteristic of andragogy is that it encourages collaboration. Countless researchers have found that collaborative relationships between the learner and facilitators yield the highest results. When learners are seen and considered by their facilitators, they tend to yield higher levels of productivity. Ilmer et al. (2005) researched the impact of cohort meetings amongst LLIs and found significantly positive feedback regarding the overall cohort, which included a sense of connectedness and capacity to navigate challenges more efficiently and collaboratively within their cohort meetings. The cohort meetings yielded a family-oriented experience that fostered positive personal and working relationships that transcended into a continuation of support for one another after completing the program (Ilmer et al., 2005).

History of Teacher Preparation

Kutsyuruba et al. (2017) argued that teaching is no easy task, but teachers' preparation for the work ahead is predictive of their experiences as first-year teachers. They noted that teachers' challenges in their first year are relative to their development in the program attended to attain their teaching certification. First-year teachers commonly encounter many problems, such as classroom management, and curriculum expectations, which are typical areas addressed in traditional education programs, as well as non-program-associated issues such as insufficient resources, unsupportive work environments, and motivating students (Uribe-Zarain et al., 2019). Bruno et al. (2020) noted that teachers' training and preparation significantly impact how teachers navigate those issues. As a result, the quality of their training rather than the

profession's difficulties serves as the most significant predictor of whether novice teachers will have a positive or negative experience.

Fantilli and McDougall (2009) investigated the notion of the Robinson Crusoe approach, which alludes to novice teachers being thrown into the deep end of the waters to sink or swim. The research results showed that teachers reported that the time given to prepare for their first-year teaching experience impacted the challenges they encountered as apprentice teachers. This idea of sink or swim suggested that the challenges teachers faced in their first year were relative to the development received from their teaching certification programs (Kutsyruba et al., 2017).

However, certified teachers reported the complex demands of the teaching profession, and the feeling of not being prepared to meet those demands often caused teachers to leave education (Simpson Steele et al., 2020). Gallant and Riley (2014) found that early exit from teaching was alarming due to alternatively certified teachers tending to leave education due to lack of preparation. According to Bruno et al. (2020), 20% of teachers in public school systems left their campuses within the first 3 years compared to their more veteran teacher counterparts. Redding and Smith (2016) noted that because education is not the first career choice for alternatively certified teachers from noneducational settings, they are more apt to leave education due to deficiencies in training from their certification program. Bowling and Ball (2018) suggested that the most contradictions among ACPs were the required coursework and brevity of the program to become certified. They argued that the shortcut method did not allow for the rigor and quality necessary for educators from noneducational settings. They also found research advocating that alternatively certified teachers leave the field because they may teach in areas unrelated to their initial career/degree, enter the alternative program with less college

preparation, complete the program with little to no pedagogical training, and may not be required to pass aptitude exams for the fulfillment of the program.

Nevertheless, the value of alternative certification programs often appears unclear compared to regular certification programs. For example, Boyd et al. (2007) argued whether there was a need for certifications and further investigated whether obtaining state teaching licensure impacted the teachers' performance. It is unclear whether alternate certification programs (ACPs) share similar sentiments regarding the value of certifications, which would provide evidence of the abbreviated approach to learning and minimal training they provide to their students. Piro et al. (2010) conducted research due to a lack of quantifiable data comparing alternatively certified and traditionally certified teachers' performance to measure if one certification method outperformed the other. Their research findings yielded a significant difference in student performance data, with traditionally certified teachers outperforming their alternatively certified counterparts in math with the opposite in social studies scores, where alternatively certified teachers surpassed veteran teachers. Their research suggested a differentiated argument for the necessity of state licensure requirements. Piro et al.'s (2010) analysis yielded conflicting opinions regarding the conventional approaches to traditional university programs in obtaining licensure, suggesting it produces teachers with increased pedagogical knowledge and professional status, which are better qualifiers for quality teachers. In contrast, Piro et al. (2010) proposed that nonconventional approaches, alternatively certified programs, to gaining teaching licensure generated an unnecessary barrier, suggesting that content knowledge is a good qualifier for a quality teacher. There needs to be more agreement regarding the value of teacher licensure.

According to Malow et al. (2007), the lack of preparedness is causing concern for educators because of the rising number of teachers gaining licensure through alternative programs and the belief that those are the teachers who experience the most significant challenges. Their research expounded on the popularity of alternative certification programs and why districts elect to hire teachers from these abbreviated programs.

Traditional teacher preparation programs dominate the educational sector, but alternative teacher programs have grown significantly, with 1 in 5 teachers being alternatively certified (Castro & Edwards, 2021). Castro and Edwards (2021) spoke on this notion of innovation in their exploratory study, which strove to identify at what end innovation ratifies the dynamic landscape of teacher preparation programs in Texas. They described the phenomenon of innovation as employing a sense of newness and creativity that contests conventional ideologies and disrupts the predefined structures of an explicit framework, which in this case is education (Castro & Edwards, 2021). Using institutional pressures of innovation theoretical framework, they dissected the cultural norms, structures, rules, and governing authorities to provide insight into educational innovations and their role in the policies on teacher preparation innovation. Castro and Edwards (2021) found that the ability to innovate was shaped mainly by institutional accreditations including, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), and subsidiary organizations such as the National Council for Teacher Quality (NCTQ).

In looking at the teacher preparation programs through the lens of organizational innovation, they were able to narrow program characteristics into three areas of focus: enrollment trends, program completers, and supervision, with data reflecting that demographics are crucial in assessing a teacher preparation's identity and structure (Castro & Edwards, 2021).

Knowing the participants of the programs helps to identify commonalities between programs and correlations between those who elect alternative routes over traditional pathways. Goldhaber (2019) also found that there is no clear consensus on whether or not the method of teacher preparation has any true impact on the teacher workforce outcomes. However, his review of the literature did find compelling evidence that many, if the not majority, of the nation's universities and colleges are doing a subpar job preparing teachers for the role of classroom teacher, with 1,450 schools under the existing quality control standards showing evidence that they could better prepare teacher candidates more effectively (Goldhaber, 2019).

Overall, national teacher preparation programs are not measuring up to the standards of their international counterparts. Countries such as Finland have been coined as a model for what teacher preparation should look like in American teacher preparation programs (Goldhaber, 2019). Research yielded that teacher preparation programs in other countries supersede that of United States teacher preparation programs based upon quantifiable data using student achievement as the basis for their findings (Goldhaber, 2019). However, Goldhaber's (2019) research of the literature showed a weak correlation between teacher preparation programs' success linked to the scores of students' assessments, which inadvertently was used to measure teacher performance summative ratings.

Schneider (2018) took a deeper dive into the history of problems and dilemmas in teacher preparation and found that the best way to view the trajectory of teacher preparation is to identify which aspects of teacher preparation dilemmas could be managed and which are problems that can be solved. He found that the myriad of problems, such as reflective practices, content preparation, and student teaching experiences, have shown significant improvement. However, there is a lack of uniformity across all teacher preparation programs regarding those factors

(Schneider, 2018). However, in hindsight, there are quite a few dilemmas in teacher preparation programs that are proven to be more difficult to manage, including specificity versus generality, flexibility versus security, and length versus volume, all within the context of four factors in teacher preparation including public funding, the scale of the business, the perceived importance of education, and equity (Schneider, 2018). When looking at the first dilemma, length versus volume, one must consider the challenges of staffing schools to meet the demands of teacher shortages across the nation. The issue with this dilemma is that the effect of this demand causes the cost to be suppressed, which limits the duration of training for teachers, as when teachers are enrolled in teacher preparation programs, they are assuming cost for program expenses and opportunity cost (Schneider, 2018). There is no direct solution to this dilemma, as the programming length must be considerably minimal due to the mediocre salary and low field distinction. (Schneider, 2018). Another essential thing to note in Schneider's findings is the belief that the skills of highly effective teachers cannot be adequately identified through professional credentials on an individual basis, as smaller teacher preparation programs with higher cost flexibility have more flexibility to effectively train a group of teachers directly (Schneider, 2018). This is notable in the sense that higher-cost programs attract more candidates but at the expense of potentially leading to quality control concerns that compromise accreditation-based security (Schneider, 2018).

Alternative Certification Programs Versus Traditional University Programs

Redding and Smith (2016) noted that alternative certification programs had become the preferred method for attaining teacher credentials by individuals seeking a career in education who prefer an abbreviated pathway towards attaining those credentials. ACPs refer to any pathway used for achieving teacher certification in nonuniversity settings. The researchers

suggested that teachers elect the abbreviated path to teaching due to the length of time to complete the program compared to a traditional university pathway. Teachers can attain their certification in less than a year, and many programs are self-paced. ACPs also allow teacher candidates to choose pathways specializing in a specific focus, such as classroom management or curriculum. In doing so, Redding and Smith (2016) noted that this narrow focus often does not allow a pragmatic learning approach to education. The condensed length of the program tends to minimize opportunities for hands-on training with student teaching compared to those who attend traditional university programs (Uribe-Zarain et al., 2019). The absence of a practical approach to education fosters missed opportunities for the teacher candidate to receive effective teaching methods from a seasoned professional (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). Templeton et al. (2020) found a direct correlation between first-attempt success on content certification exams and certification pathways, as university-based prepared participants scored higher on their first attempt than their alternatively certified counterparts.

Cohen-Vogel and Smith (2007) indicated that those electing the ACP route tend to enter education as an alternative career. Many ACP participants tend to join education after working in other industries outside of education. They suggested that the notion of no prior experience in the field means a more profound significance for novice teachers to participate in practical experiences before completing the ACP. Templeton et al. (2020) conducted research to assess the effectiveness of Texas Educator Preparation Programs and found that the necessity of alternative certification programs was reared due to the need for math and science teachers as there was a significant shortage in rural/urban areas. Boyd et al.'s (2007) research also indicated that ACP teacher candidates tend to accept teaching positions in urban schools with low socioeconomic populations, which has increasing demands on novice teachers, including closing

achievement gaps and classroom management. Templeton et al.'s (2020) research showed that there are specific characteristics of campuses that employ first-year teachers, including campuses that have higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students. In 2012 and 2019, 60% of economically disadvantaged students were enrolled in Texas schools with first-year alternatively certified teachers working in schools with an average of 67.07% economically disadvantaged students in comparison to 63.24% economically disadvantaged students being served by first-year university-prepared teachers (Templeton et al., 2020).

Redding and Smith (2016) noted research that suggested that ACPs attract candidates with diverse backgrounds who add a range of characteristics to education. Compared to their traditionally certified counterparts, other attributes of ACP teacher candidates include the trends of more men, an increased number of minorities, older candidates over the age of 30, and more inclined to teach high-demand subjects. Templeton et al. (2020) yielded similar findings in their study, noting that African Americans tend to attend ACPs with 12,366 participants attending ACPs in comparison to the 3,645 African Americans participants who attended university-based programs, yielding four times as many black educator preparation programs (EPP) participants than university-based programs (UBPs). The data are also true for other minority races, including Hispanic with 19,616 ACP participants to 18,721 UBP participants, Native American with 251 ACP participants and 175 UBP participants, and mixed races with 1,248 ACP participants and 785 UBP participants (Temple et al., 2020).

According to Boyd et al. (2007), some states have placed additional expectations on their teacher preparation programs and licensure requirements. In contrast, other states have become lenient and offered alternative ways for teacher candidates to gain licensure to increase the teacher pool. The issue is the effects of the contradicting methods on teacher preparation and

certification and teacher effectiveness and whether more burdensome requirements yield more effective teachers. This may be due to teacher preparation programs providing very few, if any, public data as to what goes on within their programs, specifically recruitment criteria, candidate approval process, and acceptance rates, which yields the still unanswered questions of whether teacher preparation programs features are related to teacher performance and success (Goldhaber, 2019). Reviewing previous studies shows limited research measuring teacher preparation programs' effects, as every state has its process for recruiting and licensing teacher candidates (Boyd et al., 2007). The autonomy states have in their own process causes a lack of uniformity, making it challenging to identify measurable data for analysis to find a correlation between teacher preparation and preparedness. Some research has suggested that very selective alternative programs that require specific criteria to be considered for acceptance into their program can produce effective teachers who perform just as well as their traditionally certified counterparts (Boyd et al., 2007). Bastian et al. (2019) conducted a study to examine what surveys of teacher preparation program completers have to say about teacher preparation quality, and in their research of the literature found that teacher preparation programs have been under scrutiny to prove the quality of their programs' mechanisms, track the effectiveness of those who completed the program, and implementation of data and evidence for their programs' improvement. This emphasis is exacerbated by the pressures of accreditation standards and state-level evaluation systems that have a hyperfocus on school outcomes and the need for constant improvement (Bastian et al., 2019).

Student achievement has historically served as a measurement of teacher success, so a study of this magnitude can demystify the belief that one method of attaining certification is better than another. Studying the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs could be used to

determine which teacher pathway has the most significant impact on student achievement (Piro et al., 2010). According to Boyd et al. (2007), some states have placed additional expectations on their teacher preparation programs and licensure requirements. In contrast, other states have become lenient and offered alternative ways for teacher candidates to gain licensure to increase the teacher pool. The issue is the effects of the contradicting methods of teacher preparation coupled with teacher effectiveness, whether more burdensome requirements yield higher student results, and why this has not been studied more closely. In reviewing previous research, there is limited research measuring teacher preparation programs' effects, as every state has its process for recruiting and licensing teacher candidates. The autonomy states have in their processes causes a lack of uniformity, making it challenging to identify measurable data for analysis to find a correlation between teacher preparation and student outcomes. Research has suggested that selective alternative programs can produce effective teachers who perform just as well as their traditionally certified counterparts (Boyd et al., 2007). The lack of evidence on whether more robust certification requirements improve student outcomes or discourage probable teachers and inadequate evidence to support whether reducing licensure requirements can decrease teacher vacancies shows a need for additional research. Upon identifying which of the two approaches has a more significant positive impact on student outcomes, policymakers can create a framework favoring that approach. The framework can then decide on the resources needed to create stricter guidelines for preparation programs or minimize the requirements to increase the appeal and grow teacher candidate pools.

According to Malow et al. (2007), the literature gap on this subject calls for exploration of the impact of teachers' perceptions about their role, the level of support needed, and the influence of extenuating factors like efficacy beliefs and socioeconomic status on their decisions

to commit to the field of education. Such research does not thoroughly analyze teachers' experiences from the lens of examining factors that impact teacher retention, as most studies measure teachers' effectiveness with data such as student achievement. By exploring existing alternative certification programs, districts, school campuses, and leaders can use this information to make informed decisions about teacher certification programs and address their strengths and weaknesses based on teacher fellows' experiences as novice teachers. The study may not have given campuses definitive reasons as to why teachers leave education prematurely. However, it did provide a basis for consideration when evaluating first-year teachers' experiences, which helps schools and leaders find ways to retain teachers. Templeton et al. (2020) suggested that as the demand increases for urgent teachers' certifications through alternative certification methods, it creates a need for deeper exploration of the short- and long-term outcomes regarding teacher preparation practices. Ilmer et al. (2005) recommended that research on this subject will help identify teachers' interpretation of preparedness and help alternative certification programs identify the level of support needed to ensure teachers are prepared based on their understanding of preparedness.

McBrayer and Melton (2018) took a different approach with their study as they examined the transferability of traditional teacher preparation exemplars to alternative teacher preparation pathways and concluded that 86.5% of the identified program exemplars could be highly transferable. The study used the 37 program exemplars identified from "Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons from Exemplary Programs" (Darling-Hammond, 2006) and categorized them into five elemental areas: curriculum and pedagogy, differentiation, assessment, rigor, relevance, professionalism, and support (McBrayer & Melton, 2018). The results of the study showed that 32 out of 37 of the exemplars were transferable and recommended that the teacher preparation

programs consider relying on program exemplars as they have a proven track record in preparing highly effective teachers.

