TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF A 2+2 TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM TRAINING EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Teacher training and preparation are important topics to consider in the field of education because of the direct impact quality of instruction and resulting student achievement. Teacher preparation programs and training help teachers develop classroom management skills, learn to lesson plan, and disaggregate data. The purpose of this qualitative study is to analyze the perceptions of teachers who were trained as part of a 2+2 teacher preparation program. Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory, Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, and Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory provide the theoretical frameworks for this study. Findings from this study revealed the need to incorporate practical application for teaching skills, provide diverse teaching placements, establish effective communication and advisement systems, promote equal treatment and recognition, and facilitate impactful mentorship.

Keywords: *Teacher Preparation Program, Teacher Preparedness, Teacher Quality, Teacher Education, Education, Self-efficacy, Joint-enrollment agreements or 2+2.*

Introduction

High-quality and relevant teacher training is vital to student success. Effective teachers can drastically change the trajectory of a student's educational experience, and teacher quality directly correlates to student achievement (Heck, 2009). As the needs of students and society change, teacher training programs must stay abreast of evidence-based teaching practices and emerging technologies in the classroom (Paolini, 2015), and must have access to and training on the necessary resources to create a more inclusive classroom environment (Darling-Hammond, 2016). Still, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) noted teachers are leaving the field of education at alarming rates. Many educators that have left the profession cited feeling unprepared and burnt out as a reason for leaving teaching (Kim et al, 2019).

With a combination of high teacher turnover rates and a growing demand for new educators to fill those spots, community college teacher certification programs offer a potential solution and affordable alternative to earning an education (Wignall, 2020; Chen & Xu, 2022). The appeal of 2+2 programs (two years at a community college followed by two years at a bachelor's degree-granting institution) is that it

allows families the option of pursuing a four-year degree that is cost-effective and likely closer to home (Wignall, 2020). Thus, 2+2 teacher preparation programs provide accessibility to education, flexible class scheduling, and recruitment of diverse program participants from varying backgrounds (Labov, 2012; Wignall, 2020). 2+2 teacher preparation programs have come to be known by several names with variations in how they are each implemented: Grow Your Own Teacher (GYO) initiative, 2 + 2 Programs, and joint teacher preparation programs. These types of programs can eliminate some of the common challenges that come with teacher labor shortages, and it does show promise in attempting to train high quality teachers (Sparks, 2022).

Unknown is the effectiveness of 2+2 teacher training programs on preparing teachers for the realities of the classroom. Aspiring teachers must be well prepared for a continually diverse and complex educational landscape. This qualitative study sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of individuals that have completed their 2+2 teacher preparation program.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do teachers who completed a 2+2 teacher training program perceive that preparation
       to have influenced their self-efficacy as a teacher?
RQ2: How do teachers who completed a 2+2 teacher training program perceive that preparation
       to have influenced their effectiveness as teachers?
RQ3: How do teachers who completed a 2+2 teacher training program perceive that preparation
       to have prepared them for classroom teaching?

Theoretical Framework

This study explored the experiences and perceptions of 2+2 teacher preparation program completers, specifically examining how it may have influenced their sense of preparedness and self-efficacy in the classroom as a current practicing teacher. Jack Mezirow 's transformative learning theory, Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, and Albert Bandura self-efficacy theory served as theoretical frameworks for this study. Jack Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory is appropriate because it focuses on how people perceive their life experiences and the ways they navigate to best understand these experiences. This aspect of the study will focus on transformation of participants' perspective; the other component to this study is focused on examining how individuals potentially surpass preconceived ideas when it comes to teaching and working with students.

Vygotsky's (1986) social constructivist theory details how people develop their knowledge as they socialize with others. This is crucial in understanding how participants' experiences in their program have helped them socially construct their own understanding of what makes an effective teacher.

Lastly, self-efficacy is best described as an individual's beliefs in their ability to do well and succeed in various situations (Bandura, 1977). This study on individuals that completed a 2+2 teacher preparation program highlighted some of the experiences and changes in perspective, while also examining how participants' perceptions of preparedness and self-efficacy may have changed after teaching.

