The Principal Rules: Applying Job Choice and Certification Reform to Educational Leaders in North Georgia

Jennifer J. Reed, Ed.D.
Murray County Schools
Chatsworth, GA, United States
jennifer.reed@murray.k12.ga.us

Michael J. Bochenko, Ed.D.
mjbochenko@valdosta.edu
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development
Valdosta State University
Valdosta, GA, United States

James L. Pate, Ph.D.
jlpate@valdosta.edu
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development
Valdosta State University
Valdosta, GA, United States

John D. Lairsey, Ed.D.
jdlairsey@valdosta.edu
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development
Valdosta State University
Valdosta, GA, United States

Kathy Nobles, Ed.D.
knobles@valdosta.edu
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development
Valdosta State University
Valdosta, GA, United States

Kelly C. Dreger, Ed.D.
kcdreger@valdosta.edu
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development
Valdosta State University
Valdosta, GA, United States

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Abstract

Within Georgia schools, leadership certification requirements have significantly changed to address increasing demands for more experienced and competent leaders. It is unclear how these changes affect principalships. A quantitative survey was disseminated to Georgia principals to determine possible influences in their leadership certification choices. The survey was created from the Principal Job Survey. This study investigated the extent law reforms affected their leadership decisions. This involved information on several independent variables about job choice (i.e., objective, subjective, work itself, school context, and critical contact) and one dependent variable based on the job desirability index. Hierarchical regression modeling and correlational statistics were used to analyze data collected from the job surveys. Relationships between job choice factors, demographics, certification requirements, and job desirability all indicated several significant influences.

Results showed subjective choice, work-itself, Georgia Professional Standards Commission certification probability, and Tier II certification probability all predicted willingness for principalship. Cost and time did have an influence on what educators would do to obtain professional leadership certification. The findings help stakeholders and policymakers in education know how changes in Georgia certification laws actually impact aspirations for leadership. More awareness and incentivization are recommended for those who face challenges due to these changes.
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Keywords: leadership, principals, certification, choice, job desirability

Introduction

Leaders in Georgia school systems face ongoing pressure and scrutiny (Cuban, 2003; Leithwood, et al., 2004). How can effective leaders be recruited, developed, and retained to meet the experiential demands required for the job? One way is through a certification program. The current leadership certification requirements within Georgia are a result of modifications made because of rules such as House Bill 455 and House Bill 923 (Georgia General Assembly, 2009; Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2010). These changes are a major overhaul of what used to be acceptable for educational leaders. Before these bills were passed, it was easier for educational leaders to have an advanced certificate, have a salary adjusted according to that certificate, and not have an actual job as an educational leader working within the school system. Now, leaders must have the experience and the knowledge to pass leadership certification programs. According to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC), there is a two-tiered system of requirements (GaPSC, 2014, 2015, 2016). Tier I, known as Standard Leadership Certification, is designated for assistant principals and leaders who are not in supervisory roles. Tier II, also called Performance-Based Leadership Certification, is certification for principalships and other supervisory roles in leadership. The need for leaders to demonstrate their practical acumen holds them accountable to all interested in school improvement over time; however, this puts more demands on an already difficult situation that has tight budgets and time constraints (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Developing effective and engaging programs for authentic leaders continues to be challenging (Acquaro, 2019; Brooking, Collins et al., 2003; English, 2005; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Jones, 2001; Simon & Newman, 2004). Most programs for leadership certification are found within the university system, and programs are determined according to changes in state policy (Orr, 2006). There are online and hybrid routes to certification in addition to the traditional face-to-face option (Hackmann & McCarthy, 2011; Preis et al., 2007). Since the tier-based rule changes in 2014, Georgia issues less leadership certification than it ever has. There is an average of approximately 1,725 less certifications each year (Buckman et al., 2018). It is unclear what these changes are actually doing and how leaders perceive these changes. For example, there is a known long-term shortage of effective leaders, which was predicted from on trends within leadership in schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Jordan et al. 1994; Stone-Johnson, 2014; Whitaker, 2001). The certification programs may have been a factor influencing this, but more research needs to be conducted to determine relationships between the requirements and the ones who have to follow them. Principals are leaders who need to have extensive training for their jobs, but the additional regulations may make administrative pursuits less appealing. It is also possible that the additional requirements may make people more confident in their abilities because there are more practical elements to the programs. General literature about current certification initiatives lacks the evidence to definitively conclude whether or not the changes are headed in the right direction (Reed, 2022). Perceptions and actual influences concerning leadership certification programs must be investigated to determine if the changes within the last two decades actually mean something to those who have to abide by them.