Spann (2019) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of alternative routes to teacher certification in rural school districts in South Carolina with a deeper analysis of the elected teacher preparation pathway, teacher performance, teacher retention rates, and the effects of the teacher preparation pathway on student achievement. Her approach significantly differed from the other studies as she sought the opinions of nine administrators who served as the appraisers of teachers who took an alternative pathway to their teaching credentials (Spann, 2019). The findings of the study showed that most of the administrators found that their alternately certified staff was sufficiently prepared.

Traditional University Programs

Traditional university programs refer to an individual's orthodox pathway toward higher education. In the case of this research, traditional teacher preparations refer to the educational pathway one chooses to attain teaching credentials by completing the required coursework prior to receiving full rights to serve as a teacher (Bruno et al., 2020). Traditional certification programs rely on rigorous curricula prescribed by the university and have a selectivity of constituents in their program. The traditional university programs set learning outcomes aligned to the subject matter expertise, and emphasis on academic and field experiences to prepare for the professional educational setting (Bowling & Ball, 2018).

Traditional teacher preparation programs provide a residency approach where the student can work alongside a veteran teacher in conjunction with their coursework to gain pragmatic skills for their future career in education. According to Whitford et al. (2018), traditional teacher preparation programs tend to serve undergraduate students and typically lead them to a

bachelor's degree and some form of state credentialing to join the field of education. They found the most distinguishable difference between traditional and alternative teacher pathways to be the accessibility to supervision while in the preparation programs, concluding that alternative pathways tend to have minimal supervision while traditional pathways offer continuous supervision (Whitford et al., 2018).

According to research, there were 26,595 teacher preparation programs, with 70% housed in institutions of higher education, and of the 500,129 participating individuals enrolled in the teacher preparation programs in 2012–2013, 89% were enrolled in traditional teacher preparation programs (Whitford et al., 2018).

Matsko et al. (2022) conducted a study investigating the differences and similarities between traditional, alternative, and residency pathways to teacher preparation and in their review of the literature found that participants of traditional route programs found themselves possessing higher instructional knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy, as well as, had a larger sense of self-efficiency than their alternatively certified counterparts. They also found studies with consistent findings of higher retention rates of teachers with a traditional pathway to certification (Matsko et al., 2022). A notable measurement of their study was whether the participants had prior experience working with children, yielding the notion that working in a childcare facility or school setting may support their experiences and found that those who participated in a residency pathway yielded the greatest proportion of prior experience with children with 48% followed by 42% alternatively certified and 21% traditional (Matsko et al., 2022). Another notable factor was whether the participants chose education as their primary major in undergraduate studies, reporting that 59% of participants of traditional pathways chose education as their primary major, followed by 26% in residency pathways and 14% in alternative

pathways (Matsko et al., 2022). When asked why they chose the specific pathways, reasons varied from strong reputation and financial aid support. Traditional pathway participants noted that better alignment between coursework and fieldwork served as the leading reason for their decision to choose a traditional pathway, with 60% reporting being able to transfer the pedagogical strategies and techniques learned from their program, followed by 44% reporting the same from an alternative pathway, and 31% from a residency pathway (Matsko et al., 2022). The most prominent feature of a traditional pathway is the ability to engage in a pragmatic experience through student teaching. Matsko et al. (2022) found that traditionally prepared teachers reported that they learned a lot from their student teaching experiences, with 73% reporting a significance in the student teaching experience compared to 58% in a residency pathway and 54% in an alternative pathway.

Matsko et al. (2022) referred to residency pathways in their research, but Zugelder et al. (2021) took a deeper dive into teacher residency pathways and explained the residency pathway to be a 1-year residency model where inexperienced college graduates participate in a postbaccalaureate teacher residency program at one setting for an extended amount of time with a clinical educator in a supervised environment. Residency pathway participants gain the opportunity to engage in a pragmatic approach similar to a traditional pathway. The difference between the two is that education may not have been the first choice for a college graduate. Teacher residencies share a commonality with residency programs for medical students, as they can gain intense knowledge through on-the-job experience. Through this nontraditional delivery of teacher education from a traditional university, candidates can engage in hands-on experiences without the classroom-based theory (Zugelder et al., 2021). This approach is said to eliminate the conventional college/university barriers, such as thoughtfulness to life schedules, and an

approach centered around the relevancy of the professional context where theory is implied in practice. Their study focused on the educational systems in North Carolina, where a bill was passed to increase educator preparation program options, changing the dynamics for certification pathways in an effort to increase the teacher candidacy pool without diminishing the value of the preparation program. Unlike other alternative teacher preparation programs, North Carolina provided explicit criteria for residency candidates, including the candidate possessing a bachelor's degree, earning a 2.7 GPA on the degree, completing 24 hours of coursework in the desired certification area or passing a content-area exam, enrolling in a reputable teacher preparation program, and an offer of employment by a local educational agency (Zugelder et al., 2021). The overall consensus of the study was that traditional pathways may be time-consuming with the number of credits required, and alternative pathways are dense in the amount of required information necessary in a short amount of time, so the role of a residency program is finding a balance between identifying what teachers need to know for immediate implications in a pragmatic way and leveraging the most important skills in conjunction with their augmented content knowledge in a structured approach to pedagogical training (Zugelder et al., 2021).

Mitigating Factors for Teacher Retention and Attrition

Simpson Steele et al. (2020) found that teachers report the complex demands of the teaching profession and their feelings of unpreparedness to meet those demands. As a result, effective teachers exiting the field of education is not uncommon. Consequently, other researchers noted that the rise in teachers leaving teaching to work in more lucrative areas has become more common, as math and science teachers have skills and experience that yield opportunities for better-paying career options (Redding & Smith, 2016). Templeton et al. (2020) provided descriptive statistics while exploring the mitigating factors that influence the

preparation of proficient teachers in Texas to identify the groundwork for an evaluative model for educator preparation programs. They found that there is a drastic decline in teacher retention as they progress in the field, with 91% staying in the field after the first year, 81% after Year 2, 74% after Year 3, 68% after Year 4, 64% after Year 5, and 54% after Year 7. They also identified that race may be a factor for retention as Hispanics tend to have the highest retention rates, with 80% staying in the field, and Pacific Islanders with the lowest retention rates of 63% (Templeton et al., 2020).

Gallant and Riley's 2014 research showed that first-year teachers also join the field for intangible benefits, one of which is being instrumental in making a difference in the lives of children. Unfortunately, many teachers experience early exit because they do not feel the campus is conducive to fostering those experiences. Teachers leaving the field prematurely is commonly referred to as attrition when teachers lack the sense of being effective or lack support in the first years of their career and abort teaching for a more favorable profession (Kutsyruba et al., 2017). Goldhaber (2019) conducted a quantitative study to identify the notable differences between the type of teacher preparation programs teachers graduate from and their workforce outcomes, posing the question of whether attending a certain type of teacher preparation program yields a more effective teacher candidate. Through his review of the literature, he found that teachers whose programs offered student teaching opportunities yielded higher probabilities of the teacher staying at the school, and better student achievement, which gives evidence that a pragmatic approach yields higher retention rates (Goldhaber, 2019). Bastian et al. (2019), in their research of literature, found that teachers who land jobs at schools with higher performance records tend to have more supportive colleagues and leadership, which may cause those teachers to rate their teacher preparation programs more favorably as these factors may impact how a teacher

perceives the quality of preparation. Contrary to the aforementioned, if a teacher is in less supportive schools, they will underrate the quality of their teacher preparation program due to their experiences at the school and not the teacher preparation program (Bastian et al., 2019).

Bastian et al. (2019) examined whether the perceptions of teacher preparation programs predict teacher retention, which yielded findings that show that there are a few factors that contribute to teacher retention, specifically opportunities to learn and when measured in comparison to university-based teacher preparation programs there is a significant association between their survey measures and teacher retention.

According to Specht and Metsala (2018), one's attitude toward the field of education can also be a mitigating factor in the outcomes of a first-year teacher's experience. Gallant and Riley (2014) found that teachers' perceptions of their ideal teaching expectations were often misaligned with the reality of their campus settings. In fact, teachers enter education seeing themselves as change agents, but over time, their desire to impact the world through serving as educators shifts from optimism to disillusionment.

Kutsyuruba et al. (2017) conducted a contextual approach to their literature review to identify a thread of themes that play a role in the cultural implications of an organization. They found that additional factors contribute to teacher retention and attrition, including teaching philosophies and ethos, socialization with peers, the role of mentors, influence upon career/professional development, exposure to diversity, and school. As a result, the search yielded articles that confirmed that the organization's culture plays an intricate role in creating meaningful experiences for first-year teachers, such as the necessity of a collaborative culture, purposeful mentorship, and a well-organized induction program.

Redding and Smith's (2016) study also suggested that several other variables play a pivotal role in teachers' high turnover rates. These include the characteristics of those entering alternative certification programs (ACPs), the ACP itself, and the support teachers receive at an organizational level. Their research suggested that minimal teacher preparation and the absence of self-efficacy cause higher attrition rates for novice teachers. Their study offered a view that reiterates the notion of school culture, organizational support, mentorships, induction programs, and preservice training weighing heavily on teacher attrition and retention.

Reitman and Karge (2019) argued that the lack of district and campus support trends is the leading cause of teacher attrition and retention. Their research suggested the significance of induction programs to provide ongoing support to teachers in their early years of teaching. Their research sought to determine the professional experiences teachers identify as most beneficial and instrumental to their teaching practices, with support from other teachers and administration serving as the most repetitive responses in their data. Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) echoed similar sentiments in their research, confirming a positive correlation between teacher induction programs and increased teacher retention.

Latifoglu (2016) saw that there was very little research on the correlation between beginning teachers' career trajectory and their forms of employment and conducted an analysis of the different experiences of teachers with both fixed-term and permanent contracts from 10 different schools as well as leaders from their schools for a broader perspective. Fixed-term contracts, in this study context, refer to employment that is limited to a precise time frame, and permanent contractual agreements have an unspecified period with opportunities for annual leave and termination and severance privileges (Latifoglu, 2016). Through a series of interviews, he found that the vast majority of first-year teachers did not anticipate the heavy workload causing

an imbalance between work and their personal lives (Latifoglu, 2016). His study showed that teachers on permanent full-time employment contracts were less likely to leave their school than teachers with fixed-term contracts. The study also noted that the leading cause of teacher retention was the reality that teaching has been coined as a stressful profession and requires a lot of emotional intelligence to withstand the emotional labor teachers endure (Latifoglu, 2016). The researcher found some noteworthy data that could give insight as to why teachers leave the field regarding their collegiality and teacher support, working conditions, workload, and overall career assessment.

The evidence from this study showed that the extent and quality of support new teachers receive from their campuses contributes to whether they are retained and can serve as a better predictor of teacher outcomes than the method of teacher preparation. This echoes the previous literature, which suggested that schools should look into a proper induction process that fosters a culture of ongoing and intentional support to teachers to ensure they have meaningful mentoring opportunities, purposeful professional development, and a myriad of support from both colleagues and leadership (Latifoglu, 2016).

Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) conducted a study to examine if new teacher induction programs could reduce the turnover rates of teachers and found that more than half of all states require some form of induction for new teachers and reported that over 90% of teachers nationally reported participation in an induction program their first year. In their review of the literature, they discovered several correlational studies that showed induction programs improving the retention rates of beginner teachers (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). The results of their study showed that African American teachers were significantly more likely to receive vast induction support than their Caucasian counterparts, with the data reporting between 80% and

100% greater (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). School characteristics such as socioeconomic status, urbanicity, or leadership were unrelated to whether first-year teachers received induction support. However, schools with large enrollments in English as a second language are targeted for extensive induction support due to the necessity of specialized expertise in language acquisition.

Morettini (2016) conducted a study to examine the effects of mentoring in urban schools to support teacher retention and found that social/moral support, encouragement, and support with classroom discipline/management were more beneficial from their mentors than mentor support in pedagogy and lesson planning. Another notable finding was the tenure of the mentor support, as participants reported that continuous support throughout the entire school year was far better than mentorship during the summer or first few weeks of the school year (Morettini, 2016). The study affirmed a repetitive need for ongoing support beyond the teacher preparation program.

Zhang and Zeller (2016) took a deeper dive with their longitudinal study to identify the relationship between teacher preparation and retention. They found numerous perspectives from which one could assume teachers chose to leave their respective fields, including their principal's role, school support, facility quality, evidence of mentorship, and salary (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Haj-Broussard et al. (2016) found that the teacher turnover dilemma creates a challenge at a local and national level, with 50% of teachers leaving the profession within 5 years for reasons ranging from the age of the teacher, teaching subjects in their field of certification, ethnicities of staff/students, and on the job support. Gaining a clearer understanding of what teachers need to be successful from the lens of teachers will drive the initiatives of ACPs to ensure that teachers

have what they need to be successful. Uncovering what teachers deem necessary for their success will improve ACPs, the curriculum, delivery methods, and ongoing support levels.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This collective instrumental case study explores teachers' preparedness based on their experiences in their alternative certification programs (ACPs) in Texas. Chapter 3 contains information on the research design and methods used in the case study. This chapter includes the purpose of the study, research questions, research design and method, population, sample, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and summary.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this collective instrumental case study is to explore teachers' preparedness based on their experiences in their alternative certification programs (ACPs) in Texas. This study was framed using Knowles's adult learning theory model. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: In what ways, if any, did your alternative certification program prepare you as a new teacher?

RQ2: What could your alternative certification program do, if anything, to better prepare you as a new teacher?

Research Design and Method

Creswell (2014) noted that qualitative research is a method for investigating and interpreting the meaning of entities or individuals attributed to a societal or individual problem. Qualitative researchers collect descriptive, narrative, and optical nonnumerical data to gain insights into the phenomena of interest, which is the role of alternative teacher certification

programs in teacher preparedness (Gay et al., 2012). Thus, a qualitative case study is a comprehensive data collection and examination of a confined structure necessitating a widespread interpretation of a small number of cases to permit the researcher to allocate more time to explore the complexities of any subject (Creswell, 2014).

This study was a collective instrumental case study. Stake (1995) stated that a collective case study refers to a study where multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into an issue. An instrumental case study highlights a specific issue. This design was chosen as it allows the perceptions and experiences of multiple subjects to be viewed on a specific issue, which is alternative certification programs. In selecting this method, the study describes teachers' experiences who have attended alternative certification programs in order to better understand how they were prepared before receiving their certifications.

Participants/Sample

This study was a qualitative collective instrumental case study consisting of 13 alternatively certified teachers from urban areas in Texas. The study consisted of a series of interviews for teachers to share what they learned from their alternative certification program. The study was criterion referenced, and participants were purposefully selected. Participants had to have 1–3 years of experience to ensure they could recall their experiences as new teachers. Also, they must have attained their teaching certification through an alternative certification program. The rationale for selecting participants with this purpose was to ensure that the participants had sufficient tenure in their role yet had recently joined the field of education to be able to recount their experiences. According to Lupascu et al. (2014), students deem effective teachers to be calm, tolerant, well-prepared, and friendly. Their research also showed passion; being communicative, organized, and responsible; flexible thinking; and forming relationships

with students to serve as additional characteristics of an effective teacher. Thus, the study included a mixture of teachers who have had some level of success, such as being selected as teacher of the month or teacher of the year, have received accolades and honors for exhibiting traits of highly effective teachers, as well as teachers who may have experienced challenges as a first-year teacher.