Mezirow's transformative learning theory, Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, and Bandura's self-efficacy theory help outline and support the design of this study through their focus on perspective

transformation, social interaction and reflection, and an examination of one's beliefs of their ability to be successful.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have been conducted to highlight areas of concern pertinent to the teaching profession, namely about: teacher training, teacher recruitment and retention. Student populations only continue to become more diverse, yet not much is changing in how teacher preparation programs are preparing teachers (Boche et al., 2021). Furthermore, teachers may also feel under prepared in a variety of areas such as technology or classroom management (Livers et al., 2021). Cochran-Smith et al. (2021) highlighted how changing educational reforms have brought added scrutiny to teacher preparation programs from both groups that work in and outside the field of education. Boche et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of also prioritizing quality field experiences for aspiring teachers. Those authentic field experiences are what often contribute to a teacher becoming more effective (Boche et al., 2021).

Teacher Quality

The U.S. Department of Education (2015) found that teacher quality is one of the major factors that can directly impact how well a student succeeds and achieves. This means that for the top 20 percent of teachers that are high performing, they afford students the opportunity to gain five to six more months of learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 3). The impact of teacher quality can impact things such as college attrition rates to changing the trajectory of students' test scores (Boche, Bartels, & Wassilak, 2021).

Teacher Training

Whitley (2021) noted that the increased expectations of teacher preparation programs resulted in many pre-service teacher training programs and colleges to reconsider what they are prioritizing in their programs. Alhothali (2021) further observed that teacher training programs are tasked with the daunting challenge of teaching aspiring educators the 21st century skills needed to help their students become active learners and students that use creativity and teamwork. Therefore, it is equally important to understand participants' experiences and feedback that have successfully completed teacher training program so that teacher preparation is structured in a way that produces more confident and effective teachers. Things such as student licensure tests and certification exams only reveal so much about the students' experiences in the program, but teachers that have completed training may offer a valuable form of insight. Teachers often leave the field for the following three reasons: compensation, teacher preparedness, and negative working conditions ("Teacher Retention", 2019). The motivation and drive to understand teachers' experiences in their teacher preparation program also comes from teacher educators use self-reflective practices and assessing the effectiveness of their own teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Teacher Self-efficacy

To improve instructional practice, it is imperative teachers develop the ability to meet goals and outcomes in their instructional practices (Jacobs, 2015). Educational research has shown that teacher self-efficacy has provided an increased quality in not only student achievement but teacher performance, well-being, and overall educational quality (Livers et al., 2021). Teachers with high efficacy beliefs have been

known to perform above and beyond district standards in their own classrooms, while teachers who underperform have been found to have low self-efficacy; they are unmotivated to excel and struggle with facing tribulations (Boche et al., 2021). Teacher self-efficacy is affected by factors, such as personal characteristics, experiences, and contextual factors (Livers et al., 2021) and contextual factors like the education's institution the educator works in: school culture, resources provided, and support from administration can affect the educator's beliefs in their effectiveness (Boche et al., 2021; Livers et al., 2021).

Method

This study employed phenomenological qualitative research to examine and understand the perceptions and experiences of completers of a 2+2 teacher preparation program.

Population and Sample

The general population is program completers of a teacher preparation program in Texas. The sample was 9 program completers from the designated South Texas teacher preparation program, who have a minimum of two years of experience in teaching. A minimum of two years teaching experience was required so that their experiences, perceptions, and feedback were robust enough to analyze and draw conclusions. Interviews were conducted via Zoom. Demographic information that was collected from the participants included age, sex, level of education, type of district they work in (i.e., public, private, or public charter), grade level taught, subject area taught, and school demographics. All participants had a minimum of two years of teaching experience in education. All participants were female. This was a coincidence and not by design. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics of study participants.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics (Demographics)

Name	Sex	Years of Experience	Type of School
P1	Female	4	Public
P2	Female	8	Public
P3	Female	8	Public
P4	Female	3	Public
P5	Female	14	Public
P6	Female	4	Public
P7	Female	6	Public
P8	Female	6	Public
P9	Female	11	Public

Data Analysis

Braun & Clarke (2006)'s method for thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The data analysis process involved organizing data, coding, and thematic development using six steps: (1) Familiarize self with data; (2) generate initial codes; (3) search and identify themes; (4) review identified themes; (5) define and name themes; (6) produce report that transforms analysis into writing. At its conclusion, the researchers again reviewed the themes and to ensure they represented the patterns of the data collected, named, and defined the themes emerged from the study.

