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## Emergency Certified Teachers' Motivations for Entering the Teaching Profession: Evidence from Oklahoma

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**Abstract:** The use of emergency certification to fill teaching vacancies has increased in many school districts across the United States. Prior research suggests that teachers' underlying motivations for entering the profession are associated with student outcomes, but very little is known about the motivations of emergency certified teachers who enter the profession in a less systematic fashion than traditionally certified teachers. To understand emergency certified teachers' rationales for entering teaching, we interviewed 30 emergency certified teachers in Oklahoma where emergency certification has risen sharply. Findings indicate that emergency certified teachers articulate intrinsic motivations for entering the profession that are similar to those commonly identified by traditionally certified teachers. However, emergency certified teachers also report motivations that seemed to be markedly different, such as using teaching as a contingency employment option or wanting to test out the profession before committing to it. This study raises important policy questions about the use of emergency certification as a strategy for filling teaching vacancies.

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**Motivaciones de maestros certificados de emergencia para ingresar a la profesión docente: Evidencia de Oklahoma**

**Resumen:** El uso de la certificación de emergencia para llenar las vacantes de enseñanza ha aumentado en muchos distritos escolares en los Estados Unidos. Investigaciones previas sugieren que las motivaciones subyacentes de los maestros para ingresar a la profesión están asociadas con los resultados de los estudiantes, pero se sabe muy poco acerca de las motivaciones de los maestros certificados de emergencia que ingresan a la profesión de manera menos sistemática que los maestros tradicionalmente certificados. Para comprender los fundamentos de los maestros certificados de emergencia para ingresar a la enseñanza, entrevistamos a 30 maestros certificados de emergencia en Oklahoma, donde la certificación de emergencia ha aumentado bruscamente. Los resultados indican que los maestros certificados de emergencia articulan motivaciones intrínsecas para ingresar a la profesión que son similares a las comúnmente identificadas por los maestros tradicionalmente certificados. Sin embargo, los maestros certificados de emergencia también informan motivaciones que parecían ser marcadamente diferentes, como usar la enseñanza como una opción de empleo de contingencia o querer probar la profesión antes de comprometerse con ella. Este estudio plantea importantes cuestiones de política sobre el uso de la certificación de emergencia como una estrategia para llenar las vacantes docentes.

**Palabras-clave:** Certificación de emergencia; mercado laboral docente; preparación docente

**Motivações dos professores certificados de emergência para ingressar na profissão docente: Evidências de Oklahoma**

**Resumo:** O uso da certificação de emergência para preencher vagas de ensino aumentou em muitos distritos escolares dos Estados Unidos. Pesquisas anteriores sugerem que as motivações subjacentes dos professores para ingressar na profissão estão associadas aos resultados dos alunos, mas muito pouco se sabe sobre as motivações dos professores certificados de emergência que ingressam na profissão de maneira menos sistemática do que os professores tradicionalmente certificados. Para entender a lógica dos professores de emergência certificados para ingressar no ensino, entrevistamos 30 professores de emergência certificados em Oklahoma, onde a certificação de emergência aumentou bruscamente. Os resultados indicam que os professores certificados de emergência articulam motivações intrínsecas para ingressar na profissão, semelhantes àquelas comumente identificadas por professores tradicionalmente certificados. No entanto, os professores certificados de emergência também relatam motivações que pareciam ser marcadamente diferentes, como usar o ensino como uma opção de emprego de contingência ou querer testar a profissão antes de se comprometer com ela. Este estudo levanta importantes questões políticas sobre o uso da certificação de emergência como estratégia para preencher vagas de ensino.

**Palavras-chave:** certificação de emergência; mercados de trabalho de professores; preparação do professor

## Introduction

Extensive evidence suggests that teachers are one of the most influential school-based inputs affecting student outcomes (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014a, 2014b; Cowan & Goldhaber, 2018; Hanushek, 2011; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Some estimates indicate that students of an effective teacher may achieve more than a full year of learning when compared to students taught by an ineffective teacher (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). Scholars have also found that the benefits of an effective teacher translate into higher college attendance rates and greater income in adulthood (Chetty et al., 2014b). Despite the importance of teachers to student success, recruiting and retaining effective teachers has remained a persistent challenge for many schools across the country (Barth et al., 2016; Barton, 2012; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017). A majority of states also report difficulty filling teaching positions in critical subject areas with 42 states reporting teacher shortages in math and 40 states reporting shortages in science (Sutcher et al., 2016).