Snowball sampling was utilized to recruit teachers who had gained teaching certification through an alternative certification program. Creswell (2015) described snowballing as a form of participant selection that calls for researchers to solicit the support of their participants to identify other participants. Stratification also occurred in the sampling process as the study required a mixture of male and female participants. Creswell (2014) referred to stratification as the process of knowing the characteristics of the population to identify specific characteristics in the participants. Because this research study focused on the influences of alternative certification programs on teacher preparation, it was critical to address the teacher's willingness to participate, as completing detailed interviews was necessary for accurate data for the study. The participants were voluntary and could withdraw if they chose to do so. To protect the participants' identity, pseudonyms were provided using alphanumeric aliases.

As stated earlier, there were a total of 13 participants from a specific area in Texas. The nationality of the participants was majority African American, with 84.6% of the participants identifying as Black and 15.4% of the participants identifying as White. The results showed that most participants were in the 31–40 age range, with 61.5% of the participants selecting this option. The other participants' ages varied, with 15.4% selecting the 21–30 and 41–50 age range and 7.7% selecting the 51–60 age range.

Data Collection

Gay et al. (2012) noted that questionnaires, observations, and interviews are all qualitative data sources. In this study, the data were collected primarily through the implementation of interviews. The interviews focused predominantly on teachers' perception of their preparedness in the classroom based on their experiences in their alternative certification programs. The guided protocol underwent an expert review to ensure the quality of the actual interview questions. The guided protocol was created from literature reviews and was based on the research questions (see Appendix A). Other data sources included field notes taken during the interviews and participants' artifacts. The interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes, depending on how detailed the interviewee responded to the questions. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Only the audio was captured, as the physical appearance of the participant was not to be revealed. The interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. The video was disabled for the participant to protect their identity and to yield authentic and transparent responses to the research questions. Interviews were selected as the preferred collection as they had advantages because the participants could provide historical information and allowed the researcher to control the questions (Creswell, 2014).

The interviews began with a brief overview of the study's purpose, explained the study's process, any potential associated risks, any benefactors of the study, the process for which they were chosen, and any other relevant details to the study. Upon reviewing these items, all participants were provided a consent form to provide their signature via DocuSign. The signatures were captured electronically and stored in a repository for easy retrieval. The participants were allowed to ask any questions or to express any concerns with the interview process before beginning the interview. Upon obtaining the interviewees' consent, the interview

proceeded with the researcher posing the research questions in the order written in the study. The participant was allowed to request clarification or to reframe the question for a clearer understanding. The interview was more conversational than a traditional question-and-answer interview protocol. The interviewee was allowed to share as much as they wanted in order to gain pertinent information to describe their experiences best.

Data Analysis

I used Tesch's (1990) eight steps for a systematic process to analyze textual data: initial reading of transcripts, organization of responses, review of total transcripts, completion of data analysis and report findings, review of the total transcript to ascertain the validity of findings, assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform preliminary analysis, and recode data if necessary. The data were reviewed carefully with attention to any relevant points that might stand out during transcription to capture a sense of the entire study. Specifically, each interview was thoroughly analyzed to identify the substance of the information captured. The data were stored in an organized repository, transcribed, sorted, and chunked for commonalities. The categories included unique topics, primary topics, and extra content that may not have been directly related to the study but helped to contextualize the data later in the discussion section.

Data analysis is aimed at making connections between the data to show interrelationships among the data. Text was highlighted using a color-coding system to note any trends in the responses. According to Leavy (2017), the best process to take to immerse oneself in the data is to do it in three stages, with the initial immersion serving as an opportunity to get a feel for the data. The second immersion assists in developing initial ideas, and the third immersion is reserved for prioritizing essential data that are most purposeful in serving the intent of the

research. Once the data are prepared, an in vivo coding process is conducted to capture a clearer understanding of the participants' responses and connect them to the research questions and purpose.

Leavy described the coding process to decrease and categorize the data generated and described in vivo coding as a strategy recounting the participants' actual language to recapitulate data segments. The first scrub coded for common emotions described as a first-year teacher and any common language used to describe their experiences in the ACP program. The second scrub coded for any specific language used to describe the type of learning experiences or activities completed in their ACP. The third scrub coded for verbs used to describe their teaching experience as a first-year teacher. The fourth scrub coded for the language used to describe the teacher's self-efficacy and self-direction in their ACP. The final scrub identified common themes or experiences shared amongst the participants.

The final step of the data analysis resulted in a categorized and thematic approach to interpreting all the data sources collected. A consensus was made regarding what it all means in order to make sense of all the information that had been collected (Leavy, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) addressed all ethical considerations in this study. An application was submitted to review proposals and approve all research conducted at Abilene Christian University. IRB intends to protect the participants engaging in the study, specifically confidentiality, informed consent, and protection from harm to those electing to participate in the study. Sieber (1992) referred to "confidentiality as agreements with persons about what may be done with their data" (p. 52). Approval was received to use human subjects before conducting the study (see Appendix B). Detailed and comprehensive information was provided regarding the

study, data collection process, sampling process, consent procedures, and confidentiality assurances were thoroughly reviewed to ensure the rights of the human subjects were protected. Due to the minimal risks, an expedited review was appropriate to assess the ethical considerations of the study.

In compliance with the university's IRB guidelines, full disclosure was provided regarding the details of the study, time commitments and availability necessary for participation, an overview of the participants' rights, any potential risks, and an emphasis on ensuring confidentiality for each participant would be given to each participant. Upon completion, all participants completed an informed consent to ensure they were fully aware of the procedures within the study and any risks related to their involvement. Providing full transparency to the goals and outcomes of the study allowed every participant to rescind their participation. Once consent was obtained, each participant received a unique identifier to maintain confidentiality. Any information connecting the participant to any data collected was removed from the study. Names and any identifying information will not be used in any publication and will be held in confidence. The brevity of the questions posed for data collection yielded minimal risks, so there were minimally foreseen ethical issues.

Ethical considerations regarding data collection are critical for this study as the audio recording was captured. Due to the nature of my study, a case study seemed to yield more valuable data as the participants were able to share their individual experiences as ACP candidates. Given (2008) noted that the use of open-ended semistructured interviews will aid in identifying any patterns of similarity. One of my reservations about conducting a case study was the recording component of the qualitative data. Given (2008) also suggested that how the data are interpreted and recorded will impact the quality of the qualitative data. To prevent any ethical

concerns, consent from the participants was obtained. A thorough explanation of how the audio was to be used to transcribe responses for accuracy was provided. Participants were informed that the recordings would be destroyed immediately after the data had been transcribed and coded.

To increase confidentiality and build trust with participants, they were able to replay the content captured and make adjustments to their dialogue for a more accurate account of their experiences. Oliver (2008) suggested that one should offer the option for the interviewee to pause or stop the interview at any point and allow the interviewee to listen to the recording at the end of the session. The interviewees were advised that the recording was merely to avoid ethical issues in data analysis and interpretation, such as fabrication or falsification of data collected. Seidman's (2019) research was highly instrumental in composing the interview questions for the case study. It provided insight into how to approach the interview process, but more importantly, how to leverage the interview approach to yield meaningful data and helped better understand the IRB process.

Trustworthiness

Adler et al. (2022) argued that "research that solves real-world problems is research that makes a difference" (p. 600). Through this study, I strove to make an impactful difference through a body of research that was inclusive of the four components of trustworthiness. The remainder of this section focuses on making connections to the four components and how they were used to triangulate the data of this study. Trustworthiness refers to the study's credibility and can be described in four elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Leavy (2017) argued that quantitative research studies tend to assess the validity of the study; in the case of this study, due to its qualitative nature, the trustworthiness of the

study refers to the quality of the study, the precision of the methodology, and whether the audience has confidence in the findings of the study. Thus, the objective of ensuring trustworthiness is to create a study worthy of consideration. Creswell (2015) proposed that trustworthiness specifically addresses triangulation, which is the process of validating evidence from various subjects, data forms, techniques of data collection, descriptions, and themes in qualitative research. Creswell also noted that member checking is also valuable in ensuring trustworthiness by taking the findings back to the participants and asking them about the report's accuracy.

The audience can use the research to invoke future research to either solidify the current research or create opportunities for opposition to counter the data. Leavy (2017) suggested that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to qualitative research, so the study must be inclusive of creativity, craft, artfulness, vividness, and transferability. In this study, innovation was necessary to explore alternative certification programs, as the subject may seem out of reach due to the scarcity of existing research. To ensure trustworthiness amid innovation, I tactfully ensured that the methodology captured the data to ensure the study was conceived, designed, and executed (Leavy, 2017). The ultimate goal of trustworthiness in my study was ensuring that the findings maintain a level of dependability in that if the study were replicated, the findings of my study would be echoed in the following studies.

The research in this study adds to the body of existing research, so transferability, the “ability to transfer findings from one context to the another based on ‘fittingness’ (the similarity between the contexts made clear by vividness in the data), is critical to the advancement of research on the subject of teacher preparedness and alternative certification programs” (Leavy,

2017, p. 155). To ensure transferability, the data from this study may be used in a myriad of future studies related to alternative certification programs for teachers.

Researcher Role

In my 12 years in education and 6 years in educational leadership, I have been afforded opportunities to work with alternatively and traditionally certified educators. In the tenure of my career, I saw high-performing alternatively certified teachers and teachers who fall victim to the sink or swim theory, where they are placed into the field with little to no hands-on experience. As a hiring agent for my campus, the subject of alternatively certified programs enticed my interest as it is my desire to hire highly qualified and efficiently prepared teachers. Considering the shortage of teaching staff due to the pandemic, pursuing teachers who had taken the fast track to certification appeared to be the more likely route. Knowing this behooved me to take a deeper dive into the role of alternative certification programs in teacher preparedness to identify a correlation between teacher preparedness and the pathway they elect for their teacher certifications. My expertise and credibility in the research method would hopefully yield findings that are authentic and realistic, given my background in education. However, it was important that the study had the highest level of confirmability, ensuring that the findings of the study were absent of biases and did not include subjectivity of my own attitudes and beliefs. I did not hold a supervisory role over those interviewed, but I hoped that the data from this research might serve as a call for an evaluation of existing alternative certification programs in pursuit of fostering quality teacher preparation programs.

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

According to the William F. Ekstrom Library (2021), assumptions are unexamined beliefs or what people think without realizing it. Wolgemuth et al. (2017) suggested that research

paradigms have disciplinary assumptions about what effects make a difference and for whom. An assumption for this study was the notion that all teachers who completed an alternative certification program gained some level of knowledge necessary for success as novice teachers. Another assumption was the notion that all alternative certification programs offer similar or the same curricula. Bowling and Ball (2018) noted that research shows several alternative certification programs offer merely short outlines of teaching essentials and could only demand a few weeks' worth of specialized teacher preparation. The number of variations in alternative certification programs can produce challenging conflicts within the preparation of individuals joining the field of education. A single-stage process is ideal for minimizing variations in program offerings amongst ACPs (Bowling & Ball, 2018). The most apparent assumption is that highly selective alternative certification programs can produce effective teachers who perform like teachers from traditional pathways. Boyd et al. (2007) found very few data available to correlate the pathway for certification, the content of their preparation, or the effectiveness of the teachers in the classroom. They also noted that the data repositories are scarce on the requirements of schools of education. The only available data are the requirements of the state for certification, which could provide a range of preparation the teachers received.

Ross and Bibler Zaidi (2019) suggested that study limitations are weaknesses in a research design that may impact the results and conclusions of the research. The researchers noted that an in-depth report of the study's limitations should explain the probable limitations, clarify the effects of the limitation, offer alternate tactics, and explain the process taken to minimize the limitation (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). Qualitative studies are inherently limited because they cannot be generalized to a larger population (Creswell, 2015). A potential limitation would be that student achievement has historically served as a measurement of teacher success. A study

of this magnitude could potentially demystify the belief that one method of attaining certification is better than the other. Boyd et al. (2007) indicated limited evidence suggesting that certification requirements can lessen the pool of alternative certification program candidates. Still, there is no evidence on how it affects student outcomes. In this study, I avoided quantifying teacher success to student success to address this limitation. An adult learning theory framework creates neutral questions to minimize limitations, reduce bias, and question sensitivity.

Naar (2021) referred to delimitation as drawing limits for the study and establishing boundaries. Researchers classify and communicate delimitations to clarify what their studies will and will not cover within the research. Delimitations in this study included the population and location from which participants were sampled, as participants must have resided in Texas and had 1–3 years of teaching experience. Another delimitation would be the requirement for the participant to have exhibited some level of success within their first years of experience as a teacher. Participants must have attained their teaching certification from an alternative certification program, also a delimitation. However, there were no delimitations regarding the level of education they serve. The participants could be primary or secondary teachers. Delimitations may also explain how a study is done (Naar, 2021). Considering that collecting the data through interviews may be a delimitation if given open-ended questions, the participant may divulge more information and ask for written responses instead of verbal ones. The delimitations structure and enlighten the study's research objectives, approach, variables, and target populations (Naar, 2021).

Summary

This qualitative case study examines teachers' preparedness based on their experiences in their alternative certification programs (ACPs). This study was a collective instrumental case

study using 13 alternatively certified teachers from urban areas in east Texas. The study involved interviews with teachers to share what they learned from their alternative certification programs. The teachers had at least 1–3 years of experience to ensure they could recall their experiences. A snowball sampling was utilized to recruit teachers who had gained teaching certification through an alternative certification program. In this study, the data were collected primarily through the implementation of interviews that focused predominantly on teachers' preparedness in the classroom based on their experiences in their alternative certification programs. Other data sources included field notes taken during the interviews and artifacts the participants voluntarily provided.

Chapter 3 discussed the research design and methods used in the research case study. Chapter 4 of this dissertation reports the findings of the research. Chapter 5 reviews the study and discusses the conclusion of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for application, and future research.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 provides the findings of this collective instrumental case study and discusses the results related to the teachers' views of their preparedness based on their experiences in an alternative certification program. A study was conducted via a Google Forms survey where participants were asked to answer questions about their participation in an alternative certification program. The focal point of this survey was to identify alternative certification program participants' feelings of preparedness based on the level of support received while in the program, the rigor of the coursework, relevance to their content of interest, collaboration amongst cohort, and overall pragmatic exposure to the future field of education. The phenomenon of interest was whether novice teachers felt their alternative certification program adequately prepared them for the day-to-day duties of a teacher based on the course work, mentorship, collaboration, and hands-on experience offered by the program. There were two specific research questions with subsequent questions to dig deeper into the teachers' experiences. The two research questions guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: In what ways, if any, did your alternative certification program prepare you as a new teacher?

RQ2: What could your alternative certification program do, if anything, to better prepare you as a new teacher?

Terminology from Knowles's adult learning theory framework led to subsequent questions that were intertwined in the survey, addressing critical concepts from the framework, including questions regarding real-world applicable life experiences, life knowledge experiences, goal orientation, content relevancy, practical activity, and collaboration to be elaborated in detail later in the chapter. Participants in the study took approximately 30–45 minutes to respond via an

open- and closed-ended survey consisting of 49 questions, including demographical questions, such as gender, age, race, marital status, and employment status. The criteria for participants required that they had attained their teaching credentials through an alternative certification program, had a minimum of 1–3 years of experience, and could recall their experiences as a new teacher. This chapter consists of eight main sections, which address the subsequent data captured in the survey: (a) demographics, (b) nature of ACP, (c) teaching background, (d) rigor of ACP curriculum, (e) real-world applicability and pragmatic approach within ACP, (f) goal orientation of ACP, (g) content knowledge offered by ACP, and (h) collaboration within ACP and beyond.

