

Online Teacher Education— What Are The Results

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Louisiana public school administrator perceptions of online teacher education. Of primary concern were superintendent and principal perceptions of online teacher education as it exists today. Data for the study were collected through the use of a survey questionnaire. The survey consisted of nine items where participants were asked to respond to a Likert scale format and one open-ended question in which respondents were asked to provide comments or suggestions regarding online teacher education. The researcher used regular and electronic mail to survey all of the sixty-nine superintendents of public school districts of Louisiana. Electronic mail was used to survey a randomly chosen sample of one-hundred-fifty public school principals of Louisiana. Forty-eight superintendents responded to the survey which represented a response rate of sixty-nine percent. Eighty-eight principals responded to the survey which represented a response rate of fifty-eight percent. Based on the limitations of the study the following conclusions were made: 1) Administrator perceptions of online teacher education appear to be much more negative than positive; 2) Administrator perceptions of online teacher education are negative in terms of teacher preparation for the areas of classroom management, student diversity and special needs, the social aspects of teaching, and teacher methodology/pedagogy; 3) Administrator perceptions of online teacher education appear to be positive in terms of preparing teachers for the theories of teaching and learning; 4) A large majority of administrators have moderate to strong reservations in hiring teachers that have been primarily trained online. Louisiana public school administrators appear to be open-minded to this new methodology but appear to be unconvinced that it will prepare teachers for the challenges that teachers now face. Results agree with earlier results in another region of the country.

Keywords: online teacher education, teacher education, methods of teacher preparation

INTRODUCTION

The use of the computer and the television to educate has been around for quite a few years. Recent trends in teacher education has seen the gradual evolvement of the computer and the communication technology to further enhance and grow the use of online teacher education in teacher preparation and education. The past ten years has witnessed online teacher education in some form at almost every college or university offering teacher preparation. Eastman and Swift (2001) noted that many colleges and universities were trying diligently to develop and maintain online teacher preparation programs at both the traditional undergraduate route and the non-traditional alternative route. Some of this push to develop online constituencies of students was noted as being somewhat motivated by economics. Universities have recently attempted to gain more and more students without having to use classrooms and other capital resources. Santilli and Beck (2005) stated that more and more universities were expanding online courses at a tremendously rapid rate. It is also interesting to note that this rapid growth in online teacher education has not been paralleled by a growth in empirical studies to determine the merit and quality of the online teacher education coursework and programs. The consumers of these programs are eventually the public schools in which the future teachers will be employed within. There has been little if any research within the public schools to determine if these online teacher education programs are proving to be as worthy as the traditional face to face instruction that teachers traditionally received. Huss (2007) noted that empirical research to determine the quality and credibility of online teacher education basically did not exist. It

would seem that this rapid growth of this new methodology would stir the researchers at many universities. Apparently those in teacher education have ignored this aspect and continue to accept the new methodology without empirical facts. Huss (2007) did state that there was some curiosity within the research community for the new methodology and new phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical research examining and analyzing the quality of online teacher education appears to barely exist or not exist at all. Colleges and universities appear to have fully accepted these online courses and programs with little or no scholarly inquiry to determine the quality of the courses and programs. Huss(2007) noted that within the school arena of PreK-12 there was no research base established concerning online teacher education. Huss also explained that most of the studies regarding online teacher education tended to focus on whether or not the faculty using it were comfortable and accepting of the new methodology. There appeared to be no research regarding the quality of the new methodology on producing quality teachers that in turn can produce high levels of academic achievement within the public schools of our country.

The majority of the research has been related to online instruction but not necessarily or specifically online teacher education. Gallagher and Poroy(2005) conducted a national study regarding perceptions of potential higher education students to online instruction. The researchers analyzed over five- hundred responses. Results were that only three percent of the respondents thought that online instruction was superior to face to face instruction, whereas twenty- nine percent thought that online instruction was inferior. It is also interesting to note that nearly forty percent of the respondents felt that they could not decide which method was superior or inferior.

