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REMOVING BARRIERS TO HELP TEACHERS FROM THE CARIBBEAN  
BECOME CERTIFIED IN GRADES K-8 IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA

by

Karen Satchell-Simpson

A DISSERTATION

submitted to Lynn University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

2024

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

Ross College of Education

Lynn University

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## ABSTRACT

### **KAREN SATCHELL-SIMPSON: Removing Barriers to Certification: Enhancing the Path for Caribbean Teachers in Florida's Grades K-8**

This dissertation explores the multifaceted challenges faced by Caribbean teachers seeking certification in Grades K-8 within the state of Florida, with a primary focus on identifying and mitigating barriers to the certification process. Caribbean educators bring diverse perspectives, pedagogical expertise, and cultural richness to the American education system, making their integration as certified teachers in Florida classrooms an asset. The research delves into the complex dynamics affecting the certification process, encompassing qualitative and quantitative surveys questions. A descriptive research study approach is employed to elucidate the systemic barriers encountered by Caribbean teachers, as well as to uncover potential solutions to streamline the certification journey. Key findings from the research reveal a constellation of obstacles, including stringent credential evaluation processes, misalignment of prior teaching experiences, linguistic and cultural challenges, and a lack of comprehensive support structures. These barriers impede the progress of qualified Caribbean educators, hindering their access to Florida's teaching workforce.

This dissertation advocates for the implementation of tailored interventions to alleviate these barriers. Proposed strategies encompass the development of culturally responsive teacher preparation programs, mentorship initiatives, and the establishment of clear pathways for Caribbean teachers to navigate the certification system. Moreover,

recommendations are made for the cultivation of an inclusive and culturally diverse educational environment that embraces the unique contributions of Caribbean educators. The implications of this research extend beyond the immediate context of Florida, resonating with educational policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders across the United States grappling with the imperative of diversifying the teaching profession. By fostering inclusivity and removing barriers, this dissertation underscores the importance of harnessing the expertise and cultural richness that Caribbean teachers bring to Grades K-8 education, thus enriching the learning experiences of students and fostering a more globally aware and equitable educational landscape.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the individuals whose unwavering support, guidance, and expertise have been instrumental in the completion of this dissertation.

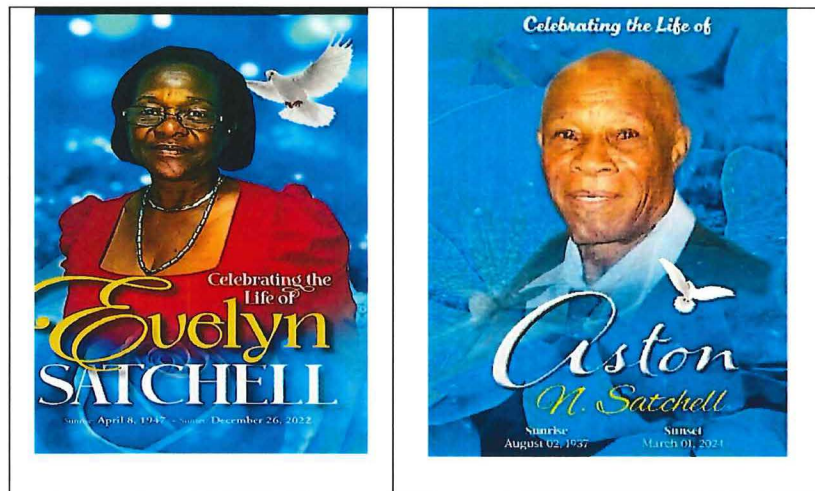
First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my committee chair, Dr. Brittany Kiser. Dr. Kiser's dedication to this project, boundless knowledge, and unending patience have been the cornerstone of my academic journey. Her mentorship and insightful feedback have been invaluable. I am profoundly grateful to Dr. April Johnson-Bynes, my esteemed committee member, for her invaluable contributions, constructive critique, and commitment to the advancement of this research.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Kathleen Weigel and Dr. Jennifer Lesh, whose thoughtful insights and rigorous examination of this dissertation have played a pivotal role in its refinement. Their expertise and wisdom greatly enriched the quality of this work. Special thanks are due to Katherine Green, the librarian extraordinaire, whose tireless efforts in helping me navigate the vast sea of literature and resources greatly enhanced the depth and breadth of this research. Thank you, Ms. Joy Ruhl, for your ongoing support. To Cohort 22, thanks for being amazing colleagues.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge Dr. Amanda Orndorff and the countless individuals whose research and work laid the foundation for my own. Your contributions have been essential in shaping this dissertation. This accomplishment would not have been possible without the collective support of these remarkable individuals. Their contributions have left an indelible mark on this work, for which I am eternally grateful.

## DEDICATION

In loving memory of my dear mother, Evelyn Satchell, and father, Aston Satchell whose presence, love, and unwavering belief in my abilities continue to inspire me even though they are no longer with us. Their memory has been a guiding light throughout this academic journey, and I dedicate this dissertation to them in profound gratitude for the values they instilled in me and the love that continues to reside in my heart. Though they are not here to witness this moment, their spirit lives on in my accomplishments, and I hope that this work serves as a testament to the enduring impact they had on my life. Mom and dad, you are always in my heart.



To my beloved husband, Everton, and precious daughter, Akayliah, you both have been my pillars of strength. You have taught me to believe in myself, and to always persevere. Thank you for being a listener and a supporter of all my endeavors, your unwavering support, encouragement, and patience throughout this journey have meant the world to me. I am deeply grateful for your love and understanding. To my siblings Shaunette, and Sheldon your belief in me kept my spirits and motivation high during this process. Finally, I would like to thank God for his guidance. All that I am, and all that I do is because of him.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OR KEYWORDS**

FTCE	Florida Teacher Certification Examinations (FTCE)
FLDOE	Florida Department of Education (FLDOE)

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

Professional certification is a best practice within organizations. Professional certification aims to help individuals be more productive and successful in their jobs (Sabirova & Khanipova, 2019). Among the many fields in which these certifications are available are education, accounting, medicine, information technology, finance, aviation, engineering, and law. Professional bodies, organizations, and certificate agencies offer certifications (Chun & Cho, 2018). As part of world education reform, teacher quality has been emphasized for some time. To better facilitate student learning, teachers have also been asked to obtain professional certification in teaching in addition to regular academic diplomas and degree certificates (Modesto, 2019). For instance, the United States of America introduced various teacher certification programs to improve the quality of teachers and the education system in the country (Sabirova & Khanipova, 2019).

Some educational professional certification providers, employers, and experts consider professional certifications important indicators of commitment and professionalism (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020). Professional certifications are available from technical to managerial levels from educational certification providers (Modesto, 2019). Certification can enhance an individual's ability to perform tasks in their current jobs or help them secure new employment. Among the available certificates are technicians, system administrators, system engineers, database administrators, network engineers, programmers, auditors, and security analysts (Modesto, 2019).

Technology has impacted every sector, and education is not any different. The educational certification process is primarily done online in other countries. Almost 95% of educational certification for foreign educators is done online (Sabirova & Khanipova, 2019).

However, many international teachers experience challenges through this process of accreditation. Some challenges are due to language barriers and complex structures (Sabirova & Khanipova, 2019).

## **Background**

This study was a reflection of the researcher's experience as a Caribbean educator who taught in Jamaica and the United Kingdom before relocating to the United States as an international graduate educator. While completing the certification process in Florida and talking to other foreign-certified teachers, the researcher realized that there is much that stakeholders need to learn about foreign-certified teachers, including teachers, parents, school administrators, and policymakers. Sysko (2018) describes a need for more information in the United States about the origins, experiences, challenges, strengths, coping strategies, and contributions of foreign-trained teachers. A relative lack of understanding may exacerbate prejudice against foreign-trained teachers (Hamzah & Mustafa, 2017).

Foreign-certified teachers are born, educated, and accredited to teach outside the United States but have also received Florida teacher certification (Sysko, 2018). Little attention has been paid to the stories of foreign teachers' certificate and licensing processes in Florida schools (Abdul-Haqq & Chambers, 2012; Roa, 2017). It may be because of the very idea of foreign-certified teachers as opposed to the norm: teachers are viewed as representations of the culture, responsible for passing on its standards and ways of knowing to the next generation, so this important task should not be handed over to newcomers to the culture (Sysko, 2018). This idea could result in teaching concepts in notions of imagined communities, subtly reproducing the inclusions and exclusions of those who belong, as well as who are legitimately positioned to

represent the nation, its values, cultures, traditions, narratives, and constitutive professions, and provinces (Chun & Cho, 2018).

As Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson (2020) argue, teachers embody and transmit a society's culture and knowledge. So foreign certified teachers find themselves in an in-between space between the culture of their native home (which they have left behind but are still a part of them) and the culture of Florida, their new home. When it comes to student-teacher relationships and classroom management, there can be tensions between these two cultures. Bissessar (2021) examined the paradox of belonging and not belonging simultaneously. The lives of newcomers to society are shaped by the paradox of belonging and non-belonging simultaneously. Despite living in the community and contributing to its socioeconomic well-being, they are racialized as outsiders and not true Americans (Chun & Cho, 2018).

Florida has maintained a stable predominant population of different origins due to the relatively high in-migration to the state (Bissessar, 2021). Moreover, Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson (2020) contend that the presumed stability of a White population serves dominant discourses that marginalize racialized minority groups. Most parts of Florida, however, continue to foster a myth that America is a priceless society where White supremacy and denial of racism prevail (Bissessar, 2021). The formation of American states and social relations were shaped by racism (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020). Racist acts have often been seen as exceptional events. According to Bissessar (2021), history textbooks in Florida schools imply that racism in education seems to be declining. America has often been conceived and imagined in racialized terms, causing it to become possible, even regular, to view less dominant cultural groups as other or as 'non-members' (Bissessar, 2021).

