

THE INTENTIONS OF FLORIDA EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRADUATE STUDENTS TO PURSUE ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS*

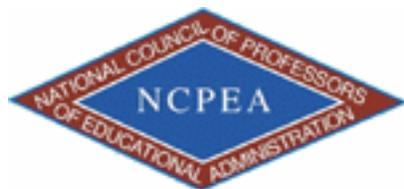
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Abstract

This article reports findings from a study that examined Florida universities' masters-level educational leadership students' intentions to pursue assistant principal positions in relation to demographic and self-assessed leadership characteristics. The study examined the influences that self-assessed leadership behavior, gender, number of credits completed, age, and teaching experience had on respondent intentions as measured by the Leadership Practice Inventory and the Demographics and Intentions Questionnaire. Results found a majority of respondents 83% intend to seek an assistant principal position upon program completion. The study's results also found the majority of graduate students in Florida Educational Leadership programs are female, 64% rated salary had an influence on their decision to go into administration, 14% claimed they do not know when or if they would ever seek an assistant principal position. Results regarding students' intentions to apply for administrative positions can be used to inform state licensure systems, school district leadership academy professional development, and university educational leadership department selection, recruitment, and retention efforts.

1 NCPEA Publications



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2 Sumario en español

Este artículo informa conclusiones de un estudio que revisó maestros-plano educativo liderazgo los estudiantes de universidades de Florida intenciones para seguir posiciones de subdirector en relación con características demográficas y auto valoradas de liderazgo. El estudio revisó las influencias que conducta auto valorada de liderazgo, el género, el número de créditos completados, la edad, y experiencia docente tuvieron en intenciones de demandado como medido por el Inventario de la Práctica de Liderazgo y las características demográficas y por Cuestionario de Intenciones. Los resultados encontraron una mayoría de demandados 83% piensa buscar una posición de subdirector sobre la terminación de programa. Los resultados del estudio también encontraron la mayoría de estudiantes de posgrado en Florida programas que Educativos de Liderazgo son femeninos, 64% de salario valorado tuvo una influencia en su decisión de entrar la administración, 14% reclamó que ellos no saben cuando ni si ellos jamás buscarían una posición de subdirector. Los resultados con respecto a las intenciones de estudiantes para solicitar posiciones administrativas pueden ser utilizadas para informar sistemas de licensure de estado, academia de liderazgo de distrito de escuela el desarrollo profesional, y la universidad selección educativa de departamento de liderazgo, la contratación, y los esfuerzos de retención.

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3 Introduction

Despite increasingly flexible processes for obtaining administrative certification, including the revision of long-standing state Departments' of Education policies and statutes, many argue a shortage of willing and qualified administrators remains in multiple states, including Florida (Archer, 2002; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Murphy, 2006a; Smith, 2008). This issue remains despite the fact that the number of approved educational leadership programs and pools of administratively certified candidates has increased (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007). In many states, only slightly more than half of those who graduate from administrator preparation programs ever end up in an administrative position (Black, Bathon, & Poindexter, 2007; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007). School districts are not lacking certified individuals willing to assume school-level administrative positions, but rather experience shortages of *willing and qualified* administrator candidates. Shortages are predominantly acute with specific administrative positions in rural or challenging urban communities (Forsyth & Smith, 2002; Herrington & Wills, 2005; Pounder, Crow, & Shepherd, 2003).

To more fully explore the dynamics of why a *willing and qualified* administrator shortage may be occurring, it is important to consider the intentions of educational leadership graduate students (Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Chung, & Ross, 2003). In addition to those who already possess a masters' degree and seek certification only, the educational leadership program of study is a precursor to seeking administrative certification and entering into administrative applicant pools. This article reports finding from a study which examined reasons why Florida educators pursuing graduate degrees in educational leadership administration intend, or do not intend, to pursue an assistant principal position. Florida statutes at the time of the study

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required two levels of certification for educational leadership. Level One is granted when a person completes required coursework and passes the Florida Educational Leadership Exam (FELE). This level allows for persons to apply to the applicant pool for administrative positions in local school districts and state department positions requiring leadership certification (Rule 6A-4.0082, F.A.C.). Level Two certification is designated as School Principal which requires documentation of successful performance in a leadership position by a comprehensive performance appraisal system approved by the district school board and the Department (Rule 6A-4.0083, F.A.C.). The majority of Florida school districts require experience as an assistant principal before a person may apply for a principal position. The assistant principalship is the first logical step in the progression of most Florida school administrative careers.

This study analyzed characteristics of graduate students in Florida that might be associated with level of intention to seek an assistant principal position upon program completion. Additionally, this study compared the strength of the association among factors of self-assessed leadership behavior, gender, age, number of credits completed and all of these factors together with regard to participants' intentions to seek an administrative position upon graduation.

4 Review of the Literature

The U.S. Department of Labor and Statistics predicted a 23.6% increase in the need for elementary and secondary administrators by the year 2012 (Hecker, 2004). However, other research on supply and demand found "little evidence of a nationwide crisis in the market for certified school administrators" (RAND, 2003, p. 1). One explanation for these seemingly conflicting stances lies in a further explanation of the issues. There is a distinction between *certified* administrator shortages and shortages of *willing and qualified* administrator candidates.

Many candidates who receive initial educational leadership certification are not ready for the complexities of the position of assistant principal and therefore do not apply or are not willing to take the jobs that are offered. There is a need to shed light on the gap between those who intend only to be certified and those who intend to be certified and aspire to become assistant principals.