Related research conducted by Gayton (2009) concluded that higher education administrators such as deans and academic vice presidents looked favorably upon online instruction. These administrators at universities and colleges placed a very high value on distance education by any means. Online instruction was perceived by deans and vice presidents as being both necessary and essential to the university and its course and program offerings. These same administrators by an extremely large majority appeared to heavily favor and prefer the face to face instruction over online instruction and the online environment. Both the deans and the vice presidents unanimously perceived that the quality of online courses was not on the same level with the traditional face to face instruction. It is important to note once again that this study was at the higher educational realm in general and did not specifically pertain to online teacher education and its benefits or drawbacks at the public school level in terms of teacher performance and academic achievement of public school students.

Perhaps the only empirical study done specifically to ascertain the differences between online teacher education and traditional face to face instruction was done by Huss (2007). Huss surveyed middle school principals within three states in order to determine their attitudes towards online teacher preparation. It was noted by the researcher that attitudes of principals should be regarded highly by those at all levels since they are the instructional leaders of the schools and since they are the primary agents in the hiring of teachers within the school districts. The research done by Huss concluded that online teacher education was not perceived as positive by a large majority of the principals of the three states. Witness to this are several questions within the survey and how these questions were answered by the principals. One-hundred percent of the principals had concerns when a teacher applicant had earned his/her degree totally online or mostly online. Ninety-five percent of the middle school principals felt that an online degree did not carry as much credibility as a traditional degree. Ninety-nine percent of the principals preferred to hire a traditional candidate rather than an online candidate if all other things were equal such as transcripts and interview performance. Many of the principals in the survey done by Huss commented that the online teacher education courses and programs would not fully prepare future teachers in the areas involving the social aspects of teaching such as face to face interaction and the networking with human beings in a real situation of face to face. Several of the principals in the study pointed out that teachers need to be people persons and that the online instruction was just not sufficient to produce this important need and disposition. Many principals mentioned that teaching was a hands-on job and was unlike sitting at a computer in one's comfort zone of one's home. Several principals had little confidence in the academic security of the online courses. Perhaps one principal summed up his beliefs in quite an effective manner when he/she compared learning to teach online with learning to be a public

speaker online. Results of the study of online teacher education done by Huss (2007) were quite negative in several key areas. Principals by a large majority were unconvinced that online teacher preparation prepares future teachers for the challenges they will face in the real world classrooms of today and tomorrow.

Since both university administrators and public school administrators appear to perceive that face to face instruction is superior to online instruction it is puzzling and curious to realize what has taken place. The universities have simply expanded the online instruction mode despite strong perceptions that online instruction is inferior to the traditional face to face instruction. It appears that economics has influenced administrator decisions to expand the online modes of instruction. This rapid growth in online teacher education does not bode well for the future teacher candidates. A review of the research reveals that administrators especially principals do not respect online teacher education and the preparation that it gives to the future candidates. The glaring problem for the teacher candidates is that principals simply have negative perceptions regarding online teacher education. Thus the online trained teacher will be at a disadvantage in the job market. It must be pointed out however that the research on this topic is only in an infancy stage at best. More research definitely needs to be done to ascertain both the perceptions of school administrators regarding online teacher education and possibly to determine if teachers trained online have quality performance and durability within the field. We must definitely not disregard the perceptions of the principals since most principals have a very good idea of what teachers need to know and do within the real world of the public school setting. It is imperative that this topic be fully researched and analyzed in a more holistic manner. Our teachers and definitely our young students deserve the best instruction that we can offer. It is very puzzling to notice that a new method has been fully adopted in such a sensitive and important area without the benefits of empiricism and intellectual discussion. Perhaps online teacher training is the future of teacher preparation and will improve teacher performance and student achievement. No other field would adopt such a stance however until there is empirical proof. The medical, agricultural, and engineering fields would not adopt new drugs, processes or methods until it was empirically proven that the new drugs , processes and methods were superior to dated ones. The field of teacher education should be held to the same standards. Our students and youth deserve the very best teachers who are trained with the best methods that are proven empirically.