To fill pressing teaching vacancies, the hiring of teachers through emergency certification has become a growing phenomenon (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2000a). Emergency certification generally allows bachelor's degree holders to become classroom teachers without any other formal training aside from an expectation to meet alternative certification requirements at a point in the future (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). Although the precise number of emergency certified teachers currently teaching in public schools is uncertain, a large proportion of the over 100,000 teachers in the United States who are not fully certified are thought to have entered the teaching profession through the process of emergency certification (Learning Policy Institute, 2018). While emergency certified teachers appear to represent an increasing segment of the teaching force, the estimated proportion of emergency certified teachers is approximately one percent of all teachers in the public education system (US Department of Education, 2018; NCES, 2018). Still, many questions exist on the use of emergency certification and how it may influence educational experiences. One concern is that individuals who enter teaching by gaining emergency certification may not possess adequate training in instructional methods, classroom management, and approaches to student behavior (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005). Emergency certification also appears to be slightly more prevalent in schools serving socioeconomically disadvantaged students in rural and urban areas (Darling-Hammond, 2010; US Department of Education, 2016). Schools serving students with considerable educational needs may then be those that are more likely to hire teachers lacking experience and training (Cosentino de Cohen, Deterding, & Clewell, 2005; Goe, 2002).

In addition to questions related to formal training, it is unclear why individuals decide to enter the teaching profession through the process of emergency certification. Understanding the motivations of emergency certified teachers may be important as effective teachers are thought to be motivated by intrinsic factors that include a desire to inspire youth, an interest in learning processes, and a strong service orientation (Bakar, Mohamed, Suhid, & Hamzah, 2014; Fray & Gore, 2018; Massari, 2014; Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016; Thomson, 2013). Intrinsic motivation in teachers has been linked to student learning (Carson & Chase, 2009; Malmberg, 2006; Perlman, 2013; Retelsdorf, Butler, Streblov, & Schiefele, 2010) and may help to create conditions in schools that foster student-teacher relationships, student engagement, and positive school climate (Forsyth et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teachers who value the intrinsic rewards from teaching are also more likely to stay in the profession over a long duration (Taylor et al., 2014). However, very little research has explored the motivations of emergency certified teachers who can enter the teaching profession without investing substantial time and resources.

This study explores emergency certified teachers' motivations for entering the teaching profession. Specifically, this study asks, how do emergency certified teachers decide to enter the teaching profession? To address this question, we performed 30 semi-structured interviews with emergency certified teachers in schools in Oklahoma. Oklahoma is an important setting for investigating emergency certified teachers' rationales for entering teaching as the state has experienced considerable growth in the use of emergency certification (Maiden & Reynolds, 2019; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). In 2011, 32 teachers entered classrooms by gaining emergency certification in Oklahoma, but as of 2019, over 3,000 emergency certified teachers were hired for teaching positions in the state (OSDE, 2018). This study aims to contribute to the literature by exploring rationales for entering the teaching profession for a subgroup of teachers that has received little attention in prior scholarship. Our findings may also offer additional insight into emergency certification as a policy response to filling teaching vacancies.

## Literature Review

### Teaching Vacancies in Public Schools

Many studies have found strong effects of teachers on a range of student outcomes (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2010; Cowan & Goldhaber, 2018; Goldhaber, 2002; Goldhaber, Brewer, & Anderson, 1999; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1999; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). Despite a sizable body of work indicating the importance of teachers, finding certified teachers to fill vacant positions, particularly in math and science, has been a recurring challenge for many school districts (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019; Pennington-Mcvey & Trinidad, 2019). This difficulty is considered to be driven by a combination of factors, including inadequate compensation, poor working conditions, macroeconomic conditions, and population trends (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019; Levin et al., 2015). Teacher attrition rates are also estimated to account for nearly 90% of demand in teacher labor markets (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Unfilled teaching positions seem to be more commonplace in high poverty rural and urban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Federal reports indicate that the proportion of emergency certified teachers may, on average, be approximately two to three percentage points higher in high-poverty rural and urban schools (US Department of Education, 2016). In these settings, schools are more likely to experience comparatively high rates of teacher turnover that may exacerbate shortages (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Rosenholtz, 1985; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007). Future projections suggest that struggles to fill teaching positions in subject areas such as math and science will continue with some researchers predicting annual shortages to be over 100,000 a year over the next five years (Sutchter et al., 2019).

To address teaching vacancies in public schools, policymakers have used a wide array of strategies, but research is generally inconclusive on what approaches are most effective (Berry & Shields, 2017). Studies find that financial incentives (e.g. pay increases, expansion of benefits, loan forgiveness) as well as improvements to working conditions in schools may help to decrease teacher attrition and improve the efficacy of recruitment efforts (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Geiger & Pivovarov, 2018; Harris et al., 2019; Russel, 2019). In a study of teachers in Texas, Hendricks (2014) found evidence of a link between increased compensation and teacher retention while Feng and Sass (2018) also reported that a loan forgiveness program in Florida reduced attrition among middle and high school math and science teachers. In addition, a review of 34 studies indicates that working conditions may be a factor in increasing teacher retention (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Conditions, such as class size, school facilities, student characteristics, preparation time, and school leadership appear to affect teachers' decisions to remain at a school (Hanushek et al., 1999; Ladd,

2011; Loeb et al., 2005). For new teachers, there is modest evidence that mentorship and administrative supports may help to improve retention rates (Crook et al., 2011; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In spite of these different approaches to teacher retention and recruitment, the problem of teaching vacancies remains a challenge for many schools.

