

Article

Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps policies regarding professional development

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Abstract: The issue of policy changes to support teacher professional development is an important factor shaping the career trajectory, efficacy, and ultimately the success of Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) instructors and the performance of the secondary students they serve and whose lives they affect. Although a rich body of research associated with policies regarding teacher preparation and professional development exists, a more closely related area of research focused specifically on the policies regarding preparation and professional development of JROTC instructors is limited. This lack of research presents a unique opportunity to explore the experiences of JROTC instructors and their perspectives on policies affecting teacher preparation and professional development. This qualitative exploratory single-case study can help to advance understanding of the complexities and nuances of teacher preparation and professional development policies supporting the JROTC instructors serving in high schools across the United States and overseas. One-on-one interviews with 14 JROTC personnel who had completed required teacher preparation requirements and professional development initiatives were conducted. Data analysis revealed 11 themes. Recommendations for improving policies concerning JROTC instructor preparation and professional development, including placing greater emphasis on the unique requirements, as well as suggestions for future research, are provided.

Keywords: JROTC; pre-service training; teaching certification; professional development; public schools

1. Introduction

The lack of school discipline and safety is a major concern in the United States. One answer to this endemic problem is to provide the nation with role models in the school system who teach students how to self-regulate their behavior and what it means to be accountable for their actions while preparing them for leadership roles in their communities. One of the nation’s foremost leadership programs, the U.S. Army JROTC prepares young people for leadership roles in their communities across the nation and overseas (JROTC, 2014). The Department of Defense (DOD, 2006, p. 3) 1205.13 indicates that the JROTC program’s objective is to “instill in students of American secondary education institutions the value of citizenship, service to the United States, personal responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment”. The JROTC provides a rigorous, evidence-based curriculum involving hands-on training and classroom instruction to support cadets in their pursuit of better academic and life outcomes (JROTC, 2014).

The argument is made that the JROTC program provides an education and structure for all students, especially for at-risk students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, that results in improved behavioral and educational outcomes. Educational stakeholders often see the benefit of providing opportunities for students to learn leadership skills in the educational setting. Thus, the public school system and the JROTC program join in a common mission of teaching and developing young people for future leadership roles. “The success of the program depends upon schools that understand their responsibilities to the student, the community, and the nation” (JROTC, 2000).

The focus of this article is the policies regarding pre-service training and professional development needs of JROTC instructors. We will explore JROTC personnel’s perceptions of how their training needs could be addressed and what policies should be enacted to ensure those needs are met. One of the key points is the gap in pre-service training for JROTC instructors, who are not always required to be state-certified teachers. We will explore what changes are recommended and what policies are needed to accomplish them.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework adopted for the study reflects Schein’s Theory of Organizational Culture (Schein, 2010) and Schein’s concepts associated with career anchors (Schein, 2006). Wiener and Vardi (1990) defined organizational culture as a system of shared values manifesting in pressures and forces that influence the motivation and behavior of an organization’s members. Schein’s (2010, p. 21) definition of organizational culture emphasizes “shared learning experiences that lead to shared, taken-for-granted basic assumptions held by the members of the group or organization”. The literature revealed that organizational culture spans several levels, including a focus on individual, group, and department levels of analysis (Schein, 2006; Verboncu and Todorut, 2012).

Schein’s theory of organizational culture provides a useful framework for examining an individual’s self-concept and place within the organization (Danziger et al., 2008). Schein wrote extensively about organizational culture (1975, 1978, and 1987); however, his interest in individual experiences and how they shape and inform what he referred to as a career self-concept or a career anchor further connects his theoretical work to the focus of the study. Schein (1990) suggested that within groups, patterns of shared basic assumptions are learned and applied to solve problems. These patterns of problem-solving behavior become valid when they appear to work. Consequently, they become institutionalized and normative for individuals within organizations, shaping how they perceive, think, feel, and establish policies in relation to these problems (Schein, 1990). The career anchor, according to Schein, consists of an individual’s beliefs regarding their talents and abilities, perceived motivations and needs, and concepts, attitudes, and values. The bulk of the data was derived from instructor and administrator interviews. Sarahee (2014, p. 694) commented on the concept of a career anchor, “investigating the internal career is a way of understanding the working needs of employees which describes their ideas about working lives”. Operationalizing Schein’s theories on organizational culture and career anchors

provided a useful model for exploring the JROTC professional development program, gaining knowledge of the context and environment in which the JROTC instructors work, and the policies that could be enacted to support their needs.

3. U.S. Army JROTC program

The evolution of military science programs in the early years between 1787 and 1916 contributed directly to the signing of the National Defense Act of 1916 (NDAA-16) and the formal establishment of the contemporary JROTC program. In addition to establishing the basic model for military science programs in the United States, the early years are significant for institutionalizing a balance between military science and liberal arts curricula in education (Kotakis, 2016; Neiberg, 2000). During the early years, a concerted effort was made to expand and strengthen vocationally oriented programs, an effort that culminated in the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 (Doerfel, 2003). These early legislative initiatives foreshadowed many trends in education, vocational education, and military science programs that occurred between 1916 and 1963, which represent the middle years of the ROTC program.

