

COMPETENCY DIFFERENCES AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATORS PREPARED THROUGH ALTERNATIVE AND TRADITIONAL LICENSURE PROGRAMS

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SESSION ABSTRACT

Alternative licensure programs number in the hundreds, yet little is known about their efficacy. This session discusses results of a study that examined special education competency (via national professional exam and a self-report measure) of 153 LD teachers prepared through alternative and through traditional bachelor's and master's degree programs in South Carolina.

2

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Operating in 37 states (Rosenberg, 2007), hundreds of alternative routes to certification (ARC) programs prepare more than 25,000 special educators annually (COPSSE, 2005). But little research exists on ARC efficacy (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). Of eight ARC presentations at CEC's 2008 Convention, only four reported on program

3

outcomes (e.g., cost effectiveness). However, none investigated the competency of ARC completers, a more potent measure of efficacy. Researchers in this study examined special education competency (via a national professional examination and a self-report measure) among LD teachers prepared through ARC and through traditional bachelor's and master's degree programs in South Carolina from 2003-2006.

4

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Severe shortages of special educators persist in most states (American Association for Employment in Education, 2006), and are projected to increase another 15% by 2016 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007) due to growth of students with disabilities and teacher factors (retirement; career changes). To address the shortage, most states have implemented ARC programs (USBLS, 2007). But little is known about the competency of ARC completers compared to their counterparts in traditional teacher education programs.

5

RESEARCH QUESTION

Do special educators prepared through alternative (add-on certification) and traditional (bachelor's and master's) teacher education programs differ significantly in their competency, as assessed through a national professional examination and a self-report measure?

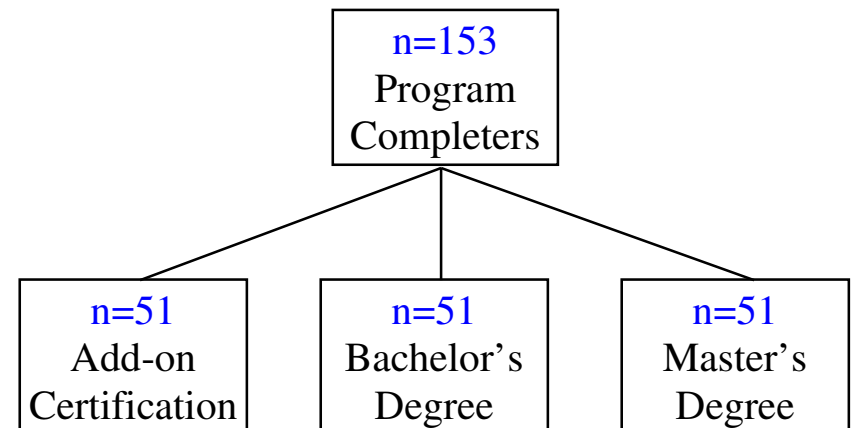
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NULL HYPOTHESIS

There are no statistically significant differences in competency among special educators prepared through alternative and traditional bachelor's and master's teacher education licensure programs, as assessed through a national professional examination and a self-report competency measure.

7

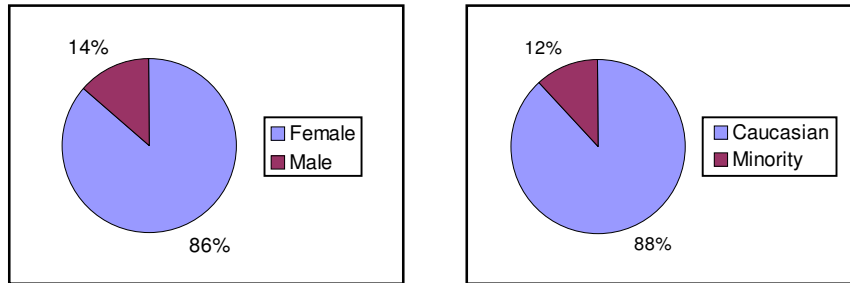
TEACHER SAMPLE



8

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

(n=153)



Mean Age: 35.5 years
School Districts: 49 of 85 (58%)

9

VARIABLES IN THE STUDY

Dependent variables

- ▶ Mean scores from national professional exam
- ▶ Mean raw scores from self-report questionnaire
 - Behavior management
 - Individualized educational programs (IEP)
 - Language/diversity
 - Practices and procedures
 - Transitioning

Independent variables

- ▶ Special education teacher preparation approach
 - Alternative (add-on certification)
 - Traditional 1 (bachelor's degree)
 - Traditional 2 (master's degree)

10

INSTRUMENTS

Two previously validated instruments were adopted for use in assessing special education competency (knowledge and skills):