METHODS

Selection of A Population

This research project involved superintendents and principals within the state of Louisiana. All of the sixty-nine superintendents of the public school districts of the state were surveyed by regular mail. The Louisiana Department of Education website was used to identify and locate the superintendents. Superintendents were also contacted via electronic mail in an attempt to encourage them to complete the survey and return it in a timely manner. Forty-eight of the superintendents returned the survey which represented a response rate of sixty-nine percent. The researcher randomly selected one-hundred-fifty public school principals from a master list of one-thousand-four-hundred- nine principals within state of Louisiana. The Louisiana Department of Education website was used to identify and locate the principals. Random selection was utilized by means of a computer generated random table of numbers to select the one-hundred-fifty principals. Eighty-eight of the principals responded to the survey that was sent by electronic mail. The eighty-eight responses of the principals represented a response rate of fifty-eight percent.

The Data- Gathering Instrument

The researcher developed a survey questionnaire that attempted to determine administrator perceptions of online teacher education. Validation of the instrument involved three phases. Twenty university catalogues were used to determine course offerings that were common to all degree programs within Curriculum and Instruction and/or Teacher Education programs. It was determined that the areas of teacher methodology/pedagogy, diversity and special needs, learning theories/principles, and classroom behavior management were the most common course themes within all of the university catalogues. Two university professors having experience with online teacher instruction and one former public school administrator served as a panel that were consulted regarding the questions that were placed on the survey. The professors and the administrator agreed upon specific questions that were based

from the common areas of most teacher education programs. The panel did point out that the survey should define online teacher education so that respondents could adequately identify the construct and thus give accurate responses to the questions. The third phase involved consulting with two university English professors so that the wording of the questions was correct and unbiased. Only slight changes were made. Reliability of the instrument was measured by the test-retest method. Nine recently retired principals and two professors of educational administration were surveyed twice within a two week lapse between the first and second administration. Pearson correlation coefficient was used on the two sets of data. The results of the statistical procedure revealed a statistic of .94 in temporal stability. Internal consistency of the instrument was not an issue since the questions had been derived from common courses within degree plans of twenty universities. The survey had nine questions that asked the respondents to respond to a Likert scale format and one question that asked respondents to make open-ended suggestions or comments regarding online teacher education.

RESULTS

The major purpose of this study was to determine administrator perceptions of online teacher education. Nine Likert scale questions and one open-ended question were asked within a survey questionnaire in an attempt to determine perceptions of online teacher education. Forty eight of the sixty-nine superintendents responded to the survey which represented a sixty-nine percent response rate. Eighty-eight of the one-hundred-fifty principals responded to the survey which represented a response rate of fifty eight percent. The overall combined response rate for the two groups of administrators was sixty-two percent. This statistic was derived by simply combining the response rate for both groups.

The first question of the survey was stated: What is your opinion of online teacher education/preparation. Forty-nine percent of the superintendents and sixty percent of the principals responded by answering highly desirable or desirable to this question. Fifty one percent of the superintendents and forty percent of the principals responded by answering strongly unacceptable or unacceptable to this question. Overall the results of this question were slightly positive.

The second question of the survey was stated: What is your opinion of online teacher education in terms of preparing future teachers in classroom management? Sixty-nine percent of the superintendents and sixty -five percent of the principals responded by answering strongly unacceptable or unacceptable to this question. Thirty-one percent of the superintendents and thirty-five percent of the principals answered highly desirable or desirable to this question. Overall the results of this question were very negative.

The third question of the survey was stated: What is your opinion of online teacher education in terms of preparing future teachers in methodology/pedagogy of teaching? Thirty-six percent of superintendents and fifty-five percent of principals responded by answering highly desirable or desirable to this question. Sixty four percent of superintendents and forty-five percent of principals responded by answering strongly unacceptable or unacceptable to this question. Overall the results of this question were slightly negative.

The fourth question of the survey was stated: What is your opinion of online teacher education in terms of preparing future teachers for student diversity and special needs? Sixty-two percent of the superintendents and fifty-four percent of the principals responded by answering strongly unacceptable or unacceptable to this question. Thirty eight percent of superintendents and forty-six percent of principals responded by answering highly desirable or desirable to this question. Overall the results of this question were moderately negative.