The JROTC program has been in existence since 1916, but its origin as a unique American institution runs much deeper, dating back to the founding of the Military Academy at West Point in the early 19th century. The program was formally established as part of NDAA-16 as a means of recruiting and preparing young men for military service in Europe during the First World War. Since then, the program has evolved into a more traditional course of study that is commonly grouped with other CTE courses in secondary schools across the United States and various locations around the world. Originally, the provisions of NDAA-16 authorized the assignment of active-duty soldiers to serve as instructors and the loan of military equipment to establish programs in six high schools in the southern United States (U.S. Army Cadet Command [USACC], 2022). Since its inception in 1916, the program has grown steadily and evolved into a contemporary citizenship and leadership development program.

One of the most important evolutions is the fostering of a closer relationship between military science programs and liberal arts education (Mupinga and Livesay, 2004; Neiberg, 2000; Perez, 2015). According to Neiberg (2000), one of the most important dynamics surrounding the development of the early U.S. education system was the balance between the need to develop a military with the potential to achieve the nation's political and economic goals without being so strong as to jeopardize the civil liberties and need for civilian oversight that were the cornerstone of the U.S. tradition. To address this dynamic, the cadre selected to run the programs at the first military academies in the United States were chosen from the professional officer corps based on their demonstrated competencies in both military science and liberal arts.

Neiberg (2000) suggested enacting policies to shift the instructor pool from an active-duty cadre to a cadre of retired military personnel serving as educators, which marked an important early step toward the professionalization of JROTC personnel and wider acceptance of JROTC programs in educational institutions across the nation. This shift in policy is important because the JROTC personnel would no longer be

considered part of the active military community; instead, from this point forward, JROTC personnel (except for those in military schools) would mainly be classified as career and technical education (CTE) or vocationally oriented teachers.

4. Professional development educators

Among the most important issues manifesting in teacher professional development is an awareness of the intrinsic link between teacher and student performance. Poekert (2012) included teachers and administrators in a qualitative study examining the implementation and effects of reform initiatives to enact policies to support professional development. Based on classroom observations, interviews, and document reviews, Poekert (2012) concluded that teacher professional development contributes to a host of important outcomes in both teacher and student performance. Current state policies do not require JROTC personnel to participate in the teacher professional development programs mandated for all other Texas teachers (Texas Education Agency [TEA], n.d.; USACC, 2022). Because the teacher professional development of JROTC personnel is limited to that required by USACC policies, which are much less rigorous than the teacher professional development of other CTE teachers serving in Texas public schools (TEA, n.d.), they may not be as prepared as other teachers for the complexities of the contemporary educational environment and less likely to succeed at meeting the needs of their students.

The USACC's policy for preparing new JROTC personnel contains little emphasis on leadership in public education and instead focuses on experiential teaching principles and methods (USACC, 2022). JROTC personnel who were the focus of the current study also serve as department heads and are tasked with a wide range of responsibilities that expand well beyond the role of teacher. Peterson and Cosner (2005, p. 29) emphasized that the role of school leaders can be characterized by "brevity, variety, fragmentation, complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty". In 2015, the TEA adopted changes to the certification policies for JROTC personnel that appeared to acknowledge the leadership abilities and potential of JROTC personnel. Beginning in 2016, JROTC personnel interested in pursuing formal leadership and administrative positions in Texas were provided an alternative teacher certification program and, consequently, a path to obtaining the credentials necessary to serve as principals in Texas schools (TEA, 2020). According to Scott and Webber (2008), despite the tremendous expenditure on teacher professional development, leadership development among teachers is usually marginalized to experiential learning and informal mentoring.

5. Background of the problem

Many circumstances can cause JROTC personnel to be less prepared and less qualified than other CTE teachers. Unlike all other vocational programs, the JROTC program is managed by the USACC rather than an education agency (USACC, 2021). For JROTC personnel, inadequacies such as limited exposure to substantive teacher professional development programs begin with a qualification system that may not adequately address initial teacher preparation and certification (USACC, 2022). An examination of the policy involving teacher initial certification requirements for

JROTC personnel nationally (USACC, 2022) revealed that the prerequisites are much less rigorous than those mandated by the TEA for all other CTE teachers in Texas (TEA, 2020). JROTC instructors' initial certification requirements depend on the date of hire and are limited to week-long face-to-face courses and a series of online courses of instruction that, though robust with discussion questions and assessments, only a cursory review and multiple choice assessment are required (USACC, 2021).