To give more certainty to this situation, cross-sectional survey research was created to explore job choice and job desirability with respect to principals within North Georgia. The purpose of the study was to a) explore possible factors of influence for educators pursuing leadership certification for principalships and b) determine educators' perceptions on the appeal, attractiveness, and intention of becoming principals. There were three major research questions within the study:

- How do principal job attributes, factors associated with the certification rule change, and demographic variables predict an educator's willingness to pursue a degree or certification in educational leadership in Georgia?

- What perceptions do educators have regarding the overall attractiveness of an educational leadership position, such as the principalship?
- What perceptions do educators have regarding the probability of seeking, being offered, and accepting an educational leadership position in the foreseeable future?

There are two important reasons as to why this study is significant for current developments in education. The first reason is that stakeholders in education, such as principals and policy creators, have to be aware of the actual consequences of regulations that are put in place for leaders to adhere to within various school systems. They need to know whether or not their intentions match the reality of what is happening in schools today. If the policies are working, then the amount of appeal for leadership positions is likely to increase as a result. If the policies are not working, then alternative strategies for certification and retention need to be implemented to actually see results. The second reason is that those who make policies can account for decisions being made by principals at the systemic level. Future decisions about leadership programs are more informed because of the deeper level of understanding about how principals perceive and realize their potential as experienced practitioners. This awareness is key to creating more requirements that are relevant for effective leaders who can make a difference within their respective spheres of influence.

Conceptual Framework

The foundational framework that underpins this study can be found within job choice theory (Behling et al., 1968), which provides explanations for the positions that people choose within their career. Career development theories originate as early as 1909 with trait and factor theory (Parsons, 1909). Within trait and factor theory, Frank Parsons (1909) identified three actions that provided the most appropriate decision-making strategy for the career choice of others: examine the personality traits of the person, determine the character traits of the job, and compare personality traits of the person with character traits required for the job. The job that is most appropriate would match the personality of the one seeking the job. This theory for career development is particularly helpful within the area of career counseling, where counselors provide guidance to others in a way that matches them to the most appropriate career path. According to studies done by Waters et al. (2003) and Marzano, et al. (2005), effective leadership practices can significantly influence student achievement. The Wallace Foundation (2013) goes further by saying that the leadership influence on student achievement is second only to classroom instruction. In other words, providing the right guidance would be essential to student success (Carey, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2004).

The focus of trait and factor theory differs from job choice theory. Behling, Labovitz, and Gainer (1968) focus on how people, specifically college students, decide careers for themselves. Appiah-Padi (2014) observed that job choice theory could be used to determine why individuals decide whether or not to pursue a college presidency position. Thomas et al. (2022) used it to determine relevant predictors about how someone decides whether to commit a crime. These shifts in perspective take the focus away from how to prescribe the right career for others. There is no one method or solution that is right for everyone, but there are three theories within job choice theory that explain why people choose to pursue or abandon potential paths for themselves: objective theory, subjective theory, and critical contact theory (Flanigan, 2011; Reed, 2022). Objective theory states that potential candidates select a job because of economic factors, such as resources, benefits, and money. Salary can have a significant influence on career decisions (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Ni, Sun, & Rorrer, 2015). For principals, it is likely that other factors have to be taken into consideration along with salary because of the high amount of pressure and time required for the job position (Battle, 2010; Gates et al., 2006; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Subjective theory asserts that potential candidates choose a job based on how it aligns with their psychological needs. The subjective includes the idea of needs based on self-concept (Super, 1953; Tom, 1971). Morrison (1962), for example, found in a study with nursing students that individuals choose positions that support their self-concept. The idea of job decisions being linked to self-concept was previously explored by Englander (1960) with elementary education majors. The education majors linked their jobs to self-concept more often than non-education majors. Critical contact theory states that candidates choose a position because of the actual work demands as well as how well they interact with others at the job. From this standpoint, interactions at group meetings, job interviews, and general task-based discussions are very important in establishing the appropriateness of the job. Studies have found that a job interviewer's knowledge, age, and level of concern for others can impact the decisions that candidates make about their careers (Alderfer & McCord, 1970; Hilgert & Easton, 1968; Schmitt & Coyle, 1976).