### **Non-Traditional Pathways for Entering the Teaching Profession**

One of the primary strategies for responding to teacher vacancies has been to ease requirements for entering the teaching profession. The majority of teachers enter the teaching profession by obtaining a bachelor's degree through an accredited teacher preparation program at a four-year university, and then, passing a series of licensing examinations (NCES, 2018). In contrast to this traditional pathway, alternative certification programs allow bachelor's degree holders to earn a teaching license within one to two years by completing an accelerated teacher preparation program, state certification examinations, and, in some states, a mentorship program (Rickenbrode et al., 2018). These programs often seek to bring those desiring a career change into teaching, but other non-traditional alternative programs aim to recruit recent college graduates without education degrees. Teach for America (TFA) is a well-known example. TFA recruits commit to two years of teaching in low-income urban and rural schools where there are teaching vacancies (Teach for America, 2020). TFA recruits must complete a five- to eight-week summer training session before entering a classroom and are then expected to work toward full certification while teaching (Teach for America, 2020). There are also non-traditional pathways that focus on specific subgroups, such as Troops to Teachers, Four-Year Olds and Younger Certificate, Title I Paraprofessional Teaching, Career Development Program, and Non-Traditional Special Education Certification Program (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; OSDE, 2019). Each of these programs tends to have training and educational requirements that must be met prior to an individual being able to enter the classroom. Among existing pathways to the teaching profession, emergency certification is one of the least restrictive approaches to becoming a teacher. Emergency certification generally allows anyone with a bachelor's degree to become a teacher without any other formal training or education (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). Its use has trended upward across the country in recent years with 42 states now offering different forms of emergency teaching licenses (US Department of Education, 2016).

### **Motivations for Entering the Teaching Profession**

There are many questions about the desirability of emergency certification as a strategy for filling teaching vacancies (Mcvey-Pennington & Trinidad, 2019). When examining factors that constitute an effective teacher, researchers have tended to analyze characteristics of teachers recorded in administrative datasets, such as teaching experience, degree type, degree level, and certification status (Goldhaber, 2002; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff et al., 2011). Evidence is largely mixed on whether any of these factors is associated with student learning (Goldhaber, 2002; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Hanushek, 1986, 1997). In the case of certification pathways, for example, there appears to be little difference in student learning between traditionally certified teachers and alternatively certified teachers (Boyd et al., 2006; Kane et al., 2008). In New York City, Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger (2008) find little difference in the effectiveness of certified, uncertified, and alternatively certified teachers. As a high-profile alternative route, researchers have examined results for TFA teachers and have tended to report that TFA teachers are slightly more effective than traditionally certified and uncertified teachers (Decker, Mayer, & Glazerman, 2004; Kane et al., 2008; Raymond, 2001). It is important to note that few empirical studies have specifically investigated how emergency certified teachers compare with other teachers. In one existing study, teachers holding emergency, provisional, and temporary certification in North Carolina exhibited a

negative association with math (-0.03 to -0.06 SDs) and reading (-0.01 to -0.02 SDs) achievement (Clotfelter et al., 2010).

Beyond observable characteristics available in administrative datasets, scholars have found that intangible factors that are more difficult to observe in administrative datasets may be important (Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015). One of these factors is intrinsic motivation (Katz & Shahar, 2015; Keller, Neumann, & Fischer, 2017; Watt & Richardson, 2013). Intrinsically motivated teachers reportedly exhibit a strong dedication to teaching and learning, enthusiasm for instructional content, and an ability to foster trusting relationships with students (Hein et al., 2012; Malmberg, 2006; Perlman, 2013; Radel et al., 2010). These factors have also been tied to student engagement and learning (Givens Rolland, 2012; Radel et al., 2010; Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015; Urdan, 2010; Wild, Enzle, Nix, & Deci, 1997; Wolters, 2004).

Compared with many occupations requiring a college degree, teaching in the United States is a career that is often characterized by relatively few opportunities for advancement, low pay and prestige, and challenging work conditions (Haggard, Slostad, & Winterton, 2006). In the case of traditionally certified teachers, the decision to commit time and resources to complete these programs could be partly indicative of intrinsic motivations for wanting to teach. Previous research documents specific factors underlying intrinsic motivation in educators. In the literature, these underlying factors include a desire to serve others (Fray & Gore, 2018; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013; Yüce, Şahin, Koçer, & Kana, 2013); to help struggling students (Chung & Huang, 2012; Jungert, Alm, & Thornberg, 2014; Pop & Turner, 2009; Struyven, Jacobs, & Dochy, 2013); to become a change agent (Afrianto, 2014; Gao & Trent, 2009; Gu & Lai, 2012; Struyven et al., 2013); to make a contribution to society (Azman, 2013; Chong & Low, 2009; Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Mtika & Gates, 2011); and to answer a calling (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2011; Chong & Low, 2009). However, this research has predominately focused on the rationales of preservice teachers in traditional teacher preparation programs. Very little research has sought to understand emergency certified teachers' motivations for entering teaching.