One way state leaders have sought to ensure teachers are highly qualified is through rigorous, state-regulated teacher licensure programs (de Deugd, 2020). In Texas, the TEA recognizes several categories for CTE teacher certification (TEA, 2020). Although the recognized categories of CTE specialties cover a wide range of vocational areas, they do not include all CTE programs, such as JROTC programs. Unlike the broad range of state and national policy initiatives leading to increased rigor in the preparation and professional development of CTE teachers (Aliaga et al., 2014; Anderson, 2008; TEA, n.d.), an examination of the policies regarding preparation and professional development of JROTC personnel in Texas revealed there are fewer requirements, less rigor, and less emphasis on teacher quality (TEA, 2020). According to Ratliff (2008), the preparation and certification of teachers merit special attention when examining the quality of teacher professional development. The general problem is that despite a large body of research and recent trends towards higher quality teacher professional development programs, the professional development of JROTC instructors remains limited in focus and less rigorous than teacher certification programs. The lack of rigor in the policies requiring JROTC personnel preparations for their positions may place them at a professional disadvantage starting on the first day of their employment; consequently, the teacher professional development occurring during the life cycle of their employment may be an even more important factor in determining teacher quality.

The specific problem addressed in this study is that without stringent policies regarding JROTC professional development, personnel do not have access to the opportunities needed to bridge gaps in knowledge, skills, and attitudes about teaching. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single-case study was to explore if and how policies can be enacted to increase the rigor of the initial and ongoing professional development of JROTC personnel. The case consisted of a section of a successful public school district in Texas that pertains to JROTC's initial and ongoing professional development opportunities.

Research Questions

The overall research question and two sub-questions guiding this study were:

RQ1. What policies need to be enacted to improve Army JROTC instructors' initial teacher preparation and ongoing professional development to improve their knowledge, skills, and attitudes about teaching?

SQ1. What policies, practices, and resources in USACC, schools, and districts aid or abet Army JROTC instructors in their attempts to overcome perceived gaps in their teacher preparation?

SQ2. What teaching challenges do JROTC instructors perceive they encounter because of barriers or gaps in their teacher preparation?

6. Methods

A qualitative single exploratory single-case study research design was used to explore the perceptions of Army JROTC instructors about the policies needed to improve their pre-service training and preparation through professional development opportunities. NVivo 12[®] was used to categorize the raw data thematically.

Population: The targeted population included three groups of JROTC instructors and district administrators from seven large high schools that serve approximately 3000 students. The first group included instructors who had retired from the Army, were certified to teach JROTC, and were currently serving in teaching roles. Their teaching experience levels ranged from less than 1 year to 16 years. The second group consisted of administrators who had retired from the Army and were certified by the USACC to oversee the JROTC program at the district level. The third group of participants was school employees from both campus- and district-level administrative offices. There were no exclusion criteria—the sample included all available JROTC-certified Army employees and civilians in the district.

Study Site: The research presented in this study focused on a tightly bound JROTC program functioning within a large urban school district located in a city in Texas. The study focused on the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of JROTC instructors and administrators in the school district because of their intimate familiarity with the JROTC program and the professional development of JROTC instructors.

Sample: Two forms of purposive sampling were used, including census and snowball sampling. The sample included (a) five Army instructors (AI; non-commissioned officers) and seven senior Army instructors (SAI; commissioned officers) from each of the seven high schools in the district, (b) one Director of Army Instruction (DAI) serving at the high school and school district levels within the organization, and (c) one operations and training administrator from both campus-based and district level administrative offices. **Table 1** includes participants’ demographic characteristics by age, race/ethnicity, teaching experience, and U.S. Army experience. **Table 2** includes participants’ demographic characteristics by U.S. Army rank (e.g., officer, enlisted men), current job title, and educational levels.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics.

Demographic	<i>n</i>	%	Mean	Range	Total
Age	14	100	54	46–71	
Gender					
Male	11	79			
Female	3	21			
Race/Ethnicity					
Hispanic	4	29			
African American	4	29			
Caucasian	6	43			
Teaching Experience	14	100	8 years	1–29 years	94 years
U.S. Army Experience	14	100	23 years	20–28 years	321 years

Table 2. Demographic characteristics current title, former Army rank, education level.

Demographic Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Army Rank	14	100
Officers	8	57
Colonel	1	
Lieutenant Colonel	4	
Major	2	
Captain	1	
Enlisted Men	6	43
Command Sergeant Major	3	
First Sergeant	1	
Master Sergeant	2	
Current Job Title	14	100
Army Instructor	5	
Senior Army Instructor	7	
Operations and Training (Admin)	1	
Director of Army Instruction	1	
Educational Levels	14	100
Bachelor's Degree	7	
Master's Degree	4	
Unknown	3	

Data collection and analysis

Prior to any data collection, permission was received from the public school administration and the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board. Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews with (a) five Army instructors and seven Senior Army instructors from each of the seven high schools in the district, (b) one Director of Army instruction serving at the high school and school district levels within the organization, and (c) one operations and training administrator from both campus-based and district level administrative offices. The interview questions aligned with the research question and sub-questions. The primary data collection instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended interview questions. The interview guide was field-tested by two qualitative methodologists and two seasoned practitioners with expertise and experience in public education and the teacher preparation and professional development of JROTC instructors.