For instance, Acikgoz (2020) found that choosing between different jobs and adding additional evaluative criteria to job choice does significantly impact career-based decisions. Because of the findings within this and other studies on job choice, an integrated approach to job choice theory was created for the purposes of this study. Figure 1 illustrates factors within an integrated approach to job choice theory including variables pertaining to general theories and specific environment.

Figure 1
Integrative Framework Map for Job Choice Theory
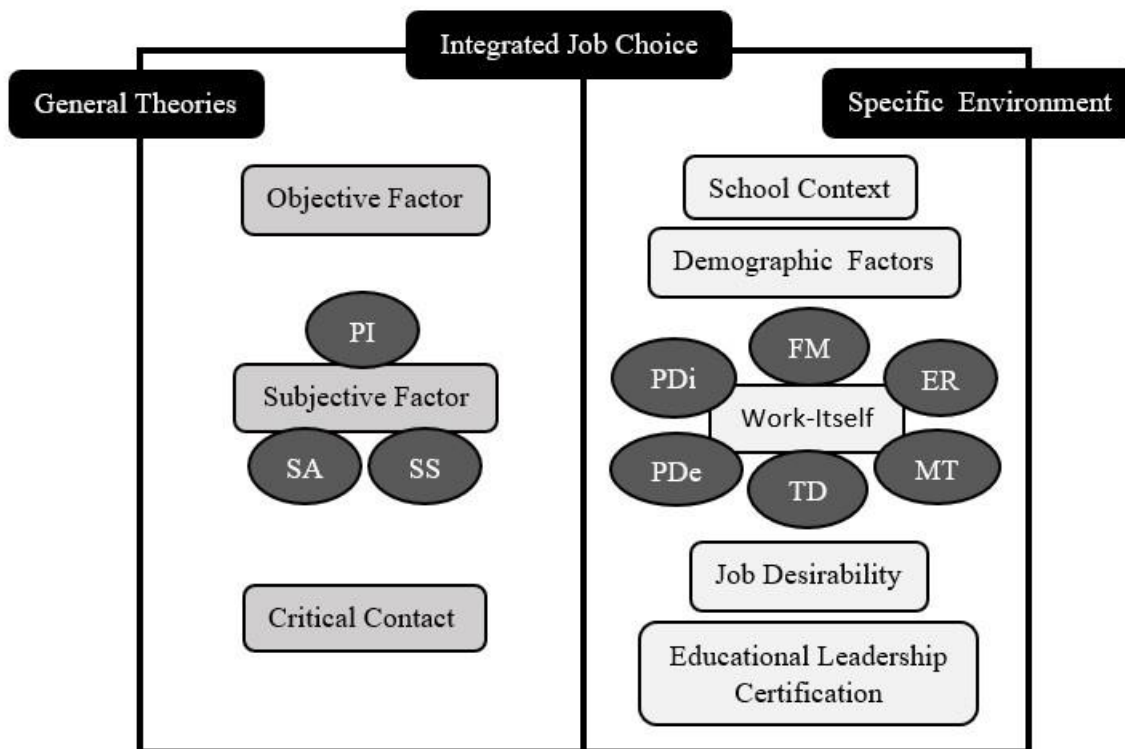
Note. Job choice theory components, from general theoretical factors to specific environmental factors. PI = Positive Impact; SA = Stress/Accountability; SS = Support System; PDi = Problems/Dilemmas; FM = Fiscal Management; ER = External Relations; PDe = Professional Development; TD = Time Demands; MT = Management Tasks.