The community is always conceived as an open, horizontal camaraderie, regardless of inequalities, as if official multiculturalism has eradicated racism and systemic discrimination from the country and the school system. This way, foreign-certified teachers and teacher educators in Florida face a crucial challenge. According to Bissessar (2021), efforts to disrupt disrespecting racism and silencing Non-Whites have been frustrating because it has been extremely difficult for White racialized teachers in many classrooms to acknowledge their privilege and power.

According to Letendre (2018), a few studies have examined the perspectives of foreign-certified teachers about their certification experiences despite most studies emphasizing barriers to employment. In Letendre's (2018) view, recruiting foreign-certified teachers, mentoring them, and providing them with professional development would be more effective if people understood these teachers' perspectives. To meet the needs of students in Florida who are increasingly diverse and to ensure a positive transition for foreign-certified teachers into Florida, the experiences of foreign-accredited teachers need to be explored narratively.

### **Significance of the Study**

Caribbean immigrants have yet to receive enough attention despite experiencing English as a second language for immigrant educators (Letendre, 2018). This oversight needs to include more information about immigrant educators' challenges as they attempt to get certification and license to teach in the United States, specifically in Florida. Although these Englishes benefit institutions that hire these academic professionals, their ideologies influence their way of thinking about them, despite their potential to shed light on the reasons for their dissatisfaction with several elements in the certification process in the United States (Bissessar, 2021). The only way to facilitate immigrant educators' certification and licensing process and to standardize



English in the whole process is to understand these mediating factors, which will help alleviate some of the challenges teachers face when preparing practicing teachers.

### **Rationale**

Below, the researcher discussed the underpinnings of this study as it relates to the conceptual design and context. The Florida teacher shortage is getting worse and teaching licensing rules are making it much worse for educators to be certified. It should also be noted that the gap is getting wider because teacher preparation programs are enrolling fewer students into college programs and more students are enrolling in k-12 schools. The rationale for this study was presented in this section, which included the conceptual framework integrating World and Caribbean Englishes with language ideology, and the context of the study, which highlighted the challenges Caribbean educators face in navigating the certification process to teach in Florida and the need for more support.

### ***Conceptual Framework***

The conceptual framework for the study includes two perspectives that was integrated: (a) the perspective of World and Caribbean Englishes and (b) language ideology. According to Letendre (2018), language ideology is a construct, notion, and representation derived from the social practices of individuals with language across multiple local and global spheres. A language ideology can be based on standardized language, which refers to the tendency toward a homogeneous spoken language imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and based primarily on the spoken language of the upper middle class (Bissessar, 2021). A non-standardized language form may be viewed oppositely or oppositely.

The language ideology of (Yeh et al., 2022) was derived from the social practices of individuals associated with language in multiple local and global contexts. As a result of

standardized language, a language ideology refers to a tendency toward homogeneous spoken languages, which were imposed and maintained primarily by dominant bloc institutions (McCay, 2019) and mainly spoken by upper-middle-class members. Non-standardized language forms can be viewed either differently or differently.

In addition, language ideology may operate in a bidirectional manner, with one group's thinking about language affecting another group's thinking about language (Greenblatt, 2018). Critical language awareness (CLA) can influence an individual's ideology about language by making them aware of the interaction between their use of language and the power associated with that use (McCay, 2019). Furthermore, it was influenced by one's experience with linguistic discrimination manifested in other people's negative actions toward the language they use and linguistic profiling, which manifests itself in negative responses to auditory cues (McCay, 2019).

In research using language ideology as a framework, researchers have examined how teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) students construct their ideologies or ways of thinking about language (Gharis et al., 2020). In professional development contexts, teachers' perspectives on language inform their practices with students (Gharis et al., 2020). Identifying conflicts between teachers' attitudes toward multiple languages within bilingual programs has been made possible by examining ideologies (Yeh et al., 2022). Through practitioner research groups, it has been possible to investigate novice teachers' ways of negotiating their English thinking in mainstream classrooms and document how they are expressed in interactions with African-American students (Yeh et al., (2022). Teachers have been focused primarily on the perspective of language ideologies and less so on the teachers' educators who prepare them, especially when those educators are multilingual and migrate from other countries.

### ***Context of the Study***

Teacher certification has evolved. As the Florida Department of Education strives to “raise the bar” to enter the teaching profession, it is clear many educators fail to navigate the tough certification rules (Roa, 2017). Caribbean teachers in particular struggle to maneuver the multiple roadblocks as licensing requirements may vary from person to person (Gonzalez et al., 2018). The number of certified teachers in the state of Florida entering the workforce continues to decline. In fact, according to the August 2023 NEA report - Florida has a teacher shortage of almost 7000 teachers (FLDOE, 2023). The process of certification has been tedious and frustrating for some educators who could help tackle the gap of teacher shortage. Navigating the certification process should be clear and concise. The rigorous process for certification and licensing ensures that teachers meet certain standards in their subject areas, however, many Caribbean educators need support in maneuvering the certification process because they find it difficult to adjust culturally (Gonzalez et al., 2018). If teachers are willing to plow through the regulatory roadblocks, we must do more to support them.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Research conducted in this quantitative survey sought to identify barriers hindering Caribbean-born teachers from obtaining certification in Florida's K-8 grades. Despite controlling for undergraduate GPA, institution selectivity, and parents' educational levels, Black test takers scored seven points lower than White test takers (Steinberg et al., 2014). According to most research, certification exams do not predict teacher effectiveness and testing seems to have little effect on overall teaching effectiveness (Shuls, 2017). Teacher certification in grades K-8 in Florida presents challenges for Caribbean teachers. Therefore, this study will contribute to identifying and addressing the barriers faced by Caribbean-born teachers in obtaining

certification in Florida's K-8 grades, to increase their representation in the teaching workforce and improve overall teaching effectiveness. By investigating the language ideologies and practices of multilingual educators from the Caribbean, this study may provide insights into how teacher preparation programs can better support these educators in navigating the certification process and in effectively teaching diverse student populations.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research question.

- o RQ1: What is the perceived effectiveness of the current Florida certification model in certifying teachers in grades K-8 from the Caribbean?
- o RQ2: How does the design and user interface of the Smart Teacher Certification website impact user experience and ease of navigation?
- o RQ3: What information and resources are provided on the Smart Teacher Certification website to support prospective teachers in understanding the certification process?

### **Assumptions**

The assumptions of the study allow participants to have a similar understanding and interpretation as the researcher. The author made the following assumptions during the study: First, the primary assumption in this study was that Florida's certification and licensing process presented many challenges for foreign-trained teachers. There was a wide range of levels and quality of post-training support and development for teachers, with some receiving none. It was also assumed that the foreign educator sector will feel a significant impact due to this expansion. Among these were teacher recruitment, training, and employment. Second, the researcher assumed that the sample size was representative and that responses were forthcoming. Third, it was assumed that the participants in this study were volunteers with no personal benefit. They

were expected to answer the questions asked honestly and to the best of their ability with no biases. Finally, it was expected that the findings from this study will advance the scientific knowledge of Caribbean educators as they pursue their teacher certification.

### **Definition of Terms**

***Accreditation:*** Compliance with organization guidelines and recommendations is required for institutional membership (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2021).

***Alternative Certification:*** A certificate program for those wishing to enter the teaching profession but lacking an education degree (Teach.org, 2021).

***Caribbean:*** A region located in the southeastern part of North America, consisting of the Caribbean Sea and its islands (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).

***Certified educator:*** An individual who has obtained a certification from a professional body or organization in their respective fields, indicating their competence and commitment to their profession (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2014).

***Florida Teacher Certification Examinations(FTCE):*** Certification test administered to teacher candidates. The Florida Teacher Certification Examinations (FTCE) is a series of tests administered by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) to individuals seeking to become certified teachers in the state of Florida. There are currently six different exams that teacher candidates must pass to demonstrate their mastery of the required knowledge and skills for teaching in Florida. Teacher candidates must achieve a passing score on each exam to earn their Florida professional certification. The specific passing score required for each exam varies and is determined by the Florida Department of Education (Florida Department of Education, 2021).

***Foreign-Trained Teacher:*** Teacher trained outside the United States through a university or college teacher's education program (Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.).

***Induction:*** Is a process or program designed to support and acclimate new educators, such as teachers or administrators, into their roles and responsibilities within a school or educational institution. (Florida Department of Education, 2021).

***Professional Experiences/ Challenges:*** The challenges teachers face during the integration and acculturation process in America or Florida (Girard & Hayes, 2015)

***Teacher preparation program:*** A program designed to prepare individuals to become certified educators, typically including coursework, field experiences, and assessments (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

***Temporary certificate:*** A certification granted to educators who have not yet completed all requirements for full certification, allowing them to teach for a limited time (Florida Department of Education, 2021).

***The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE):*** The Florida Department of Education, is the state agency responsible for overseeing public education in Florida (Florida Department of Education, 2021).

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

It is well documented that our student population has increasingly diverse needs, requiring highly qualified classroom teachers. Due to the unprecedented teacher shortages that will continue in the coming years, districts will need to recruit and retain the best candidates for job openings in the classroom. In this research, the researcher attempted to identify the certifications of new hires more likely to remain in the district, thus preventing the cycle of need from perpetuating. By analyzing the certification pathway that prepared teachers for the challenges they faced after entering the profession, the research seeks to identify the most effective ones.

During this study, the researcher started with an introduction to the study, followed by a detailed and scholarly background. This information stated the research problem to be investigated and provided a detailed account of the significance of the study. Furthermore, the rationale for choosing the descriptive methodology was explained, followed by a list of the terms used throughout the research. Chapter 1 concluded with a list of assumptions and definitions of terms. Chapter II presented a comprehensive review of past studies and, thus, current literature on teacher certification. The literature review outlines the gaps affecting Caribbean teachers as they seek certifications in the State of Florida. From the gaps identified, the researcher created three research questions. In Chapter III, the researcher described the methodology, research design, and data collection procedures for this research. A detailed data analysis was presented in Chapter IV, including a written and graphical explanation of the study results. Finally, in Chapter V, the researcher summarized the study's results related to the existing literature on this research topic.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

President Ronald Reagan commissioned a report on the quality of education in America in 1983. In his remarks at the Commission's first meeting, the president noted that schools and colleges are as vital to society, the citizens, and their families as any other area of their lives (Bissessar, 2021). To correct the alarming direction in which public education was viewed, the Commission recommended several much-needed reforms in the report. More than 30 years after that report, humans look at the education system and where they are, and many of the issues identified in 1983 remain unresolved. In addition, student achievement stagnates, and teachers and administrators face challenges at all levels (Letendre, 2018). Teachers throughout the nation must be prepared to meet the needs of all students with high-quality preparation programs if they are going to improve student achievement. This chapter explores recent literature about the foreign teacher certification process in the United States of America, specifically in Florida.