Results

Several themes reflecting the experiences of participants were revealed in transcribing the data. These themes included *practical application of knowledge and skills, diverse and quality teaching sites, effective and consistent communication, reliable and standardized forms of advisement, equal treatment and recognition, and impact of mentor teachers.*

Table 2

Themes Relationships to Research Questions

Theme	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
Practical Application of Knowledge and Skills		X	X
Diverse and Quality Teaching Placement Sites		X	X
Effective and Consistent Communication	X		
Reliable and Standardized Forms of Advisement	X		
Equal Treatment and Recognition		X	X
Impact of Mentor Teachers		X	X

Effective and Consistent Communication-RQ1

Citing things from schedule conflicts to issues with support services, a handful of participants that had participated in the program often pinpointed some issues within the program to communication and the impact it had on their development and self-efficacy as a teacher. For Participant Two, it was stating their observations and saying, *"Honestly, my communication was very minimal. It was very much at the beginning of the semester."* When discussing how both their communication and overall preparedness impacted their self-efficacy as a teacher they stated,

> *if I had to, like, let's say, rate it from one to ten, one being the worst and ten being the greatest, I would say two. Honestly, I think it just helped me to get my degree so that I can apply to a job and say, 'hey, I'm certified, graduated.' They told me what I needed to do, but that was it.*

They went on to explain that their experiences in the program ranging from communication to teaching experiences did not give them a level of self-efficacy they were entirely confident in. On the other hand, Participant Eight did not see a drastic impact on their self-efficacy as teacher despite their slightly more positive experiences with communication in the program.

> *It was good. They were always ready to help when I did email them or how to speak with them. Overall, it was like a neutral experience. It just kind of came with as you got more experience as a teacher after graduating, that's when you started seeing, like, a change in your self-efficacy.*

Reliable and Standardized Forms of Advisement

Perhaps one of the more detailed topics covered were participants' feelings of not being treated the same as other groups of teacher candidates when it came to advisement. Considering that these were groups of individuals that were part of the 2+2 program model, some participants saw notable differences in the information the program participants that did not commute versus those that attended at a satellite campus received for advisement. Overall, program participants wanted improved and consistent advisement on coursework. Participant Six had a hard time citing entirely positive communication experiences, *"I had trouble sometimes because the advisor at the time, it was a male, I forgot his name. I'm not sure that he's still there, but he wasn't really good at guiding me or letting me know."*

The lack of a uniformed and consistent approach to advisement also added unnecessary stress towards students. Because they either completed incorrect or additional classes, some participants felt either overwhelmed or underprepared. Participants often found themselves missing required classes from one semester to the next. They struggled to gather all pertinent information when it came knowing which classes they were actually going to need, and which classes would impact their development and confidence as teachers. When discussing the overall role of the teacher preparation program and the impact it had on their self-efficacy they said, *"it played a big role, especially my last semester when it was student teaching, because it gave me pretty much like the backbone of it even if it took me a little longer because I took the wrong classes."*

Diverse and Quality Teaching Placement Sites

While not necessarily linked to effectiveness, many program participants cited having experience in different levels as something that improved their confidence in the classroom. Program participants also emphasized the importance and benefit from working in diverse and quality placement sites. As Participant Two stated:
> *One of the things I did like was that he (professor) encouraged me. I already knew I wanted high school English, but he encouraged us to try all grade levels. When you're doing your field experiences, go and try different levels and don't limit yourself to one grade level, to one class. And I did take it to heart.*

Participant Nine echoed a similar sentiment in that,
> *And my experiences were also very varied. So, for example, throughout the program, I was able to do some student observations in what I think was kinder all the way through fifth grade, and it allowed me to see the difference between the age groups and the difference between the student abilities and their needs in the classroom. Then, when I did my student teaching, I want to say I also got to experience different levels in the elementary setting, and that was really nice.*

Equal Treatment and Recognition

The structure of the 2+2 program model works both for and against in that it allows program participants the flexibility to receive quality instruction from a university that may be too far to drive to for some. However, in having two cohort models that attend two different locations for the same program, differences in treatment of those groups are bound to occur. The lack of equal treatment and recognition also impacted how confident participants were in their own abilities. Program participants want both equal treatment and recognition for their effort in the program. Participant Nine also encountered similar issues in going to her advisor for input and later stating,

> She was a really good to reach out to, but it was kind of hard getting through to other people. Remember I had to go up there and was a little upset when I found out that we weren't going to graduate with honors? We're like what? Oh my God. We had credits up the wazoo. But just because we didn't take enough credit hours with --------, we weren't going to graduate Cum laude or Suma cum laude or whatever. That was really disappointing.