The conceptual structure of job choice theory is further explored within the Principal Job Survey (Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Barksdale, 2003). This survey helps to measure influences on career decisions, attractiveness of positions, and probabilities of obtaining certifications related to principalships. Pounder and Merrill (2001) originally designed the Principal Job Survey for high school principals, but it was later adapted by Barksdale (2003) to include all levels of principalship within primary and secondary education (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school). A panel of experts analyzed the modified version and concluded that the effectiveness of the survey was maintained, even with the changes. Barksdale's (2003) survey is the one used within the study, with slight changes that reflect current rules about educational leadership positions and certifications. The items within the Principal Job Survey encourage an integrative approach to job theory, where any one of the three theories outlined can provide reasons for job choice, job desirability, or willingness to participate in career-based certification programs.

Materials and Methods

For this study, a quantitative cross-sectional survey was required to answer the research questions. According to Creswell (2018), survey research is most appropriate for gathering descriptives, correlational data, and predictive data over time. The cross-sectional design was appropriate for the study because it (a) provided a practical, efficient way to capture the perceptions of educators within one point in time, (b) gave relevant information about possible factors influencing job desirability, and (c) collected feedback about willingness to participate in principalships and leadership certification programs.

The data collected were primarily quantitative in nature, where descriptive statistics were calculated for the independent variables and dependent variable in order to determine relationships among them. The independent variables were objective, subjective, work itself, critical contact, and school context. The dependent variable was the job desirability index, which was an average based on survey responses to perceived attractiveness of principalship, perceived probability of seeking principalship, and perceived probability of acceptance of a principalship.

Consent to conduct the study was obtained by the Institutional Review Board of the university as well as administrators from four school districts in North Georgia. A minimum sample size of 321 was generated for the population by using Raosoft Sample Size Calculator. This general sample size was needed to determine the appropriate number for a 5% margin of error, 95% confidence interval, and 50% response distribution. The survey was distributed at random to PreK-12 educators via email. The email took the participants to an online Principal Job Survey created with Qualtrics Research Suite. Out of the population of 1,920 educators who received the surveys, there were 327 educators who successfully completed them. Survey responses were anonymous, and participants were informed that their names would not be identified with their responses. The actual survey contained four sections: demographic questions, 5-point Likert scale items for influential attributes, 6-point Likert scale items to gauge attractiveness to principalships, and 6-point Likert scale items to determine probability of seeking leadership certification. Data from the online survey were transferred to IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) for data analysis (IBM, 2019).

Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the items in the Principal Job Survey (Barksdale, 2003; Pounder & Merrill, 2001) was established by a panel of six experts who had experience as a principal or assistant principal in high school. One retired principal, three active principals, and two assistant principals participated in the panel. They helped to analyze and classify the attributes of the survey into very distinct categories: objective, subjective, work itself, critical contact, and school context (Reed, 2022). There were also three active district-level administrators who looked over the contents of the original survey to verify the items presented. They had worked in high-school administration positions in the past, so they were familiar with requirements for principalships and supervisory roles in education.

Additionally, reliability was calculated with the use of Cronbach's alpha. Internal consistency values need to range from .70 to .90 to establish reliability for the items in the survey (Creswell, 2018). Table 1 summarizes the relevant values found for this study.