### **National Perspective on Teacher Certification**

Historically, significant questions have been associated with teacher credentialing (Bissessar, 2021). The first question concerned who should be in charge of licensing teachers. Most professions are governed by non-governmental organizations and state and federal governments that oversee standards and oversight. However, the actual process and standards for the profession itself rest with those within it to protect the public from incompetence and lack of professional judgment. It is in the public's interest to have those with the most expertise protect it (Bissessar, 2021). Historically, this has not been the case in education. Secondly, what are the best methods for determining a teacher's competence regarding credentialing? Can an examination score alone demonstrate this? What would evidence of competence be if a successful course of study was completed?



Since the nineteenth century, these questions have been answered in a pendulum swing. Before the turn of the century, examinations were the primary means for assessing an educator's competency. Almost fifty years later, certification examinations were practically extinct. Towards the end of the century, examinations were again placed much higher on the agenda (Bissessar, 2021). Meanwhile, education and training requirements for teaching continue to rise relentlessly as the pendulum swings concerning teacher certification examinations. Among all countries in the world, the United States has the highest level of formal education among its teachers. As a result, the student's academic performance levels do not match the teacher's education levels (Bissessar, 2021). Approximately 57% of U.S. public school teachers, not all in academic subjects, held master's degrees in the 2011-12 school year (Demie, 2021).

Teachers' education must be supported, so the third question centered on what a course of study for teacher certification entails. A growing focus has been placed on general academic knowledge, specific specializations, and a professional course required for student teachers or interns as part of their student teaching or interning experience (Demie, 2021). Regarding teacher licensing, the last question focused on its specificity. Is it necessary for teachers to be certified in physics or science, Spanish or a foreign language, calculus or math? A teacher's license also affects other facets of education, such as the daily schedule and how rural versus urban schools address their students' needs (Bissessar, 2021).

### **Teacher Certification and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted in 2001, requiring teachers to meet the law's requirements by June 2006 (Bissessar, 2021). The law requires teachers of core academic classes (English, reading, language arts, math, science, foreign language, science, civics, government, economics, arts, history, and geography) to meet its requirements. Generally,

this means teachers hold bachelor's degrees, are fully certified, have completed enough coursework, passed a state test, or have met other state requirements to demonstrate their knowledge and skills (Furuya et al., 2019). The Center on Education Policy conducted annual comprehensive studies of NCLB implementation. Five years after the law was implemented, their yearly survey concentrated on determining which qualifications qualify a person to be considered highly trained (Bissessar, 2021).

The report's key findings indicated that the original intentions for NCLB still needed to be realized regarding the connection between teacher qualifications and student achievement. According to the report, 66% of districts reported minimal or no impact of NCLB teacher requirements on student achievement (Bissessar, 2021). The exact requirements did not significantly impact the effectiveness of their teacher workforce in 74% of communities. According to a district official, NCLB's definition of a highly qualified teacher needs to be more focused on content knowledge. It is essential to consider how well a teacher engages with students, their ability to relate to them, their ability to teach students with diverse backgrounds, and their ability to differentiate instruction according to their needs (Bissessar, 2021). If states comply with NCLB, they can implement teacher certification requirements nationwide.

### ***The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Teachers' Certification***

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law in 2015 as a replacement for NCLB. ESSA aims to provide states with more flexibility in terms of accountability and funding while also focusing on improving educational outcomes for all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Vander Ark, 2019). ESSA still requires teachers to be certified, but it gives states more leeway in defining what certification entails. States are allowed to set their standards for teacher certification, but they must ensure that these standards are

rigorous and aligned with state academic content standards (Vander Ark, 2019). ESSA also requires that states provide professional development opportunities for teachers, particularly those who work with disadvantaged students. States must ensure that professional development is evidence-based and tailored to the needs of teachers and students (Vander Ark, 2019). In addition, ESSA requires that states develop plans for recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers, particularly in schools that serve disadvantaged students. These plans must include strategies for identifying and addressing teacher shortages, improving working conditions for teachers, and providing incentives for teachers to work in high-need schools (Vander Ark, 2019).

One of the key changes that ESSA has brought about is a greater emphasis on teacher effectiveness. The law requires states to develop systems for evaluating teacher performance based on multiple measures, including student achievement, classroom observations, and other factors (Vander Ark, 2019). These evaluations must be used to inform decisions about professional development, tenure, and other personnel decisions. By focusing on teacher effectiveness, ESSA aims to improve educational outcomes for all students and close achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds. Overall, while ESSA still requires teacher certification, it has given states more flexibility in defining what certification entails. The law also emphasizes the importance of teacher effectiveness, providing funding and support for states to develop systems for evaluating teacher performance and providing professional development opportunities. Overall, ESSA represents a significant shift from the prescriptive approach of NCLB to a more flexible and evidence-based approach to improving educational outcomes for all students.

## **Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Perspective**

Just as with law and medicine, teaching requires a professional license. A teacher's actions affect students' daily lives, brain development, character development, aspirations, and self-confidence (Gunning et al., 2018). The states have established a process to ensure that anyone taking on this role has the skills and expertise they need to be effective in their practice (Bissessar, 2021). Each state sets its licensing requirements, so policies vary from state to state. At the national level, several parameters are relatively consistent.

In the United States, there are several different structures for teacher certification. Three main categories of teacher certification exist; alternative certifications, Level I certifications, and Level II and beyond certifications (Chun & Cho, 2018). Seventeen states issue alternative types of accreditation that result in giving a teaching certificate without completing a traditional preparation program (Hamzah & Mustafa, 2017). Level I certifications are issued after completing a teacher preparation program and required state assessments (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020). All 50 states issue this type of certification. Following completion of mandated or optional state requirements, a teaching certificate is issued for Level II and beyond types of accreditation. In 45 states, Level II and beyond certification is required or can be obtained as an option (Ankeny et al., 2019). In addition, 48 states in the United States require student teaching as part of a traditional teacher preparation program before issuing the Level I certification. In 28 states, some form of mentoring is needed for accreditation (Ankeny et al., 2019).

## **Florida's Perspective and Impact on Teacher Certification**

States and citizens began demanding to know what area of certification public school teachers had. Demie (2021) reported that in Florida, how to pursue that responsibility

continuously sparked controversy, debate, and policy shifts. Historically, Florida's credentialing system has operated as a practical method of ensuring the public that teachers have a minimum qualification to provide services that benefit the state (Demie, 2021). Additionally, a growing number of teachers must be supplied by the state, based on school population increases, at a minimal cost to taxpayers, to ensure that standards cannot be raised too high. Most of the discussion about teacher credentialing has been about control issues and preparation content (Furuya et al., 2019). As many other states did in the early days of state oversight of teacher authority, Florida relied primarily on examinations.

The fifth-year included a full year of graduate study by 1906, and Florida became one of the first states to require a fifth year of college coursework for secondary teacher credentials (Demie, 2021). For all levels of teaching service, the state Commission for the Study of Educational Problems decided to abolish the longstanding system of certifying teachers by county examinations and to rely solely on the system for higher education for prospective teachers (Demie, 2021). Florida began to reform teacher education and credentialing in response to public uncertainty regarding teacher competency and quality of instruction.

There are five different types of credentials. These are elementary, secondary, administrative, junior college, and designated subjects (Demie, 2021). To become fully certified teachers, elementary and secondary teachers had to complete one year of post-baccalaureate study. Furthermore, it sets specific requirements for undergraduate work for both elementary and secondary candidates seeking teacher certification. A secondary teacher's major and minor subject matter preparation aligned with the courses they could teach.

As a final requirement for an administrative credential, undergraduate majors in academic fields were required (Furuya et al., 2019). Most notably, the requirements regarding an

education-specific major faced significant opposition during the latter 1960s. The Florida credentialing system was restructured following the unraveling of the original act (Demie, 2021). Five new principles were introduced into teacher preparation (Demie, 2021): 1. Creating the first independent licensing agency of its kind in the country, the Commission on Teacher Preparation and Licensing; 2. Subject matter preparation continued to be a key focus, but new opportunities were provided for proving competence through state examinations or completion of subject matter preparation programs; 3 and developed one credential for all teachers from kindergarten through 12th grade, based on the grade level of the content, not the student's age; 4. Keeping the fifth-year requirement but allowing seven years to complete it; Developed distinctions between teaching a single subject and teaching many subjects to a single group of students in one self-contained classroom as opposed to teaching a single topic to a rotating group of students throughout the day.

When a committee was established to assess the content of the fifth-year teacher preparation requirement, more significant changes were made to Florida credentialing. It was determined that the program should not be based on one year but should extend over three to five years and include coursework in education, student teaching, and extensive supervised internships (Furuya et al., 2019). As a result of this assessment, Florida developed its two-tiered credential system, which is still used today (Furuya et al., 2019). Upon completion of state-mandated or optional requirements, Level II indicates the issuance of a teaching certificate. According to Demie (2021), the current educational climate in Florida has forced district and state officials to make concessions regarding the qualifications of teachers.

### **Florida's Current Educational Climate**

Florida public schools are facing a financial crisis. Approximately 30% of students attended schools in districts that were in severe financial straits after three years of continuous cuts to public education funding (Ankeny et al., 2019). Consequently, communities were forced to lay off teachers to remain fiscally solvent, losing 26,000 jobs, or nearly 9% overall (Bissessar, 2021). A drastic increase in teacher layoffs affected districts and schools immediately, creating a current teacher shortage due to low enrollment in university preparation programs. According to a report produced by the Florida Commission on Teacher Credentialing, there were 26,446 students enrolled in teacher preparation programs during the 2011-12 academic year, compared to 77,700 students enrolled a decade earlier (Demie, 2021).