One participant discussed what that imbalance of attention created:

> It felt like in my first year, my experiences for the first time really settled in, I'm freaking out inside but trying to not show it. I don't know. I mean, I was able to navigate it, thank God, but I would have preferred if they would have helped you a lot more. I guess I just wanted more confidence, because once you're up there helping and teaching, you're able to see like, oh, I did this wrong but the people in the program don't always tell you. It's more just like 'oh, good job'. So, it's just more your own self-reflection at the end of a lesson that helps.

Practical Application of Knowledge and Skills

One of the themes that emerged was the sentiment among program participants the value of having opportunities to apply what they learned to feel better prepared. A majority of the participants mentioned the need to have more opportunities to learn content beyond what is necessary on certification exams, so they are able to bring theory and practice together once they are in the classroom. Some of the participants expressed an interest in having the professors prioritize their focus from just discussion of theory to more effective ways of teaching. Participant Two stated,

> But when I finished that experience, I was glad because, again, it was that life application where you're doing this theory. Okay, then this week when you go and volunteer…we had to do it every week and apply it. I guess the point I'm trying to say is it depends on the professors. If the professor just sticks to lectures but doesn't ask the student to apply it, then it's horrible for the student. And I think that was my experience when I had those professors that made me get out of my comfort zone in those education classes. I think those were the ones that truly prepared me for now, especially this last year that I was on an ESL assignment.

Participant three noted a similar sentiment in stating, *"it's one thing to read about it and study it in class, and then another thing to see it and apply it in an actual classroom setting, and that was great."*

Impact of Mentor Teachers

One of the most consistent items that participants cited as impactful for their teacher preparation program was the positive role of their mentoring teacher and the level of preparedness they felt. Six participants cited remaining in close contact or in constant communication on social media with their mentoring teacher as they grew and developed as a teacher. Participant One recalled how much they enjoyed learning from their mentor teacher by stating, *"taking over my mentor teachers lessons is what I*

love the most.'' When talking about what helped participant one feel most prepared, she stated *"I feel like I was prepared because I got to see real experiences with students and interactions with teachers."* Participant Three shared similar experiences in highlighting the impact of their mentor teacher,

> *She was very supportive and motivating. She just made me feel like I could do it. When it came to the evaluations and all of that, everyone would get really nervous. Like, oh, man, what if I don't do good? She was just so great with the praise and making you feel like, no, you've got this. 'You're going to be a great teacher'. And I think that's really important because teaching is kind of nerve wracking. You're almost putting on a show. And that's what helped, I think, build my confidence also going into teaching.*

Participant Seven said the mentor teacher interactions proved to be most impactful of their teacher training experience.

> *The most significant, I think it would be the mentor I was assigned to. It was a young English teacher as well. She was really helpful. Not only was she a good mentor, but she turned into a great friend. Although way that she would do her things in her classroom, it inspired me to do the same things in mine. I saw that in her classroom, she would not only teach the teach, but she would also involve life lessons into them. That's something I wanted to do as well.*

Interpretation of Findings

Practical application allows student teachers to apply the theories, concepts, and strategies they learn in their teacher education programs to real-life classroom situations. It helps them understand how to effectively translate the theories they learn in class into practical actions and make informed instructional decisions. Through hands-on experiences, they can develop their teaching expertise and gain a deeper understanding of what works best in the classroom. Classroom management is also a critical skill for teachers as it involves establishing a positive and productive learning environment, managing student behavior, and creating a safe and inclusive space for all learners. By engaging in practical experiences, student teachers can learn how to manage various situations, address challenges, and promote a conducive learning atmosphere. Heikkila et al. (2020) stress the importance of not separating theory from practice. In keeping the two together, teachers are able to develop their professional agency as educators. Additionally, through actual teaching experiences, they can observe the impact of their instructional strategies, assess student engagement and learning outcomes, and identify areas for improvement. Reflective practice helps student teachers refine their teaching approaches, adjust based on feedback, and continuously grow as educators.