## Methods

### Study Setting

To understand emergency certified teachers' motivations for entering the teaching profession, we undertook semi-structured interviews with 30 emergency certified teachers in the U.S. state of Oklahoma. To receive emergency certification in Oklahoma, prospective teachers must have a bachelor's degree and must pass a background check (OSDE, 2019). After being hired as an emergency certified teacher, the individual must earn alternative certification within two years by passing three state certification exams. Emergency certification was rarely used in Oklahoma until 2009, but the state has since experienced substantial growth in the use of emergency certification as over 3,000 emergency certified teachers gained teaching positions in the state in 2019 (Fuxa et al., 2019; Kauffman, 2019). Oklahoma requires schools to make every possible effort to hire a certified teacher before turning to emergency certification (OSDE, 2019). In recent years, approximately 17% of new traditionally certified teachers in the state have taken higher paying positions in neighboring states that offer higher compensation for teachers (OSSBA, 2019). Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has also plummeted by 39% in the past 10 years (Fuxa et al., 2019). These trends have dramatically decreased applicant pools for open teaching positions in Oklahoma.

## Participants

For this study, we recruited emergency certified teachers across varying subjects, school levels, and geographical settings in Oklahoma. A combination of purposeful and convenience sampling was used during the recruitment process. One of the researchers attended teacher professional development conferences where emergency certified teachers were recruited for interviews. This researcher also placed recruitment flyers at schools and toured schools as part of recruiting emergency certified teachers. As a precondition for interviews, all participants needed to have been emergency certified and have no prior teaching certification. State policy requires schools to exhaust all efforts to find a certified teacher before hiring an emergency certified teacher (OSDE, 2019). Sixteen of the emergency certified teachers that we interviewed were hired within two weeks of the start of the school year, two were hired in the middle of the school year, and four completed a boot camp before being hired in the summer prior to the following school year.

Participants completed a brief demographic survey at the end of each interview. This form asked participants their age, ethnicity, highest level of education, university major, marital status, household size, and household income. Table 1 presents a profile for each emergency certified teacher who was interviewed. Of the 30 participants, 25 were females and five were males. Twenty-one participants taught core subjects (i.e., math, science, English, and history) and nine taught non-core courses (e.g., art, music, and physical education). Participants taught in elementary, middle, and high school in urban, suburban, and rural areas. After interviews were complete, they were transcribed using Trint audio transcription software. Copies of transcriptions were offered to participants, allowing them an opportunity to revise or correct their transcripts. None of the participants elected to make revisions to their transcripts.

Table 1

### *Characteristics of Participants*

| Age   | Gender | Race<br>Ethnicity  | College<br>Degree          | Teaching<br>Experience | Course<br>Teaching | Grade Level<br>Teaching | School<br>Locale |
|-------|--------|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| 25-34 | Female | White              | Recreation<br>Management   | Yes                    | Core               | Kindergarten            | Urban            |
| 35-44 | Female | White              | Journalism                 | No                     | Core               | 1st                     | Urban            |
| 25-34 | Male   | Black              | Psychology                 | No                     | Core               | 2nd                     | Urban            |
| 25-34 | Female | White              | General Studies            | No                     | Core               | 3rd                     | Urban            |
| 35-44 | Female | White              | Marketing                  | Yes                    | Core               | 2nd                     | Rural            |
| 35-44 | Female | Native<br>American | Business<br>Administration | Yes                    | Non-<br>core       | 1st-6th                 | Rural            |
| 25-34 | Female | White              | Criminal<br>Justice        | Yes                    | Core               | Kindergarten            | Suburb<br>Large  |
| 25-34 | Female | White              | Psychology                 | No                     | Core               | Kindergarten            | Suburb<br>Large  |