Over the last decade, researchers have warned of significant shortages of individuals certified and willing to take on administrative positions (Boehlert & O'Connell, 1999; Hammond, Muffs, & Sciascia, 2005; Pounder & Crow, 2005). In 1999, Boehlert and O'Connell warned that the number of educational administration jobs was increasing at higher rates than in the past. Hammond, Muffs, and Sciascia (2001) claimed a nationwide shortage of school principals. Pounder and Crow (2005) called the impeding shortage of qualified administrators alarming. Roza, Celio, Harvey, and Wishon (2003) acknowledged that school districts were aware of not only shortages in the number of administrative applicants, but they were keenly aware of shortages of the quality of their labor pools and anticipated increases in principal openings mainly due to age and retirement turnovers. School districts realized it would be more difficult to find certified quality candidates as time passed. Likewise, Gewertz (2000) denoted a looming job-vacancy problem due in part to a large number of administrators approaching retirement and a reluctance of younger educators to enter administration because of pressure to produce higher student academic achievement. In addition, low pay and lack of respect, coupled with increasing responsibilities, as well as the difficult financial and political challenges of running a school all create a lack of willing and qualified applicants.

Boehlert and O'Connell (1999) and Tallerico and Tingley (2001) contended that misleading district-reported data and reports of under-representation of women and minorities were of concern since schools are becoming more diverse. This research might offer a partial explanation for the seemingly contradictory perceptions in that there may not be an overall shortage, but only a shortage within the areas of geography, gender and race. While reasons for shortages abounded, others still debated whether shortages were systemic. Flessa and Grubb (2006) argued that many districts continued to face principal shortages and reported that Florida's school districts, in particular, were faced with dramatic teacher and administrator shortages. Nevertheless, they, along with others, suggested that looming vacancies were only for certain types of schools in certain locations and particular jobs (Fenwick & Pierce, 2001; Flessa & Grubb, 2006). Shortages of administrators largely exist for specific administrative positions in rural or challenging urban communities

(Forsyth & Smith, 2002). Many districts do not face district-wide shortages of quality certified administrator candidates, but rather the shortages pertain to their high-needs schools. High-needs districts are often identified as areas of low socio-economic status, or those containing several inner city schools. Areas of highest need would most benefit from competent and enthusiastic leadership and administration. The primary issue is not the quantity of administratively certified candidates, but the quality of applicants and the willingness of applicants to take jobs that many now view as less than desirable (Herrington & Wills, 2005; Pounder, Crow, & Shepherd, 2003; RAND, 2003).

Much of the literature written during the last decade is dominated by perceived shortages of certified, qualified, and willing administrators. However, there are a growing number of studies claiming there is not a shortage of principals but rather an inequitable distribution of applicants, as well as superintendents are not finding the type of principals they want (e-Lead, n.d.; Roza, 2003). Roza (2003), in an analysis of 83 school districts across the nation, found that the average district receives 17 applicants for each principal position, a modest decline of perhaps two applicants per position over seven years.

5 Theoretical Framework

The job choice theory is essentially the examination of why individuals select one job over another. It is based upon the presumption that jobs are selected based on objective factors, such as financial incentives (Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Selection based on objective factors is considered rational, "Rational choice is a general theory of human behavior that views all humans as complex, fallible learners who seek to do as well as they can given the constraints that they face and who are able to learn heuristics, norms, rules, and how to craft rules to improve achieved outcomes." (McGinnis, 2000, p. 487). Job choice theory can be considered a type of rational choice.

Behling, Labovitz, and Gainer (1968) originated job choice theory and it was furthered in the educational arena later by Young, Rinehart, and Place (1989). Young, Reinhart, and Place (1989) developed three separate theories of job choice: objective, subjective, and critical contact. Objective theory refers to job applicants as mainly economic and applicants join organizations that are the most economically competitive. Subjective theory refers to applicants as psychological beings motivated by getting their psychological needs fulfilled via the job's work environment. Critical contact theory of job choice says applicants are concerned with the work expectations and requirements communicated during the initial interview. In all three job choice theories, individuals seem to draw their motivation either externally or internally.

In this study, the incentive for selecting an administrative position was examined by comparing these external to internal motivators. The two internal factors considered were the self-assessed leadership on the Leadership Practice Inventory (subjective theory) and the self-assessed role economic incentives (objective theory) each play on graduates in seeking an administrative position after Level One certification. The external factors were equated to the direct amount of graduate program credits completed and demographics and intentions questionnaire criteria.

6 Statement of the Problem

To more fully explore the dynamics of why a quality administrator shortage may be occurring, it is important to consider the intentions of educational leadership graduate students (Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Chung, & Ross, 2003). The purpose of this study, conducted in 2010, was to investigate the relationship between self-assessed leadership behaviors of educational leadership graduate students from Florida universities and their intentions to seek assistant principal positions upon program completion. Additionally, this study compared the strength of the association among factors of self-assessed leadership behavior, gender, age, number of credits completed and all of these factors together with regard to participants' intentions to seek an administrative position upon graduation.

The questions guiding the study were:

1. Is there a relationship between intent to seek an assistant principal position (as measured by the DIQ) and self-assessed leadership behavior (as measured by the LPI)?

2. Is there a relationship between intent to seek an assistant principal position and Gender (Male, Female)?
3. Is there a relationship between intent to seek an assistant principal position and number of credits successfully completed (< 3, 3-9, 10-15, 16-21, 22-27, 28-33, > 33)?
4. Is there a relationship between intent to seek an assistant principal position and age groups (25-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55, > 55)?
5. Is there a relationship between intent to seek an assistant principal position and self-assessed leadership behavior, gender (Male, Female), number of credits successfully completed (< 3, 3-9, 10-15, 16-21, 22-27, 28-33, > 33), and age (25-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55, > 55)?