Data analysis included defining and grouping the data into distinct groups, including JROTC instructors, school administrators, documents, and observations. All data gathered from the interview process were compiled digitally, transcribed verbatim, and screened to maintain privacy. Interviews reflected three distinctly different perspectives, offering the promise of unique and varying perspectives. The different groups were treated as separate data sources for coding and categorizing purposes. Data were also collected from documentary evidence, archival records, and information obtained by examining the professional development program and other

relevant policies within the school district. This vein of inquiry also produced unique coding and categorizing requirements. The NVivo12[®] qualitative analysis software was used thematically to organize and interpret the data.

7. Findings

JROTC instructors come to their teaching positions from the Army’s structured world with a minimum of 20 years of experience (with exceptions). Classroom management came naturally to this study’s participants. A significant disparity was identified between the military backgrounds that qualified the JROTC instructors for their positions and the realities of their JROTC positions. Classes in the Army are structured, and students are typically eager to learn and participate, in comparison to JROTC classes, where students, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, are often not as eager to participate and lack basic literacy skills.

Table 3 provides the inductive and deductive themes related to Research Question 1. **Table 4** proves the inductive and deductive themes related to Research Question 2. **Table 5** provides the inductive and deductive themes related to Research Question 3. The findings for each theme are provided in the following section.

Table 3. Research question 1 inductive and deductive themes.

Inductive Theme	Deductive Themes	Cases	Frequency
Professional development needed in initial training and ongoing professional development opportunities	USACC and School District Training and Professional Development-Positive and Negatives	14	100
	School District Training and Professional Development-Positive and Negatives	14	79
	Misalignment of Professional Advancement and Career Pathways	8	16
	Professional Development Limited Opportunities	6	11

Table 4. Sub-question 1 inductive and deductive themes.

Inductive Theme	Deductive Themes	Cases	References
School district policies, practices, and resources that help overcome gaps in teachers’ preparation	USACC and School District Missions, Policies, Practices Implementation	5	14
	Lack of resources	4	7

Table 5. Sub-question 2 inductive and deductive themes.

Inductive Theme	Deductive Themes	Cases	References
Teaching challenges related to barriers or gaps in teacher preparation	Instructors’ Motivation	13	29
	Potential Strategies to Fill Gaps in Training	13	59
	Obstacles	10	15
	Training Alignment with Classroom Practices	8	13
	JROTC Instructor Relationship with Core Subject Teachers, School Administrators, and USACC Administrators	6	12
	Classroom Management	5	11

7.1. USACC training and school district training and professional development positive and negatives

Findings suggested a need to align USACC and school district training policies with JROTC needs. Further, findings indicated that training should be consistent and relevant to the classroom. Findings also showed that providing a policy requiring a

teacher certification track for JROTC instructors could be helpful. The literature regarding the JROTC program and instructors indicates that the initial qualification and preparation of JROTC instructors is centralized and administered by USACC rather than a recognized educational institution (USACC, 2022). Therefore, JROTC instructors enter the teaching profession without the benefit of participating in a rigorous teacher preparation program, resulting in a state-sanctioned educator certificate. Unlike most other CTE teachers, policies do not require JROTC instructors to participate in a rigorous teacher preparation program, obtain a state teaching certificate from a recognized educational institution, or participate in the professional development and continuing education programs required of other teachers (TEA, 2020; USACC, 2022). USACC could increase initial and continuing instructor qualifications; however, budget constraints prevent adding requirements the Army cannot fund. An increase in requirements by USACC or CTE before hiring instructors could diminish the already small pool of applicants. To increase preparation and ongoing professional development, opening communication channels between the Army and district offices could maximize efficiency and lower costs of more effective professional development.

The literature also suggests a link between purposeful professional development programs aligned with teachers' perceived needs and academic achievement gains (Shaba et al., 2015). Further, Aschynshyn and Chernoff (2016), in a quantitative study with 21,000 students in 900 Canadian schools, found that essential components of successful teachers and programs include policies that (a) focus on the improvement of content knowledge, (b) promote networking, and (c) support professional activities. Army and district-sponsored surveys and task forces could help to increase the instructors' success.