Exposing student teachers to a range of teaching environments and contexts is crucial for their professional growth and development. Diverse placement sites provide opportunities to work with students from various backgrounds, cultures, and abilities, preparing student teachers to meet the needs of a diverse student population. By experiencing different teaching settings, such as elementary vs. secondary or suburban vs. rural schools, student teachers gain a broader perspective on the challenges and opportunities present in different educational contexts. Quality placement sites also ensure that student teachers have access to experienced mentor teachers who can provide guidance, support, and valuable insights. In fact, Bastian et al. (2023) documented the notion that varied, high quality learning environments in student teaching placements do further the development of teacher training candidates. Moreover, exposure to high-quality teaching placement sites enables student teachers to observe effective instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and assessment practices, which they can later incorporate into their own teaching. Ultimately, diverse and quality teaching placement sites enhance the

overall readiness and effectiveness of student teachers, equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and cultural competence necessary to excel in their future classrooms.

Effective and consistent communication between students in teacher training programs and program staff is necessary. Clear and timely communication ensures that students receive the required information, guidance, and support throughout their teacher preparation journey. By maintaining an open line of communication, program staff can address any concerns or questions that students may have, providing them with the resources and assistance they need to succeed. Regular communication also allows program staff to share updates, announcements, and important deadlines, keeping students informed and engaged in the program. In light of the recent pandemic, Özyildirim and Jomaa (2023) also emphasized the importance of enabling the highest forms of communication between students and higher education institutions to increase student achievement. Furthermore, effective communication fosters a sense of belonging and connection among students, creating a supportive learning community. Students who feel heard and supported are more likely to have a positive experience in their teacher training program and feel confident in their ability to navigate the challenges of the classroom. Ultimately, by prioritizing effective and consistent communication, teacher training programs can enhance student satisfaction, promote student success, and contribute to the development of well-prepared and confident future educators.

Reliable and standardized advisement ensures that students receive consistent and accurate guidance throughout their academic journey. Reliable advisement can help students avoid unnecessary delays, confusion, or errors in their academic planning. Moreover, standardized forms of advisement ensure fairness and equity in the support provided to all students, minimizing potential biases or inconsistencies. Shunner (2023) identified the importance of advisors using both effective tools and record keeping methods to help inform their decision-making process as they work with students. This not only allows them to develop a degree plan more effectively with students but also take appropriate steps to refer students to other departments for specialized services (Shunner, 2023). A reliable and standardized advisement system also promotes accountability, as both students and program staff have clear expectations and responsibilities. By establishing a strong advisement framework, teacher training programs can enhance student satisfaction, retention, and overall success, ultimately producing highly competent and well-prepared teachers.

It is crucial for teacher preparation programs to provide an inclusive and supportive environment where all program participants are treated fairly and with respect. Equal treatment ensures that students have access to the same opportunities, resources, and support throughout their program, regardless of their background, race, gender, or any other characteristic. Recognizing the value and contributions of each student cultivates a sense of belonging, motivation, and self-worth. When students feel valued and acknowledged, they are more likely to actively engage in their studies, participate in discussions, and contribute to the learning community. Furthermore, equal treatment and recognition foster a positive and collaborative learning environment, where students can learn from each other's diverse perspectives and experiences. When discussing the development of equitable program design, Jotia et al. (2023) found that prioritizing capacity building and sustainable program development can help programs ensure their participants are getting fair treatment. By prioritizing equal treatment and recognition, teacher training programs promote equity, diversity, and inclusion, which are essential values in the education field and contribute to the development of well-rounded and culturally competent future educators.

Mentor teachers serve as experienced guides and role models, providing invaluable support, guidance, and expertise to aspiring teachers. They offer real-world insights into the complexities of the classroom, sharing practical strategies, pedagogical approaches, and effective instructional techniques (Goldhaber et al., 2020a). Mentor teachers also provide constructive feedback and help student teachers reflect on their teaching practices, fostering professional growth and continuous improvement. The mentor-mentee relationship allows student teachers to observe and learn from experienced educators, gaining firsthand knowledge of best practices and classroom management skills. Mentor teachers offer a safe space for student teachers to ask questions, seek advice, and explore different teaching approaches. Additionally, Goldhaber et al. (2020a) found that their mentorship not only enhances the confidence and competence of student teachers but also facilitates the successful transition from theory to practice. The impact of mentor teachers extends beyond the teacher preparation program, as their guidance shapes the future teaching careers of aspiring educators, ultimately influencing the learning experiences and outcomes of countless students.