- ▶ Praxis II[®] exam #10382 (Education of Exceptional Students: Learning Disabilities) <http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/PRAXIS/pdf/0382.pdf>
- ▶ SPeNSE *Service Providers Survey* (selected items) <http://ferdig.coe.ufl.edu/spense/instruments.html>

11

RESEARCH DESIGN

Statistics

- ▶ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) with follow-up univariate statistics for pairwise comparisons

Significance

- ▶ Alpha level of $p \leq .05$

12

RESULTS-PRAXIS II®

► Means & Standard Deviations

Group	n	Mean	SD
Add-on	51	174.67	10.78
Bachelor's	51	177.37	11.76
Master's	51	181.14	10.68

► ANOVA Test

	SS	df	Mean ²	F	p
Between Groups:	1,077.18	2	538.59	4.384	.014*
Within Groups:	18,428.42	150	122.85		
Total:	19,505.60	152			

13

There was a significant effect of special education teacher preparation on Praxis II® exam scores at the $p < .05$ level for the three conditions [$F(2, 150) = 4.384, p = .014$].

► Univariate Tests

Pairing	t	p
Add-on-Bachelor's	1.208	.229
Add-on-Master's	3.046	.003*
Bachelor's-Master's	1.695	.093

Master's degree completers earned significantly higher Praxis II® scores than did add-on completers.

14

RESULTS-SPENSE

► Means & Standard Deviations

Practices & Procedures (25 items)

Group	n	Mean	SD
Add-on	14	80.29	7.81
Bachelor's	12	75.42	8.17
Master's	14	77.14	9.23

Individualized Educational Plans (6 items)

Group	n	Mean	SD
Add-on	14	17.50	1.87
Bachelor's	12	17.33	1.55
Master's	14	17.50	1.65

15

Behavior Management (14 items)

Group	n	Mean	SD
Add-on	14	43.79	4.85
Bachelor's	12	43.67	5.64
Master's	14	46.07	5.73

Language/Diversity (6 items)

Group	n	Mean	SD
Add-on	14	15.93	4.61
Bachelor's	12	13.08	6.12
Master's	14	12.86	4.97

Transitioning (9 items)

Group	n	Mean	SD
Add-on	14	27.90	6.28
Bachelor's	12	29.30	3.57
Master's	14	29.00	3.31

16

► ANOVA Tests

Practices & Procedures

	SS	df	Mean ²	F	p
Between Groups:	160.65	2	80.32	1.128	.335
Within Groups:	2,635.65	37	71.23		
Total:	2,796.31				

There was no significant effect of special education teacher preparation on self-reported competency in practices and procedures at the $p < .05$ level for the three conditions [$F(2, 37) = 1.128, p = .335$].

Individualized Educational Plans

	SS	df	Mean ²	F	p
Between Groups:	0.24	2	0.12	0.042	.959
Within Groups:	107.69	37	2.91		
Total:	107.93	39			

There was no significant effect of special education teacher preparation on self-reported competency in individualized educational plans at the $p < .05$ level for the three conditions [$F(2, 37) = 0.042, p = .959$].

Behavior Management

	SS	df	Mean ²	F	p
Between Groups:	49.72	2	24.86	0.849	.436
Within Groups:	1,083.92	37	29.29		
Total:	1,133.64	39			

There was no significant effect of special education teacher preparation on self-reported competency in behavior management at the $p < .05$ level for the three conditions [$F(2, 37) = 0.849, p = .436$].

Language/Diversity

	SS	df	Mean ²	F	p
Between Groups:	80.50	2	40.25	1.472	.243
Within Groups:	1,011.57	37	27.34		
Total:	1,092.07	39			

There was no significant effect of special education teacher preparation on self-reported competency in language/diversity at the $p < .05$ level for the three conditions [$F(2, 37) = 1.472, p = .243$].

Transitioning

	SS	df	Mean ²	F	p
Between Groups:	14.53	2	7.27	0.338	.715
Within Groups:	795.32	37	21.49		
Total:	809.86	39			

There was no significant effect of special education teacher preparation on self-reported competency in transitioning at the $p < .05$ level for the three conditions [$F(2, 37) = 0.338$, $p = .715$].

21

IMPLICATIONS

Results support Resenberg's (2007) contention that ARCs can produce competent special educators on par with traditionally-prepared teachers. We might expect master's degree completers with advanced knowledge to score higher on Praxis II[®] exams, but the statistical difference of a mere 7 points may be of little practical meaning, given the concurrent finding that self-reported competency did not vary significantly.

22

INFORMING POLICY & PRACTICE

In light of these research results, the similarity of South Carolina's ARC program (i.e., add-on certification) with other ARCs (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2006) would suggest generalization of current, positive competency findings to programs in other states. However, future ARC efficacy research will need to link empirically observed special educator competency with student achievement (Nougaret et al., 2005).

23

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24

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