Since 2012-13 and 2013-14 years have been added, these numbers have declined to a 12-year low, representing a 76% decline from 2001-2014 (Jiang et al., 2018). Shortly, those hires will need to fill several vacancies, reducing the number of available teachers. Jiang et al. (2018) predict a somewhat unknown number of retirees in the coming decade. Since older teachers have been concerned about their futures and delaying their retirements, retirements will inevitably increase as the economy picks up. As a result, the teacher pipeline in Florida is likely to take some time to recover since most teachers are expected to retire by 60 within the next few years (Warner et al., 2018). Under-prepared teachers with emergency or interim credentials are increasingly being sent into classrooms, which is a concern. If such a change is made, it will negatively impact the students who need the most qualified teachers, not the least (Warner et al., 2018).

The concept has been introduced previously. It has been shown that students most in need of highly qualified, highly trained teachers are the least likely to receive them since

legislation was passed that enabled teachers to begin teaching in K-12 schools without full credentials (Ankeny et al., 2019). The number of substandard certifications and permits issued has risen sharply, from approximately 4,700 in 2012-13 to nearly 7,700 in 2014-15, a 63% increase (Davis & Bowers, 2019). Students are most adversely affected by this assignment of teachers who still need to complete preparation programs and substitutes who come and go. In addition, Jiang et al. (2018) point out that students whose standardized test scores are low and whose population consists of many low-income students, minorities, and English learners are most in need of highly qualified teachers.

### **Preparation Programs**

The U.S. Department of Education released a recent annual report on teacher quality. Regardless of the type of training program in which a candidate participates, whether an alternative or traditional program, the Department of Education expects all teaching candidates to have acquired the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to effectively teach the nation's diverse student populations (Ankeny et al., 2019). A traditional model accounted for 69% of teacher preparation providers in 2014, while an alternative model accounted for 31% (Jiang et al., 2018). According to the U.S. Education Department, traditional teacher preparation programs generally prepare undergraduates with no previous teaching or work experience to become teachers. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) notes that some traditional teacher preparation programs offer credentials but not a degree. Alternate preparation programs exist on the other side of conventional preparation programs. In alternative route teacher preparation programs, candidates may work toward their initial teaching credential while serving as the teachers of record in a classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In the 2013-14 academic year, approximately 460,000 Americans were enrolled in either traditional or



alternative preparation programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Both conventional and alternative preparation programs are discussed in the following sections.

### **Traditional Preparation Programs**

This section discusses traditional teacher preparation programs in the United States, with a focus on the national credentialing requirements for teachers and the entry and exit requirements for traditional undergraduate and professional education coursework. The section also provides information on the clinical supervision requirements, including student teaching, which is a requirement of traditional teacher preparation programs. Additionally, the section discusses the Florida teaching certification requirements and the importance of student teaching as a form of adult learning and preparation for the challenges teachers may face in their profession.

#### ***National***

Credentialing requirements for teachers have changed drastically throughout the twentieth century. Following the 1983 release of the Nation at Risk report, the nation has focused on teacher education and who should be responsible for qualifying teachers. A high level of qualification is required for teachers under No Child Left Behind (2001). As reported by the United States Department of Education in 2014, states reported 1,497 teacher preparation programs offering twelve programs on average each.

2014 saw a variety of entry and exit requirements for traditional teacher preparation programs nationwide. According to the Department of Education (2016), traditional undergraduate programs typically require minimum GPAs (2.5) and transcripts. For professional education coursework at the National Level, exit requirements typically include a 2.5 GPA, a minimum number of classes or credits, and a specific 3.0 GPA for professional education

coursework. According to the Education Department, clinical supervision requirements are standard in traditional teacher preparation programs.

Supervisory clinical experience is generally defined as participation in classroom activities by a teacher candidate before and during student teaching (Jiang et al., 2018). Observation of small groups tutored by preservice states and participation in classroom activities includes two types of teachers. These include practicing teaching, participating in various student activities without taking on any classroom responsibilities, and (b) completing a student teaching course in which the student is fully responsible for the classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). U.S. Department of Education (2016) reported that traditional teacher preparation programs required teacher candidates to complete, on average, 100 hours before student teaching. Student teaching is a requirement of traditional teacher preparation programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). As described previously, the state determines how prospective teachers will meet the requirements for teacher certification, whereas the federal government specifies the general requirements.

### ***Florida***

According to Jiang et al. (2018), obtaining a Florida teaching certification requires completing a teacher preparation program at a college or university, earning a bachelor's degree in a particular subject area, and then gaining student teaching experience. The stakes in student teaching are high (Ankeny et al., 2019). There is only one chance for teacher candidates to experience the best placement possible. It will help them decide the type of school they will teach and set expectations for their performance as teachers.

The second concept of student teaching is related to adult learning. Jiang et al. (2018) describe this concept as adult learning through student teaching. The experiences and knowledge

an individual accumulates as they mature provide a resource that can be used for self-directed learning as they mature. In a student teaching placement, prospective teachers develop the knowledge and skills they need to become teachers. Unlike a student in the public education system, a teacher in a mediocre or disastrous classroom situation or a master teacher cannot undo their experiences (Ritzhaupt et al., 2020). Although higher education is responsible for providing adequate school teachers, this glaring failure is often overlooked. As part of the traditional teacher candidate experience, students teach to prepare them for the challenges they will face as teachers of record. They can put their pedagogical knowledge and skills to practice in their teacher preparation program (Davis & Bowers, 2019).

### ***Alternative Preparation Programs***

This section discusses the rise and popularity of alternative teacher certification programs in the United States. It explores the reasons for the growth of these programs, the similarities and differences between them, and their effectiveness in producing qualified teachers. The section also provides information on the alternative certification programs in Florida and the different options available for teacher certification across states.

#### ***National***

It was in the 1980s that alternative certification first became popular. The Florida Department of Education (2022) suggested that this would make it easier for individuals without teaching credentials to enter the classroom. Insurgences in alternative education can be attributed to several factors: Some say that teachers are in short supply and there is a high need for them. Others argue that traditional preparation programs placed burdensome requirements in front of talented people who needed to possess the significant education background necessary at that time for conventional programs.

Over 20 years, from 1985-2005, 59,000 American teachers with teaching credentials acquired through routes other than traditional teacher preparation programs (Education, 2022). The dramatic rise of alternative certification programs has been attributed to several reasons, but the data are pretty even, based on the number of teachers participating in 28 programs. Education, (2022) found that such programs rearranged the traditional teacher-preparation sequence without altering its substance, allowing candidates to take the burdensome course load while teaching. In the alternative route teacher preparation program, teacher candidates will receive the preparation and training they need to earn their teaching credentials. A wide range of alternative routes is defined in different states, varying significantly from one state to another (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). According to the Tenth Annual Report on Teacher Quality published by the U.S. Department of Education (2016), states offer 11 alternative teacher preparation programs on average.

Despite differences in specific parameters, alternative preparation programs in different states share some similarities. Alternative teacher preparation programs require a transcript, a minimum GPA (2.5), and a minimum number of completed courses, credits, or semester hours (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Likewise, exit requirements shared three categories for alternative teacher preparation programs: the number of courses, credits, and semester hours completed; the minimum grade point average (2.5); and the minimum grade point average (3.0) for content area coursework. Malcolm Knowles' first assumption about adult learners is connected to this method of teacher certification. With maturity in self-concept, individuals become self-directed. In order to learn the theories of being a teacher while being the teacher of record, self-directedness is essential.

## ***Florida***

The most popular alternative to teaching in Florida is participating in an internship program. Their employing district pays their teachers a salary during these programs and provides them with a formal teacher preparation program while they serve as the teacher of record. Based on data provided by Florida teacher preparation programs for the 2012-2013 academic year, Ankeny et al. (2019) found that the distribution of teacher candidates who completed their credentials by following either a traditional or alternative route was reasonably even across gender and racial lines. According to the data released by the U.S. Department of Education, Florida had 9,527 candidates complete traditional teacher preparation programs, accounting for 6% of the nation's total. Among alternative teacher preparation programs, it ranked second in the country with 1,208 graduates in 2012, or 9 percent of all graduates (Education, 2012). Statistics indicate that both traditional and alternative programs produced equal numbers of potential teachers in Florida.

## ***Certification***

State-by-state options for teacher certification are vastly different at the National Level. It is possible to obtain state teacher certification in three ways (Davis & Bowers, 2019): alternative or alternative-like, initial or initial-like, and Level II (or higher). All states require an initial or level I certificate for teachers to begin working in the classroom. Some States require that their teachers get professional development points for recertification. Before receiving their Level I certification, candidates in some states, namely 17, have an alternative certification option (Davis & Bowers, 2019).

### ***Traditional Certification***

This section discusses traditional certification pathways for becoming a teacher. In general, traditional certification involves completing a degree program at a university or college in education and completing a student teaching program. After completing certification requirements and passing any additional testing, the certificate is awarded. Each state's credentialing structure determines other certification requirements. The section also provides information on traditional certification in Florida and how teacher candidates receive the Preliminary (Level I) credential, which has a five-year validity period. To renew the Preliminary certification, the teacher must complete a district-approved induction program that will lead to the issuance of the Clear credential (Level II).

### ***National***

According to previous discussions, a traditional pathway into teaching involves completing a degree program at a university or college with a major in education and completing a student teaching program (Davis & Bowers, 2019). After completing the initial or Level I certification requirements and passing any additional testing, which is determined at the state level, the certificate is awarded. Each state's credentialing structure determines other certification requirements (Graff, 2021).

### ***Florida***

Teacher candidates in Florida receive the Preliminary (Level I) credential upon completion of coursework and assessments. The certification has a five-year validity period (Graff, 2021). To renew the Preliminary certification, the teacher must complete a district-approved induction program that will lead to the issuance of the Clear credential (Level II) (Graff, 2021).