The fifth question of the survey was stated: What is your opinion of online teacher education in terms of preparing future teachers in learning theories and principles? Fifty-five percent of superintendents and eighty-four percent of principals responded by answering highly desirable or desirable to this question. Forty five percent of superintendents and sixteen percent of principals responded by answering strongly unacceptable or unacceptable to this question. Overall the results of this question were strongly positive.

The sixth question of the survey was stated: What is your opinion of online teacher education in terms of preparing future teachers for the social aspects of teaching? Sixty-seven percent of the superintendents and sixty-four percent of the principals responded by answering strongly unacceptable or unacceptable to this question. Thirty-three percent of the superintendents and thirty six percent of the principals responded by answering highly desirable or desirable to this question. Overall the results of this question are strongly negative.

The seventh question of the survey was stated: Would you have any reservations in hiring future teachers within your district/school that have been trained primarily using online teacher education? Eighty-seven percent of superintendents and eighty-nine percent of principals responded by answering moderate to strong reservations in hiring online trained teachers. Thirteen percent of superintendents and eleven percent of principals responded by answering little to no reservations in hiring online trained teachers. Overall the results of this question were extremely negative.

The eighth question of the survey was stated: What is your perception of the academic security and academic integrity of online teacher education courses currently offered? Eighteen percent of the superintendents and nineteen percent of the principals responded by answering high levels were present. Fifty-three percent of superintendents and sixty percent of principals responded by answering slight to moderate levels were present. Twenty-nine percent of superintendents and twenty-one percent of principals responded by answering that little levels of security were present. Overall the results of this question were slightly positive.

The ninth question of the survey was stated: What is your present level of knowledge concerning the use of online teacher education? Ninety six percent of superintendents and eighty seven percent of principals responded by answering high to moderate knowledge. Four percent of superintendents and thirteen percent of principals responded by answering little level of knowledge present. Overall the results of this question were strongly positive.

The final part of the survey asked the administrators for any suggestions or comments regarding the use of online teacher education. A large majority of the comments or suggestions were negative regarding online teacher education. Below are some of the actual comments and suggestions made by principals and superintendents.

Comments/Suggestions

- How will you learn to teach by sitting at a PC. We need teachers who can manage and motivate in a real classroom.
- Text in technology or text in a book are both the same. Neither gives real life experiences.
- Teaching is a human services profession and requires a great deal of human interaction. Online is convenient but teaching in our time is not convenient it is working with humans.
- While a limited online component may be acceptable the majority of teacher prep should be in face to face collaborative environments.
- These teachers and future administrators that are getting online training or not getting anywhere near the preparation that we did by collaborating with the professor and our peers in the classroom. They will not be prepared for the students and parents of today and tomorrow. Sitting at the computer just does not prepare anyone for the demands of teaching and leading people.
- Teaching requires hands on engagement and involvement.
- The theories of teaching can be learned online but the social aspects can never be .It is not equal a good classroom teacher or experience. I would not hire someone online if I had another choice. These people will be two steps behind everyone else and I do not have time to train them while they are on the job. They need to be ready on Day one and not on Day one-hundred- one.
- Nothing can replace the discussion and collaboration of a good classroom experience. While online may be fine for some courses I hope I never have to hire someone trained primarily online. There needs to be more observation of good teachers and more student teaching.
- You cannot expect a teacher to be competent if they did not interact in a class with students.
- Field experiences are vital to teacher training.
- How will one learn to interact with students by staying home on the computer.

- I just do not see online training being a substitute for face to face teaching.
- Nothing beats practical experience. We learn by doing.
- Teachers need face to face interaction combined with online.
- Face to face time must be done for future teachers for special areas like SPED and classroom management.
- Mix online learning with plenty of field experiences and student teaching.
- You cannot find any substitute for practical experience and teaching. You learn by teaching. Fine for theory but will not produce outstanding teachers.
- Teacher candidates need mentors who support them as they teach and interact with students. Collaboration is the key. Online should be kept to a minimum.
- Online teacher prep would be good for teachers to view excellent teachers conducting lessons.
- Perhaps combining online courses with some campus courses and field experiences would be suitable.
- There needs to be a balance between online courses and campus courses. Many of us leaned by modeling a good teacher or a good college instructor. Not all were good. Some were. There needs to be interaction between teachers in training and students before the first day of school.
- I have a hard time accepting that a teacher will be able motivate manage and deal with all of our students yet could not find the initiative to attend class at campus nearby. This job requires energy that requires a person to be able to manage others.

