

The Extent of Autism Knowledge of Novice Alternatively Certified Special Education Teachers in Texas

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An increase in the prevalence rate of autism is not necessarily matched by a concurrent increase in the rate of highly qualified special education teachers, resulting in chronic teacher shortages in this area. Alternative certification (AC) is used as a mechanism to alleviate the demand for highly qualified special education teachers. However, AC routes have often left novice teachers underprepared for teaching students with autism, more specifically in the implementation of evidence-based practices necessary for instructional effectiveness. The purpose of the study was to assess the knowledge of novice AC teachers in the area of autism intervention and to determine the extent to which demographic, educational and professional factors predict the variance in knowledge scores. Data were collected through an electronic survey instrument disseminated to all novice (i.e., first-and second-year) alternatively certified special education teachers in the state of Texas. Results indicated that AC teachers were not adequately knowledgeable about autism and the largest predictor of autism knowledge was hours engaged in self-directed learning. Implications for improving the quality of AC programs in Texas are discussed.

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