7 Methodology

This study employed a non-experimental research design wherein two statistical techniques—Simple Linear Regression and Multiple Regression were used. The basic design of a comparative study is to identify a difference between groups as a function of the identified dependent variable. Since the researchers did not have complete control over the variables participants or groups were not randomly assigned, the study was non-experimental rather than rigorously causative. No attempt was made by the researchers to influence respondent attitudes or motivation toward applying for assistant principal positions. Experiences with faculty, program satisfaction, efficacy of faculty in terms of how that might have motivated students to move forward were extraneous factors that widely and randomly vary from program to program and were beyond the scope of this study. However, these factors may combine to account, in part, for student's motivation and intent.

7.1 Population and Sample

The identified initial pool of sample subjects were currently enrolled Florida Educational Leadership graduate students attending on campus, or online, at any of the following public or private universities: University of South Florida (USF), University of South Florida Saint Petersburg, University of Central Florida (UCF), Florida State University (FSU), University of Florida (UF), Saint Leo University (SLU), and National Louis University (NLU), University of South Florida Polytechnic. These universities were selected from a list of the State-Approved Public and Private University programs and are all NCATE accredited. Florida's educational leadership masters' and/or alternative certification programs are the initial certification for administrators and all the programs must meet the Florida Principal Leadership Standards and be approved by the Department of Education.

Graduate students were identified with the assistance of each University's Educational Leadership Department Chair who in turn requested compliance from professors in their respective departments. The population was educational leadership graduate students who were willing to respond to a survey. Since the sample was pooled, the researchers closely tracked data from each university participating in the survey. A total of 223 individuals responded. From the USF group, 143 participants responded, 36 responded from UCF, 13 responded from FSU, and a combined total of 31 from NLU and SLU responded.

All students surveyed in person returned the survey. Out of the 223 surveys returned, two hard copy and two online surveys were incomplete and were not used because they were missing more than five question responses. Additionally, when two respondents submitted their in-person survey, they reported having already completed the survey online; therefore, the two hard-copy in-person surveys were not included in the data analyses. As promised to the institutions, all data once collected, were combined so institutional data were unidentifiable within the data set. This made the actual number of participants who were used in the study data, 217. After exclusions were completed, the data from 217 surveys yielded demographic results with regards to years of teaching experience, race/ethnicity, county, current position, grade level, setting, degrees, and whether or not the participants had guidance or special education teaching experiences. Of the 217 respondents, 74.7% described themselves as teachers and 75.6% percent were female. The majority, 84.3%, identified themselves as White and/or Caucasian. The mean age range of persons in the study was between 31-35 years old. The vast majority (89.5%) of participants had between 0-14 years of teaching

experience in the secondary (46.5 %) public setting (62.7%). Additionally, most participants had only a Bachelors degree (77.4%), but 46 already had a masters' degree, two had a specialist degree, and one had a doctorate.

Florida's graduate programs used in this study were NCATE accredited and were listed on the state-approved program list and had similar curricular designs and met Florida's minimum qualifications. Many Educational Leadership graduate programs have varying entrance requirements. Most programs had the in this study had the following commonalities for entrance. They required a portfolio or comprehensive examinations for entrance. To graduate, most programs require between 33 and 39 credit hours. Lastly, most programs consist of core courses, electives, and a field experience or internship practicum.

7.2 Instrumentation

Each individual respondent's self-assessed leadership behavior was identified by using the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) and analyzing the five separate constructs: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Posner, 2009). The LPI was developed through a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative research methods, in-depth interviews, and written case studies from personal-best leadership experiences. It is a survey tool with 30 behavioral statements. Six statements represent each of the five leadership behavioral practices for a total of 30 items (Zagorsek, Stough, & Jaklic, 2006).

The LPI's validity was tested using a positive workplace attitude scale where respondents were asked 10 questions using a five-point Likert-type scale regarding their feelings and assessments about several factors (Posner, 2009). The internal reliability, Cronbach alpha, for this scale was 0.92. The LPI's standard reliability was tested through analysis of internal reliability. That is, internal reliability coefficients, Cronbach alpha, for each of the five constructs or practices of exemplary leadership (model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart), had strong consistent internal reliability coefficients when measured against all respondents, self-only respondents, and observer respondents. The Cronbach alpha coefficients were considered to be *very good* due to being greater than .70. The LPI's standard reliability was tested through analysis of internal reliability and all of the five leadership practices had strong consistent internal reliability. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients were all greater than .70 for each of the leadership constructs and they are generally regarded as having items highly correlated within each scale (Posner, 2009).

In addition, a Demographics and Intentions Questionnaire (DIQ) was developed to gather information on the participants. The DIQ had 15 questions. Gender, race/ethnicity, and age were other demographic characteristics included in the questionnaire. In addition, the number of graduate credits completed, total years of any experience in public or private school teaching, level, county, and the type of degrees previously completed were all included in the questionnaire. This questionnaire asked if the participant had worked in special education or as a guidance counselor and probed using open ended queries regarding any influence salary advances and personal reasons had on their decision to pursue a degree in educational leadership. The reason for inquiring about counselor or special education background has to do with past career choices and intent, commitment, and retention which might influence professional educator's future career decisions. For example, the experiences and roles guidance counselors, females, and special education teachers have had might affect self-assessed leadership and career pathways. A Stanford study researched exemplary pre-service and in-service administrator preparation programs found they shared common features. They discovered graduates of exemplary programs were more likely to be female, members of an ethnic minority group, had strong relevant teaching experiences, served frequently as coaches of other teachers, department chairs, team leaders, were committed to their communities, and capable of becoming instructionally grounded transformational leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). The DIQ inquired about their intentions of whether or not to seek an assistant principal position, if it would be secondary or elementary level, and when they intended to seek an assistant principal position after completion of their graduate programs.