**Administrator Perception Of Online Teacher Education
(Numbers expressed in percentage)**

	Desirable		Unacceptable	
	Superintendents	Principals	Superintendents	Principals
Classroom management preparation	31	35	69	65
Methodology preparation	36	55	64	45
Student diversity/ Special needs preparation	38	46	62	54
Learning theories, principles preparation	55	84	45	16
Social aspects of teaching preparation	33	36	67	64

	Little- No Reservations		Moderate- Strong Reservation	
	Superintendents	Principals	Superintendents	Principals
Reservations to hire online prepared teachers	13	11	87	89

	Little Security		Moderate Security		High Security	
	Super-intendents	Principals	Super-intendents	Principals	Super-intendents	Principals
Academic security/integral perception	28	21	53	60	18	19

	Low Level		High Moderate Level	
	Superintendents	Principals	Superintendents	Principals
Administrates knowledge of online teacher preparation	4	13	96	87

CONCLUSIONS

The information gathered from this study does not shed a positive light regarding online teacher education as perceived by public school administrators. It is rather apparent that principals and superintendents do not have confidence that teachers primarily trained online will be able to meet the challenges of teaching in today's classrooms. Online trained teachers will be at a definite disadvantage in the market since the people doing the hiring have little confidence in the training that was received. If principals and superintendents are correct in their perceptions of the quality of online teacher training then there exists perhaps an even greater disadvantage for the

teacher trained online. A large majority of administrators perceive that online teacher training does not prepare teachers for the critical areas of classroom management, social aspects of teaching, special needs and diversity and teacher methodology. Indeed if the administrator perceptions are correct then many of the teachers trained online will simply not be capable of doing an adequate job performance much less being very successful in the area of classroom performance. The students of today and the classrooms of today demand a very high level of people skills and collaborative human interaction from the teachers. Administrators simply do not believe that online teacher education will prepare teachers for these complex human interaction demands. It must be noted that principals and superintendents were once teachers and that both groups have adequate knowledge of what is needed to be successful in the classrooms of today. It is important that the beliefs and perceptions of our most qualified and experienced educators should not be discounted.

The lack of confidence of online teacher education should be addressed and discussed by university administrators. It is imperative that the quality of the product being produced is not only perceived as high quality but is also possessing high quality. Online teacher education lacks both of these characteristics at this time as revealed by this study. University administrators should always attempt to guarantee the quality of its graduates and of course the perceptions of the quality of its graduates. It appears that this study reveals that teachers trained online do not have the skills necessary to succeed. If teachers do not succeed in our public schools then this will adversely affect our student quality and enrollment at our colleges and universities. It is imperative that university administrators consider not only the short term economic benefits of online courses but also the long term economic drawbacks of not adequately training our teachers which results in low achievement of our youth resulting in lower student enrollments in higher education. The unintended consequences of any action must be considered. Empiricism and an honest intellectual discussion should take place before we change our methods. No other field would change its methods without strong research results pointing to the positive benefits of the change. The field of education deserves the same.

It is recommended that further research be conducted within the schools to ascertain the job performance of online trained teachers versus traditional face to face trained teachers. It is also recommended that more principals in different states and regions be surveyed regarding this important topic. Another interesting and valuable potential research topic would be to ascertain the durability of online trained teachers as compared to traditionally trained teachers. It is rather apparent that principals and superintendents definitely aspire to have great teachers within the classrooms, however at this time both groups do not have the confidence to hire those teachers trained primarily online.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dr. Faulk began his career as a teacher in the public schools of Louisiana in 1982. His experience includes seventeen years at the public school level and eleven years at the university level. He presently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses within the College of Education at McNeese State University. Dr. Faulk earned his Doctorate of Education degree at Texas A&M University at College Station in 1993. Dr. Faulk enjoys teaching Educational Research, Educational Measurements, Classroom Management and Methods of Teaching Secondary Education.

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NOTES