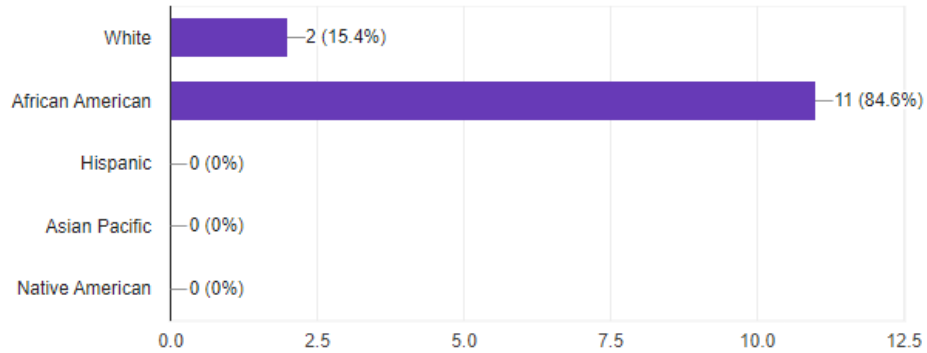
Demographics

Demographics were captured by each participant, raising questions such as nationality, age, employment status, gender, and marital status. However, the responses did not link or identify any participants, as their identity remains anonymous. Settings were set on the survey to minimize exposure of the participants' identities and to manage how the responses were collected and protected. The setting requiring the collection of email addresses was deactivated, and requiring the participant to sign into their Google account was also removed from the survey settings. A total of 13 participants within the Texas region participated in the survey. The nationality of the participants was majority African American, with 84.6% of the participants identifying as Black and 15.4% of the participants identifying as White (see Figure 1). Several participants were solicited in various methods, including email blasts to school districts, posts on social media, and referrals from educators within the region.

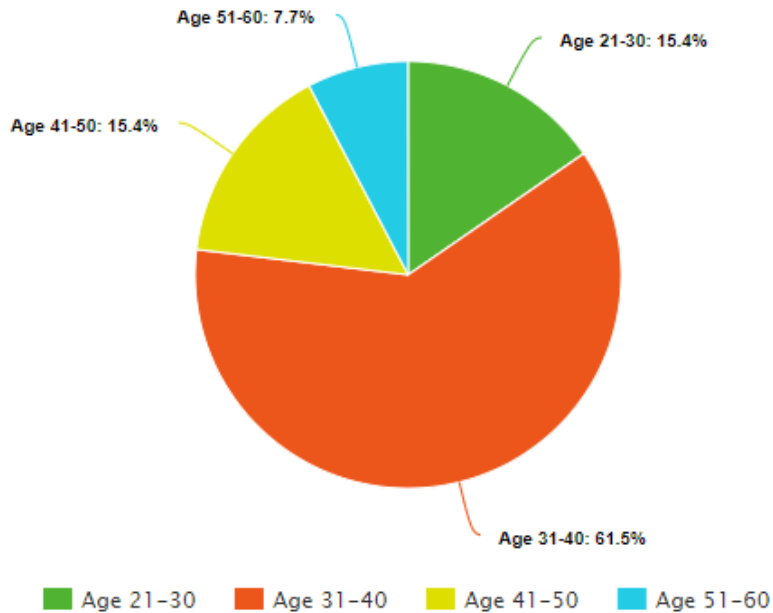
Figure 1*Nationality Results From Participant Survey*

What nationality do you identify with?

13 responses



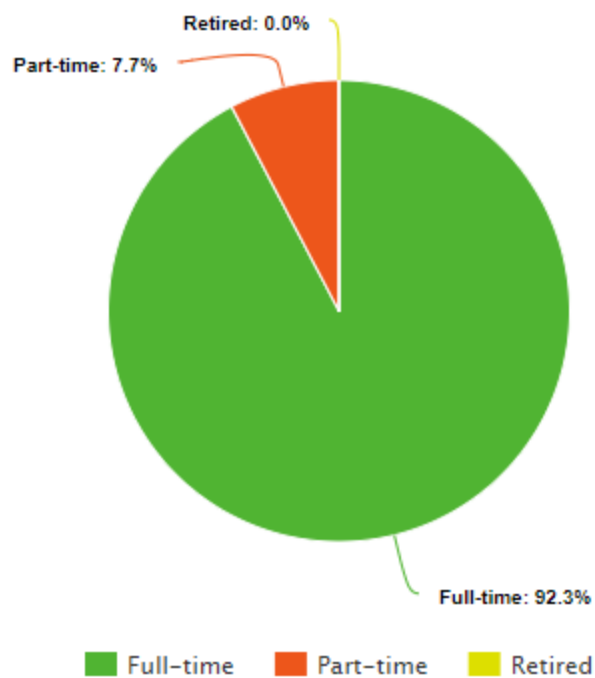
The age range of the participants was also captured, with the participants being able to identify within the (a) 21–30, (b) 31–40, (c) 41–50, and (d) 51–60 age range (see Figure 2). The results showed that most participants were in the 31–40 age range, with 61.5% of the participants selecting this option. The other participants' ages varied, with 15.4% selecting the 21–30 and 41–50 age range and 7.7% selecting the 51–60 age range.

Figure 2*Age Demographics Chart Based on Survey Responses*

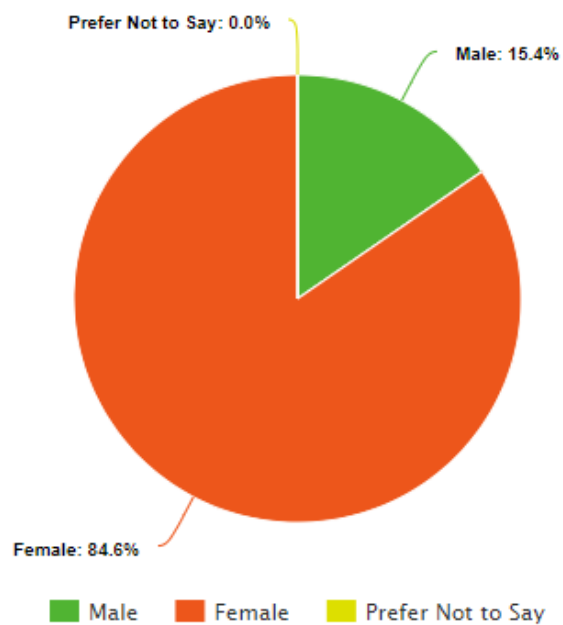
Employment status was captured to identify whether the participants were employed as full-time, part-time, or retired teachers (see Figure 3). The survey results reported that 92.3% of the participants identified as full-time teachers, and 7.7% reported as part-time teachers. Gender and marital status were also captured to identify any correlations between ACP students who may have been married or single while attaining their certifications and if there was any correlation or differences between the experiences of men and women (see Figure 4). The survey reported that 84.6% of the participants were female, and 15.4% identified as male.

Figure 3

Employment Status Results Chart From Participant Survey

**Figure 4**

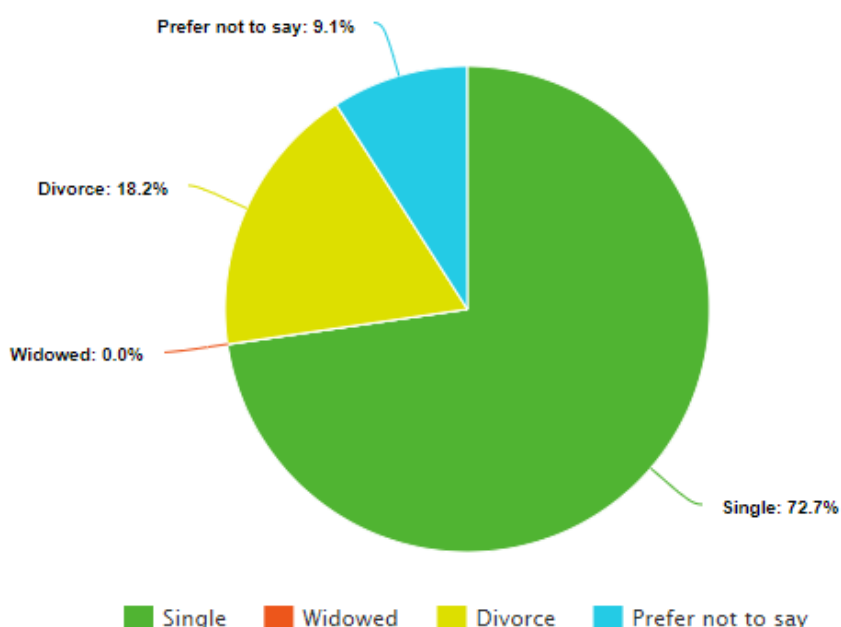
Gender Identification Chart of Participants



Regarding marital status, some participants chose not to disclose this information, with 9.1% preferring not to say their marital status, and 2 participants did not answer the question at all, with only 11 of 13 responses (see Figure 5). However, 72.7% of the participants stated they were single, and 18.2% stated divorced. One thing to note regarding the framing of this question was the need for more clarification of whether I was requesting the marital status currently or at the time of their studies during the ACP program. Therefore, my efforts to compare marital status may have been skewed considering the lack of clarity of whether the marital status reported was their current relationship status or relationship status while attending their ACP.

Figure 5

Marital Status Results From Survey



Nature of the ACP Program

The goal of these questions was to attain a clear context of how the participants attained their teaching credentials, identify the ACP attended, and identify the modality of the program. Participants were asked the type of alternative certification program they attended with options

of (a) a university-based alternative certification program, (b) an alternative certification program for profit, or (c) an alternative certification program via a school district (see Figure 6). The study reported that 92.3% of the participants completed their teaching certification through a for-profit alternative certification program, and 7.7% reported taking the university-based alternative certification program route. Participants were also asked about the modality in which they completed the program, whether face-to-face, online, or hybrid (see Figure 7). These questions showed that most participants completed their ACP program online, with 46.2% reporting having taken an online route. However, 38.5% of the participants reported that they elected an ACP pathway with a face-to-face modality, and 15.4% reported a hybrid modality with both face-to-face and online learning opportunities.

Figure 6

Teacher Certification Attainment Results

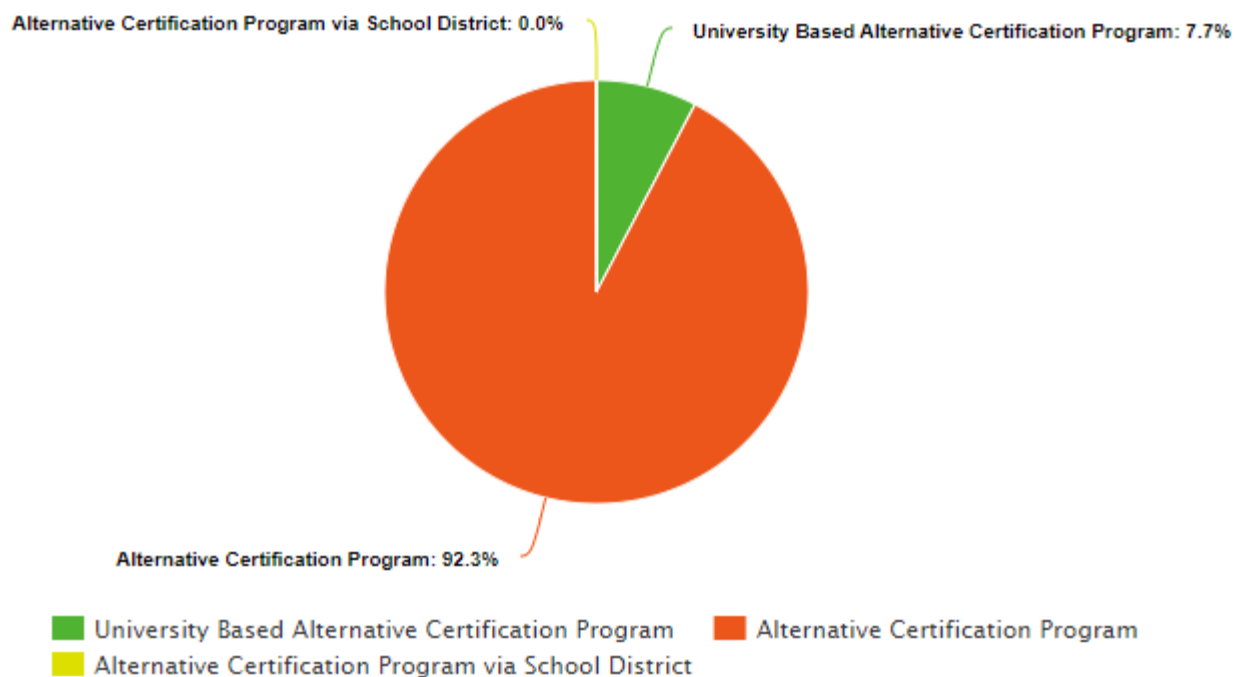
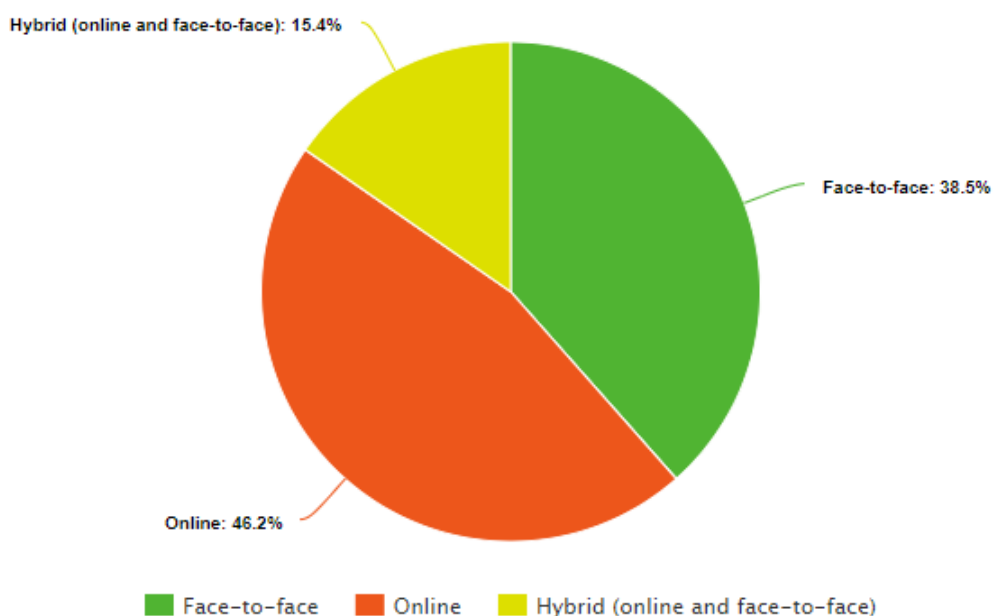
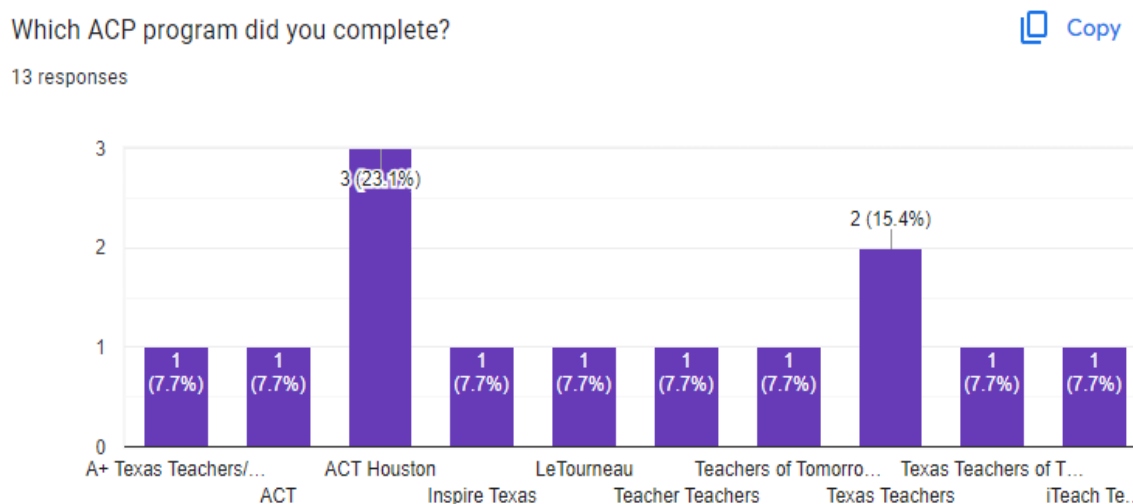


Figure 7*Modality of Program Completion Results*

The modality of the program plays a vital role in the type of experiences teachers have, as research shows that face-to-face learning environments tend to yield higher performance in adult learners when given explicit instruction from their instructors in a synchronous setting. Participants also provided the names of the specific ACPs attended, with 30.8% of the participants having attended Alternative Certification for Teachers (ACT) Houston; 38.5% having attended Texas Teachers of Tomorrow, formerly known as Texas Teachers; 7.7% having attended A+ Texas Teachers; 7.7% having attended Inspire Texas; 7.7% having attended LeTourneau; and 7.7% having attended iTeach Texas (see Figure 8).