7.3 Pilot Study

A pilot was conducted using these two instruments to determine instrument integrity and usability. Due to the limited number of educational leadership graduate students, the researchers utilized eight post bachelors' degree education major students from Saint Petersburg College, a local educator preparation institute, to test the usability of the instruments. The results identified two errors in this online survey: two questions were the same and the age group 50-55 years was missing. These students took the pilot survey online, not in person. As a result, the online DIQ instrument was modified. The researcher was able to make these corrections and modifications prior to the actual administration for the main study.

7.4 Analysis

From the 223 surveys administered, only 217 were actually used in the final calculations. If a missing response was in the DIQ, it was left blank. If it was in the LPI, the following rules were applied. The first rule was if five or more questions on the survey were left blank, the participant was excluded from both the demographic/intention and LPI data. This rule applied to four of the 223 submitted surveys. If the participant failed to answer more than one question from any individual behavioral construct on the LPI, the information from the LPI for the participant was excluded from calculations. If the participant was missing only one question from any individual construct, then the average for the construct was used to replace the missing data point. Additionally, any LPI surveys missing two or more responses within any single construct were excluded from the analysis. From the entire LPI, out of the 217 surveys analyzed, exactly 100 were missing no more than one response to one question from any single behavioral construct.

The analysis procedure used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. This data analysis included descriptive statistics, means, standard deviations, and frequency counts where applicable. In addition, histograms were examined as well as z scores and Normal P-P plots to support assumptions of normality. For this analysis alpha was set at $p = .05$ provided assumptions of normality are met. The researchers utilized inferential statistics to determine the relationship between the independent variables (intent to seek an assistant principal position as measured by the LPI, number of credits successfully completed or program completion progress, gender, and age) and the dependent variable (intentions to seek an assistant principal position as measured by the DIQ). In addition, one question from the DIQ was used to measure graduate students' intent to seek an assistant principal position upon program completion. The question was scaled using a four-point Likert-type scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree, with the latter representing the greatest intent in seeking an assistant principal position.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

Study reliability may have been reduced because a pure random sample was not obtained and the study was conducted with relatively limited numbers of respondents and institutions within one state policy environment. The strictly cross-sectional quantitative methodological design does not observe phenomenological behaviors or behaviors over time. This was administered once, not replicated many times. Additionally, the study's surveys were restrictive. Likert-type instruments that do not allow personal suggestions or insight by design. This study's focus was not concerned with student perceptions of external market factors of supply and demand or competitiveness, but on perceptions of intentions, which can be different from the actual job choice behaviors (Rynes, 1991). The sample was drawn from a few public and private institutions serving the Tampa Bay Metropolitan area. Additionally, there is no guarantee of response accuracy with self-reporting, which restricts the degree of variance and limits generalizability. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study identified reasons administrative pools may have perceived shortages of quality candidates. Results may be used to inform state licensure systems, school district leadership professional development, as well as university educational leadership departments' selection, recruitment, and retention efforts. The following sections report the findings, offer a discussion of the findings, and consider implications of the study.

8 Findings

8.1 Description of Participants' Demographics

The responses on the Demographic and Intentions Questionnaire (DIQ) provided a profile of participating initial certification seeking educational leadership masters-level students.

The respective means of the years of teaching experience revealed that the majority of participants (89.5%) had between 0-14 years of experience. However, the mean was between 5-9 years of teaching experience, meaning the majority of educational leadership students in this study had less than 10 years of teaching experience or more before entering an educational leadership graduate program. Table 1 provides the teaching experience for the total sample.

Table 1

Years of Experience	<i>n</i>	%
0-4	52	24.0
5-9	95	43.8
10-14	47	21.7
15-20	16	7.4
>20	7	3.2
Total	217	100.0

The race/ethnicity of respondents was dominated by the White/Caucasian category with 84.3% of participants identifying themselves with this category, represented in Table 2. The majority of the participants in the study were female (75.6%), which is commensurate with the findings in the study of educational leadership programs by Bruner, Greenlee, and Hill (2007).

Table 2

Race Category	<i>n</i>	%
Black	14	6.5
White	183	84.3
Hispanic	11	5.1
Asian	1	0.5
Other	6	2.8
Missing response	2	0.9
Total	217	100.0

A majority (75%) of the participants described themselves as classroom teachers and the combination of classroom teacher and resource/lead teacher categories represented 87.9% of the participants. Since many administrative jobs in the public school setting are not available to persons without an educational leadership graduate degree, this percentage was expected. It should be noted private schools might not have the same requirements for completion of certification coursework prior to being hired as an administrator.

The distribution of the participant's grade level was split between elementary (38.2%) and secondary teaching (46.5%). Eight participants answered that their school was an "exceptional" educational school or center, which may have also qualified as elementary or secondary but was not delineated on the survey. Not only were there more secondary than elementary-level teachers, but also after examining current teaching assignments, the majority of participants who responded to the question (62.7%) worked in the public

school setting. It should be noted though a large number of participants did not respond to this question ($n=60$). Participants were asked if they had ever had experience as a guidance counselor or special education teacher (SPED). The majority of respondents (74.2%) had not had such experiences, while 25.8% indicated experiences as guidance counselor or SPED.