Table 1
Cronbach's Alpha Reliability

Variable Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Objective scale	4	.78
Subjective scale, Positive Impact	6	.88
Subjective scale, Stress/Accountability	6	.85
Subjective scale, Support System	5	.82
Work-Itself, Problems/Dilemmas	6	.87
Work-Itself, Fiscal Management	6	.84
Work-Itself, External Relations	7	.82
Work-Itself, Professional Development	6	.83
Work-Itself, Time Demands	4	.73
Work-Itself, Management Tasks	3	.71
School context scale	4	.85
Critical contact scale	3	.74
Job desirability index	3	.94
Georgia Educational Leadership Certification	5	.92

Note. Adapted from Reed (2022).

For the original versions of the survey (Barksdale, 2003; Pounder & Merril1, 2001), all variable scales successfully met this range except for critical contact. Critical contact fell within range after the survey was modified for this study.

Principal component analysis with a varimax rotation was also used to further specify, clarify, and reduce any ambiguities concerning the reliability of survey items (Hair et al., 2010; Harrington, 2009).

Results

Techniques used to gather and analyze the data included descriptive statistics and hierarchical multiple regression. Demographic descriptives for gender, ethnicity, highest degree earned, and career experience are provided in Table 2. There were more females who participated in the study (80.40%). Most participants were Caucasian (93.90%) and held graduate degrees, particularly Masters (34.30%) and Specialists (39.00%). Many of them (71.2%) had at least ten years of career experience.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Demographics

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Male	64	19.60
Female	263	80.40
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	8	2.40
Caucasian	307	93.90
Asian	2	.60
African American	1	.30
Other	9	2.80
Highest Degree Earned		
Bachelors	68	21.00
Masters	110	34.10
Specialist Degree (Ed.S)	126	39.00
Doctorate Degree	19	5.90
Number of Years in Career		
0-9	94	28.80
10-19	115	35.30
20-29	102	31.30
30+	15	4.60

Note. Adapted from Reed (2022).

To determine what had an impact on job desirability, means and standard deviations were calculated from all the responses given from Sections 2, 3, and 4 of the survey. The independent variables had an impact scale range from -2 (low impact) to 2 (high impact). Job desirability and leadership certification had ranges from 1 (low impact) to 6 (high impact). The subjective component, particularly in the area of positive impact, had the highest amount of positive influence in career decisions in leadership (1.10 out of 2.00) when compared to the other independent variables. Work itself had very little impact on participants' perceptions (.05 out of 2.00). Georgia leadership had an average impact of 2.88 out of 6.00, which is somewhat unlikely to impact career decisions. Table 3 shows descriptives for job desirability.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Job Desirability

Variable	N	M	SD	Low	High
Objective scale	313	.78	.73	-2.00	2.00
Subjective scale, Positive Impact	299	1.10	.76	-2.00	2.00
Subjective scale, Stress/Accountability	304	-.39	.91	-2.00	2.00
Subjective scale, Support System	303	.59	.85	-2.00	2.00
Work–itself scale, Problems/Dilemmas	309	-.29	.97	-2.00	2.00
Work–itself scale, Fiscal Management	314	.05	.84	-2.00	2.00
Work–itself scale, External Relations	300	.53	.73	-2.00	2.00
Work–itself scale, Professional Development	300	.35	.78	-2.00	2.00

Work–itself scale, Time Demands	298	-.16	.85	-2.00	2.00
Work–itself scale, Management Tasks	302	.29	.92	-2.00	2.00
School context scale	308	.40	.80	-2.00	2.00
Critical contact scale	298	.39	.84	-2.00	2.00
Job desirability scale	320	2.86	1.53	1.00	6.00
Georgia Educational Leadership Certification	307	2.88	1.63	1.00	6.00
Overall attractiveness of leadership position	320	3.11	1.48	1.00	6.00
Probability of seeking a leadership position	320	2.68	1.62	1.00	6.00
Probability of being offered a leadership position	319	2.57	1.50	1.00	6.00
Probability of accepting a leadership position	320	2.78	1.73	1.00	6.00

Note. Adapted from Reed (2022).