7.2. Misalignment of professional advancement and career pathways

Findings suggested a misalignment between professional advancement opportunities and available career pathways. JROTC instructors have extensive military backgrounds yet lack training as educators. The literature indicates that the career pathways available to JROTC instructors are limited to teaching and administrative positions. In 2015, a specific teacher certification opportunity was created for JROTC instructors in Texas, consistent with legislative efforts to improve the quality of vocationally oriented teachers and programs throughout Texas (TEA, n.d.). However, the bill had no mandates for additional educational requirements or training other than those already established by USACC (Legiscan, 2015). The new policy created a pathway for JROTC instructors seeking opportunities to serve in administrative positions, and the new JROTC instructor certification satisfies principal certification requirements (Legiscan, 2015).

7.3. Theme 3 professional development limited opportunities

Findings indicated there was a lack of professional development opportunities and that JROTC instructors needed to be self-directed in their professional development. These findings are consistent with the literature indicating the lack of training and professional development opportunities for JROTC instructors. The

professional development of JROTC instructors in Texas is limited to a handful of annual training requirements directed by USACC. Many of the annual training requirements revolve around topics like first aid, CPR, concussion training, marksmanship safety, hazing, and bullying policies, among other similar topics. Few of the annual training policies are focused on improving the knowledge and skills of JROTC instructors as educators. Policies do not require JROTC instructors to participate in annual professional development programs and continuing education initiatives (TEA, 2015). The TEA mandates all teachers, except JROTC instructors, to participate in a continuing education program referred to as Teacher Choice (TEA, 2016). The Teacher Choice program requires teachers to participate in approved continuing education programs designed to improve the overall quality of the teacher. The findings and the literature indicate limited professional development opportunities. Again, improved communication between USACC and school districts could establish expectations that district professional development opportunities include JROTC instructors. USACC could revise its programs to include more classroom training.

7.4. USACC and school district missions, policies, practices implementation

Findings indicated a misalignment between USACC and the school district's mission, policies, practices, and implementation. JROTC instructors reported feeling isolated and a lack of focus on their professional development needs. Findings suggested disparities between USACC and school district missions and few policies that support JROTC instructor professional development. There is no extant literature on the implementation of USACC and school district missions, policies, and practices. Findings suggest that school districts offer training to JROTC instructors, although few JROTC instructors participate. The USACC offers limited training. New JROTC instructors lack onboarding when entering the JROTC classroom, and they have limited knowledge regarding the classroom experience and how to reach marginalized populations. As in any configuration where employees answer to two masters, communication is key. The Army could initiate a conversation with school districts to align their missions and policies to better support instructors' professional development needs.

7.5. Theme 5 lack of resources

Findings suggest a lack of resources for funding JROTC professional development, and JROTC instructors lack the time to take training and engage in professional development. USACC provides training for the annual training topics cited earlier. There is little funding provided to enact policies requiring instructors to gain pedagogical knowledge and skills. The school does not provide funded policies for these types of training, although there are opportunities to become certified as teachers, as mentioned earlier. There is no literature available concerning funding sources for JROTC instructors' professional development and training. Some states do require certain courses for JROTC instructors' continued employment as a part of the school's contract for hire. They allow the training required by the Army to serve

as a part of the course requirements. The communication that fostered those agreements could be expanded to increase the instructors' qualifications in more states.

7.6. JROTC instructors' motivation to enroll in professional development and training

Findings suggested that without policies requiring JROTC instructors to enroll in professional development and training, they must be self-motivated to find external opportunities. Further, findings indicated that some of the participants lacked the motivation to enroll in any USACC or school district training. The literature is clear about the significant role that motivation plays in training. In a quantitative study with 498 business students working on a team project, Medina (2016) investigated the effect of a person's team satisfaction on training motivation and conflict, which explains how a person's team experiences can affect their training motivation. Medina's (2016) findings indicated that a person's team satisfaction was a partial mediator of their training motivation and conflict. Medina (2016) suggested that managers investigate policies that pave the way for improving an individual's satisfaction with the team, increasing their motivation to engage in training and gain new knowledge.

The literature indicates that supervisors have a significant role in whether subordinates engage in training programs (Park et al., 2018). Contrarily, in this study, the JROTC administration did not play a significant role in creating policies to require or attract JROTC instructors to participate in available programs. Research also indicates a positive correlation between employee commitment and training, which corresponds with these participants' lack of motivation to seek training opportunities (Ocen et al., 2017).

7.7. Potential strategies to fill gaps in JROTC instructor professional development and training

The JROTC instructors in this study provided 27 strategies to fill JROTC training gaps. The literature regarding potential strategies to fill JROTC instructor training and professional development gaps is nonexistent. The professional development literature indicates that the conditions, environment, and characteristics of the professional development programs that leaders administer are essential determinants of the depth of understanding that teachers attain and improvements in teaching practice and quality (Stewart, 2014; Whitworth and Chiu, 2015). Duran et al. (2012) argued that professional development programs for teachers are most effective when they focus on the teachers' needs. Too often, trends in teacher professional development reflect emerging strategies and concepts that do not reach deep enough into teachers' specific needs (Siko and Hess, 2014). Trends in teacher professional development suggest that most teacher professional development programs target the larger audience of teachers in general rather than the specific needs of the teachers they are marketed to serve. Further, conducting needs assessments to identify JROTC instructors' specific needs would be consistent with training literature (Shernoff and Bessler, 2017).