The highest level of degree earned for the majority of respondents (77.4%) was a baccalaureate degree, which was expected since those surveyed were enrolled in a master degree program. However, 22.6% did have masters' or higher degrees in other areas. More study is needed to investigate the certification areas of those who hold masters degrees to see if there are distinct trends that could be identified by school level and/or subject matter.

Self-assessed leadership behaviors and intentions to seek an assistant principal position

Research question one sought to determine if there was a relationship between intent to seek an assistant principal position and self-assessed leadership behavior. The results of research question one indicated no significant relationship was found between graduate students' intent to seek an assistant principal position (Intentions) and their self-assessed leadership behaviors ($R^2 = .014, p = .715$). However, the data showed the majority of respondents (83.9%) do intend to seek an assistant principal position upon program completion.

Research question two examined if there was a relationship between intent to seek an assistant principal position and gender. The descriptive statistics of the dependent variable by gender showed 53 male and 164 females responded indicating their intent to seek an assistant principal position upon program completion. Even though the majority of respondents were female, results of research question two indicated no significant difference was found between graduate students' intent to seek an assistant principal position and their gender ($R^2 = .020, p = .074$).

Research question three investigated if there was a relationship between intent to seek an assistant principal position and number of credits successfully completed. While 83.9% of respondents claimed they would seek an assistant principal position upon program completion, 64.1% of respondents rated the influence salary had on their decision to pursue a degree in educational leadership as either somewhat important or one of the primary reasons in the DIQ. Each graduate credit represents a graduate student's economic investment in their future and one step closer to program completion. While there could be many reasons to progress towards graduation, including an increase in salary, the results of research question three indicated no significant relationship was found between graduate students' intent to seek an assistant principal position and the number of credits successfully completed ($R^2 = .006, p = .251$).

Research question four explored if there was a relationship between intent to seek an assistant principal position and age group. The highest percentage of respondents in this study was between 25 to 30 years of age. Since the age categories ranged from 25 to greater than 55, the actual design of this research question had to change in order to analyze it due to the skewness of the age range distribution. This variable had to be normalized to better represent any relationships in the data. Regardless of this change, the results of research question four still indicated no significant relationship was found between graduate students' intent to seek an assistant principal position and their age ($R^2 = .004, p = .384$).

Research question five sought to identify a potential relationship between intent to seek an assistant principal position and self-assessed leadership behavior, gender, number of credits successfully completed, and age. No individual relationships between predictor and dependent variables were found, as this research question did not yield statistically significant results. The fact the variables did not synergize with one another suggests no significant relationships existed between leadership behavior scores via LPI, gender, number of credits completed, and age. However, 83.9% of the respondents did proclaim they intended to seek an assistant principal position after graduation and 14.3% claimed they intended to never seek an assistant principal position or they do not know when they would ever seek an assistant principal position. In research question five, there was no significant difference between graduate students' intent to seek an assistant principal position and a regression model containing leadership total, gender, credits, age, leadership multiplied by gender, leadership multiplied by credits, and leadership multiplied by age ($R^2 = .047, p = .188$) as demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Results Table Indicating No Research Question Reached Statistical Significant Differences

Research Question	Analysis	Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable	Sig.
1	Multiple Regression	Intentions	Encourage, Model, Enable, Inspire, and Challenge	.715
2	ANOVA	Intentions	Gender	.074
3	Regression	Intentions	Credits Completed	.251
4	Regression	Intentions	Age	.384
5	Multiple Regression	Intentions	Leadership total, Gender, Credits, Age, Leadership X Gender, Leadership X Credits, and Leadership X Age	.188

9 Discussion

Relationship between intention to seek a leadership position and self-assessed leadership behavior

Some research suggests leadership behavior aptitudes can be measured (Posner, 2009). In this study, respondents' self-assessed leadership behavior scores using the LPI instrument were not significantly correlated with graduate students intentions to seek an assistant principal position upon program completion. This does not mean there is not a link between these two variables, but this study, in this setting, did not reveal one. However, the strongest relationship appears to be between the constructs Inspire and Challenge and the construct most predictive of the total LPI score was Challenge. Nevertheless, through the absence of a correlation, this study found there was no link between self-assessed leadership behavior and intention to seek an assistant principal position.

Influence of gender on the intention to pursue a leadership position

More fully understanding the role gender may play in influencing the intention of educators to pursue administrative positions has implications for public policy, scholarship, and district-level incentive policy decisions. In this study, the estimated marginal means of intentions for females were not significantly higher than males; meaning that females did not indicate stronger intentions to seek an assistant principal position upon program completion than males. While the data from this study did not reveal a statistical significance in the relationship between gender and intent to seek an assistant principal position, it does not necessarily mean differences were nonexistent.

In this current study's population of Florida graduate school respondents, it appears there were more females in educational leadership programs. The survey results revealed high numbers of females (75.6%) in the population sample of Florida educational leadership programs surveyed. These findings are consistent with the literature and mirror the prior work of Greenlee, Bruner, and Hill (2009) who claimed it is common that women make up more than half of the educational leadership students across universities. Educational Leadership programs in the last two decades continue to shift from mostly white male students to having a majority of white female students. Bruner, Greenlee, and Hill's study (2007) of 25 educational leadership programs found 65% of their students were female. This current study's findings supports that research since 75.6% of respondents were female and 84.3% identified themselves as White. This is a 10% rise in the number of educational leadership graduate student females in proportion to the 65% in found in Bruner et al. (2007).