Table 1 (Cont'd.)  
*Characteristics of Participants*

| Age   | Gender | Race<br>Ethnicity  | College<br>Degree                             | Teaching<br>Experience | Course<br>Teaching | Grade Level<br>Teaching | School<br>Locale |
|-------|--------|--------------------|---|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| 35-44 | Female | White              | Liberal Arts                                  | Yes                    | Core               | 4th                     | Suburb<br>Large  |
| 35-44 | Female | Hispanic           | Animal Science                                | No                     | Core               | 7th                     | Suburb<br>Large  |
| 35-44 | Male   | White              | Psychology                                    | No                     | Core               | 8th                     | Suburb<br>Large  |
| 25-34 | Female | Black              | English and<br>Masters in<br>Librarianship    | Yes                    | Non-<br>Core       | 9th-12th                | Suburb<br>Large  |
| 35-44 | Female | White              | Vocal Music<br>and Theater                    | Yes                    | Core               | 11th                    | Suburb<br>Large  |
| 21-24 | Female | Native<br>American | Psychology                                    | No                     | Non-<br>Core       | 9th-10th                | Suburb<br>Large  |
| 35-44 | Female | Black              | General Studies                               | No                     | Non-<br>Core       | 10th-11th               | Urban            |
| 45-54 | Female | Black              | Business                                      | Yes                    | Core               | 9th-12                  | Urban            |
| 45-54 | Female | Black              | Biology &<br>Chemistry                        | Yes                    | Core               | 6th-8th                 | Urban            |
| 45-54 | Female | White              | Criminal<br>Justice                           | Yes                    | Core               | 9th-12th                | Urban            |
| 55-64 | Male   | Black              | Music<br>Education<br>Masters Liberal<br>Arts | No                     | Non-<br>core       | 6th-8th                 | Urban            |
| 45-54 | Male   | Black              | General<br>Studies/<br>Masters<br>Business    | No                     | Core               | 2nd                     | Urban            |
| 35-44 | Female | White              | Geology                                       | No                     | Core               | 1st                     | Urban            |
| 21-24 | Female | Hispanic           | Public Health                                 | No                     | Core               | 7th                     | Urban            |
| 21-24 | Male   | Black              | Speech<br>Pathology<br>Audiology              | No                     | Core               | 6th-7th                 | Urban            |
| 25-34 | Female | Middle<br>Eastern  | Psychology                                    | No                     | Core               | 1st                     | Urban            |



Table 1 (Cont'd.)  
*Characteristics of Participants*

| Age   | Gender | Race<br>Ethnicity | College<br>Degree                             | Teaching<br>Experience | Course<br>Teaching | Grade Level<br>Teaching | School<br>Locale |
|-------|--------|-------------------|---|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| 45-54 | Female | Black             | Criminal<br>Justice<br>Masters Social<br>Work | Yes                    | Non-<br>core       | 9th                     | Urban            |
| 35-44 | Female | White             | Apparel Design<br>and Production              | No                     | Core               | 4th                     | Urban            |
| 55-64 | Female | Black             | Psychology                                    | No                     | Core               | Kindergarten            | Urban            |
| 21-24 | Female | White             | Psychology                                    | No                     | Non-<br>core       | K-6th                   | Urban            |
| 21-24 | Female | White             | Deaf<br>Education                             | No                     | Non-<br>core       | 9th-12th                | Urban            |
| 25-34 | Female | White             | Deaf<br>Education                             | No                     | Non-<br>core       | 9th                     | Urban            |

### Interview Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were carried out in the summer and fall of 2018 and spring and summer of 2019. Each interview was done in-person and interviews were approximately 30 minutes in duration. Prior to interviews, the researchers explained the purpose of the study and requested that participants sign a consent form to participate in the study. The focus of the interviews was primarily on why participants had decided to enter the teaching profession. As responses to this main question unfolded, questions about aspirations and future professional plans, prior experience and training, previous occupations, and educational background were also asked to probe participants' primary motivations for entering teaching and to provide additional context into these rationales. Appendix Table 1A presents a list of questions comprising the semi-structured interview questionnaire.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted beginning with a list of 20 codes derived from a substantial body of theoretical and empirical literature covering teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for entering teaching (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Padhy, Emo, Djira, & Deokar, 2015; Rots et al., 2010; Watt et al., 2012). Appendix Table 2A presents these *a priori* codes. During initial rounds of analysis, the first author applied these *a priori* codes to interview transcripts, labeling participants' main rationales for deciding to enter teaching through emergency certification. The second author reviewed labels used on transcripts for a subset of interviews and identified areas of disagreement/agreement. After reaching consensus on a refined set of codes, an additional round of labeling of transcripts was performed. In subsequent analyses, codes on the transcripts were collected and placed in an Excel spreadsheet alongside representative quotations from interview transcripts. Codes were combined into broader categories, and then, refined into themes over three rounds of analysis. Themes were classified as representing either intrinsic or extrinsic motivations

for deciding to become a teacher. The researchers selected representative quotations to illuminate each of the themes.

## **Findings**

By exploring emergency certified teachers' motivations for entering teaching, our participants articulated a range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. We found that emergency certified teachers who had unaccredited postsecondary teacher training or were transitioning to a second or new career in teaching tended to stress intrinsic motivations for wanting to teach. However, many other emergency certified teachers also emphasized extrinsic motivations. These motivations included using teaching as a contingency employment option, wanting to try out the profession before committing time and resources to becoming certified, and turning to teaching out of financial necessity.

### **Intrinsic Motivations for Deciding to Enter Teaching**

#### **A Lifelong Aspiration to Teach**

Many aspiring teachers reported using emergency certification as a way to fulfill a lifelong dream of becoming a teacher. In this study, 10 emergency certified teachers reported that they had used emergency certification to switch careers or have a second career. All of these career changers mentioned that they had long wanted to pursue teaching but had been inhibited by perceived barriers to entry, such as what they felt were lengthy and cost-prohibitive teacher preparation programs. Seven of the ten career changers reported that they had always wanted to teach but had originally made different career choices because of financial and family considerations. For these teachers, emergency certification provided a pathway to pursue their dreams to teach without having to return to school. One career changer represented this sentiment when describing her move from working at a company to a school as a classroom teacher:

I had always wanted to teach, and then, the opportunity came with emergency certification. I was working in human resources for a while, and then I was like, I'm going to go back to do what I really wanted to do.