Figure 8*ACP Program Name From Participants***Teaching Background**

The subsequent questions posed in the section of the survey were intended to identify the nature of the participants' background and how their prior experiences impacted their decisions within their teaching career, specifically if education was not their first career choice, identifying variables that led the participant into the teaching field and the selection of the content in which they teach. Since holding a degree is a prerequisite to participation in an alternative certification program, capturing the types of degrees ACP candidates held would be viable information in understanding the type of teacher(s) the participants elected to become (see Figure 9). The 13 participants reported holding degrees in a range of fields, including political science, theatre, telecommunications, business, general studies, business management, master's in business administration with a concentration in healthcare administration, English literature, media studies, and history education.

Participants also were asked if education was their first career and, if not, what industry they pursued before becoming a teacher. Research in previous studies showed that industry

experience in specific teaching fields yields better outcomes for students as they come with a wealth of industry experience that pragmatic teaching practice cannot give, specifically teachers of career and technology subjects. The study reported that 30.8% of the participants chose education as their first career, while the others reported that teaching was not their first choice. The participants reported having previously held careers working as a journalist, sales rep, and medical assistant for Exxon, radio production, accounting, finance, and theatre technical support industries. Participants were asked if the role of a teacher was their first profession in the field of education, as some people move internally into teaching roles once they gain a passion for the field by working in other capacities within education. The range of teaching experience was also collected to examine the attrition and retention rates among participants of ACP (see Figure 10). The range of experience ranged from first-year teacher to 17 years, with 14.14% of the participants having reported 1–2 years of teaching experience, 21.21% reporting at least 3 years of teaching experience, 30.8% of the participants reported 9–10 years of teaching experience, and 23.1% of the participants reported 16–17 years of teaching experience.

I also investigated the level of education the participants teach with options ranging from (a) elementary school, (b) middle school, (c) high school, (d) community college, (e) and university level (see Figure 11). The research showed that 23.1% of the participants taught at the elementary school level, 30.8% at the middle school level, 69.2% at the high school level, 15.4% at the community college level, and 7.7% at the university level.

Figure 9*Participants Responses Regarding Tenure in Education*

How long have you been in the field of education i.e. paraprofessiona, teacher aide, etc.?

13 responses

18 years
9 years
11 years in higher education 5 years public school
10+
11 years
14 years
3.5 years
3 years
2 years

Figure 10*Participants' Responses Regarding Tenure as a Teacher*

How long have you been a teacher?

13 responses

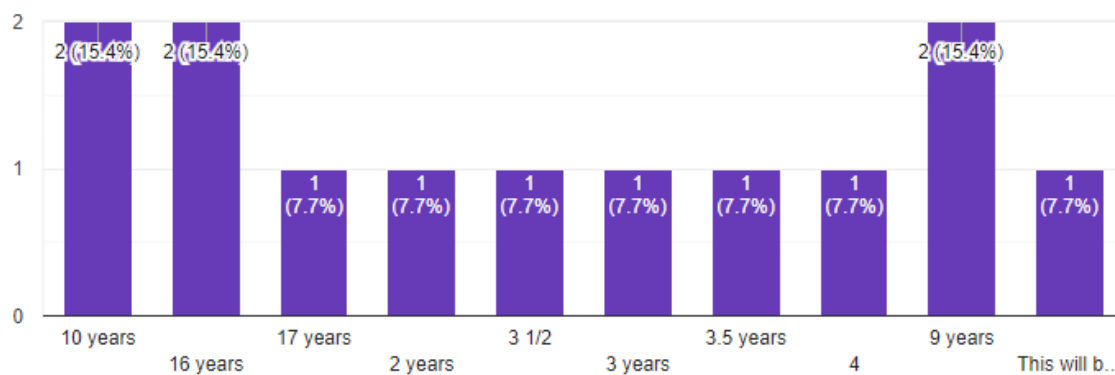
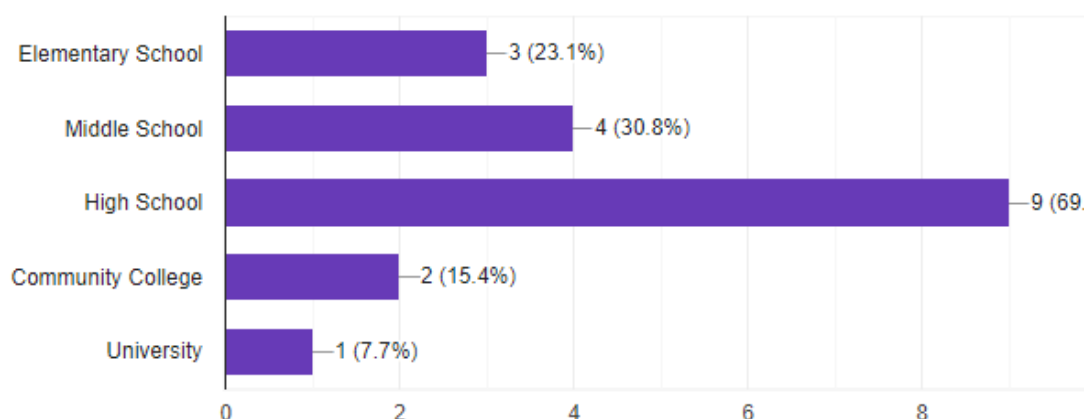


Figure 11

Bar Graph Representing Level of Education Taught by Participants

What level of education do you teach?

13 responses



Participants were also asked if they had remained at their current school since the inception of their educational career, and only 23.1% reported that they remained at the same school where they had begun their teaching career. In comparison, 76.9% reported that they either switched levels in which they taught (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school), changed school districts, and/or changed to other campuses within the same school district.

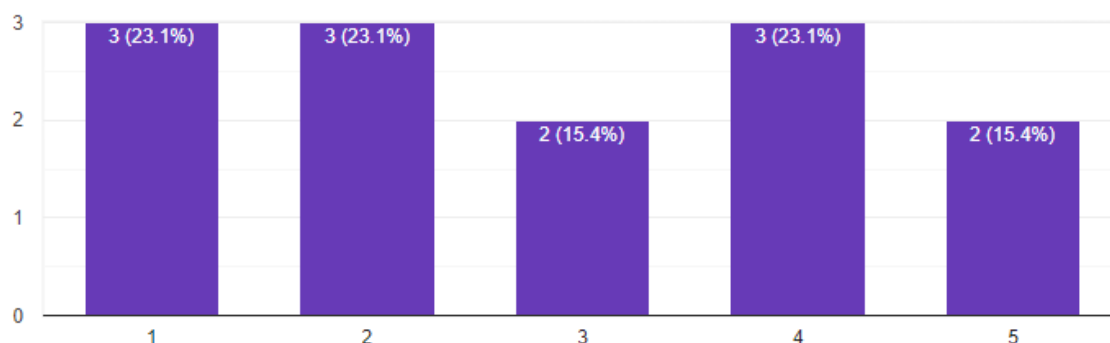
Teachers also were asked to rate their experiences as first-year teachers using a Likert rating of 1= *not good at all* to 5 = *it went very well* (see Figure 12). The responses were comprehensive, with 3 participants reporting their experience was not good at all; 3 participants rated their experience as a 2; 2 participants rated their first-year experience as a 3; 3 participants reported their experiences as a 4 out of 5; and 2 participants reported that their first year as a teacher went very well.

Figure 12

Graph of Participant Responses Rating Their Experience as a First-Year Teacher

How would you rate your experiences as a first year?

13 responses



In looking at the various levels of experience, the subsequent question was if the participants had a mentor or engaged in an induction cohort when they began teaching to see if their experiences could have been skewed based on the level of support provided during their first year. In the case of these results, 61.5% reported having had a mentor or participated in an induction cohort. In comparison, the other 38.5% did not share similar induction experiences in their first year of teaching.

Research Question 1

In looking at the subsequent questions regarding teacher background, it is essential to address the first research question: In what ways, if any, did your alternative certification program prepare you as a new teacher? (see Figure 13). The question was posed as an open-ended question. I wanted the participants to be as descriptive and elaborative as they chose to clearly understand the impact of their ACPs on their experiences as first-year teachers. Four of the 13 participants reported that their ACP did not prepare them at all, with one of them noting that they “learned a lot my first year from the training the school district provided.”

Figure 13

Participant Responses Regarding Alternative Certification Program Preparation

In what ways, if any did your alternative certification program prepare you as a new teacher?

13 responses

My mentor through the program helped support me when I was feeling overwhelmed and feeling like I did not have a handle on work/life balance. She gave me tips on what I could do such as curbside groceries and leaning on my school mentor to help me take the load off.

It help me understand observation and how to pass the exam for certification

Networking, role playing, observations, discussions, small groups, study groups

It exposed me to the basic skills needed to enter the classroom

It prepared me to dig deep and be the best I can be, by researching various methods to execute my position.

My alternative certification program prepared for the structure and flow of the classroom. The program gave me an insight of how I can manage and structure my classroom.

Texas Teachers did not prepare me at all.

Pedagogy as a concept possibly, the legal rights and laws- Although nothing compares to the hands on - in classroom experience.

Online Curriculum

It did not

None

They did not really I learned a lot my first year from the training the school district provided.

The provide ongoing professional development opportunities. I was also given an option to participate in an internship or clinical teaching. I got feedback and support throughout the school my first year of internship.

Others reported that the ACP program helped them understand the observation process and how to pass the exam for certification, prepared them to dig deep and be the best they could be by researching various methods to execute in their position, preparing them for the structure and flow of the classroom, giving insight as to how they could manage and structure their classroom, giving them the basic needs necessary for entering the classroom, provided pedagogy as a concept, learned the legal rights and laws of education, providing ongoing professional development opportunities, offered clinical practice, received feedback and support from the ACP throughout their first year of internship, helped with networking, role-playing, small group and study groups, and offered a mentor through their program that helped support when feeling overwhelmed and lacked a handle on work/life balance by providing tips on what they could do to help ease the load.

Implications of Adult Learning Theory in Alternative Certification Program

As previously provided, an accurate summary of one of the critical characteristics of Malcolm Knowles's adult learning theory emphasized the importance of adults being self-directed and autonomous in their learning. This means that adult learners are actively involved in the learning process and take responsibility for their learning experiences.

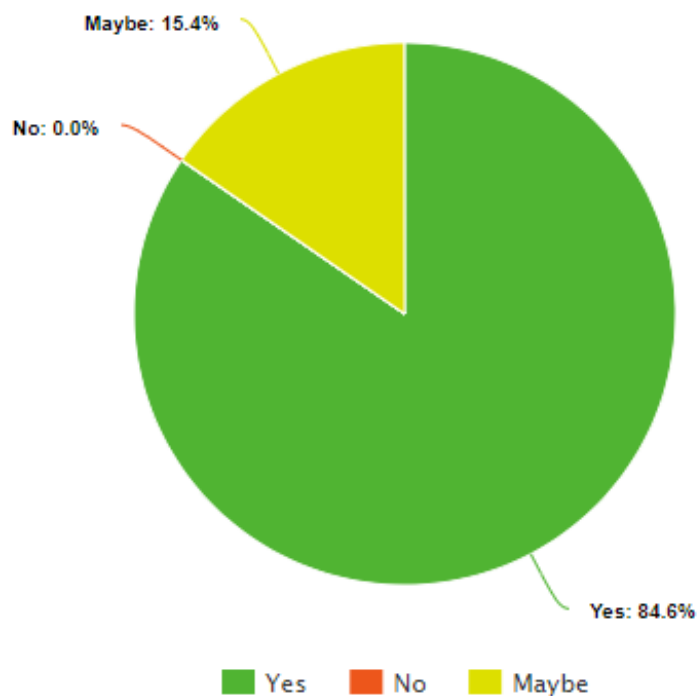
The idea is that adults are more motivated to learn when they can set their own goals, make choices about how they will achieve those goals, and have a say in the direction of their learning. This characteristic acknowledges that adults bring a wealth of knowledge and life experiences to the learning environment and can use these experiences to guide their learning. Facilitators play a supportive role in this process, helping to create an environment that encourages self-direction and autonomy. The goal is to enable adults to take ownership of their learning journey and to foster a sense of independence in the learning process. It is worth noting

that Knowles's adult learning theory has influenced adult education and training practices, and his principles continue to be relevant in adult learning.

One of the survey questions asked if they considered themselves a self-directed learner; 84.6% of the participants identified themselves as being self-directed, with 15.4% reporting that they were not self-directed (see Figure 14). The notion of adult learning as self-directed/autonomous denotes the learner being vigorously involved in their learning development. The learner drives the results of their learning experiences by generating goals and choices as to how they will attain those goals. The connection, in terms of the ACP, is how dependent the participants' experiences in the ACP would be in correlation to their intrinsic motivation to drive their outcomes and whether this notion contributes to their success both in the program and as a first-year teacher.

Figure 14

Participant Responses Regarding Being a Self-Directed Learner



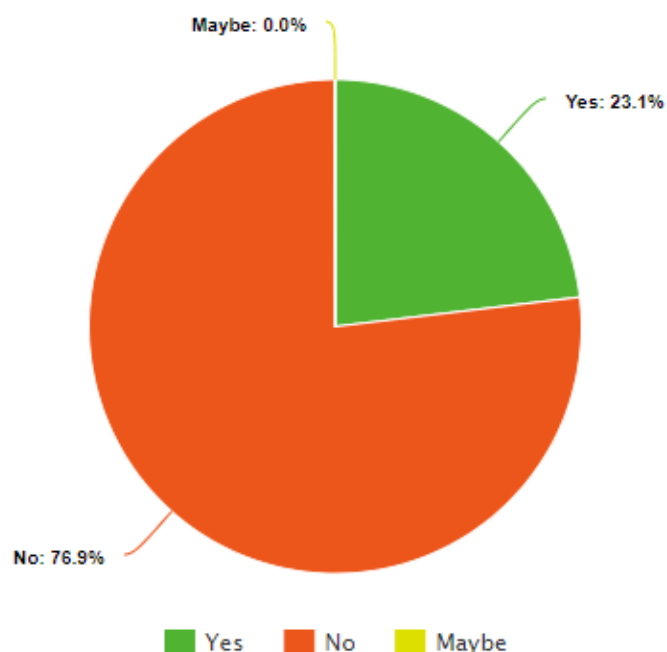
Participants were also asked if they sought any support from anyone within the ACP program while in attendance and, if so, from whom they sought support. The question about seeking support from within the ACP aligns with the principles of adult learning theory, particularly the importance of coaching and support in the learning process (Cox, 2015). Knowles's adult learning theory states that adults benefit from a supportive and collaborative learning environment. The idea is that providing coaching and support can enhance the learning experience and contribute to better outcomes. This support may come from facilitators, mentors, peers, or other individuals within the learning community. By asking participants whether they sought support within the ACP program, I can explore how the principles of adult learning theory are being applied in practice. It reflects an understanding that adults may require guidance, feedback, or assistance from others to navigate their learning journey effectively.