Findings indicated that policies to support the following strategies could help fill gaps in training (a) USACC and school districts work together, (b) institutionalize best

practices, (c) re-tool JROTC instructor training programs, (d) incentivize professional development by providing stipends, (e) improve JROTC instructors' understanding of the JROTC curriculum, (f) solicit input from the department leaders, (g) focus on issues in alignment with classroom needs, (h) inform educational stakeholders about the role of JROTC instructors within the school (i) utilize professional development and training accessible to the school location, (j) provide time for professional development and training within the school calendar, (k) actively engage JROTC students in their participation in the JROTC class, (l) encourage new instructors to take more initiative in seeking professional development, (m) encourage USACC and schools to work together as a team to create supportive policies, (n) re-evaluate JROTC program curriculum, (o) re-examine the JROTC mission statement, (p) require mentorships between seasoned JROTC instructors and new instructors, (q) individualize professional development to meet the specific campus needs, (r) articulate JROTC goals and objectives better to ensure alignment with state and district goals, (s) require an onboarding program for new JROTC instructors, (t) require training on how to accommodate students with special needs, (u) develop training that is unique and focused on the needs of the JROTC instructor, (v) develop two-tiered training programs for seasoned and new instructors, (w) hire people at the administrative levels who have experience as JROTC instructors, (x) make sure new JROTC instructors receive training prior to assuming their duties as instructors (y) provide training on cultural competencies, (z) provide training on how to adjust curriculum for those students who are not proficient in reading and writing, and (aa) provide information and training about working with the students from marginalized backgrounds in the new JROTC instructors' school.

7.8. Obstacles to filling gaps in JROTC professional development and training

Findings suggested nine obstacles to improving JROTC professional development and training, including (a) lack of time, which was the number one identified barrier to training, (b) an imbalance between what JROTC instructors perceive are their responsibilities and what other educational stakeholders expect of them, (c) no monetary incentive, (d) lack of information on how to manage and teach students with special needs (e) no alignment between the school, school district, and USACC regarding mission, goals, and objectives relate to the classroom, professional development, and training, (f) lack of preparation to work with students from marginalized backgrounds, (g) lack of prioritization of time, effort, and resources, and (h) misconceptions of the community, educators, and school administrative staff regarding the JROTC's mission, goals, and objectives. The literature regarding the obstacles to filling gaps in JROTC professional development and training is nonexistent. However, training literature emphasizes the need for policies requiring the tracking of employees' time in real-time to assess work productivity (Burnett and Lisk, 2019). In the classroom, time management tools like the curriculum manager are available; however, the JROTC instructors have minimal training on how to teach using the tools they have. This issue centers on the lack of policies requiring instructors' preparation for their roles as teachers. Further, Nenonene et al. (2019) emphasized the

importance of infusing social-emotional learning into pre-service teacher programs and educator professional development and training, which could prepare them to meet their students' needs.

Findings suggested that JROTC instructors need to learn how to work with marginalized student populations, which is consistent with teacher cultural competency literature. Hordijk et al. (2018) suggested effective teaching includes the following cultural competencies (a) critical reflection on personal beliefs and values, (b) communicating in non-stereotyping and non-discriminatory ways, (c) showing empathy for all students regardless of race or ethnicity, (d) awareness of own cultural values, (e) intersectionality awareness, (f) awareness that educators are role models, and (g) ability to motivate and engage with all students. These are all skills that JROTC instructors indicate they would like to develop; however, that development across the program will not take place without consistent policies requiring it. USACC and school districts need to develop complementary, consistent policies to fill these gaps.

7.9. Training alignment with classroom practices

Findings indicated that training should be aligned with the classroom practices and environment that JROTC instructors encounter, which is consistent with the education literature indicating that educator training should be aligned with pedagogical practices (Education Commission, 2010; Stevenson et al., 2020). Further, the literature suggests that initial teacher training and alignment with effective pedagogical practice are pivotal parts of improving learning outcomes (Education Commission, 2019). The literature is clear that all educators should have practice-based professional development opportunities (Education Commission, 2019; Stevenson et al., 2020).