If there is a decrease in male graduate students in educational leadership programs or an increase in female graduate students in educational leadership, are females graduating and seeking assistant principal

positions? A decade ago, the literature suggested women are underrepresented in the administrative fields, but the landscape has changed (Banks, 1995; Buell, 2001; DeFelice, 1999; Grady, 1992). There has been a steady and significant increase in the number of women being licensed for administrative positions (McCarthy, 2002; Orr, 2011). Similarly, 51% of the licenses in the Indiana five-year study were issued to females (Black et al., 2007). The School and Staffing Survey (SASS) for 2007-2008 purports school principalships are equally held by males (49.7%) and females (50.03%). From this current study, it does not appear females in Florida educational leadership programs were necessarily more likely to seek an assistant principal position than males. Likewise, Cranston (2007) found no gender differences between those interested or disinterested in an administrative position. On the other hand, Boehlert and O'Connell (1999) did find statistical significances between gender and intention.

Influence of degree progress on the intention to pursue a leadership program

This research sought to identify if there was a statistical relationship between a graduate student's progress in the degree program and their intentions to seek an assistant principal position. Strahan and Wilson (2006) claimed proximity to a future possible self has an impact on current motivation to act in ways to achieve future goals. However, the number of credits successfully completed and degree progress was not shown to be a significant factor in determining intentions towards seeking an assistant principal position upon program completion in this current study. Preconceived notions that the more credits completed in the educational leadership program, the more the intent to seek an assistant principal position, is simply not supported in this study's population. The lack of a significant finding in the influence of degree progress and intentions may suggest there is no relationship between the number of credits a respondent has completed and their intention whether to become an assistant principal in the future or not.

Even though this study's data did not reveal statistical significance linking degree progress and intent to seek an assistant principal position, the DIQ does offer insight into what is driving the intentions of the nearly 84% of respondents to eventually seek an assistant principal position. In Young et al. (1989), objective choice theory refers to applicants joining the most economically competitive jobs and subjective theory refers to applicants as psychological beings motivated by getting their psychological needs fulfilled via the job's work environment. In this study, incentives for seeking an assistant principal position can be examined by comparing these external to internal motivators. Two internal factors, self-assessed leadership on the LPI (subjective theory) and the self-assessed role economic incentives (objective theory) each play a role in seeking an administrative position upon program completion. The external factors are equated to the direct amount of graduate program credits completed and the DIQ criteria.

In the DIQ, 64.1% of respondents rated salary as an influence on their decision to pursue a degree in educational leadership as either somewhat important or one of the primary reasons. Each graduate credit represents a graduate student's economic investment as well. So, while these graduate students might be motivated to graduate and stop paying tuition, many might also be rewarded with a pay increase due to the graduate degree incentive pay. Additionally, these students potentially could be one step closer to another pay raise and promotion to assistant principal where their psychological fulfillment needs could be met. So, external and internal (objective and subjective) incentives are in place respectively for program completion. With 83.9% of respondents indicating they will seek an assistant principal position upon program completion, it appears to affirm and support this notion. Additionally, 38.8% of those who responded to the open ended question, as to the reasons for waiting, revealed it was because they wanted more experience in their current position or another position such as an academic coach before seeking an assistant principal position. It could be the case some graduate students might be getting fulfillment from their current position or they were not yet receiving the psychological fulfillment to the levels they need before wanting to seek an assistant principal position. The 9.4% that intended to wait to seek an assistant principal position stated it was due to family related reasons.

Influence of age and experience on the intention to pursue a leadership position

The survey results did not support the age as having a significant impact on graduate student intentions to seek an assistant principal position. Because the average age range of Florida's educational leadership graduate programs in this study was 31 to 35 years old, the design of the analysis of this research question had to change due to the skewness of the age range distribution. The fact that age does not appear to be

a factor of influence in the pursuit of an administrative position supports other perspectives. This finding affirms the work of Cranston (2007). Out of a total of 146 aspirant assistant principals taking the Aspirant Principal Questionnaire, Cranston found no statistically significant differences in responses with regard to age and he found no influence of age between those interested or disinterested in an administrative position. Additionally, this study's results are mirrored by both Pounder and Merrill (2001) and Murphy, Elliott, Goldring and Porter (2007) who posited that even though experience may have played a strong role in the evolution of principal leadership skills and in interest in the position, age may not have played a direct role in the likelihood of a candidate pursuing an assistant principal or principal administrative position.

With regard to experience, the majority (89.5%) of this study's participants had between 0-14 years of experience, which generally corresponds to the fact that the average mean for age of participants was between 31 and 35 years of age. The vast majority of respondents were Caucasian female (74.3%), secondary teachers or lead teachers (46.5%), holding at least one bachelors degree (77.4%), and working in a public school (62.7%). While Mazzeo (2003) claims many students obtain the graduate degree and certification with no intention of obtaining an administrative position, the median description of respondent profile mostly appears to be career oriented experienced teachers: only 14.3% of this study's respondents claim they never intend to seek an assistant principal position.

Influence of leadership behavior, gender, degree progress, and age on the intention to pursue a leadership position

The final research question was designed to uncover if there were any interaction relationships between intent to seek an assistant principal position and the following variables: self-assessed leadership behavior, gender, number of credits successfully completed, and age. This research question did not yield statistically significant results. The fact the variables did not synergize with one another suggests no significant relationships existed between leadership behavior scores via LPI, gender, number of credits completed, and age. No significant link was found between graduate students' intentions to seek an assistant principal position and the factors in this study. However, 83.9% of the respondents did proclaim they intended to seek an assistant principal position after graduation. What about the 14.3% who claimed they intend to never seek an assistant principal position or that it is unknown when they would ever seek an assistant principal position?

