

## **Struggles and Tribulations of Provisionally-Licensed Teachers of Business and Information Technology and Marketing Education**

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**Abstract:** *Developing a commonly accepted description of expert teacher competencies has been a debatable issue for several decades, with some educators and policy makers insisting that a teacher can only be deemed qualified if she has expertise in both the subject matter and the methods of teaching. For instance, several decades ago, Dewey (1904) posited that a teacher can only be considered duly qualified if she has both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Others, however, for instance Hess (2001), have argued that knowledge of subject matter is a sufficient descriptor of teacher expertise and that there is no need to require a teacher to have pedagogical knowledge before being certified and admitted to the profession. In the current context of a severe shortage of teachers, several school systems have found an additional justifiable reason for hiring teachers without initial teacher preparation. Many new teachers are having to enter the field through an alternative certification route through which they start work based on their content knowledge and then acquire pedagogical knowledge on the job through experience and some course work. In the literature, there is little information about the experiences of alternatively certified teachers of career and technical education (CTE). This study seeks to contribute to filling that information gap by examining the lived experiences of alternatively certified teachers of Business and Information Technology (BIT) and Marketing Education (MKTED) with a view to informing policy and practice relating to CTE teacher certification. The results of the study indicate that alternatively certified CTE teachers experience difficulties that lead to a high rate of teacher turnover, which is an issue to which policy makers need to pay very close attention, given the cost of teacher replacement.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), content knowledge, teacher turnover, teacher certification, career and technical education (CTE).*

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### **I. Introduction**

Someone has quipped that there are very few people, if any, who would volunteer to be passengers on a plane, knowing that the pilot was learning on the job how to fly the plane. This statement, said in jest, was likened to the imprudence of hiring an untrained teacher and expecting the teacher to competently facilitate children's academic growth. Making lasting impressions on children's minds and guiding them toward academic excellence is a serious proposition that requires a teacher who possesses both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, as pointed out by Dewey over a century ago (Dewey, 1904). Eight decades after Dewey's advice about the importance of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, Shulman (1987) suggested a classification of teacher knowledge that had seven types of knowledge, namely:

- Content knowledge (i.e., knowledge of subject matter)
- General pedagogical knowledge
- Curricular knowledge
- Pedagogical content knowledge
- Knowledge of learners and their characteristics
- Knowledge of educational contexts
- Knowledge of educational ends

Of the seven categories of teacher knowledge described by Shulman (1987), Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) is perhaps the most critical in teacher education programs. As Shulman says, PCK marks the difference between a subject specialist (e.g., marketing education major) and a teacher of that subject. In designing a teacher licensure path through a preservice teacher preparation program, teacher educators therefore put due emphasis on PCK. For this reason, Magnusson, Krajcik and Borko (1999) proposed teacher education

programs that combined subject content and pedagogy as a way of developing student teachers' topic-specific strategies and deepening PCK in general.

However, not everyone agrees that a teacher needs both categories of knowledge. For some people, a teacher only needs to have content knowledge, that is, knowledge of the subject matter. Some, like Hess (2001) view the traditional teacher certification (TC) practice as an unnecessary wall that needs to be brought down because it inhibits entry of the much-needed talent into teaching. According to Hess, the argument for preservice teacher license is flawed because if it were applied to university professors, many talented poets, journalists, artists, and writers would not be employed by universities.

The call to dismantle the so-called barriers created by the practice of preservice licensure requirements appears attractive when viewed against the ever-rising demand for teachers. The subject of teacher shortage has attracted much discussion over the years (Constantine, Player, Silva, Hallgren, Grider, & Deke, 2009; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019). Recently, Gibson (2021) reported that

Public schools have for years contended with a shortage of educators. But the pandemic has made the problem more acute, as the stress of teaching during the coronavirus has spurred many in the profession to resign or retire. Indeed, Americans have been quitting jobs in record numbers and educators are no exception — 30,000 public school teachers gave notice in September alone, according to the Labor Department.

The perennial acute shortage of teachers is a significant factor in the hiring of AC teachers. Colleges' teacher preparation programs are not supplying school systems with enough teachers to meet the demand (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). This, together with other factors that support the hiring of AC teachers, including the arguments made by Hess (2001) among others, has contributed to the existence of AC teachers in schools despite the wealth of information about the advantages of having TC teachers. That information, however, has not sufficiently included the voices of the AC teachers.