Two emergency certified teachers had previously retired from the military and decided to begin a second career in teaching. These two participants cited a long-held aspiration to support youth and give back to society by teaching in the public education system. One of these teachers mentioned how the ease of entry into teaching allowed him an opportunity to help youth and give back to his community:

I said, man, this [emergency certification] would be a perfect opportunity for me to reach out to the younger generation coming up and try to groom and mold them as a way of giving back for what educators had done for me over the years. It's pretty much what I've done for the past 23 years as I've taught soldiers.

#### **Wanting to Help Schools Meet an Immediate Need**

To help schools fill immediate needs for classroom teachers, several emergency certified teachers mentioned that they used emergency certification to make a temporary role transition within districts where they had been working. Three emergency certified teachers, for example, had

worked as a paraprofessional, teacher assistant, or substitute teacher. One of them who had formerly been a substitute teacher described how the process unfolded:

I had been subbing for the past five years and I became a paraprofessional. This year they asked me to come in and be a paraprofessional at the middle school and while I was over there, my principal asked if I would come over here and teach second grade, so I said yes. That's how I came into the profession.

These emergency certified teachers reported that they were trying to help out under difficult circumstances by filling pressing teaching vacancies in schools where they had worked in varying capacities. These teachers said that they were willing to be moved at the discretion of the principal based on school needs. These role transitions to the classroom also appeared to ensure that districts were employing emergency certified teachers with more knowledge of and experience working with children as opposed to hiring an emergency certified teacher who had little or no experience working with children. These teachers also had a known presence and existing relationships in the school, which seemed to make it convenient for the principal to hire these individuals. In her role transition from paraprofessional to classroom teacher, one teacher reasoned that she had made the transition because she worried about the poor educational experiences of children in the district where she worked and wanted to make a difference. On the whole, the willingness of teachers to undertake transitions to full-time classroom teachers seemed to be driven by a desire to ensure that children had reliable classroom teachers.

### **A Strong Desire to Serve Youth with Special Needs**

Two emergency certified teachers interviewed for this study had hoped to enter teaching as traditionally certified teachers through a university-based teacher preparation program. However, these two teachers' university program lost accreditation one year before they were able to graduate. Even though these two teachers did not receive traditional certification through their program, they invested the time and resources that other traditionally certified teachers must invest to complete a traditional teacher preparation program. Their rationales for wanting to teach seemed to align with those commonly voiced by traditionally certified teachers (Manuel & Hughes, 2006). These two teachers also described having a strong desire to serve children with special needs, explaining that they had always wanted to be teachers and that they loved working with children who had special needs. These interests initially compelled both of these teachers to enroll in a traditional teacher preparation program while specializing in special education. One teacher articulated this reasoning for wanting to teach based on her experience with a deaf child:

My degree is in deaf education, so as a kid, I met a girl that was my age that signed, and I fell in love with it. So, after that, all I wanted to do was find a way to be able to teach kids.

Both of these teachers had hoped to become educators and decided to enter the profession by using the emergency certification route after their programs had lost accreditation. One of these teachers mentioned that there were ten people in her graduating class that were in the same situation as her and many more underclassmen who had not yet graduated. The president of this institution reported that as many as 200 students would be affected by the accreditation loss (Eger, 2017). Among the 30 emergency certified teachers that were interviewed in this study, these two teachers were the only ones to have passed all three state certification tests. Nonetheless, they were unable to gain traditional certification unless they repeated coursework at an accredited institution. Furthermore,

apart from these two participants, these two participants were also specialists in deaf education, which is an area with high teacher shortages in Oklahoma.

## **Extrinsic Motivations for Deciding to Enter Teaching**

In this study, many emergency certified teachers that we interviewed also stressed extrinsic motivations for deciding to become an educator.

### **Contingency Employment Option**

Choosing to teach as a contingency employment option seemed to give some individuals who needed work in the short-term an employment option when they did not have one in their desired field. For instance, four emergency certified teachers had other professional aspirations outside of teaching but decided to enter teaching as a contingency option after other hoped-for opportunities did not come into fruition. Three of the four who noted using teaching as a fallback occupation made it clear that their employment would be temporary. The four teachers emphasizing teaching as a contingency option mentioned that they were pushed into teaching to gain employment, income, and health benefits until other positions opened in their desired fields. Under emergency certification provisions, having a bachelor's degree created an employment option that would otherwise not have been available. Each of these teachers seemed to enter teaching with extrinsic rationales in mind. One participant mentioned that she planned to move after her husband received an expected promotion, and that she needed "something to keep her busy" in the near term. She explained how the teaching shortage coupled with emergency certification provisions gave her an opportunity to "do something" while waiting for her husband's anticipated promotion:

My husband was transferred for a promotion into this area and so we started looking at certain companies for me to work for because I have a background in food science and there's just not a lot of food science companies in the area, but since I do have a degree in animal science, my husband suggested I take a look at teaching.... I was hired immediately the day that we started school.