Descriptives about job attractiveness indicated moderate attractiveness to educational leadership on average (3.11 out of 6.00). The chances of seeking ($M = 2.68$), being offered (M = 2.57), and accepting ($M = 2.78$) an educational leadership position were somewhat attractive on average. Pearson correlation coefficients were generated from the information to determine the relationship between the independent factors and job desirability. There were statistically significant positive correlations between job desirability and the following factors: objective scale ($r = .40$), subjective scale–factor 1 ($r = .52$), subjective scale–factor 2 ($r = .36$), subjective scale–factor 3 ($r = .47$), work–itself–factor 1 ($r = .43$), work–itself–factor 2 ($r = .47$), work–itself–factor 3 ($r = .46$), work–itself–factor 4 ($r = .46$), work–itself–factor 5 ($r = .37$), work–itself–factor 6 ($r = .43$), school context scale ($r = .28$), and critical contact scale ($r =.47$). There was also a significant positive relationship between job desirability and educational leadership certification ($r = .75$).

Hierarchical regression analysis, principal component analysis, and ANOVA tests indicated several variables that impacted job desirability. Subjective scale–factor scale 1 ($p = .03$), probability to seek educational leadership certification ($p < .001$), highest degree earned ($p = .04$), probability of obtaining a Tier II certification only (p = .006), probability of obtaining leadership certification under GaPSC rule certification requirements ($p < .001$), and number of years in professional educational career ($p = .02$) were all significant predictors. Results for the overall model are summarized in Table 4. In Table 4, the values of B and standard error are unstandardized coefficients, whereas beta is standardized.

Table 4
Overall Regression Analysis Results for Factors

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	*t*	*p*
(Constant)	1.78	.59	N/A	3.01	.003
Objective	.20	.15	.10	1.27	.20
Subjective PI	.38	.18	.20	2.15	.03
Subjective SA	.18	.17	.11	1.05	.30
Subjective SS	.02	.14	.009	.12	.91
Work-Itself PDi	.08	.16	.06	.53	.60
Work-Itself FM	.05	.15	.03	.35	.73
Work-Itself ER	-.11	.18	-.06	-.62	.54
Work-Itself PDe	-.13	.17	-.07	-.77	.44
Work-Itself TD	.04	.13	.02	.32	.75
Work-Itself MT	.05	.14	.03	.33	.74
School Context	.001	.11	.00	.008	.99
Critical Contact	.10	.13	.05	.73	.47
Probability to seek certification	1.57	.17	.52	9.09	.00
Gender	-.16	.18	-.04	-.91	.37
Age	.09	.11	.06	.87	.39
Race	-.15	.32	-.02	-.46	.65
Marital status	.06	.18	.02	.35	.73
Highest degree earned	.19	.10	.11	2.03	.04
Number of years in career	-.03	.01	-.17	-2.29	.02
Probability for Tier I degree	.005	.05	.007	.10	.92
Probability for Tier I only	-.07	.07	-.10	-1.07	.29
Probability for a Tier II degree	.03	.06	.04	.49	.63
Probability for Tier II only	.21	.07	.24	2.76	.006

Probability of certification (GaPSC Rule)	.35	.07	.40	4.98	.00

Note. Adapted from Reed (2022). PI = Positive Impact; SA = Stress/Accountability; SS = Support System; PDi = Problems/Dilemmas; FM = Fiscal Management; ER = External Relations; PDe = Professional Development; TD = Time Demands; MT = Management Tasks. Dependent variable = Job desirability index.

The analysis procedures also determined that the factors predicting job attractiveness were probability to seek educational leadership ($p = .002$), age ($p = .02$), probability of obtaining Tier II certification only ($p = .02$), and probability of obtaining certification under GaPSC rules ($p = .02$). There were multiple factors that predicted the probability of seeking an educational leadership in the future: probability to seek educational leadership certification ($p = .002$), probability of obtaining Tier II certification only ($p = .01$), and probability of obtaining certification under GaPSC rules ($p < .001$). The probability of being offered a leadership position in the future was predicted by gender ($p = .009$), highest degree earned ($p = .003$), and probability of obtaining certification under GaPSC rules ($p < .001$). Finally, significant predictors of the probability to accept an educational leadership position in the future were the probability to seek leadership certification ($p = .001$), highest degree earned ($p = .046$), number of years in career ($p = .04$), probability of obtaining Tier II certification only ($p = .04$), and probability of obtaining certification under GaPSC rules ($p < .001$).