7.10. JROTC instructor relationship with core subject teachers, school administrators, and USACC administrators

Findings indicated that JROTC instructors are insulated from their educator counterparts and isolated in their JROTC roles due to a lack of training and teamwork. Results further suggest that JROTC instructors have distant, if any, relationships with their service headquarters personnel. In addition, there is no extant literature regarding JROTC instructors' relationships with core subject teachers and school administrators. The literature indicates that developing mentorships in pre-service teacher programs helps mold pre-service educators learning and establish professional development while mediating educator attrition and burnout by improving well-being (Briscoe, 2019). Other literature suggests that developing communities of inquiry within the JROTC program and school setting could provide JROTC instructors with a way to improve their practices (Pogrund, 2019). Members of communities of inquiry regularly connect with peers who share interests, collaborate, stimulate their learning, and change their teaching practices in meaningful ways (Pogrund, 2019).

Findings showed that educational stakeholders often view the JROTC as a disciplinary program and an enlistment program for the military and do not understand that it is a leadership program to help students become good citizens. Findings also indicated that some teachers do not like the presence of the JROTC program in the

schools. These findings are echoed by critics of the JROTC program who argue that the JROTC promotes militarism, gun culture, and violence, and JROTC teachers are not certified (McCauley, 2014). However, the literature regarding the effects of the JROTC on student outcomes is positive (Goldman et al., 2017). Research investigating academic outcomes showed positive correlations between JROTC and students' grade point average (GPA), improved attendance, and lower dropout rates (Goldman et al., 2017). Research examining nonacademic JROTC benefits indicates that the JROTC provides a sense of community to students, especially those students who do not participate in other extracurricular activities (Goldman et al., 2017).

Furthermore, JROTC cadets are provided with scholarship opportunities (Goldman et al., 2017). Contrary to the misconceptions perpetuated about the program, military service is not mandated, JROTC is a leadership program, and its mission is to prepare students to become better citizens. The JROTC has successfully reached marginalized students and provided them with leadership skills that can significantly change their life trajectories (Goldman et al., 2017).

7.11. Classroom management

Findings indicate that JROTC instructors need different skills to manage a classroom than the skills they obtained in the Army. While those skills help them manage a classroom, findings indicate that it takes different skills and techniques to be a successful JROTC instructor. Findings suggest that JROTC instructors typically have good classroom management skills and are often used as a resource by core subject teachers struggling with classroom management issues. These findings are consistent with the literature indicating that one of the strengths of the JROTC program is the class management skills of instructors (Goldman et al., 2017; Miller, 2016)

8. Discussion

The general problem is that despite a large body of research and recent trends towards higher quality teacher professional development programs, the professional development of JROTC instructors remains limited in focus and less rigorous than teacher certification programs. The lack of rigor in the policies requiring JROTC personnel preparations for their positions may place them at a professional disadvantage starting on the first day of their employment; consequently, the teacher professional development occurring during the life cycle of their employment may be an even more important factor in determining teacher quality.

The specific problem addressed in this study was that without stringent policies regarding JROTC professional development, personnel do not have access to the opportunities needed to bridge perceived gaps in knowledge, skills, and attitudes about teaching. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single-case study was to explore how policies can be enacted to help JROTC personnel in their initial and ongoing teacher preparation. Pitsoe and Maila (2012) asserted that teacher professional development is directly related to teacher and student performance. Analysis of USACC JROTC instructor qualification requirements suggests that the initial preparation of JROTC instructors does not conform to high-quality teacher expectations defined by the TEA or federal education policy. Because JROTC

instructors have limited exposure to teacher preparation resources, they must self-direct their professional development in alternative ways to address perceived gaps in their teaching skills and knowledge. Participants in this study identified nine obstacles and suggested 27 strategies to fill JROTC training and professional development gaps. These gaps are likely shared by many other CTE employees who are hired based on their expertise and experience but have little knowledge of working with high school students, marginalized students, or students with special needs. Communication between the Army and the CTE directors (or the directors where JROTC falls within the district if not CTE) could have wider implications in assisting all like employees with better, more relevant professional development opportunities.

The disconnect between USACC and school district administrators' agendas and communication, and misconceptions in school and community settings regarding the mission and purpose of the JROTC program result in new and seasoned JROTC instructors' isolation. JROTC or USACC professional development programs for JROTC instructors exist; however, without policies requiring instructors to delve into the details of the courses as they would college courses, the advantages of the training fall short. The school district provides some training; however, JROTC instructors report a lack of motivation to participate due to the perception that they lack applicability to their classrooms. JROTC instructors express frustration regarding the lack of relevant training and professional development opportunities. Time is one of the biggest obstacles to participating in training or professional development. JROTC instructors struggle to provide support to marginalized students and those with disabilities. There is a dichotomous career pathway for JROTC instructors that includes pursuing a career as a core subject teacher or an administrator. Instructors must be self-motivated to find opportunities for professional development that lead to rewarding career pathways. This study extends the literature relevant to JROTC instructors and professional development and training, which is almost nonexistent.

Limitations

This study is limited to instructors' military backgrounds and JROTC experiences that comprise a unique culture impacting their perspectives and how they answered the interview questions. This study is limited due to the lack of prior research on the topic of JROTC professional development, training, and initial instructor preparation. The study is also limited by not including other vocational/CTE employees who may face the same lack of relevant professional development.