### **Trying Out Teaching Before Committing**

Teachers in this study mentioned that emergency certification provided a pathway that allowed them to try out the teaching profession, thereby giving them an opportunity to determine whether or not they could live off a teacher's salary and benefits before committing to the profession over the long term. Four participants had previously held a range of jobs in lower paying occupations, such as a behavioral interventionist, convenience store employee, and non-profit administrator. For these individuals, the teaching profession provided improved income and benefits while allowing them to decide if teaching was a profession they wanted to do over the long-term. Another emergency certified teacher had been a stay-at-home mom and felt that emergency certification presented an opportunity to test out teaching and to figure out if she liked the profession before investing the time to complete alternative certification requirements. Three recent college graduates also wanted to test out teaching before fully committing to it. These three individuals were not able to find jobs after graduation, so they decided to see if they could make a career out of teaching given the minimal prior investment needed to enter the profession and availability of teaching positions in schools. Neither of them was sure whether they would continue teaching into the next academic year.

### **Turning to Teaching out of Financial Necessity**

Financial necessity played a powerful role for four teachers interviewed in this study. One individual explained that the need for health insurance, in particular, had propelled her into teaching because her spouse had had a severe injury and financial responsibilities had fell to her within her family. Teaching under emergency certification let her enter the classroom, gain crucial benefits for her family, and continue working toward certification in the meantime. In describing her family circumstances, she noted:

Whenever we saw changes with our family financial situation going the way they were, I just started applying for anything they [schools] had open that I might be qualified to get because I needed insurance for myself.

Two recent college graduates explained how financial concerns had led them to change from being enrolled in teacher preparation programs to different academic majors so that they could skip an unpaid student-teaching internship required by their respective teacher preparation programs, graduate faster, and begin earning a salary as emergency certified teachers. Both of these students were also non-traditional students who mentioned that they had to work to support their families. As a single mother of seven children, one explained how she could not afford to do an unpaid internship for six months:

So, I started out trying to do an education degree. I have seven kids so I have a lot of things that tend to come up. So, I did the whole entire process and every time I would start to take my state testing, something major would happen with one of my children.... I needed to find a better route that was more feasible for me and that was faster.

Under emergency certification provisions, she described how she could teach for two years and work on completing state certification requirements in the meantime. The other participant was also the primary caregiver for her mother who was battling health issues. She reasoned that emergency certification provided a route to the classroom that was financially expedient.

## **Discussion**

Emergency certification allows bachelor's degree holders to fill teaching vacancies in schools without any other formal training. Although previous research documents why traditionally certified teachers decide to enter the teaching profession, few scholars have explored the motivations of emergency certified teachers. The purpose of this study was to illuminate emergency certified teachers' motivations for entering the teaching profession in a jurisdiction that has experienced a sharp rise in the use of emergency certification in recent years. From in-depth interviews with 30 emergency certified teachers, we found that many emergency certified teachers emphasized intrinsic motivations that included a desire to serve youth with special needs, wanting to help schools in need, and lifelong aspirations of becoming a teacher. However, emergency certified teachers also stressed extrinsic motivations for deciding to enter teaching. For instance, a large number of teachers interviewed in this study reported using teaching as a contingency employment option, turning to teaching out of financial necessity, and wanting to test out the profession before fully committing to it.

This study's findings make a valuable contribution to literature given the lack of empirical research investigating emergency certified teachers and their rationales for becoming educators. Previous studies indicate that intrinsic motivation in teachers is associated with student learning,

engagement, and positive student-teacher relationships (Bakar et al., 2014; Carson & Chase, 2009; Malmberg, 2006; Perlman, 2013; Retelsdorf, Butler, Streblov, & Schiefele, 2010). Intrinsic motivation in teachers may also contribute to strengthening school climate and culture (Forsyth et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, a number of emergency certified teachers stressed intrinsic rationales for wanting to teach. These individuals articulated a strong interest in youth development, teaching and learning, and the common good that were similar to rationales identified among traditionally certified teachers in prior scholarship (Bakar et al., 2014; Fray & Gore, 2018; Massari, 2014; Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016; Thomson, 2013). In these cases where intrinsic rationales drive decisions to teach, it is possible that emergency certification removes barriers to the classroom for individuals who end up becoming valuable teachers in schools.