Alternatively licensed teachers work on completing a list of coursework for full certification while actually teaching. They do not student teach like traditionally prepared teachers and begin teaching with very little, if any, preparation in core teaching and program management standards. Examples of these standards include, but are not limited to, behavior management, curriculum planning, integrating student organizations, methods in teaching, program management, and utilizing work-based learning (Manley & Zinser, 2012). These core-teaching and program management standards are essential for teachers when stepping into a classroom. Without them, they are doomed to fail (Bottoms, Egelson, Sass, & Uhn, 2013). Hammond and Carver-Thomas (2017) found provisionally licensed teachers only last a few years and then quit because they do not have proper preparation and support.

Against this background, based on Shumate (2021), this paper discusses the question: 'What characterizes the third year of teaching for a provisionally licensed Business and Information Technology (BIT) and Marketing Education (MKED) teachers?' The question about experiences of alternatively certified teachers in their third year of teaching is important because of the high rate of teacher turnover among beginner teachers. Studies have established that the rate of turnover among AC teachers tends to be higher than among their colleagues who are traditionally certified (see for instance, Redding & Smith, 2016). Listening to the voices of AC teachers is prudent because their lived experiences would shed some light on factors contributing to AC teacher turnover as well as the possible relationship between alternative teacher certification and students' performance. The cost of losing and replacing teachers is high (Benner, 2000; Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020), and so is the cost of poor student achievement that could be associated with inadequate teacher preparation.

## **II. Study Questions**

The main question of this study was: 'What characterizes the first three years of teaching for a provisionally licensed BIT and MKED teachers?' For purposes of this study report, the sub-questions flowing from the main study question are as follows:

- a) What support mechanisms are available to enhance the competence levels of provisionally licensed BIT and MKED teachers?
- b) What challenges do the provisionally licensed BIT and MKED teachers face?

## **III. Methodology**

### *Study Design*

This study was based on a qualitative research design because the qualitative approach is best suited for an inquiry in which participants express themselves, explaining their lived experiences in a real-world environment (Patton, 2015). The design consisted of two stages, namely:

- a) A pre-interview survey to elicit participants' demographical data, teaching experiences, and level of understanding of CTE teacher competencies.
- b) An in-depth interview to collect data about their experiences regarding CTE core competencies.

#### *Study Population*

- a) Geographical spread: Three regions in the state of Virginia.
- b) Licensure: Participants were provisionally licensed.
- c) Program areas: The study focused on teachers of Business and Information Technology, and teachers of Marketing Education.

#### *Study Setting and Data Collection*

Data were collected in environments convenient and comfortable to participants. There was minimum manipulation of the study settings.

#### *Instrumentation*

In addition to the survey, interviews were used to collect data. The same set of interview questions was used for each participant to ensure reliability and to avoid bias. The clarity of the survey and interview questions was determined through a pilot test.

#### *Data Analysis*

Codes, categories, and themes were identified through a rigorous data analysis method. A better understanding of the participants' perspectives was gained through analysis of data collected from surveys and interviews. As Patton (1987, 109) has observed, "the purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter the other person's perspective" (Patton, 1987, p. 109). Analysis of the data helped to understand participants' competency levels gained in their first year and third year of teaching.

## **IV. Findings**

#### *Struggles of alternatively certified teachers*

Below are the highlights of the negative experiences of alternatively certified teachers that participated in the study.

1. Struggling with lack of Support System
  - i. Absence of administrative observation, support, and guidance
  - ii. Absence of mentoring
  - iii. Mentor not a good fit
  - iv. Mentor has a different endorsement area
  - v. No support for teaching students with special needs
  - vi. Difficult to find teachers who are willing to collaborate

One participant summed up this experience this way: *"One day I was over in the office, and I needed to talk to someone. The person I needed to talk to could not talk to me. They had not responded to my email, and they were supposed to call me and never did. I literally walked out of the office and walked back to my room crying because I was so fed up with everything."* (Serena)