Discussions

Based on the results of the study, it is clear that there were several predictors concerning job desirability, job attractiveness, the probability of seeking an educational leadership position, the probability of being offered an educational leadership position, and the probability of accepting an educational leadership position. For job desirability, the subjective factor of positive impact consistently predicted it. This means that the participants consistently perceived that making a positive, influential difference in what they do is a significant consideration in their choices about principalships. There were also other significant attributes with positive relationships to job desirability: probability to seek educational leadership certification and highest degree earned. As educators are more likely to seek out opportunities for education and certification, they are also more likely to desire principalships. There was one negative relationship found, where educators with less experience were more interested in a principal position. Therefore, those with more education and less years of experience with the actual job are more likely to find the job interesting. Someone who is used to the job, from a practical perspective, would tend to perceive it as boring or monotonous. Barksdale (2003) found that career experience was a negative predictor of the probability of being offered a job. This along with the findings about job desirability in this study, Tom (1971), Super (1953), and Behling et al. (1968) support the more integrative approach concerning job choice, rather than approaching job choice in terms of basic trait matching. It is not guaranteed that those with the best capabilities or certifications for the job would desire or even be offered more opportunities than what they already have, and it may not be possible for very experienced people to have as many opportunities for job mobility as those who do not have obvious attributes for leadership positions (Pijanowski et al., 2009; Winter et al., 2001).

In terms of job attractiveness, the participants perceived leadership options as moderately attractive, with an average score of 3.11 out of 6 on the attractiveness rating scale within the survey ($M = 3.11$; $SD = 1.48$). While not completely neutral, more needs to be done to attract and retain educators to leadership positions. This includes providing opportunities for recruitment and education about principalships, since awareness positively impacts job choices. For those already having practical field experience, incentives or upgrades for certification can be motivating if they find it contributes something new and exciting to what is already being done. Job attractiveness is positively influenced by different factors, namely age, the probability of seeking educational leadership positions, the probability of obtaining Tier II certification only, and the probability of obtaining certification under GaPSC rules. In other words, principalships are more likely to be attractive as educators get older, and educators like when the odds are in favor for their success. Their motivational preferences and perceptions about principalships typically align with their job choices. The results on job attractiveness favor trait matching as described by Parsons (1909) because of the fact that an appropriate career decision is based on how well the job matches the perceptions, personality, and traits of the seeker. The results favor integrative approaches to job choice theory as well because educators are not just concerned about the job description. There are a variety of factors that go into decisions about leadership positions (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

Moreover, educators perceive the probability of seeking, being offered, and accepting a leadership position in their field as somewhat attractive. The ratings for the probabilities of seeking, being offered, and accepting an educational leadership position are 2.68, 2.57, and 2.78, respectively. Having more chances to explore and pursue principalships makes such positions more appealing, but more is likely needed to keep or increase favorable perceptions of leadership positions as a whole. Although there were at least three predictors for each probability type, there was only one factor that had a positive relationship with all of them: the probability of obtaining certification under GaPSC rules. Educators who are certain about their certification chances with the GaPSC are more attracted to opportunities for principalships or other leadership opportunities within their field, and they are more likely to perceive that they have better chances for advancement that benefits them. The need for certainty in a career position is a psychological need, which is subjective in nature. Therefore, these particular results support the subjective theory within job choice theory, as espoused by Behling et al. (1968). They also support the theory of role personality by Super (1953), since it is similar to subjective theory with its emphasis on psychological needs and self-concepts.