Credentials with the Clear designation are renewable every five years without additional requirements (Wilhelm et al., 2021). The number of Preliminary (Level I) and Clear (Level II) credentials issued in California has been steadily declining. A decrease in Preliminary (Level I) and Clear (Level II) certifications in the state is closely aligned with the reduction of university teacher preparation enrollment and the drastic increase in intern and permit issuances.

### ***Support***

This section discusses the importance of teacher retention in the education system, particularly in Florida. The high cost of replacing teachers who leave the profession, both financially and in terms of student learning, highlights the need to retain high-quality teachers. To achieve this, schools must focus on creating a supportive learning environment for teachers, including induction programs and mentoring, to reduce attrition rates. The section highlights the role of induction programs in Florida, such as Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA), and how it has led to higher retention rates, attitudes, and instructional skills in new teachers. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) implemented across Florida also requires districts to include induction support in their Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) and provide essential services to support new teachers. Overall, the text emphasizes the need for schools to prioritize teacher retention and support as part of school improvement efforts.

### ***National***

Based on a report published by Gray et al. (2021), more than half a million teachers move or leave the profession each year, costing taxpayers \$2.2 billion. Recent research suggests that replacement costs are approximately \$18,000 per teacher, which adds to a much higher annual price tag of more than \$7 billion (Wilhelm et al., 2021). Many factors contribute to these costs, including losing teachers due to attrition, which requires additional recruitment, training, and

support. Consequently, teacher attrition has a far more significant impact than just the financial loss districts incur when they cannot retain a steady teaching force (Graff, 2021). Due to these data, reducing attrition would also decrease the need for new teachers, allowing money to be better spent on mentoring and other methods for promoting student achievement and teacher development.

The goal of any school leader should be to keep good teachers. Well-prepared and capable educators significantly impact students' learning (Friedrichsen et al., 2018). The education system needs to take a few steps to retain high-quality teachers for our diverse student population. De Jong et al. (2018) suggest that school systems can create a magnet effect when they demonstrate a commitment to finding, retaining, and supporting good teachers. The schools must hire the best-prepared teachers as this will result in lower attrition and higher levels of competence in the teaching workforce over the long term (Wilhelm et al., 2021). In the alternative, they will have large numbers of underprepared teachers who drain schools of their human and financial resources, causing schools to continue to spend money on recruitment efforts, resulting in an ever-increasing drain on schools' resources (Cunningham, 2019).

Recent research by Suominen (2018) indicates that teachers now pay closer to \$18,000 per year. The figures rise dramatically when the cost of a decrease in student learning is added, hence the need to make appropriate decisions. In light of Malcolm Knowles' fifth assumption about adult learners, which indicates an internalization of a teacher's motivation to learn and a desire to remain in the profession after a few years, this focus on teacher retention is relevant (Cunningham, 2019). Site leadership must retain and support teachers as part of school improvement efforts.



According to Wright et al. (2018), every school must be organized not only to support student learning but also to support teacher learning and to provide them with the conditions for success. Both teacher retention and student achievement can be improved by several factors (Graff, 2021). School leadership and teacher empowerment are among these factors. Teacher retention is also heavily influenced by the learning environment teachers encounter when they enter the profession.

Several reasons contribute to why many new teachers leave the profession within five years, including poor working conditions and a lack of practical on-the-job training and support (Graff, 2021). To be increasingly effective in their practice, new teachers must feel valued as members of the professional learning community, have adequate time to work with colleagues, and have access to information, materials, and technology no matter where they are employed (Cunningham, 2019). New teachers in Florida receive various types of support, as outlined in the following section.

### ***Florida***

New teachers in Florida receive induction support primarily. New teachers must be provided with comprehensive induction programs, such as Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA), during their first two years (Suominen, 2018). The mentoring and coaching that Graff (2021) provided led to the next level of professional licensure, including embedded coaching and feedback from well-trained mentors. It has been shown that solid mentoring during the first years of teaching enhances the retention effects of intense initial preparation (Suominen, 2018). Moreover, well-designed mentoring programs increase new teachers' retention rates, attitudes, feelings of efficacy, and instructional skills (Friedrichsen et al., 2018).

Knowings' third and fourth assumptions about adult learners are directly connected to the concept of induction (Friedrichsen et al., 2018). Adult learners' readiness and orientation to learning, as well as the shift a new teacher experiences, are related to these assumptions. Job-integrated professional education focuses on each new teacher's context and content during induction. Ongoing professional development became the hallmark of professionalism in conjunction with universities, state leaders, and local districts (Boichenko et al., 2019). From the perspective of a university, the vision considered what teacher education should look like, from the perspective of a district, from the perspective of their classroom work, and finally, from the perspective of a state, how this work should be refined (Boichenko et al., 2019). Initially, dedicated funding sources were required for job-embedded professional development, which formed the foundation of induction. An extensive national study on the attrition of beginning teachers in induction with mentoring found that the attrition rate was 15%, compared to 26% for those without induction support (Furuya et al., 2019).

Florida historically funded all candidate induction programs as part of categorical aid with the Teacher Credentialing Block Grant. A significant change occurred when state legislators aiding districts with deep budget cuts at the state level allowed districts to use many of their categorical monies for education purposes (Friedrichsen et al., 2018). A crucial first step was taken in Florida to support new teachers' access to induction programs. With the full implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) across Florida (Boichenko et al., 2019). Districts must determine whether induction support for new teachers is incorporated into their Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) and what essential services they will provide to ensure qualified teachers in classrooms.

### ***Professional Development***

According to De Jong et al. (2018) 's report, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, issued in 1996 by the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, classrooms are the key to the nation's future. As a result, this report provided recommendations for addressing concerns in the teaching profession that will ultimately change the profession for the better for many years to come. In addition, teacher preparation and professional development were recommended as part of those recommendations (Long et al., 2019). To achieve this, Graff (2021) suggested that teacher education and professional development should be based on standards for both students and teachers. Moreover, securing funding for mentoring new teachers includes evaluating their teaching skills and creating sustainable, high-quality sources of professional development that will provide the resources needed to ensure continuous improvement in schools (Parfitt & Rose, 2018).

A change in the definition of quality instruction is integral to retaining quality teachers who serve diverse populations. A new report on teacher quality must be developed based on the current educational climate (Long et al., 2019). Teachers' autonomy is eroding in their classrooms as narrow measures of student performance are increasingly held accountable (Furuya et al., 2019). It has become more common for teachers, regardless of their expertise or knowledge, to use scripted curricula and receive professional development.

Both new and veteran teachers need help to apply their subject matter knowledge, skills, and judgment when following scripted curricula (Graff, 2021). Student learning will increase with effective instructional practices and recognize the teachers' rich toolkit of craft knowledge and skills (Furuya et al., 2019). Pratt (2018) indicated that it includes quality teaching in professional development. People must adhere to the assumption that all students can learn if

they are provided with the right conditions (Pratt, 2018). Teachers must be trained to believe that the appropriate teaching supports and differentiated opportunities will enable them to provide quality teaching (Pratt, 2018). To retain new teachers, there is a need to provide them with sustainable, site-based professional development.

It is essential to involve experienced colleagues in site-based professional development who watch and provide feedback to teachers regarding instructional strategies, model professional practices, and share insights about students' work (Pratt, 2018). Through professional collaboration, new teachers can better meet the needs of the diverse students they encounter every day. Professional Learning in the Learning Profession, a 2009 report by the National Staff Development Council, suggests regular professional learning for all teachers is crucial to benefiting students (Long et al., 2019). Every school subject and grade level should have teachers working closely with school improvement priorities throughout the year. Mentorship from an experienced colleague is an essential part of professional development for new teachers.

### ***Mentoring***

The focus can shift from improving instructional strategies to professional development and collaboration once a district or site has established a professional development and collaboration structure. All generations of teachers should contribute their skills and knowledge to create schools that can respond to current demographic realities (Graff, 2021). A veteran teacher might be interested in standards-based instruction, literacy strategies that have been developed recently, or the integration of technology into the classroom to reach diverse student populations. In this case, they are likely to benefit just as much as their inexperienced counterparts (Graff, 2021).

The number of educators eligible to serve as mentors across the country has reached almost 30 states (Bissessar, 2021). Only 18 states require mentors to maintain professional development during their mentoring tenure, while more than 30 states provide or require initial mentor training. A report found that only four states (Alaska, Hawaii, Maryland, and Washington) provide full-time mentoring for their new educators. Meanwhile, 23 states require or encourage their mentor teachers to observe classrooms during release time (Wang & Bale, 2019).

In Florida, state legislation led to the development of job-embedded professional development, known as Induction. It was decided that new teachers should be inducted by districts, not universities, as had been the historical practice. As a result, a credentialed candidate would demonstrate the knowledge gained through university coursework in their classroom practice during the induction process (Parfitt & Rose, 2018). Furthermore, Gray et al. (2021) suggest that teachers who participated in the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) induction model were likelier to stay in the profession due to its effectiveness.

California pioneered a statewide induction program for teachers. The Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program set the Standard for teacher education and reduced attrition. The program gained national recognition and has become a model for other states (Parfitt & Rose, 2018). During the late 1990s, California was one of only 16 states to offer to mentor new teachers across the nation (Furuya et al., 2019). Most beginning teachers leave the profession within three years of starting their careers (Petty et al., 2021).

According to a study by Gray et al. (2021), Florida's schools retain teachers at a significantly higher rate than the national average, with 84% of 45 maintaining themselves in the classroom compared to 50% previously reported at the National Level (Gharis et al., 2020). With

the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2001, teacher induction was supported. Among the critical components of NCLB was the requirement that states employ highly qualified teachers for all students. Wang & Bale (2019) state that there is growing evidence that induction programs effectively retain teachers, reduce costs, improve teacher quality, and improve student performance. As part of a comprehensive induction program, new teachers are trained, acculturated, supported, and retained throughout a multiyear process designed to transition them into a lifelong professional development program (Aldridge et al., 2021).