Participants were also asked if they collaborated with others while in their ACP at their current campuses and in what ways (see Figure 15). The responses to this question could provide insights into the effectiveness of the support structures within the ACP program and help identify areas where additional support or improvements may be needed. It also acknowledges the collaborative nature of adult learning and the recognition that learners may benefit from interactions with others in the learning community. The data reported that 30.8% of the survey participants sought support, and the other 69.2% stated they did not seek support while in their ACP. Compared to those who did collaborate, the collaboration level within their ACP ranged from working with others with different content knowledge and engaging in a group project to fulfill course assignments to the assistance received from others who completed the program. In the details given regarding their collaboration experiences while attending an ACP, many participants did not see those experiences as being resourceful when the collaboration shifted to

their campuses, as 76.9% did not find the collaboration experiences to help them with collaboration experiences at their schools. In comparison, 23.1% of the participants reported that those experiences did help them later as teachers.

Figure 15

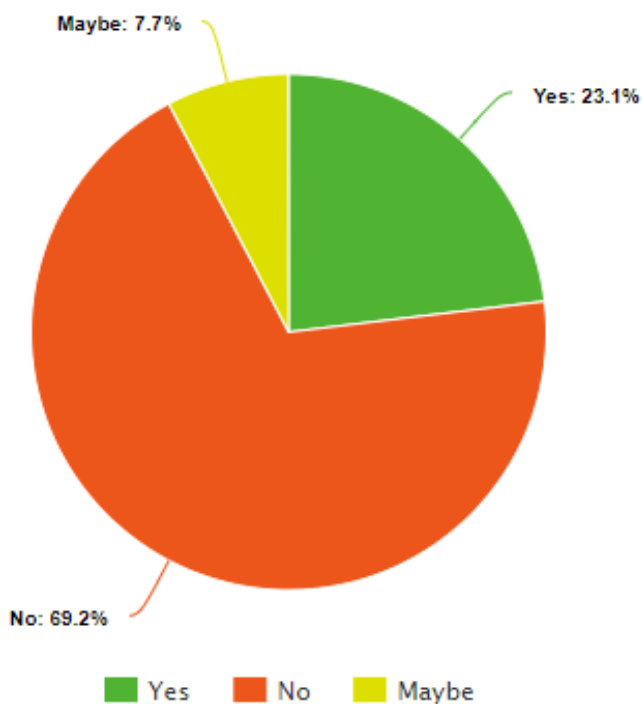
Pie Graph of Participant Responses Regarding Collaboration Experiences During ACP



The same question was reframed and posed to identify if participants' collaboration experiences while in their ACP helped them as new teachers (see Figure 16). Similarly, many said no, with 69.2% reporting it did not help, 23.1% reporting that it did help, and 7.7% reporting that it could have helped them as a first-year teacher.

Figure 16

Pie Graph of Participant Responses Regarding Effects of Collaboration During ACP



Many of the participants reported that they currently collaborate with other members of staff as part of their teaching practice, with participants reporting that they collaborate with other teachers in creating grade-level goals and expectations, designing practical lessons, engaging in professional learning communities (PLCs), and creating cross-curricular projects within their respective grade level. Other participants reported that due to the content they teach, they needed to be more open in collaborating with other teachers because they were the only course teachers. There was no one else to serve as a thought partner to collaborate with at their campus.

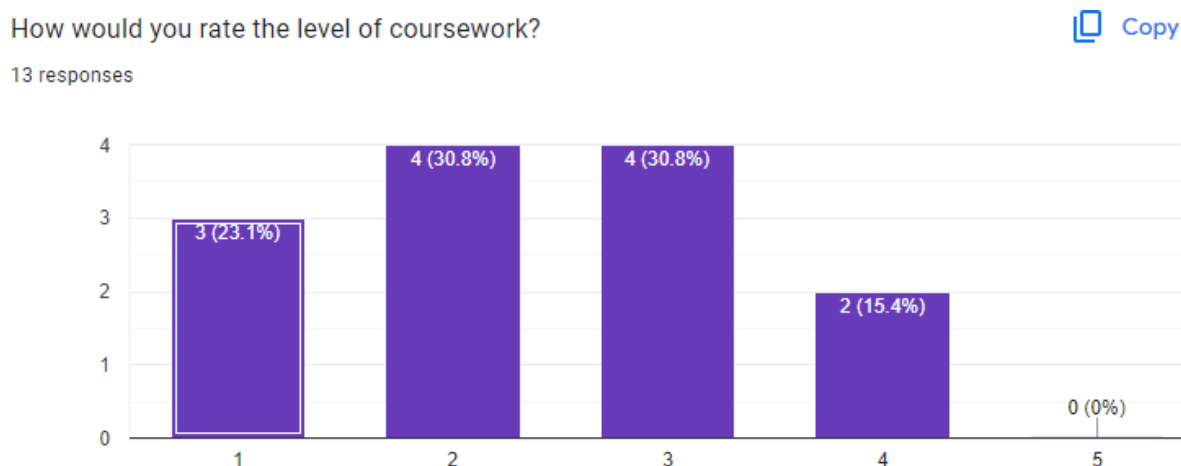
Rigor of ACP Curriculum

In the context of an alternative certification program (ACP) for educators, the term “rigor” typically refers to the level of challenge, depth, and thoroughness integrated into the program. Rigor in education is about setting high expectations for learning and ensuring that the

curriculum and assessments require significant intellectual engagement and critical thinking. The participants were asked questions regarding the quality of their coursework, course workload, and the level of challenge they encountered while in their ACPs. When asked on a Likert scale of 1–5 how they would rate the level of their coursework, with one being easy and five being challenging to navigate, 23.1% rated a level 1, 30.8% rated a level 2, 30.8% rated level 4, and 15.4% rated level 5 (see Figure 17). The results show that participants found their coursework to be relatively easy with minimal if any, challenge.

Figure 17

Chart of Participant Responses Regarding Level of Coursework



Participants who rated their coursework as challenging were further asked how they persisted in their learning. Responses from participants included receiving support from the instructor, “just kept pushing and figured it out,” and relying heavily on the library to help with challenges and research. Another participant reported that they did not work while completing the program, allowing them to focus exclusively on their coursework. It was also important to note how the participants managed their coursework load with the day-to-day duties of everyday life.

Maintaining a healthy work–life and school–life balance is crucial for overall well-being and sustained success in both professional and academic pursuits. Striking this balance is particularly challenging as individuals navigate coursework demands alongside their day-to-day responsibilities. Recognizing and addressing the importance of this equilibrium is essential for promoting personal satisfaction, mental health, and achievement within their ACP. Participants’ responses affirmed the importance of time management, ranging from “I made sure to complete work Monday–Friday” to working on the program coursework weekly for 1 hour a week. Other responses included setting calendar reminders to make sacred time for coursework, completing at least five modules a week, and delegating weekends to complete modules. Essentially, participants reported that the success of completing the coursework was a derivative of effectively managing their time and ensuring that they set goals requiring them to appropriate sacred time to complete their coursework.

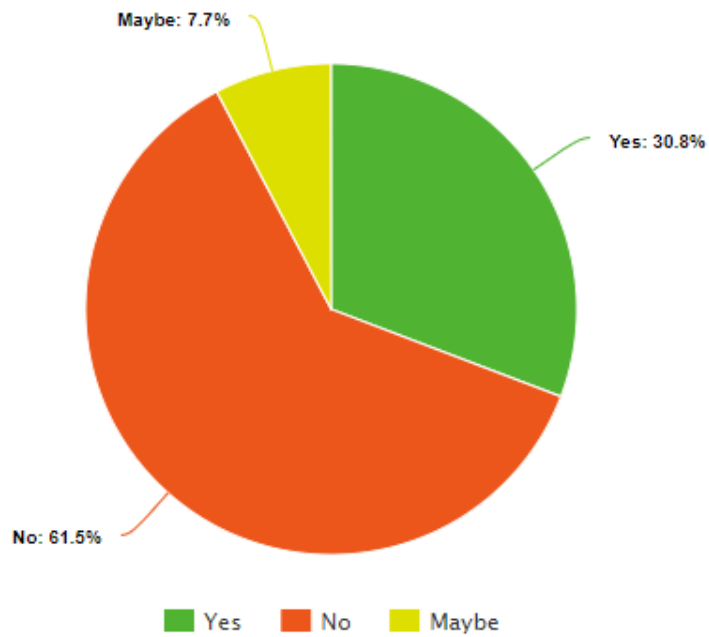
Real-World Applicably and Pragmatic Approach of ACP

When asked what their ACP could do, if anything, to prepare them as a new teacher better, providing more real-world experiences was one of the leading responses in the survey. Participants mentioned that they would have preferred more opportunities in the classroom shadowing a teacher to get a better feel for the job, with echoes of replies stating they wish they had more interaction with actual classroom teachers. ACPs possessing a pragmatic approach in their alternative certification programs acknowledge the practical demands of teaching and focus on preparing candidates to navigate the complexities of the classroom environment effectively. By emphasizing immediate applicability and hands-on experiences, these programs can seek to produce competent and confident educators ready to impact student learning positively.

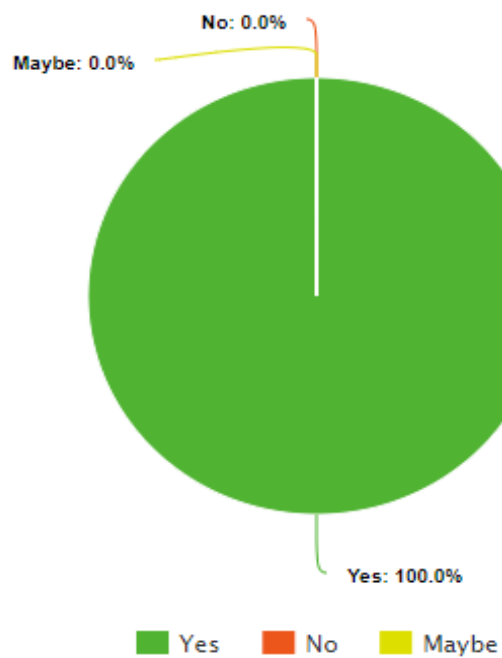
Participants were asked if they engaged in any real-world applicable or life experiences while in their ACP, and 61.5% of the participants reported no, 30.8% reported yes, and 7.7% reported being unsure (see Figure 18). When asked to elaborate on the types of life experiences, participants reported responses such as content-based observations, and 1 participant reported that they were able to serve as a tutor within their current school district. Shockingly, most of the participants who did experience actual world application within their ACP reported that those experiences helped them drastically as first-year teachers, with 1 participant reporting that they became very comfortable as first-year teachers due to their participation in classroom observations. As a result of the lack of real-world application in their ACP program, participants found using life knowledge experiences to be highly critical as a teacher, with 100% of the participants reporting that they use life knowledge experiences as a teacher (see Figure 19). Participants reported that they employ real-life experiences with their students because learning through real-life experiences enhances the long-term retention of knowledge. When students connect learning to tangible experiences, the information is more likely to be retained over time.

Figure 18

Pie Graph of Participant Responses Regarding Real-World Applicable Life Experiences

**Figure 19**

Pie Graph of Participant Responses Regarding Use of Life Experiences

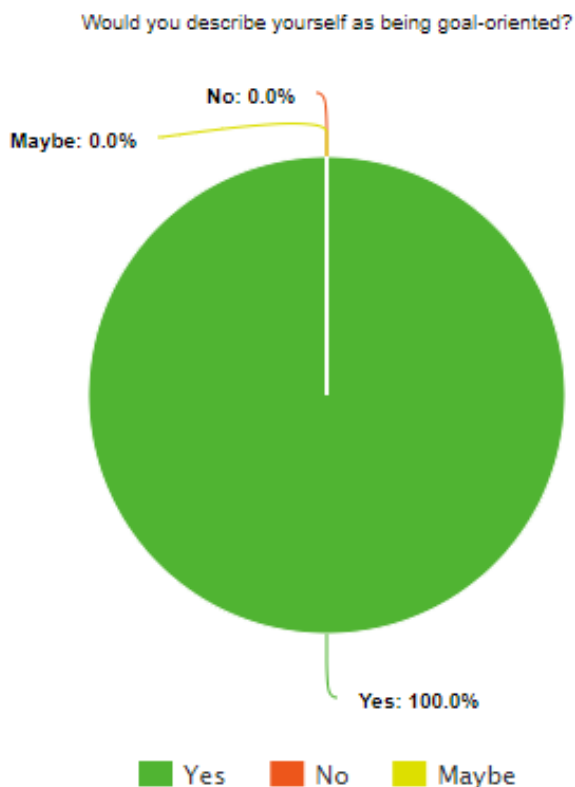


Goal Orientation of ACP

Alternative certification programs typically have specific goals and orientations that distinguish them from traditional teacher preparation routes. The primary goal of alternative certification programs is to prepare individuals with noneducation backgrounds efficiently and effectively to become qualified and competent teachers. One of the primary goals of alternative certification programs is to facilitate a quicker entry into the teaching profession. These programs are designed to provide a streamlined pathway for individuals who have expertise in specific subject areas or professional fields to transition into teaching without completing a traditional teacher education program. In the context of the questions posed to participants in the survey, goal orientation referred to the goals the participants set for themselves within the ACP. I began the series of questions by asking participants if they saw themselves as goal oriented, and 100% reported identifying as goal oriented (see Figure 20).

Figure 20

Pie Graph of Participant Responses Regarding Goal Orientation



The next series of questions dived into how being goal oriented helped them as an ACP participant and teacher. I asked the participants if they set any goals while in their ACP program and to elaborate on the types of goals they set. The participants provided responses that included passing their exam on the first try, securing a teaching job at the end of the first year of being in the program, completing the program by the end of summer, finish the modules in 90 days, finish the program in less than 6 months, work–life balance goals, and learn how to differentiate to reach all learners. The goals ranged from personal to professional, but overall centered around timelines/goals towards attaining their teaching credentials and securing a job thereafter. Many participants reported that setting those goals helped them as new teachers because they used the same processes for setting milestones to complete their certification program and applied it to

their students as they set milestones for matriculating through their coursework. They also reported that setting goals helped them manage time as a teacher. I also asked the participants if they set goals as teachers and 100% of the participants reported that they did indeed set goals as teachers. When asked if they require their students to set goals, 92.3% reported that they also require their students to set goals.

Content Knowledge Offered From ACP

The content knowledge offered by alternative certification programs is designed to equip individuals with the subject-specific expertise necessary for effective teaching in their chosen fields. These programs are aimed at ensuring that candidates possess a strong foundation in the content they will be teaching, even if they do not have a traditional background in education. Participants were asked to reflect on their content relevancy experiences and elaborate on those experiences that helped them as a new teacher. Participants reported that they received training on lesson planning, lesson execution, content-based observations, watching observation videos, and pedagogy curriculum. The types of responses collected were to be expected, as ACPs are responsible for teaching their candidates how to develop and organize curriculum materials for their respective subject areas. This includes understanding the scope and sequence of content, designing lesson plans, and aligning instructional materials with academic standards.