Many emergency certified teachers also stressed extrinsic motivations for entering teaching. Motivations reported by emergency certified teachers, such as a need for short-term employment or a desire to test out the profession, appear to be less commonly cited among those who obtain traditional certification (Fray & Gore, 2018; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013). One potential concern is that individuals focused on short-term personal rewards from teaching may not deliver a quality educational experience in the classroom. Emergency certified teachers who reported deciding to teach in the short-term while waiting for positions to open in their desired fields might be less inclined to invest time and resources to improve their practice, develop relationships with students and their families, and meet training and certification requirements necessary to become alternatively certified. High turnover in these cases is also plausible, which may hurt continuity, curricular coherence, and collaboration within schools (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

There are several limitations to this study that must be noted. In the study setting of Oklahoma, teaching vacancies are among the highest in the country and use of emergency certification to fill these vacancies has increased rapidly in recent years. Considering this context for teacher labor markets, findings from this study may not be generalizable to states where teaching vacancies are not as severe. Social desirability bias is another limitation that suggests a need for cautious interpretation of the trends presented in this study. During interviews, emergency certified teachers may have felt the need to respond to questions in ways that were expected for new teachers entering the profession (Grimm, 2010). In addition, a known limitation of qualitative research using interview data is the potential for selection bias. For example, emergency certified teachers who were willing to participate in interviews may have had more positive experiences and motivations for wanting to teach than those who did not participate in interviews.

### **Future Directions and Policy Considerations**

This study raises questions for future research on emergency certification. In future work, statistical comparisons of the motivations for entering teaching between emergency certified teachers and their peers would help to build on the findings of this study. Statistical analysis is needed to understand retention rates among emergency certified teachers and to examine further the effectiveness of emergency certified teachers relative to other classroom teachers. The findings in this study also inform a broader set of questions for state policy on emergency certification. Unfilled teaching positions seem likely to continue for many schools across the country. Nevertheless, it is uncertain which combination of targeted policies based on state-specific needs might reduce the need for emergency certification as a way of filling persistent teaching vacancies. There are also questions about how schools can effectively incorporate emergency certified teachers once they are hired (Darling-Hammond, 2000a, 2000b; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Novice teachers who have had little teaching experience or time to learn subject matter may face considerable barriers to delivering effective instruction. Some school districts have responded by carrying out short-term

boot camps and summer certification programs that emergency certified teachers attend (Tulsa Public Schools, 2020), but how effective these types of strategies are at integrating emergency certified teachers is unclear.

In addition, emergency certification appears to be emblematic of ongoing changes to the teaching profession and the nature of entry into it. Alternative certification programs, for instance, have been growing for years and districts are increasingly launching their own training and certification programs for teachers. These trends place pressure on enrollments in university-based teacher preparation programs as there are growing disincentives for prospective educators to devote the time and resources needed to complete traditional certification (e.g. unpaid internships) when they can enter the classroom through pathways requiring fewer resources and less time. Exactly how teacher preparation programs should adapt to the current environment is a topic of much debate, but trends suggest that changes to these programs of some kind may be needed. At the same time, official efforts seem to be mostly focused on addressing needs for teachers in the short term, although projections indicate that the demand for teachers in certain subject areas (e.g. high school math and science) will continue to outpace the supply of certified teachers into the future (Sutcher et al., 2019). Therefore, it would seem that the energies of policymakers may be needed to consider long-term strategies that can address root causes of specific types of shortages in schools.

## Appendix

Table 1A  
*Semi-structured Interview Questionnaire*

| <u>Questions</u>  | <u>Probes</u>   |
|---|---|
| 1. Why did you decide to become a teacher?              | What other factors drove you to become a teacher?                     |
| 2. What subject and grade level are you teaching?       | Are you planning to continue teaching the same subject in the future? |
| 3. Have you taken any of the state certification tests? | Which ones/when do you plan on taking them?                           |
| 4. What is your degree or college major?                | Do you have any minors?   |
| 5. Have you ever been a substitute teacher?             | If so, for how long? What state(s)?                                   |
| 6. Is teaching your only job?                           | What is your other job(s)?  |
| 7. What was your previous career?                       | How long were you at that job? What was your reason for leaving?      |

### Job Process Questions

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 8. What was the teacher job interview process like?   | Were you referred by someone or recruited? |
| 9. What made you choose the school you teach at?  | Do you have kids that attend the school?   |
| 10. Can you tell me about the kinds of support (teachers/principals) you've had since you've been teaching? |  |
| 11. Are there any professional development opportunities or requirements?                                   | What are they? Are they useful?            |
| 12. What are your overall plans in the teaching field?  |  |



Table 2A

*Intrinsic and Extrinsic Codes*

Intrinsic codes

Love of particular subject area  
Long-term goal to become teacher  
Philosophical match  
Give back / service orientation

Love working with children / youth  
Interest in schools / school culture  
Personal satisfaction / growth

Interpersonal bonds

Enjoyment of teaching and learning  
Lifelong learner

Extrinsic codes

Income / Salary  
Immediate financial need  
Benefits / Pension  
Lost job / Need a job

Status  
Work conditions  
Time off / Summer vacation

Ease of entry into teaching / convenience

Praise from others  
Ease of occupation

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