There are other options that could be linked and affect graduate students' intentions. It might be easier and reduce controversial struggles if some administratively certified graduates would seek district level positions such as curriculum specialists, supervisors, program coordinators, etc. This current study did affirm part of the previous mentioned Stanford findings where the preponderance of respondents were highly experienced female teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

Males, females, and minorities experience internal and external barriers entering into administration. It was reported men typically enter into education with administration in mind from the beginning and they generally go from teacher to assistant principal, principal, and finally district level administration with only about five years teaching experience in the classroom (DeFlice, 1999). Females generally tend to be very committed to teaching because they typically spend about 10 to 15 years in the classroom before entering administration and subsequently do well as instructional leaders. This study supports DeFlice's research with the females in this sample having more than 10 have years of teaching experience. Although this study did not investigate a possible link between discrimination and intent to seek an assistant principal position, some literature claims women are more likely to be discriminated against due to their gender and men are more likely to be discriminated against due to their age (Boehlert & O'Connell, 1999).

9.1 Exploratory Analysis

A second look at the LPI and intent to seek an assistant principal position was conducted to search for any trends in the data. Self-Assessed Leadership Behavior constructs associated with the LPI (encourage, model, enable inspire, and challenge) were standardized and categorized by intensity. Groups were specified by extracting cases with z scores ≤ -0.5 and cases with z scores ≥ 0.5 . This strategy removed approximately 34% of the cases clustered around the mean. Essentially, only those responding with high and low scores were retained to determine if any trends or differences existed between groups on intent to seek an assistant

principal position. In addition, instead of only investigating overall intent construct, only those most likely to seek an assistant principal position were retained. Specifically, cases with z scores greater than -1.0 were retained for analysis. This strategy only extracted those participants likely to seek an assistant principal position. Those unlikely to seek the position were categorically removed.

Results from the analyses found a distinct trend in the data. For every sub-construct, low leadership practice construct scores on intent to seek an assistant principal position were lower than those with high leadership practice construct scores. These findings suggest those likely to intend to seek an assistant principal position (high intensity) have higher self-assessed leadership behavior potential and/or qualities. It further suggests students with low self-assessed leadership behavior quality construct scores (encourage, model, enable, inspire, and challenge) may be self-selecting themselves out. That is, participants with low scores may want to be in a leadership position, but temper their intent due to a lack of self-efficacy about their self-assessed leadership. These exploratory findings may suggest universities need to concentrate more on teaching and training leadership behaviors to ensure those who would like to be in an assistant principal, but feel they may not imbue high leadership behavior qualities, will be given the needed assistance to reach their goal. After all, whatever an individual's learning style may be, they continually do more to improve themselves (Posner, 2009).

Open-ended question results

The largest theme of responses as to why educational leadership students plan to wait after graduation to seek an assistant principal position is they are waiting to get more experience in their current or next position. According to the DIQ's results, most of the applicants who claimed they would wait to seek an assistant principal position indicated they were waiting to get more experience (38.8 %). Some (18.8%) said they were waiting for a specific district level position, higher education position, Department of Education position, or a very specific position.

An interesting phenomenon that should be noted from this study's results is 18.8% (nearly 1 in 5) of the 85 open-ended respondents plan to seek something other than an assistant principal position. This study's participants indicated they were waiting to get a district level position, higher education position, Department of Education position, or another specific position other than an assistant principalship. Additionally, 10.6% were waiting to earn another degree, more certifications, or other professional type development. This has implications for educational leadership curriculum and instructional programming, whereby it needs to meet the needs of learners seeking district, higher education, district and/or DOE positions in addition to those who seek the more-traditional assistant principal administrative route upon program completion.

Examining the median age of a typical graduate student respondent in this study, it would not be unreasonable to surmise that many may not seek an assistant principal position due to family related reasons. There were varied responses on the DIQ for reasons for waiting to seek a position due to family. Some of the reoccurring reasons were: I have children in the system and want to wait until they are out of high school; I just started a family and plan to pursue a career in leadership after having children; I want my children to be in middle school before I become an administrator; I want my children to be old enough to be in Kindergarten first; I'm taking time off to raise my daughter and when she is school age, I'll apply, probably in five years; and my wife and I just had a child so when things settle down, I will send resumes out. But, they all are claiming to wait until the right time when their children are old enough. More research is needed in this area.

10 Implications

Multiple studies confirm that qualified candidates are waiting or are not even pursuing leadership positions, even when they are available. Connecticut's Board of Governors (2003) claimed to have 2,400 educators and two-thirds of all of New York's (Herrington & Wills, 2005) educators actually already hold administrative licenses, yet choose not to work in administrative roles. Critical contact theory of job choice says many do not seek positions due to concerns with the work expectations and requirements. Since the role of the principal has grown enormously and required competencies and tasks are staggering, job requirements far exceed the reasonable capacity for an administrator (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Teachers

are not oblivious to the increased pressure on principals and many have become genuinely disinterested in becoming administrative candidates. Fewer aspiring administrators see the appeal of administration because it is seen as a burnout position, particularly at the high school level (Boehlert & O'Connell, 1999).

In the face of more flexible processes for obtaining certification and growing pools of credentialed candidates, there still remains a shortage of quality administrators in many states, including Florida (Davis et al., 2005). This problem is exacerbated by the numbers of teachers who are potential leaders, but who do not want to be school principals. They most often cited the stress of the job, time required for the job, and societal problems as reasons for not pursuing school leadership positions (Hewittt, Pijanowski, Carnine, & Denny, 2008).