9. Implications and recommendations for future directions

This study has implications and policy recommendations for JROTC and school district leaders.

- 1) Specifically, JROTC leaders could develop relationships with school district leaders that provide JROTC instructors with more resources. The lack of alignment between USACC and the school district was one of the significant findings of this study. Collaboration is a critical component of an effective program. Research indicates a positive link between collaboration, principal leadership, and teacher self-efficacy (Sehgal et al., 2017). Successful school

leadership engages in people-centered relationships through collaboration with personnel, parents, students, and community stakeholders (Preston and Barnes, 2017).

- 2) The JROTC instructor training program could be improved by policies that (a) add rigor to the current courses, (b) require initial instructor onboarding, and (c) promote professional development programs that include relevant topics beyond the core JROTC curriculum topics aligned with findings from this study. This recommendation is consistent with the pre-service teacher literature, indicating that onboarding orientations and basic training results in positive teacher engagement and lays the foundation for ongoing training and professional development (Montgomery, 2020). Further, ongoing professional development is linked to increased classroom effectiveness and instructional leadership (Montgomery, 2020). Required JROTC instructor onboarding could improve collaboration, job satisfaction, understanding, and JROTC program quality (Montgomery, 2020).
- 3) Incentivize JROTC professional development (e.g., provide stipends, promotion). Findings indicated a lack of motivation due to the limited training and professional development opportunities. Medina (2016) suggested that effective managers investigate ways to improve an individual's satisfaction with the team, increasing their motivation to engage in training and gain new knowledge.
- 4) Create policies to individualize JROTC professional development to meet the campus needs. The literature indicates that the individualization of teachers' professional development can positively impact job satisfaction and retention rates (Dow et al., 2017). Career mapping and individual professional development plans are two ways to individualize JROTC professional development (Webb et al., 2017).
- 5) Study other groups of school employees hired based on their experience and expertise to gain insights into how they may have found and incorporated relevant and affordable professional development programs.

10. Recommendations for future research

Recommendations for future research include expanding the literature to include an examination and exploration of the integration of culturally responsive pedagogy into the JROTC program (Robinson, 2019). Further, the literature regarding the modification of the JROTC curriculum should be developed to incorporate inclusive pedagogy, and the findings should be presented in new JROTC instructors' training. There is a need to explore the connection between JROTC students' academic achievement and JROTC instructor's self-efficacy (Cole et al., 2016). Further, examining the internal, external, and cultural variables within the JROTC classroom is important (Cole et al., 2016). A qualitative exploratory design from the JROTC student and teacher's viewpoints could provide an understanding of the correlational relationship between variables (Cole et al., 2016). A study using a larger more diverse sample could contribute additional affordable solutions to the obstacles creating gaps in instructor initial and continued professional development. It is essential to

understand JROTC instructors' perspectives of their work environment, their instructional practices, the JROTC curricula, and JROTC students' academic achievement (Cole et al., 2016).

11. Summary

A qualitative exploratory single-case study was used to explore JROTC administrators' perceptions regarding what policies need to be enacted to improve Army JROTC instructors' initial teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. The case consisted of a section of a public school district in Texas that pertains to JROTC instructors' professional development opportunities. The case included JROTC instructors, district administrators, policies and regulations, the professional development program, and any other resources pertinent to the study identified through the data collection process. After the University of Phoenix IRB permission and JROTC site permissions were obtained, in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 JROTC instructors to collect data about JROTC instructors' perceptions of how they overcome the gaps in their initial teacher preparation through development opportunities and other self-directed educational initiatives.

This study addressed the central research question and two sub-questions exploring the attitudes and beliefs of JROTC instructors about the obstacles and strategies to overcome gaps in their initial teacher training. NVivo 12[®] data analysis yielded 11 emergent themes, including Theme 1 USACC Training and School District Training and Professional Development Positive and Negatives, Theme 2 Misalignment of Professional Advancement and Career Pathways, Theme 3 Professional Development Limited Opportunities, Theme 4 USACC and School District Missions, Policies, Practices Implementation, Theme 5 Lack of Resources, Theme 6 Instructors' Motivation, Theme 7 Potential Strategies to Fill Gaps in Training, Theme 8 Obstacles, Theme 9 Training Alignment with Classroom Practices, Theme 10 JROTC Instructor Relationship with Core Subject Teachers, School Administrators, and USACC headquarters personnel, and Theme 11 Classroom Management. Participants indicated that USACC and school district policies and procedures are misaligned. Time is the greatest resource that JROTC instructors lack. JROTC instructors shared their lack of motivation to take classes. Participants identified strategies that required policy changes to improve initial and ongoing professional development. The JROTC instructors also identified several obstacles to implementing those policies.

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