Implications of Findings

These findings shed light on areas of improvement that have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of teacher training programs and better prepare future teachers for the realities of the classroom.

Practical Application is Imperative

Firstly, the finding that program participants value having opportunities for practical application of knowledge highlights the importance of incorporating hands-on experiences into teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation programs would benefit from exploring the specific types of practical application that are most beneficial and effective in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Incorporating more realistic and immersive teaching experiences will better equip future teachers with the skills and confidence needed to succeed in the classroom. The fact that teachers want diverse and quality teaching sites emphasizes the need for teacher training programs to provide placements in a variety of educational settings. At the policy making level, they should work towards getting more information to understand the impact of exposure to diverse teaching environments on teacher preparation and cultural competence. By offering diverse teaching placements, programs can prepare teachers to effectively address the needs of a wide variety of students, foster inclusivity, and promote equitable education.

Communication is Key

As teacher preparation programs consider the role of clear and timely communication channels between students and program staff, program staff should focus on identifying effective communication strategies and technological tools that can facilitate efficient information sharing and support. Ensuring that students have access to accurate and up-to-date information will enhance their experience and success in the program. Furthermore, when considering the role of having reliable forms of advisement, it demonstrates the need to establish standardized and trustworthy advisement systems. The outcomes of this research reveal that more information is needed to explore the development and implementation of comprehensive advisement frameworks that provide students with consistent guidance, support, and clarity regarding program requirements, course selection, and career pathways. Higher Education institutions should also investigate strategies for promoting equal treatment and recognizing the diverse backgrounds and contributions of all students. Creating an inclusive learning environment where students

feel valued and acknowledged will create a positive learning experience and promote the development of culturally competent teachers.

Good Mentorship is Needed

Lastly, policy makers and teacher preparation programs should delve into the characteristics and strategies employed by impactful mentor teachers, as well as the processes for selecting, training, and supporting mentors. Understanding the mentorship dynamics and best practices will facilitate the development of effective mentorship programs.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for both future research and practice in teacher training programs. These findings emphasize the need to incorporate practical application, provide diverse teaching placements, establish effective communication and advisement systems, promote equal treatment and recognition, and facilitate impactful mentorship. By addressing these areas, teacher training programs can better prepare students for the complex nature of the classroom and create a supportive environment that prioritizes the growth and success of future educators.

Recommendation 1: Begin fieldwork experiences much earlier.

Early fieldwork experiences provide aspiring teachers with invaluable opportunities to observe and learn from experienced educators in real classroom settings. By immersing themselves in the teaching profession from the beginning, student teachers can develop a deeper understanding of the realities and challenges of the classroom environment (Wong et al., 2019). They can witness firsthand how theory translates into practice and gain practical skills that are essential for effective teaching. Additionally, early fieldwork experiences allow student teachers to establish meaningful relationships with mentor teachers, receive personalized guidance and feedback, and gradually assume more responsibilities as they progress through their program (Goldhaber et al., 2020b). Starting fieldwork early not only enhances the overall quality of teacher preparation but also instills a sense of professionalism and confidence in future educators, preparing them to hit the ground running when they enter the workforce.

Recommendation 2: Focus on a select group of schools to build meaningful partnerships and provide quality placement sites.

Establishing strong partnerships with a select group of schools allows teacher training programs to ensure that their student teachers have access to high-quality and diverse teaching environments (Laboskey & Richert, 2002; Österling & Christiansen, 2022). This targeted approach allows for deeper collaboration and communication between program staff and school personnel, fostering a shared understanding of program goals and objectives. Concentrating efforts on a select group of schools also enables program staff to develop long-term relationships with mentor teachers, who can provide consistent guidance, support, and mentorship to student teachers. Moreover, by working closely with a select group of schools, program staff can tailor the fieldwork experiences to align with the program's objectives, ensuring that student teachers receive the necessary support and opportunities for growth. These meaningful partnerships not only benefit student teachers but also contribute to the professional development and capacity-building of the schools involved, fostering a positive relationship between teacher training programs and the education community.

Recommendation 3: Consistently and frequently offer advisement sessions to both colleges participating in the partnership.