2. Struggle to Implement Essential Teaching Competencies
  - a. Struggle to find curriculum materials
  - b. Struggle to develop overall curriculum plan
  - c. Struggle to develop detailed and comprehensive lesson plans
  - d. Spend excessive amounts of time developing curriculum
  - e. Struggle to connect with students
  - f. Struggle to engage students in lessons
  - g. Struggle to help students with special needs
  - h. Struggle to use cooperative method of instruction
  - i. Struggle with classroom behavior management strategy
  - j. Struggle with integrating FBLA/DECA into curriculum

Looking back at his experience concerning classroom behavior management competencies, a participant said: *"A lot of teachers at first do not know how to pick their battles. If they had a guideline how to pick them it would be easier. It wastes more time and energy. I think that is why a lot of teachers burn out. We cannot keep teachers right now because of the classroom management piece. That is the hardest thing for new teachers."* (Joe).

3. Struggle to Implement Essential Program Management Competencies

- a. Not aware of requirement to recruit students
- b. Mission of program not known
- c. Do not know how to serve as the FBLA/DECA advisor
- d. Do not know how to establish and utilize advisory committee
- e. Not aware of how to develop and implement community-based program
- f. Do not know how to manage the cooperative method of instruction

Reflecting on the challenges of the role of a CTE student organization advisor for an AC teacher, a participant said: *“The first year was challenging because I was learning it all as we went along.”* (Wendy)

#### 4. Taking Coursework While Teaching Does Not Work

- a. Not aware of the requirement to take courses during the first three years
- b. Little assistance in knowing what to take and locating where to find them
- c. Too much stress to take courses while teaching
- d. Need coursework and training before starting to teach
- e. Little knowledge of non-credit professional development opportunities

In commenting on the challenges of taking coursework, a participant said: *“It was tough. When I knew I had to take those five classes I did not know if the classes would help me. First going into it without any classroom management strategies or ideas was tough. Part of me wishes I could have a little bit more on that. However, having been in the classroom and then taking a class I was like ok now I understand. I liked that a lot. That first year was tough because I knew nothing. The class meant more because I had that first year without anything.”* (Connie)

#### *Potential Support*

Participants reported that by their third-year teaching, they felt some little improvement in their teacher competencies. The study identified the following types of support: a) Mentoring Support; b) Peer Support; and c) Administrative Support.

Participants appreciated whatever support they received because it had an impact on their competencies. They wished therefore they had had more consistent and effective support because it would have made a significant difference. For instance, Serena said, *“I needed someone who understood my world for like five minutes and I did not have that. I was stressed and it was not a good moment. I am rather lucky in that the guy I replaced who had taught my program for years became an assistant principal (in a different school). Granted he kind of left everything out of date and I had to fix all of that. I have at least a little bit of relationship with him.”*

## V. Discussion

The findings of the study vindicate Dewey (1904) and, a century later, Shulman (1987) who stated that a teacher requires both content knowledge and knowledge of how to teach. The assumption that knowledge of subject matter alone is sufficient for one to be a successful teacher is not borne out by the findings of this study, going by the list of maledictions and tribulations of teachers who went through the alternative certification route. It is a wonder that participants of the study lasted that long in teaching despite the difficulties that they faced in their three years of teaching. Probably, they were able to stay on because of the little support that they received. The lamentations of the alternatively certified teachers that participated in this study partially explain the high rate of teacher turnover among alternatively certified teachers and the possible relationship between students' academic growth and alternative teacher certification.

It is imprudent to ignore the voices of the teachers that were interviewed in this study because, as stated earlier, the cost of teacher turnover is high (Benner, 2000; Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020), and the cost of poor academic growth among students is immeasurable.

## VI. Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for the attention of a) practitioners and policy makers; and b) future research.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

- a) Before alternatively certified teachers start teaching, they should go through an induction program covering the core competencies that include instructional planning, execution, and evaluation; student behavior management; work-based learning; establishment of industry panels; managing student organizations; managing school-community relations; and program management.

- b) School administrations should strengthen mentoring systems by training mentors; developing, executing, and evaluating mentoring programs; and creating manuals that guide new teachers navigating professional development requirements and resources.

#### **Recommendations for further research**

- a) Investigate alternatively certified teachers' reasons for leaving or staying.
- b) Replicate the study in regions and disciplines not covered in this study

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