Limitations

There were four limitations observed about this study. One limitation has to do with generalizability. The results pertain to educators within North Georgia school districts, so inferences made about educators' perceptions are only applicable to the population of interest. More research needs to be conducted for educators within other regions of the United States and educators in areas outside of the United States. Another limitation pertains to the fact that there is a lack of significant literature available about how educators perceive and are impacted by educational leadership certification. While there are historical and legal references made about leadership certification programs, not enough studies are available to discern the practical implications of leadership certification rules and programs. The third limitation concerns the responses of the participants themselves. Some participants may have a limited understanding of certification programs or principalships, and that may have affected their responses to survey items. The number of responses may have been affected by the timing of survey dissemination as well. Surveys were given to participants prior to Thanksgiving school break. This time of year is very busy for educators because they attempt to give students as much information as possible before the break occurs. This may result in more disregarded surveys due to timing. The fourth limitation pertains to study methodology. Correlational and causal elements exist within this research study, but survey research cannot account for all possibilities of causality that happen within the actual school environment. Therefore, more experimental research needs to be done to determine the extent to which certification programs in educational leadership help reach goals and outcomes created for those within the school system.

Recommendations

Because of the lack of literature available on leadership certification and factors influencing the job decisions of principals, it is important to conduct more studies about the subject matter. More quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies need to be available. It is possible to replicate this quantitative study in order to expand on how educators feel about leadership positions both inside and outside of their field. The Principal Job Survey could be modified to include those within higher education who have had principal positions or who have encountered leadership certification opportunities within their respective departments. A qualitative study that is based on this study could focus on the exploration of themes found within the survey through in-depth observations or the determination of perceptions through interviews. A mixed methods study could determine the effects of leadership programs through experimentation, survey administration, and focus groups.

Another area of concern is the lack of interest in principalships, especially from those with more experience in the field. It is important that stakeholders within PreK-12 education have programs that reach a wide variety of educational needs. Potential leaders need to feel that what they do matters, and that needs to translate within leadership certification programs. The benefits must outweigh time and cost demands. More incentives need to be there to support and congratulate those who pursue opportunities in leadership. For instance, teachers could receive stipends, professional development trips, or additional time for planning because they participate in events pertaining to educational leadership certification. Opportunities for ongoing feedback can be present at all levels of education so that those who make policies about certification can be aware of what is actually happening.

The final area of concern is that lack of understanding can limit opportunities for seeking, pursuing, accepting, and receiving leadership positions. This study indicated that educators have more willingness to pursue jobs in leadership if they are certain they can accomplish what is required of them. One strategy that can remedy the amount of uncertainty about leadership certification is mentorships. Educators can partner with those who have effective leadership skills in supervisory roles that include principalships. The guidance given by leaders in sought positions is valuable because it makes others aware of what to do as a leader and how to lead without having to feel overwhelmed and alone about completing all that is required (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Murphy et al., 2008). More research needs to be completed on how principals recruit, mentor, and train educators for leadership opportunities. The results can help those employed within the school system develop better programs and plans for future leaders.

Conclusions

Survey research was conducted with educators to determine factors that impacted job choice, job attractiveness, and willingness to participate in leadership certification programs. Descriptives and regression analyses were performed to answer relevant questions about the perceptions of North Georgia educators concerning educational leadership certification. It was found that several factors had significant relationships with job decisions, including positive impact, fiscal management, and probability of obtaining certification according to GaPSC rules. Demographic variables such as age, highest degree attained, and number of years in career also tended to impact decisions about principalships. The findings are mostly supported by integrative approaches to decision-making within careers, particularly that which is encouraged by Behling et al. (1968). The study does corroborate the fact that the attractiveness of leadership certification is not as high as it needs to be in order to stop the shortage of effective leaders in administrative positions. This means that more awareness, understanding, personalization, and diverse research must be completed to better address the leadership needs of schools today. Policymakers and others who influence the development of educational leadership certifications must be able to identify existing challenges in school systems, and more benefits need to be available for those who decide to pursue leadership roles in the future. The demand for more leadership improvements will not solve itself overnight, but exploring the perceptions of those who need them is a start in the right direction.

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