Teachers were initially asked to provide the content they teach, which, surprisingly, were mainly STEM courses (science, technology, engineering, and math), with a few reporting to teach English and one teaching art. More specifically, 3 participants reported that they taught English, three reported that they taught math, three reported that they taught either science or health science, two reported that taught teach business information, and one reported that they taught art. When asked what led the participants to choose their respective contents, their

responses were vast, including reasons such as it was their original major in university, they had a background in the field of study, they preferred the subject when they were in school, or they had a passion for the subject. Indeed, it is standard for second-career teachers to gravitate toward teaching content areas that align with their professional experiences or educational backgrounds. This trend has several advantages and contributes to the diversification of the teaching workforce.

Participants were also asked if they felt they had strong content knowledge (see Figure 21). Understanding a teacher's perception of their content knowledge is crucial for fostering reflective practice and identifying areas of opportunity for professional growth. Recognizing areas where teachers feel confident in their content knowledge allows them to build on their strengths. It provides a foundation for designing practical lessons and contributing meaningfully to their students' learning experiences. The data showed that 92.3% of participants felt they had a strong sense of content knowledge. When asked if their rating of their content knowledge aligned with their superiors/appraisers, with 1 being not aligned at all and 5 being very aligned, the majority of the participants felt their ratings on their content knowledge were pretty aligned with their superiors, as 46.2% chose 4 as their response and 38.5% chose very aligned.

Participants were also asked if they felt their ACP gave them adequate preparation for the curriculum, and if so, they were asked to elaborate on those experiences. Of the 13 responses, only 1 participant reported that the ACP needed more support or preparation regarding their understanding of the curriculum. A follow-up question was posed inquiring about how the ACP provided them with content knowledge, and they unanimously agreed that very few, if any, resources were provided for content knowledge acquisition for their respective subjects.

Participants were then asked if they felt they received what they needed from their ACP to

succeed as a teacher teaching their respective content, and 76.9% of the participants reported that they did not receive what they needed as a teacher teaching their specific content (see Figure 22).

Figure 21

Pie Graph Regarding Participants' Perception of Their Content Knowledge

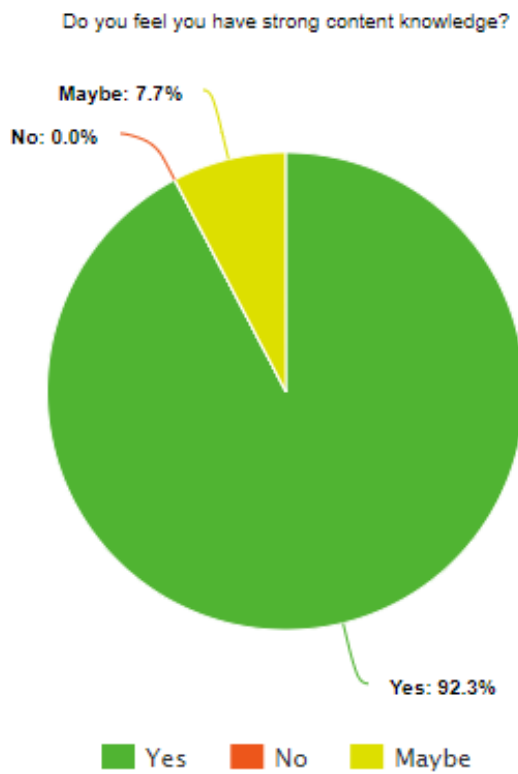
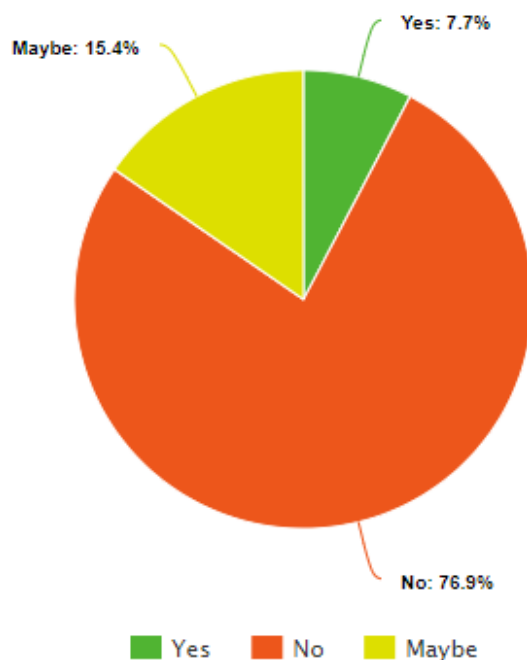


Figure 22*Pie Graph of Participants' Responses Related to Support Received From ACP*

Do you feel you received what you needed from your ACP to succeed as a teacher teaching your content?



In summary, understanding a teacher's perception of their content knowledge is invaluable to professional growth. It serves as a foundation for targeted development, enhanced instructional practices, and creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment for students. Reflective practice in this context fosters a culture of continuous improvement within the teaching profession.

Research Question 2

In response to the second research question, participants were asked what their alternative certification program could do, if anything, to prepare them better as new teachers. This information can help alternative certification programs make informed decisions on how to best support novice teachers entering the education industry. The participants reported a range of ways in which the ACP could better support them, with the first mentioning the number of

requirements necessary for completion, with 1 participant reporting, “There were a lot of requirements to complete,” and another reporting that not only was it a lot to complete, but it was also challenging to manage their workload and coursework.” A participant reported that the workload from the coursework impacted their workload from their job, as the overload of obligations to the ACP impacted their performance at work. It was suggested that consideration of the work–life/school–life balance would better assist ACP participants and increase their overall success.

Another participant reported that the ACP could provide more insight into content-specific curricula. Participants shared that they would have liked to receive additional guidance on acquiring a more comprehensive understanding of the material they would be teaching, elaborating that they could have gained from more intentional experiences that enhanced their knowledge and taught them practical strategies for delivering the content engagingly. The survey also mentioned that there was a need for more content curricula for Career and Technical education teachers. It is said that teachers with prior industry experience bring invaluable context to the educational sector. However, in this case, some participants reported that they would have been more successful if the program had assisted them in taking their work experience and modeling how to integrate this knowledge into the classroom. ACP programs are aimed at transitioning individuals with work experience into the teaching profession. However, an area of opportunity for ACPs is to identify best practices to transfer the relevant work experiences of its participants into valuable skills for the classroom. There are a few ways in which ACP programs can help individuals leverage their work experience for teaching, including the assessment of transferable skills, whereby the ACP programs can assess the candidate’s professional background to identify transferable skills that can be applied in a classroom setting. This could

include skills such as communication, leadership, problem-solving, and organizational abilities. The ACP could also offer customized training plans that address specific gaps in pedagogical knowledge while leveraging the candidate's existing expertise. This personalized approach could help individuals transition smoothly into the teaching profession. By combining these elements, ACP programs facilitate a smooth transition for individuals with work experience, ensuring that they not only meet the requirements for teacher certification but also bring valuable skills and perspectives to the classroom.

Other participants reported that they would have liked more interaction with actual classroom teachers and opportunities for classroom observations. Responses included “give more real-world experiences to all new teachers and make it a mandatory component of all programs,” and “I would’ve have preferred to have spent time in the classroom shadowing a teacher for a month or two to get a better feel for the job.” The notion of implementation of a pragmatic approach was a universal theme throughout all of their responses. Being able to experience the execution of teaching in a safe and controlled environment was highly suggested by all 13 participants. Participants in the ACPs expressed a collective interest and need for the opportunity to practice their teaching skills in a simulated environment. They believed that engaging in simulated teaching exercises, with the support and guidance of a veteran teacher, would significantly enhance their preparedness for the classroom. Here are some reasons participants suggested that a simulated teaching environment is crucial for their professional development:

Hands-On Learning

Simulated teaching provides a hands-on experience that bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This experiential learning will better prepare participants for the challenges of actual classrooms.

Application of Pedagogical Strategies

Practicing in a simulated environment allows participants to apply and refine various pedagogical strategies, ensuring they are well-equipped with effective teaching methods.

Immediate Feedback

The presence of a veteran teacher during simulated exercises would provide immediate and constructive feedback, and this timely feedback would be invaluable for their growth and development as aspiring educators.

Building Confidence

Simulated teaching would help build confidence in managing classroom dynamics, addressing diverse learning needs, and handling unexpected situations. This confidence is vital for a successful transition into the teaching profession.

Collaborative Learning

Participating in simulated teaching with peers fosters a collaborative learning environment. They can share insights, learn from each other's experiences, and collectively enhance their teaching skills.

An important thing to note was that the participants were aware that this may be a challenging task. However, all not only agreed that organizing such activities would ensure the success of the ACP program(s) but also believed that incorporating simulated teaching, facilitated by experienced educators, would significantly contribute to the overall effectiveness of their training. Some participants reported having these experiences, including participation in lesson observations, writing, presenting a lesson for the class, and teaching to a class with students; however, the frequency and consistency across all programs needed to be more consistent.

The last recommendation was the incorporation of mentors, as many felt they needed more support both while in the program and thereafter. One participant reported that “their advisor came out twice, and that’s it,” so there was minimal to no support from the ACP upon their completion. One of the participants stated a need for real mentor support, while another emphasized that they would have liked to have a mentor veteran teacher once they completed the coursework. Working with a veteran teacher as a new teacher is immensely valuable, offering a range of benefits that contribute to professional development, classroom effectiveness, and overall success in the teaching profession. Here are several reasons highlighting the importance of such mentorship from participants:

Guidance and Support

Veteran teachers bring a wealth of experience and knowledge. They serve as mentors, providing guidance and emotional support during the challenging early stages of a teaching career. This support is crucial for navigating the complexities of the classroom and education system.

Practical Wisdom

Experience often brings practical wisdom that textbooks and training programs may not cover. Veteran teachers can share insights on effective teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and ways to engage students that come from years of hands-on experience.

Modeling Effective Practices

New teachers can observe and learn from the veteran teacher’s instructional techniques, classroom management skills, and communication methods. This modeling helps novices understand how to implement best practices in real classroom settings.

The mentorship provided by a veteran teacher contributes to the long-term success of a new teacher's career. The lessons learned and skills acquired through this relationship create a strong foundation for sustained educational growth and effectiveness. The importance of working with a veteran teacher as a new teacher lies in the mentorship's ability to accelerate professional growth, provide practical insights, and foster a supportive environment essential for success in the dynamic field of education. Ongoing mentorship can serve a novice teacher well in many capacities, but more importantly, working closely with a veteran teacher provides opportunities to expand professional networks. These connections can lead to collaborative projects, shared resources, and a supportive community of educators.

The last suggestion for how ACPs could better support was implementing more test preparation modules. Participants expressed failed attempts at passing state exams. They reported that if their program provided more support in understanding the dynamics of the state exams, they could have been more successful on their first attempt. Many participants reported having easy to moderately easy coursework, but one may suggest that the rigor of the work was lacking due to the implications of test preparation questions. The lack of alignment to the knowledge needed for their exams could be a reason leading to failed state examination tests. If ACPs provide modules that focus on practice questions or how to answer the questions through the lens of an experienced teacher, then participants may feel better prepared to sit for these exams.

Overall, ACPs should adopt a reflective approach to the delivery and offerings within their programs to better serve novice teachers within and beyond their programs. Key considerations to ponder include individualized support, continuous professional development, mentorship support, collaborative learning communities, and flexible program structures, which

are all areas of development to ensure they are fostering a community of well-prepared and capable educators.

In summary, Chapter 4 presents the findings derived from the study, offering insights into the research questions and objectives. Moving forward to Chapter 5, the focus shifts to comprehensively unpacking the study's results. This involves revisiting the research design to provide context, identifying any limitations and delimitations that may have influenced the outcomes, and suggesting practical recommendations for educators and researchers. Additionally, the chapter concludes by drawing overarching conclusions that synthesize the critical contributions of the study to the field and point toward potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study focused on the role of alternative certification programs in teacher preparedness as first-year teachers. Research has yielded evidence that alternatively certified teachers experience challenges in fulfilling their teacher duties due to the brevity and lack of pragmatic practice in ACPs. This collective instrumental case study explored teachers' preparedness based on their experiences in their alternative certification programs (ACPs) in Texas. The study used the adult learning theory framework to address the following research questions:

RQ1: In what ways, if any, did your alternative certification program prepare you as a new teacher?

RQ2: What could your alternative certification program do, if anything, to better prepare you as a new teacher?

In Chapter 5, a revisitation of the research design and methodology is undertaken to offer a comprehensive understanding of the study's framework. The results are detailed and analyzed concerning existing literature, providing a contextualized perspective. Recognizing the inherent limitations and delimitations, the chapter transparently discusses these aspects, contributing to a nuanced interpretation of the study's outcomes. Furthermore, the section delves into the implications of the findings, offering insights into how they may inform educational practices and policies. Recommendations for practitioners and researchers are suggested, outlining actionable steps based on the study's insights. Ultimately, the chapter concludes by summarizing the key takeaways, emphasizing the significance of the study, and suggesting potential directions for future research in the field.

Collaboration Within ACP

The varying levels of collaboration within the ACP, as reported by participants, showcase the diversity of collaborative experiences in adult learning contexts. Based on the level of collaboration from participants, it is vital to break down the different forms of collaboration mentioned.

Working With Others With Different Content Knowledge

This type of collaboration suggests that participants engage with peers who bring diverse knowledge and expertise. As ACPs rethink how they can integrate collaboration, cross-curricular should be a focus. Collaborating with individuals with different content knowledge can enrich the learning experience by providing varied perspectives and insights. It can align with the idea that adults often bring diverse life experiences and expertise to the learning environment.

Engaging in a Group Project for Course Fulfillment

Group projects are a common strategy in adult education to foster collaboration. They allow participants to work together to achieve a common goal, apply their learning, and benefit from each other's strengths. Through ACP implementation of this collaborative approach, participants can report opportunities that promote teamwork, communication, and sharing responsibilities.

Assistance From Others Who Completed the Program

Seeking assistance from individuals who have already completed the program indicates a form of mentorship or peer support. Learning from those who have successfully navigated the same program can provide valuable insights, advice, and encouragement. This collaboration supports the idea that adults benefit from interactions with more experienced peers. Suppose ACPs consider implementing a buddy program to pair a former student with a newly enrolled

student. Those who have completed the program can provide practical advice on navigating specific challenges, potential roadblocks, and common pitfalls. Their insights can serve as a roadmap for current participants, helping them navigate the program more effectively.

Overall, these examples of collaboration align well with the principles of adult learning theory, emphasizing the importance of peer interaction, diverse perspectives, and practical application of knowledge. The variety of collaborative experiences reported by participants suggests that the ACP should be designed to facilitate different forms of interaction, recognizing the value of collaborative learning in adult education.

Limitations

The reported limitation on collaboration due to the nature of the content being taught reflects a common challenge in specific educational contexts, mainly when teachers are the sole instructors for specific courses. This situation can arise in settings like smaller schools or specialized programs. In exploring the implications of this limitation, there are a few things to note:

Isolation in Content-Specific Roles

Teachers who are the sole instructors for a particular course may experience professional isolation, lacking colleagues who teach the same content and can serve as thought partners. This isolation can impact the collaborative aspects of adult learning, as one key element is interaction with peers to enhance the learning experience.

Challenges in Diversifying Perspectives

Collaboration is often valued for the diverse perspectives and insights it brings. Teachers who are the only ones responsible for a particular course may miss out on engaging with

colleagues who bring different approaches or content knowledge. This can limit the breadth of perspectives available for professional growth.

Potential Solutions

To address these challenges, educational institutions might consider implementing strategies to facilitate collaboration despite content-specific isolation. This could include virtual collaborations with teachers from other institutions, creating professional learning communities, or providing online platforms for educators to share resources and insights.