It was noted that 83.9% of this study's respondents intended to seek an assistant principal position, 3.2% indicated they never intend to seek an assistant principal position, and 11.1% claim it is unknown when they would seek an assistant principal position. The remaining 1.8% was due to missing responses. However, concerns, fears, and personal complexities like age (Boehlert & O'Connell, 1999; Cranston, 2007; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring & Porter, 2007; Pounder & Merrill, 2001), gender (Banks, 1995; Buell, 2001; DeFelice, 1999; Glass, Bjork, & Bruner, 2000; Grady, 1992), and leadership style (Cranston, 2007; Murphy et al., 2007; Pounder & Merrill, 2001) may indeed affect intentions of educational leadership graduate students and their choices for career pathways.

While this study does support and affirm the literature that cites increases in females pursuing educational leadership degrees, it did not address the gaps between female underrepresentation in school administration positions and where the link is between gender and intentions. More studies, including focus groups, in this area are needed to examine the gap between graduate student completing certification and actually seeking an assistant principal position. If these studies are conducted, such insight can aid in recruitment efforts in practical settings. For instance, armed with the knowledge either female graduate students seeking school administration might be rising or male graduate students seeking school administration is shrinking, recruitment efforts can be appropriately adjusted to match the upcoming population reality with current and projected administrative openings in relation to gender, if disproportionality exists. Additionally, this study and the literature cited above coupled with gender trend analysis, could be examined by state education officials and school districts in order to maintain administrative gender balance efforts particularly in the number of females in leadership positions in secondary schools.

Recommendations for practice based on this study include developing and/or revising higher education curricular programming for those who do not seek an assistant principal position. Since 21.9 % did have Masters Degrees in other areas, more study is needed to investigate the certification areas of those who hold masters degrees to see if there is a trend by school level and/or subject matter. Given this fact and that many respondents were pursuing the degree without a goal of immediately seeking an assistant principal position, university programs might develop two tracks within the educational leadership masters degree, one for those seeking Educational Leadership FLDOE certification, and others who simply want more knowledge about leadership and administrative practices to enhance their teacher leadership skills. In addition, it is evident there is a need for more effort put forth to support female and minority students to increase enrollment and retention in administrative credentialing programs to increase the diversity of the assistant principal pool of candidates. According to Pounder and Merrill (2001), professional development incentives might attract minority candidates, who are especially needed if leadership demographics are to approach that of school student enrollment. Graduate student paid Administrative Internships, field experiences, and specific in-house training might all aid in luring qualified candidates (Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Districts also should explore other ways to improve the daily work life of administrators and workload management.

If only a little more than half of those who graduate from administrator preparation programs ever end up in administrative positions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) and the vast majority (83.9%) in this study claim they intend to seek an assistant principal position, the question shifts to what happens to create this difference between intent and accomplishment after program completion? Murphy, Elliott, Goldring and Porter (2007) argue aspiring principals must bring to the role a base of experience and knowledge that establishes expertise for the role, but with that must also bring personal characteristics, values and beliefs which that will entice them to pursue the role and succeed in it. A combination of experience and these

factors paired with personal characteristics, values and beliefs provides some insight into what types of leaders are drawn to this type of work (Cranston, 2007). Pounder and Merrill (2001) noted aspiring administrators claimed that the opportunity to make a difference, to empower school change, to grow personnel, and to offer a vision for a school as primary motivators in their administrative applications. However, since the majority of the work lies outside the functions most attractive about the position, the willingness of a qualified candidate to pursue a position may be influenced. In the end, the bottom-line according to Howley, Adrainavio, & Perry (2005), is that “the body of empirical literature prioritizing teachers’ perspective on school administration likewise argues that the degree of readiness of potential principals depends on their ability to strike a suitable balance between their expectations and misgivings” (p. 759).

Induction or mentoring opportunities need to be part of a future study. If available after graduation, would graduates be more apt to move into an assistant principal position. Another recommendation is that future researchers examine more closely what happens to their intentions to seek an assistant principal position after graduation, particularly at those graduates who intend to wait extended times prior to applying for assistant principal positions. Using DOE records, this future research could examine what occurs after graduate school and completing the program and after certification.

11 Summary and Conclusion

No statistical significance was found between the variables that provided the focus for this study. Historically, women have been underrepresented in the administrative fields, but the market continues to rapidly change. This study is yet another that affirms the majority of graduate students in Educational Leadership programs are female.

Degree progress based upon number of college credits successfully completed was not shown to be a significant factor in determining intentionality toward seeking an assistant principal position upon program completion. Neither gender nor age exerted a significant influence on the likelihood to pursue an assistant principal position. It is interesting to note the mean average age range of Florida’s educational leadership graduate programs in this study was 31 to 35 years old. If these individuals remained in education, they would have another 30 years of time to wait to apply for an assistant principal position. As could be expected, none of the factors explored individually had statistical significance in their interaction. These latter results were not surprising based upon the separate findings presented.

Educational Leadership departments can benefit from the knowledge of these results and better understand educational leadership graduate student’s intentions. In this sample, the majority of respondents were female, which is consistent with literature claiming a higher female population in educational leadership graduate programs and the vast majority do intend to seek assistant principal positions upon program completion. Albeit almost one-third claimed to intend to seek an assistant principal position immediately, only a tenth of respondents claim they will wait to seek an assistant principal position so they can earn another degree, more certifications, or obtain additional professional development. Finally, a substantial amount of students claimed they intend to never seek an assistant principal position or that it is unknown when they would ever seek an assistant principal position.

This research has benefitted the field because it has examined where the links between research and practice do and do not exist. The study uniquely contributed to identifying graduate student’s intention before they seek school leadership roles. This and similar studies in the future hold the potential to offer state departments of education, school district leadership academies, and university educational leadership departments valuable information for administrative reform of selection, recruitment, and retention of aspiring administrators.

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