### ***Foreign Certified Teachers***

Various terms in the literature have been used to refer to a category of foreign-certified teachers. Teachers with foreign training (Gharis et al., 2020), immigrants with foreign education (Graff, 2021), internationally trained teachers (Pratt, 2018), internationally educated teachers (Davis & Bowers, 2019), and visible minority teachers use these terms. In addition, Morgan et al. (2022) refer to teacher candidates with qualifications from outside of America as 'internationally trained teachers. Though the terminology used varies, the descriptions generally include: 1) teachers who studied and became certified outside of America, 2) immigrants who have worked abroad as teachers, 3) immigrants who teach in their host country, and 4) immigrants who study or work abroad as teachers or teacher candidates. As it emphasizes a teacher's immigration status in a host country, the term 'immigrant teachers' may have unintended meanings.

In this study, the term 'foreign certified teachers' refers to teachers who earned their teacher education credentials outside of the United States of America and are currently working or have worked in Florida. Teachers in Florida who have worked in American schools outside Florida have met additional qualifications in those states because each state has its teacher

credentialing requirements. What have foreign-certified teachers experienced? After arriving in a new country and seeking employment, foreign-trained professionals face initial challenges adjusting to their new environment. Wright et al. (2018), what does it mean to be a stranger in a foreign land?

Creating generative spaces for reflection on the experience is possible when tensions and contradictions between language, culture, ethnicity, and pedagogy are embraced by foreign-certified teachers (Wang & Bale, 2019). They asked foreign-certified teachers about their difficulties in Australia in their studies. According to the teachers, bureaucratic education systems and processes cause issues, including varying registration procedures, difficulty getting their teacher qualifications recognized, and difficulty assessing English proficiency. A lack of recognition of credentials obtained outside Australia and difficulties finding permanent full-time teaching positions (Pratt, 2018) are among the difficulties in finding employment. According to the foreign-certified teachers, students' behavior in Australian schools seemed to be less disciplined than in their native countries, as well as cultural differences. Russian immigrant teachers in Israel face various barriers, including language barriers, curricular issues, cultural barriers, and student-teacher relationships (Morgan et al., 2022). Foreign-certified teachers face similar challenges (Aldridge et al., 2021)

### ***Culture, Cultural Tension, and Cultural Adjustments***

The connection between culture and education has been documented in several studies (West & Frey-Clark, 2019). Classroom participation styles are influenced by students' culture, relationships with their teachers, and beliefs about schooling. Generally, students are expected to avoid eye contact with teachers in some cultures and remain silent in the classroom (Aldridge et al., 2021). Other cultures encourage active participation in the school and eye contact with

teachers (West & Frey-Clark, 2019). While human cultures are too complex to be separated into two categories, Wright et al. (2018) can provide insight into how culture influences how students learn and how teachers teach and manage their classrooms. Culture can vary from one individual to another.

It is essential to understand and promote students' cultures to enhance their personal and academic development, according to Wang & Bale (2019). Therefore, foreign-certified teachers in Florida are in a tension-filled situation where they are responsible for valuing and promoting the local cultures and negotiating perceived cultural borders (West & Frey-Clark, 2019). There are differences, as already mentioned, even within the same cultural group. It is common in literature on experiences of immigrant professionals to discuss clinging to hope, the process of (un)learning, and resilience as means of cultural adjustment. Owen et al. (2018) identified that transformation takes place through clinging to hope, the process of (un)learning, and resilience.

Due to cultural differences, it can be challenging to integrate foreign-certified teachers into the school community. Consequently, foreign-trained professionals can unlearn or affirm their cultural identities due to profound cultural dissonance (Owen et al., 2018). Asian immigrants working in Western countries are required to work hard and respect hierarchy in Eastern societies, whereas in Western organizations, individualism and hard work are highly valued. Petty et al. (2021) offer a postcolonial lens through which Lin's East-West binary can be critiqued.

A teacher who ignores or trivializes the cultural background of his students is likely to face resistance (Petty et al., 2021). The importance of mutual respect and understanding between foreign-certified teachers and students, parents, other teachers, and school administrators (Gomez, 2020). Based on Furuya et al. (2019) study, immigrant professionals perceive that they



have a foot here, a foot there, and a foot nowhere when they live and work in a different country. Chun & Cho ((2018) found that Korean immigrants who participated in the research could adapt to American culture and language through determination and hard work.

Immigrant professionals, including foreign-certified teachers, are credited with their professional success due to personal agency, also known as perseverance and hard work. Nevertheless, such a narrative needs to be revised. It seems to assume that North America, and settler societies more generally, are a land of unlimited opportunity where individuals can achieve whatever their merit permits (Wilson et al., 2020). Hard work, self-motivation, integrity, and self-awareness are all factors that contribute to career success. This idea is the meritocracy myth (Wilson et al., 2020). Though merit plays a significant role in the careers of immigrant professionals, including foreign-certified teachers, there are also 24 non-merit factors involved, which suppress, neutralize, or even negate the effects of merit and create barriers to individual mobility.

According to Pratt (2018), cultural barriers can be minimized, and foreign-trained professionals can be more satisfied at work. The company offers cultural orientation programs, training in communication skills, cultural awareness training for all employees, and diversity training for all employees. Cultural diversity must be respected and understood to minimize cultural conflicts and discrimination (Wilson et al., 2020). A more satisfied foreign-trained professional has a better job if they respect another culture and are familiar with it. There is a positive correlation between acculturation and job satisfaction for foreign-certified teachers. Demie (2021) suggests that all employees should receive training in cultural competence and awareness, regardless of their cultural background.

Cultural competence involves being aware of and respecting other people's cultures (West & Frey-Clark, 2019). The cultural challenges experienced by foreign-trained professionals should be included in research into their experiences. According to Warner's (2018) study, community acceptance is crucial to the success of foreign-certified teachers. There was a demonstrated appreciation for cultural diversity among the foreign-accredited teachers. One study participant said that she felt welcomed as a member of the school's diverse community and had access to the school's community of practice resources, including interactions and guidance from peers with more experience and course materials (Gomez, 2020).

### **Qualifications**

To enter a profession, teachers must possess qualifications or credentials (Holloway, 2019). An authorized source, such as the government, higher education institutions, or private organizations, can provide these. Furthermore, a teaching qualification is one of several academic degrees and certificates that enable individuals to become teachers (Bulakh et al., 2019). Different countries have different measures of teaching qualifications. To ensure that teachers are competent, develop foundational teaching and learning concepts, and become familiar with the curriculum, some authorities require student teachers to participate in practical teaching exercises during a teacher education program. Teachers are required to complete teacher education programs from colleges or universities. Once registered, they must become a member of a national accreditation agency (Bulakh et al., 2019).

### ***Florida's Teacher Certification Process***

Teachers must complete Educator Preparation Institutes to earn the Professional Florida Educator's Certificate. To show mastery of the required tests, teachers in Florida must pass the Florida Teacher Certification Examinations (FTCE), which includes multiple-choice questions, essays, and other assessments. The FTCE tests the teacher's knowledge in subject areas, such as English, math, science, and social studies, as well as their professional knowledge and skills, such as teaching methods, ethics, and classroom management(The Florida Department of Education, 2022). The Florida Department of Education offers preparation materials and resources to help potential teachers prepare for the FTCE. This includes practice tests, study guides, and workshops. Additionally, many Educator Preparation Institutes also provide training and support to help teachers prepare for the exams.

Pass rates for the FTCE exams vary by geographic location in Florida. According to the Florida Department of Education (2022), the overall pass rate for the FTCE exams was 63% in 2021. However, pass rates varied by subject area and geographic location. For example, the pass rate for the Professional Education Test was 63% overall, but in some counties, the pass rate was as low as 40% (Florida Department of Education, 2022).

Florida recently implemented a new option to waive the four General Knowledge (GK) tests for individuals who hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution. These individuals can instead take a General Knowledge combined test, which includes reading, writing, math, and an essay. Upon passing the FTCE, potential teachers are certified as teachers (Florida Department of Education, 2022). A Florida Professional Certificate is automatically awarded to candidates who pass all three sections. Temporary certification was available to teachers while they pursued the three-year Professional Florida Education Certificate. Florida

Department of (Education, 2022) also offers an interstate reciprocity program that allows candidates to qualify as Florida teachers.

### **Caribbean Migrants**

The research showed that Afro-Caribbean immigrants numbered 3.5 million in 2009 (Aldridge et al., 2021). Most Afro-Caribbean immigrants migrate voluntarily from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, respectively, have the most Afro-Caribbean refugees. According to Aldridge et al., 2021, most respondents report excellent or strong English language skills. Despite their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, Afro-Caribbean immigrants face stereotypes and challenges in the United States. In their new identities in American society, Black people experience invisibility due to their marginalization as Black people (Gomez, 2020). Their new racial status as African Americans brings emotional upheavals and intercultural challenges (Holloway, 2019). Social isolation and marginalization are often choices they must make when faced with racial stereotypes and stigmas.

They make up 6% of full-time instructors, compared with 79% of White instructors (Bulakh et al., 2019). Caribbean immigrants are often referred to as 'Afro-Caribbean,' as African Americans. A survey of full-time White professors reveals that 84% are Black, while only 4% are Hispanic (Holloway, 2019). Holloway, 2019 argues that structural racial inequities prevent black faculty members from being promoted, tenured, and retained. Additionally, they report interpersonal injustices, such as racism and oppression (Suominen, 2018). As a result, their physical and psychological well-being is adversely affected, an unwelcome climate is created within departments and institutions, and the retention of employees is adversely affected.

CE speakers appear to be influenced by language ideologies regarding standardized English in such a way that they use standardized English in formal settings (such as academia) while maintaining their nonstandard English in informal settings (such as the home) (Morgan et al., 2022). Suppose a CE speaker encounters ideologies concerning the English language beyond the Caribbean context or interacts with SE speakers who do not respond to CEs in a desired manner. In that case, they usually realize they are being positioned as 'non-native' English speakers.