While the limitation on collaboration is a recognized challenge, institutions and educators must explore creative solutions to foster a sense of community and collaboration, even when teachers are the sole instructors for specific courses. Recognizing and addressing these challenges contribute to improving adult education programs.

Rigor of ACP Curriculum

The participant feedback highlighting the need for adequate preparation in curriculum planning and content knowledge in the ACP underscores the importance of continuously assessing and improving program components. To address this concern, here are some recommendations for taking a deeper dive into the delivery and quality of content frameworks:

Academic Challenge. Rigorous ACPs should present challenging content and learning experiences that require participants to delve deeply into the subject matter. This includes thoroughly exploring teaching methodologies, educational theories, and practical applications in the classroom.

High Expectations. Rigor implies setting high expectations for participants regarding their understanding of educational principles, instructional strategies, and the ability to apply

learned concepts in real-world teaching situations. It should encourage aspiring educators to aim for excellence in their professional development.

Comprehensive Assessments. Rigorous programs should incorporate assessments that go beyond simple recall of information. Assessments may include complex projects, case studies, reflective essays, and other evaluations that require participants to demonstrate a deep understanding and application of their learning.

Real-World Application. Rigor should not just be about theoretical knowledge but also about the practical application of concepts in real-world teaching scenarios. A rigorous ACP should ensure that participants are knowledgeable and equipped to apply their knowledge in diverse classroom situations effectively.

Continuous Learning and Reflection. Rigorous ACP programs should emphasize continuous learning and reflective practice. Educators in alternative certification programs should be encouraged to engage in ongoing professional development, stay current with educational research, and reflect critically on their teaching practices.

In summary, the rigor of an alternative certification program reflects the program's commitment to providing a comprehensive, challenging, and high-quality learning experience that prepares aspiring educators for the complexities of the teaching profession. Rigorous programs should be aimed at developing the knowledge, skills, and mindset required for successful and impactful teaching. ACP programs need to consider those above to ensure that their participants have meaningful experiences and can efficiently utilize the curriculum provided in preparation for their new roles.

Managing Coursework Load With Everyday Duties

Participants who successfully balance work and school prioritize effective time management. This involves setting clear goals, creating schedules, and allocating dedicated time slots for coursework. The survey findings showed the ability to prioritize tasks as a crucial component of success for ACP participants. An integral factor for ACPs to consider is encouraging their participants to identify high-priority assignments and break them into manageable steps, which would help them tackle coursework systematically without feeling overwhelmed. Utilization of support systems can also serve as a key component to the success of ACP participants, as engaging with support systems, both at work and in the academic environment, can ease the burden. Communicating with supervisors, colleagues, and instructors can help create understanding and, in some cases, may lead to flexible arrangements. Embracing flexibility was also a key factor when managing a dual workload. Participants who adapt to unexpected changes and incorporate flexibility into their schedules are better equipped to handle the demands of both work and school. One thing not mentioned in the survey responses but has become a trending topic in recent years is the incorporation of self-care practices, which is also vital. Individuals prioritizing self-care activities such as regular exercise, adequate sleep, and downtime are better equipped to handle stress and maintain overall well-being.

In conclusion, the importance of work–life and school–life balance cannot be overstated. Achieving equilibrium is a dynamic process that involves intentional decision-making, effective time management, and a commitment to self-care. Participants who successfully manage their coursework load within their day-to-day duties enhance their well-being and position themselves for sustained success in their professional and academic endeavors.

Real-World Applicability and Pragmatic Approach to ACP

Based on the survey results, alternative certification programs often integrate real-world applications into their coursework to ensure that aspiring educators are well-prepared for the challenges and demands of the classroom. Feedback from participants provides some examples of how alternative certification programs can provide real-world application in their coursework. Beginning with classroom observations and practicum experiences, many alternative certification programs do not include classroom observations and practicum experiences where candidates spend time in real school settings. If implemented, this hands-on approach allows participants to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations, observe effective teaching practices, and interact with students. Microteaching sessions are another way in which ACPs can incorporate a pragmatic approach. Microteaching involves practicing specific teaching skills in a controlled environment, often with peers or mentor teachers. Alternative certification programs may incorporate microteaching sessions to allow candidates to receive feedback, refine their instructional techniques, and gain confidence before entering the classroom. Participants can also conduct case studies and simulations to provide candidates with real-world scenarios they might encounter in the classroom. Analyzing and solving these cases can help candidates develop problem-solving skills, make informed decisions, and understand the complexities of teaching.

Implementing collaborative lesson planning in the coursework on campuses could also be beneficial. Participants of ACPs could engage in collaborative lesson planning opportunities where candidates work in teams to create lesson plans, instructional materials, and assessments. This mirrors the collaborative nature of teaching and allows candidates to experience the importance of teamwork in educational settings. Integrating culturally responsive teaching modules is another opportunity for real-world application to be emphasized through coursework.

Alternative certification programs can include modules that address students' diverse backgrounds, helping candidates understand how to create inclusive and equitable learning environments. Given the increasing role of technology in education, coursework can also include projects that require candidates to integrate technology tools into lesson plans. This ensures that candidates are well-equipped to incorporate modern teaching methods into their classrooms.

These examples demonstrate how alternative certification programs can intentionally incorporate practical, real-world experiences and scenarios into their coursework. This approach helps candidates bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring they are well-prepared for the dynamic and complex nature of teaching in diverse educational settings.

A pragmatic approach in alternative certification programs involves focusing on practical, real-world aspects of teaching rather than solely on theoretical or abstract concepts. This approach recognizes the need for aspiring educators to quickly acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for effective classroom instruction. The implications of a pragmatic approach in alternative certification programs are significant and encompass various aspects, including expedited entry into the classroom, application of practical teaching strategies, and integration of real-world classroom experiences. Most importantly, if effectively implemented, ACPs can emphasize fostering reflective practitioners.

This pragmatic approach to reflection encourages candidates to engage in reflective practice, continuously evaluating and refining their teaching methods based on real-world experiences, contributing to continuous improvement and professional growth.

Goal Orientation of ACP

Overall, the study yielded essential data showing that goal setting is advantageous for teacher candidates and their future students. Goal setting in alternative certification programs can

help teacher candidates efficiently prepare for the teaching profession, focusing on acquiring essential skills and knowledge. The correlation to goal setting as an ACP candidate and a first-year teacher proved significant gains with their students as it has several positive impacts for teachers working with students, including the following:

- **Student engagement:** Implementing goal-setting practices in the classroom enhances student engagement. Clearly defined goals can create a sense of purpose and direction, motivating students to participate in learning actively.
- **Empowering students:** Setting goals can empower students to take ownership of their education. It can instill a sense of responsibility and encourage them to work towards achieving their academic and personal objectives.
- **Individualized learning:** Goal setting can allow teachers to tailor instruction to meet individual student needs. It can promote differentiated learning experiences that cater to various learning styles and abilities.
- **Cultivating a growth mindset:** Goal-oriented approaches can foster a growth mindset in students. They can learn to view challenges as opportunities for learning and understand that effort and perseverance contribute to success.

In essence, setting goals is a shared and beneficial endeavor for teacher candidates and educators working with students. It serves as a guiding framework that promotes efficiency, personalization, and a commitment to continuous improvement in the pursuit of educational success.

Content Knowledge Offered From ACP

The combination of questions regarding content knowledge allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between participants' content knowledge, the support provided by

the ACP, and the influence of their prior professional experiences on their decision to pursue teaching. Potential insights that could be gained include identifying gaps in content knowledge, as responses to content knowledge questions can reveal specific areas where participants may feel less confident or require additional support. In assessing the ACP's support effectiveness, feedback on the support received from the ACP can highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the program's support mechanisms in helping participants acquire the necessary content knowledge. By recognizing the impact of career transition, ACPs can forge a deeper understanding of how former career experiences influence the decision to teach. This can inform program adjustments to better accommodate and leverage the unique strengths participants bring from their previous professional backgrounds.

Overall, analyzing the responses to these questions can guide program improvements, ensuring that the ACP addresses the diverse needs of participants and effectively supports them in acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary for successful teaching careers. The content knowledge offered by alternative certification programs should be designed to prepare individuals to be effective and knowledgeable educators in their chosen subjects. The goal is to bridge any gaps in their background and provide them with the tools and expertise to deliver high-quality instruction to their students. The biggest takeaway of the results is the need for continuous professional development. Content knowledge extends beyond initial training, and alternative certification programs should incorporate elements of continuous professional development to ensure that teachers stay current with advancements in their subject area throughout their careers.

Based on the study results, many of the participants elected to teach content relative to their field of study from their professional background. It is not uncommon for second-career

teachers to glean a field of teaching content comparable to their professional experience or educational background. Some key reasons why second-career teachers often choose to teach content related to their prior careers or educational expertise include relevance of expertise, practical application of skills, connection with industry trends, role modeling and mentorship, and cross-disciplinary insights.

Second-career teachers bring valuable expertise and real-world experience from their previous careers. Teaching content related to their expertise allows them to leverage their knowledge and skills, making the learning experience more relevant and engaging for students. Also, teaching a subject related to their professional background allows second-career teachers to align their passion and interests with their instructional responsibilities. This alignment often leads to increased job satisfaction and enthusiasm for teaching.

In terms of practical application of skills, second-career teachers can apply practical skills and insights gained from their prior careers to the classroom. Applying real-world knowledge enhances instruction quality and gives students a deeper understanding of the subject matter. It also allows for connection with industry trends, as teachers with professional experience in specific fields are often more attuned to industry trends and advancements. This connection allows them to bring current and relevant information into the classroom, preparing students for the realities of their chosen career paths. Second-career teachers can also serve as valuable role models and mentors when teaching content related to their professional backgrounds. They can share personal experiences, offer career advice, and guide students in navigating their future paths. The diverse backgrounds of second-career teachers contribute to cross-disciplinary insights. They may integrate knowledge from multiple fields, fostering a holistic and interconnected approach to learning.

The alignment of second-career teachers with content areas related to their professional experiences or educational backgrounds is a valuable trend that brings a wealth of benefits to both educators and students. It enhances the authenticity of classroom instruction, strengthens the connection between education and the workforce, and contributes to a more diverse and dynamic teaching landscape.

Summary

In summary, by taking these steps, ACPs can address the identified gaps and ensure that participants receive comprehensive preparation in curriculum planning and content knowledge. This continuous improvement approach contributes to the overall quality and effectiveness of the program in preparing first-year teachers for success in the classroom. ACPs should consider reviewing the existing curriculum thoroughly to identify specific areas where participants feel the preparation could be improved. By evaluating the alignment of the curriculum with relevant teaching standards and best practices in curriculum development, ACPs should conduct a needs assessment to understand participants' specific needs and expectations regarding curriculum planning and content knowledge. This could involve surveys, focus groups, or interviews to gather detailed feedback from current and past participants. Through collaboration with experienced educators and subject matter experts, they can ensure the content frameworks are comprehensive and aligned with the requirements of the teaching profession. Their insights can contribute to the development of robust content modules.

ACPs can enhance the curriculum by including practical applications and real-world scenarios that require participants to engage in curriculum planning exercises. This can provide hands-on experiences and better prepare them for the challenges they may face in the classroom.

By providing ongoing professional development opportunities for ACP participants, they can stay updated on the latest trends in curriculum development and content knowledge.

Well-prepared instructors contribute significantly to the quality of the program. Creating mentorship and support structures within the program and connecting participants with experienced mentors who can guide them in curriculum planning and content mastery allow for intentional peer collaboration and mentorship, enhancing the learning experience. Also, by implementing a continuous program evaluation process to assess the effectiveness of content delivery regularly, ACPs can collect participant feedback, analyze assessment results, and make data-driven adjustments to improve their programs.

Based on the study's results, ACPS must consider flexibility to address its participants' diverse needs and backgrounds. Tailoring content delivery methods and frameworks to accommodate various learning styles and preferences aids in the improvement of the quality of experiences participants have and increases their perceptions of preparedness for the program. By taking these steps, ACPs can work towards addressing the identified gaps and ensure that participants receive comprehensive preparation in all areas of the teaching profession. This continuous improvement approach contributes to the overall quality and effectiveness of the program in preparing first-year teachers for success in the classroom.

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Appendix A: Guided Protocol for Interview

Introduction Questions

1. How did you attain your teacher certification?
2. What modality did you take to complete the program (i.e., face-to-face or online)?
3. How long have you been in the field of education?
4. How long have you been a teacher?
5. Was education your first career? If not, what did you do before teaching?
6. Do you teach elementary school, middle school, or high school?
7. Have you worked at your current school since you began teaching? If not, what other settings have you worked at?
8. Did you have a mentor or engage with an induction cohort when you began teaching?
9. How do you think your first year as a teacher went?
10. What nationality do you identify with?
11. What age range do you fall in 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60?
12. What is your first degree in?
13. Are you married, single, widowed, or divorced?
14. What is your current employment status?
15. What is your gender?

RQ1: In what ways, if any did your alternative certification program prepare you as a new teacher?

1. Would you consider yourself as being a self-directed learner?

2. While attending your ACP, did you seek support from anyone within the program? If so, who?
3. Did the level of coursework appear to be easy for you, or did you experience challenges navigating the coursework?
4. If the work was challenging, how did you persist in your learning?
5. How did you pace your workload while in your ACP?

RQ2: What could your alternative certification program do, if anything, to better prepare you as a new teacher?

1. Did you have any real-world applicable life experiences while in your ACP?
2. Were any life knowledge experiences offered to you in your ACP? If so, can you tell me about those experiences?
3. Do you feel those experiences helped you as a new teacher? If so, how?
4. Do you use life knowledge experiences as a teacher?

Probing questions: How did goal orientation experiences in the alternative certification program help as a new teacher?

1. Would you describe yourself as being goal oriented? If so, in what ways?
2. Did you set any goals while in your ACP? If so, do you mind sharing what types of goals you set?
3. Did setting those goals help you as a new teacher? If so, how?
4. Do you set goals as a teacher?
5. Do you require your students to set goals?

Describe the content-relevancy experiences in the alternative certification program that helped you as a new teacher.

1. What content do you teach?
2. What led you to choose that content?
3. Do you feel you have strong content knowledge?
4. When rated by your superiors, do their ratings align with how you would rate your content knowledge?
5. What areas do you feel you require more support related to content knowledge?
6. How did your ACP provide you with content knowledge?
7. Do you feel your ACP gave you adequate preparation for the curriculum? If so, how so?
8. Do you feel you received what you needed from your ACP to succeed as a teacher teaching your content?

How did practical activity experiences in the alternative certification program help as a new teacher?

1. What would you describe as a practical activity experience?
2. Did your ACP provide any hands-on or field experiences before you began teaching? If so, can you tell me about those experiences?
3. Do you think those experiences helped you as a new teacher?

Describe the collaboration experiences in the alternative certification program that helped you as a new teacher.

1. Did you collaborate with others while in your ACP program? If so, can you tell me about those experiences?
2. Do you collaborate with other teachers at your campus? If so, in what ways?

3. Do you think the collaboration experiences during your ACP helped you collaborate with teachers at your campus?
4. Do you think the collaboration experiences you engaged in while completing your ACP helped you as a new teacher?

Appendix B: IRB Approval

Date: 11-16-2023

IRB #: IRB-2023-267

Title: "An Exploration of the Role of Alternative Certification Programs in Teacher Preparedness"

Creation Date: 10-27-2023

End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Bianca Dugas

Review Board: ACU IRB

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
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Key Study Contacts

Member	David McIntyre	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	XXXXXXXXXX
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Member	Bianca Dugas	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	XXXXXXXXXX