Regular advisement sessions serve as a crucial means of support and guidance for students in the teacher training program, ensuring that they receive the necessary information and resources to progress successfully. By offering consistent and frequent advisement sessions, colleges can address any questions, concerns, or challenges that students may face throughout their academic journey. These sessions provide opportunities for students to receive personalized guidance regarding course selection, program requirements, and career pathways (Shunner, 20223). Moreover, consistent advisement sessions promote accountability and help students stay on track with their academic goals. Additionally, regular advisement sessions foster collaboration and communication between the colleges, enabling them to align their approaches, share best practices, and ensure a cohesive and comprehensive teacher training experience for students. Ultimately, by prioritizing consistent and frequent advisement sessions, colleges can enhance student success, retention, and satisfaction.

Recommendation 4: Have advisors regularly attend professional development together at each partnering institution to advise from a common professional development background.

Consistent professional development sessions allow advisors to stay updated with the latest research, best practices, and trends in teacher education. By attending these sessions together, advisors from different partnering institutions can foster a shared understanding and knowledge base. Lynch et al. (2022) observed that this shared professional development background ensures consistency and coherence in the guidance and support provided to student teachers. It promotes a common language and approach among advisors, enabling them to effectively address the needs and concerns of student teachers across institutions. Furthermore, attending professional development together facilitates networking and collaboration among advisors, creating a supportive community of practice. In continuously enhancing their professional knowledge and skills, advisors can better serve student teachers and contribute to the overall quality and effectiveness of the teacher training program partnership.

Recommendation 5: Establish policies that will be uniformly implemented at both universities to both recognize and convey the same information.

Uniform policies ensure equity, transparency, and a cohesive experience for student teachers across institutions. When both universities adhere to the same policies, it eliminates confusion and disparities in recognizing the achievements and progress of student teachers. It also ensures that essential information, such as program requirements, course offerings, and academic standards, is consistently conveyed to student teachers, regardless of their university affiliation. Grace-Odeleye and Santiago (2019) highlighted the importance prioritizing uniform program design and incorporating appropriate planning and assessment strategies when creating program partnerships. This uniformity establishes a sense of fairness and provides a level playing field for all student teachers, regardless of the university they attend. Additionally, having standardized policies promotes collaboration and communication between the universities, enabling smoother coordination and the exchange of best practices in teacher preparation. Ultimately, establishing uniformly implemented policies benefits student teachers by ensuring a consistent and high-quality learning experience throughout their teacher preparation journey.

Recommendation 6: Recruit high-quality mentor teachers and pair them with students earlier in the program.

In recruiting high-quality mentor teachers and initiating the mentorship process early, student teachers can benefit from their extensive experience and wisdom from the outset. Matching a student teacher to a mentor teacher earlier allows for longer-term relationships to develop, fosters deeper trust, understanding, and continuity in mentorship (Goldhaber et al., 2020b). Student teachers can observe effective instructional practices, receive timely feedback, and engage in reflective discussions, which accelerates their professional growth and development. Furthermore, early exposure to high-quality mentor teachers enables students to witness the daily realities of the classroom and gradually assume scaffolded teaching responsibilities under their guidance. Brown et al. (2019) also found that pre-service teachers' ability to learn from experienced mentor teachers had a positive impact on their perceptions of preparedness and self-efficacy. This hands-on experience helps student teachers apply what they are learning from their teacher preparation programs. Overall, recruiting high-quality mentor teachers and establishing early partnerships positively impact the quality of teacher preparation and the future success of student teachers.

Limitations

This study was delimited to include only Texas teachers that were former program students enrolled in an HSI (Hispanic serving institution) in South Texas. This study was delimited to a 2+2 Teacher Preparation program and only included participants that successfully completed their 2+2 teacher preparation program. This study was limited in that the study may be difficult to generalize amongst other populations since it was conducted with participants from Texas that attended a Hispanic Serving Institution. Furthermore, there was no way to control how vague or detailed participants were in their responses to interview questions.

Conclusion

In order to design teacher preparation programs in such a way that participants are well positioned to positively affect student achievement and to facilitate growth in student learning, there is great value in understanding the experiences of teacher preparation program participants; to know and understand, and then to allow those perspectives to inform teacher preparation program improvement. It begins with understanding the perceptions and experiences of teacher candidates. These findings are significant to both future research and practice. To prepare more effective teachers, teacher preparation programs must design and deliver training that meets future teachers' needs.

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