Spanish and English are both fluent in Afro-Caribbean teachers. It is well documented that teachers and education practitioners have engaged in self-marginalization by favoring standardized English over non-standardized English for personal and professional reasons (Greenblatt, 2018). Wilson et al., 2020 report that despite teachers' increased acceptance of nonstandard varieties of English, they prefer Standard English (i.e., Queen's English) for instruction (Wilson et al. 2020). According to Wilson et al., 2020, a few studies have examined the English of Afro-Caribbean immigrant educators and found that their native languages are marginalized after interacting with undergraduates.

### **Florida Teacher Shortage**

The Florida school system is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest school system in the nation, with 67 public school districts, comprising more than 4,000 public schools (including the public and charter schools that enroll almost 3 million students annually, (FLDOE, 2023) Trending data from the Florida Department of Education suggest that in the near future, Florida will need to add more than 16,000 full-time teachers over the next 5 years. The Florida Education Association tracks advertised teacher vacancies statewide and counted nearly 5294 vacancies for January 2023 (FLDOE, 2023). Consequently, the teacher shortage has continued to negatively affect our

students. Class size has long been a source of contention, particularly in Florida, where voters approved restricting the number of students in a classroom in 2022. With fewer teachers available, schools continue to struggle to maintain lower student-to-teacher ratios, leading to larger class sizes. Large class size makes it more challenging for teachers to provide individualized attention to students.

The ongoing teacher shortage has caused an increase in workload for teachers. In some cases, teachers are required to take on additional responsibilities or teach multiple subjects or grade levels due to the shortage. This has led to increased workloads and potential burnout. Schools may have difficulties filling vacant teaching positions with qualified educators. This has led to the hiring of less experienced or less qualified teachers, affecting the overall quality of education. Additionally, the teacher shortage has contributed to higher turnover rates, as educators seek better opportunities or less stressful working environments elsewhere. Furthermore, teacher preparation programs are enrolling fewer candidates each year and k-12 school enrollment increases each year, making classes larger and the gap wider with students per teacher. Florida's children deserve qualified, caring teachers and education staff professionals who can meet their needs.

### **Summary**

Researchers should position their research relative to other research. By providing an overview of relevant literature, the researcher has attempted to understand the experiences of foreign-certified teachers in this chapter: Caribbean Educators, the United States, and state literature. There are different approaches to qualitative research employed by the studies cited, and they highlight various themes found in the literature on the experiences of foreign-certified teachers and other foreign-trained or immigrant professionals. A review of the literature on

foreign educators is also presented in the chapter, which contends that only some studies have examined the experiences of Caribbean immigrants in various environments. By exploring the experiences of foreign-certified teachers in Florida, this study will add to the existing literature. The study presents a methodology in Chapter III.

## **Chapter III: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Chapter III illustrated and justified the methods used to examine the strategies to remove barriers to help teachers from the Caribbean become certified in grades K-8 in Florida. Teacher certification has evolved and several educators want to teach but are not able to because of the lack of teacher certification (Darling-Hammond & Garner, M, 2017). The Florida certification platform is a dynamic and evolving process, continuously adapting to reflect the changing needs and demands of the education field. As the Florida Department of Education strives to “raise the bar” to enter the teaching profession, many educators fail to navigate the tough certification rules. The number of certified teachers in the state of Florida entering the workforce continues to decline, especially in the critical shortage areas (Florida Department of Education, 2021). This study was designed to evaluate the content and functionality of Smart Teacher Certification using a descriptive research method approach. An online survey (Appendix E) was used as the method of evaluation due to its convenience and anonymity.

### **Research Questions**

The study sought to investigate the following research questions.

o RQ1: What is the perceived effectiveness of the current Florida certification model in certifying teachers in grades K-8 from the Caribbean?

o RQ2: How does the design and user interface of the Smart Teacher Certification website impact user experience and ease of navigation?

o RQ3: What information and resources are provided on the Smart Teacher Certification website to support prospective teachers in understanding the certification process?



A practical manner of studying the challenges faced by teachers from the Caribbean in becoming certified grades K-8 teachers is by using a quantitative survey and qualitative. According to Check & Schutt (2012), survey research can be defined as the collection of specific information from a sample of individuals via their responses to set questions. This type of research was deemed appropriate as it allowed various methods to recruit participants, collect data, and analyze the resulting information. Survey research can leverage quantitative strategies such as Likert-style surveys, as surveys frequently describe and explore subjects' behavior in social and psychology research (Singleton & Straits, 2009).

Chapter III outlined the methodology section used in this quantitative and qualitative survey research and provided arguments from similar studies and the literature to justify the research methods applied in the study. Information was collected by discussing the study's research methods, population sample, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

### **Research Design**

This study was designed to evaluate the content and functionality of the website, Smart Teacher Certification using a descriptive method approach. Survey Monkey, an online survey was chosen as the method of evaluation due to its convenience, brevity, and anonymity. Internet-based surveys are relatively low cost and enable the researcher to reach wider audiences which improves the validity of the results, according to Check & Schutt (2012). Dillman et al. (2014) describe and test a tailored design for survey-type research. As such, they found that improving the visual appeal and using appropriate font sizes, for example, can improve the response rate. Attending to these issues via electronic surveys further adds to the validity and reliability of the sample population. Participants were sent to the Smart Teacher Certification website to retrieve the survey from the site feedback form. The survey questions (Appendix E)

included open-end and close-ended questions to include Likert Scales, Checklist, and Rating Scale questions. The information gathered from these questions made up the quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative questions asked, focused on confirming or testing a theory or an assumption. The survey also included open-ended questions to include coded short-answer responses. The qualitative research approach helped to summarize and interpret data.

The data collected helped the researcher analyze and assess the overall quality of the content and functionality of the website. The questionnaire had 15 questions and participants were asked for details and opinions on the following: Current position and Area of Certification, Educational Attainment, Site Layout, and Design, Site Engagement and Easy of Navigation, Rationale for the Smart Teacher Certification website, Key Elements of the Smart Teachers Model, and Value of the resources provided on the website. Participants were expected to agree to the informed consent (Appendix C) before moving on to the survey. Participants were not allowed to move to the first question if the answer to the informed consent (Appendix C) was “disagree.” Participants had access to the survey on December 15, 2023, and it was closed on January 30, 2024. The study investigated the barriers facing teachers from the Caribbean in becoming certified grade K-8 teachers. The results were used to forecast future events based on the data and findings (Curtis, Comiskey, and Dempsey, 2016). Survey research is valid and has clear benefits in helping describe and explore variables in social sciences. Survey research equally has pitfalls; however, by using internet-based data collection methods, the researcher can prevent such pitfalls from affecting the validity of the research findings.

The quantitative feedback was used to indicate whether the Florida Department of Education website was a useful tool for Caribbean educators who had attained their teacher certification. The quantitative feedback was used to indicate whether the website was a useful

tool for Caribbean immigrant teachers who are seeking a professional certificate from the Florida Department of Education. The qualitative responses were aggregated and assessed to identify appropriate changes to improve the content and the functionality of the website prior to public release.

### **Rationale for Research Design**

The present study investigated the barriers teachers from the Caribbean face in becoming certified in grades K-8 in Florida. The findings from this study will provide academics and practitioners with verifiable knowledge needed to improve the certification process and address the high turnover rate and teacher shortage in Florida. Two-thirds of immigrants from Caribbean countries live in two U.S. states, 41% in Florida and 25% in New York between 2015 and 2019 (USCIS, 2022 and DHS, 2022)). According to findings from the Department of Homeland Security (2022), 864,800 Caribbean immigrants live in the Miami-Dade area, representing 20% of the Caribbean foreign-born population. As such, the findings from this study will provide actionable insights into improving the certification process and addressing a problem faced by the community. A quantitative and qualitative survey is the designated research strategy to answer the research questions successfully.

A research design can be defined as a strategy applied in a study to understand better a group of respondents or a particular phenomenon in its environment (Nel & Muller, 2010). As a result, this study applied a quantitative survey following a quantitative research methodology. Survey research can apply several data collection techniques, with surveys, questionnaires, and interviews being the most common. Such questionnaires or surveys may be administered by the researcher to an individual or a particular group and include a series of themes or sub-themes that reflect the study's aims (Costanzo, Stawski, Ryff, Coe, & Almeida, 2012). Questionnaires may

include demographic questions in addition to valid and reliable research instruments such as Likert-style surveys (DuBenske et al., 2014; Ponto, Ellington, Mellon, & Beck, 2010). The researcher can leverage the above strategy to validate the contents of the survey so that the respondents or research participants can better interpret and evaluate the potential for validity errors. It is helpful to the reader when authors describe the contents of the survey questionnaire so that the reader can interpret and evaluate the potential for validity errors. As such, surveys can improve the validity of the results and the reliability of the study's findings (See Buerhaus et al., 2012).

### **The Setting of the Study**

The study was conducted within a specialized educational website focused on providing information and resources related to the certification process for prospective teachers. This platform serves as an online hub where aspiring educators could access relevant information, guidance, and resources to navigate the complexities of teacher certification. (Ponto et al., 2010). The research focuses on exploring the design, content, and functionality of these online platforms, assessing how effectively they support prospective teachers in understanding the certification process. It involves analyzing the structure and organization of the website, the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the information provided, and the availability of resources to assist individuals throughout the certification journey. Prospective teachers visiting this website can access detailed explanations of the certification requirements and processes.

In this digital setting, the study investigated the user experience and usability of the website, examining factors such as website navigation, search functionality, and accessibility features. (Dillman et al. (2014) Researchers analyze the types of media employed, such as videos, webinars, or interactive tools, to enhance understanding and engagement. Additionally,

the study explores whether the website includes testimonials, success stories, or a community forum where prospective teachers can interact, seek advice, and share their experiences.

The primary focus is to evaluate how well the website supports teachers in understanding the intricacies of the certification process, ensuring that the information provided is accurate, up-to-date, and accessible. By examining the setting of this online teacher certification platforms, researchers can gain insights into the effectiveness of these digital resources in assisting individuals in their pursuit of teacher certification.

### **Description of Population**

The target population for this study were teachers from the Caribbean in the state of Florida teaching in grades K-8. Individuals participating in this study were over 18 years old, live in the United States, and have completed their professional teacher certification. The present study used a sample size of approximately 80 respondents. The surveys were administered via Survey Monkey based on specific themes that were equally quantifiable. The initial data source were demographic data from the research participants, and themes which were analyzed via quantitative and qualitative questions in a survey.

The inclusion criteria were immigrant educators from the Caribbean who have immigrated to the United States and are currently residing in the state of Florida and hold a Florida Professional Teaching Certificate. These individuals have a background in teaching or education from their home country and have navigated the certification process to teach in Florida's educational system (Ponto et al., 2010). The population included individuals from diverse cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds from the Caribbean who have a professional certification in various teaching disciplines and grade levels, such as elementary, secondary, or special education. They may have completed their education and teacher training

outside the United States. Within the population, there may be variations in terms of the length of time since immigrating to the United States, previous teaching experience, language proficiency, and familiarity with the U.S. education system. Shaheen et al. (2019) By focusing on the population of immigrant educators who were certified, the study aims to shed light on the unique experiences and support mechanisms needed for other educators to ensure their successful integration into the Florida educational system as certified teachers.

### **Sampling Process**

The researcher applied purposeful sampling to recruit research participants. To acquire a representative set of respondents from the sample population, purposive sampling was used as an adequate sampling technique. Shaheen et al. (2019) found that purposeful sampling was an adequate method to collect data from information-rich audiences. For this research, a diverse and representative sample was recommended to capture the range of experiences and perspectives. A sample size of 80 participants was suitable for this study. The sample reflected the diversity of the immigrant educator population in Florida, considering factors such as age, nationality, linguistic background, educational background, and teaching disciplines. (Wilson et al., 2020). The sample included both recent immigrants and individuals who have resided in the United States for a longer period, as the experiences and challenges may vary based on the length of time in the country. Participants with varying levels of prior teaching experience were included, ranging from individuals seeking initial certification to those with teaching experience in their home country or as paraprofessionals in U.S. schools. The sample included participants with different levels of English language proficiency, as language requirements and challenges may play a significant role in the certification process.

Potential participants were recruited through collaboration with teacher preparation programs, community organizations supporting immigrant educators, and online platforms or forums specifically targeting immigrant educators in Florida. Snowball sampling was also employed, where participants may refer other eligible immigrant educators they are acquainted with. It was important to ensure ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, are upheld throughout the sampling and data collection process. (Phakiti, 2015). The researcher emailed teacher groups (Appendix A), and then post flyers (Appendix B) about the survey on social media groups.

### **Data Collection**

Prior to collecting the data, approval was first garnered from the Lynn Institutional Review Board. Obtaining the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this dissertation ensured ethical compliance, ensured institutional compliance, and enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Participants of this study were asked to agree with the expectations of the informed consent form (Appendix C) provided. This consent form ensured ethical research practices, promoted participant understanding and voluntary participation, and protected privacy and confidentiality. Participants were able to review the website but not participate in the survey should they decline the informed consent (Appendix C). The first step in collecting data is getting approval from relevant bodies. (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020).

The researcher then gain access to the potential participants with flyers (Appendix B) posted on LinkedIn and Facebook groups that the researcher deemed to be feasible for sourcing data. These groups included LinkedIn groups, Caribbean educators from Phinished/FinishEdD (Drs/Future Drs) #WhoGotNext, and members of the researcher's personal social media network. The researcher also send emails to associates who have completed their professional

certification. Data is collected through online quantitative and qualitative surveys that capture the experiences and perceptions of research participants based on set themes (Knapik, 2006). This method will ensure the validity and reliability of the outcomes.

### **Instrumentation**

This study used internet-based survey methods to reach a wide range of respondents. This Survey Monkey included questions about their experiences, challenges, and support needs related to the certification website. The first question of the survey was the informed consent (Appendix C). There were fifteen questions about the site's navigation, layout, design, and content. The researcher used a combination of open-ended questions and close-ended questions. The survey included twelve close-ended questions to including three checklist-type multiple-choice questions, two rating scale multiple-choice questions and, eight Likert scale questions to quantify responses. This survey also included two open-ended questions with short responses. An example of the survey questions asked if the layout and design were visually appealing and user friendly. The demographic data which was collected for this study includes respondent's educational attainment and employment data. The survey took approximately eight to ten minutes to complete. The surveys used Survey Monkey which was embedded into the Smart Teacher Certification Website (Appendix F).

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study ensured ethical considerations were adhered to by following standards that minimize interference with the research findings. The researcher did not have any contact with the participants prior to the research, and their identities were safeguarded during and after the research phase. Participant anonymity was ensured throughout the research. Furthermore, all research participants completed consent forms (Appendix C) allowing them to participate



knowingly in the study and were notified that they might withdraw from the study at any time. The research adheres to strict ethical codes of conduct by leveraging the findings of the Belmont report. According to Kimmelman (2020), the Belmont report outlines a comprehensive set of guidelines to support ethical research practices. No identifying information was collected or stored during this study.

### ***Risks & Benefits***

A study may be considered ethical when there is a positive risk-benefit ratio. This included minimizing the risk of individuals participating in the study while justifying the benefits for the participants. The researcher took precautions to ensure participant anonymity and maintain the confidentiality of their responses. The researcher did not collect IP addresses. Participant's identity were not collected. Additionally, the researcher was sensitive to issues relating to immigration and cultural background. The topic of immigrant educators and their certification process may be sensitive and evoke emotional responses. Some participants may have had challenging experiences or faced potential barriers related to their immigration status or cultural background. (Holloway, 2019). In addition, external factors beyond the control of the researcher, such as changes in immigration policies or educational regulations, may impact the certification process for immigrant educators during the dissertation study. These factors may introduce unforeseen challenges or affect the generalizability of the findings.

This dissertation offered the potential to improve support systems for immigrant educators, inform policy decisions, contribute to professional development, enhance educational outcomes, and advance the research field however there are no benefits to participants, but they may enjoy knowing they are assisting in creating a solution for other Caribbean educators who are navigating the Florida education certification system. Caribbean educators who migrate to

the United States can have improved access to information, guidance, and mentoring, ultimately enhancing their chances of successful certification and integration into the education system. By recognizing and addressing the risks, researchers can maximize the benefits and ensure the ethical and responsible conduct of the study.

### ***How Data Was Secured***

Data was stored in a secure digital environment, such as password-protected computers or encrypted databases that only the researcher knew. When transferring data electronically, a secure method such as encrypted email was used. Data was not transferred through unsecured channels. Data will be retained for one year after the study has been completed and then safely disposed of. The research environment was protected by using a secure network connection, up-to-date antivirus software, and firewalls.

### ***Anonymity & Confidentiality***

The researcher followed ethical guidelines and institutional policies to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. The approval from the IRB (Appendix G) provided guidance on how to protect the identities and information of those involved in the study. (Singleton & Straits, 2009). The researcher ensured that immigrant educators and any other participants in the study remain anonymous. Participants were not asked to identify themselves. Confidentiality, on the other hand, relates to safeguarding the information shared by participants. The researcher ensured that any personal or sensitive data collected during the research process was kept confidential and protected from unauthorized access. This involved securely storing data, anonymizing it when reporting findings, and obtaining informed consent (Appendix C) from participants to ensure their information was used appropriately.

## **Quality of Data**

Data is deemed as high quality. Data quality is the process of data profiling to identify any inconsistencies and anomalies in the data. This study strived to meet high-quality standards through adherence to the validity and reliability of data, as discussed below.

### ***Validity***

To ensure that this study accurately measures the intended variables and establishes a causal relationship between them. The researcher designed the study carefully, ensuring that the research methods, data collection instruments, and procedures align with the research objectives. To enhance external validity, the researcher selected a representative sample of immigrant educators and considered the diversity of their backgrounds and experiences. According to Surucu & Maslaski (2020), validity is the extent to which a concept can be quantified. Data collection methods' reliability must be considered when performing or reviewing research instruments. According to Middleton (2022), three primary categories of validity exist. The first looks at content validity, the instrument used to collect data, and how they relate to the variable under study. (Hufford, 2021). The second category examines whether the test findings can be deduced from the data (Fink, 2010).

The final criterion was criterion validity. A criterion can be defined as any other measurement tool that can be used to assess the same variable. For example, correlations can be used to establish the degree to which instruments evaluate the same variable (Haele & Twycross, 2015). Construct and content validity was be used in the study. These validity methods was used as they require transforming ideas and concepts that can be tested in the data. Validity techniques are used to assess if the indicators of the study reflect the initial concept.

### ***Reliability***

To enhance the reliability of this study the researcher ensured that the survey questions, or other measurement tools used in the study were reliable and produce consistent results. The researcher strived to implement standardized protocols, provide clear instructions to participants, and have set processes in place to minimize errors and variations in data collection. Using a previous research-designed survey instrument can be a powerful tool in a dissertation investigation as it offers customization, control, and efficient data collection. Therefore, the researcher duplicated some questions from Dr. Amanda Orondoff's survey instrument as it has proven to measure what it intended to as well as produce consistent results. The researcher will gain permission from Dr. Amanda Orondoff to use these questions (Appendix D). Consistency in data collection methods enhances the reliability of the findings. Consistency is an essential aspect of reliability (Middleton, 2022). A subject should be able to give the same responses if the study was to be carried out again. Although there is no precise way to determine reliability, several methods have emerged from validation to ensuring quantifiable responses (Haele & Twycross, 2015). According to Locke & Wallace (2014), reliability supports the study's findings over time and evaluates the consistency of instruments used in the study. The Cronbach's alpha was applied across the survey as various scores have different difficulty levels. This estimation method is used because it requires less time, and the recommended coefficient score is 0.8.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher utilized the software packages Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) which offers a wide range of tools and functions for quantitative data analysis. This software package offers a wide range of tools and functions for quantitative data analysis. SPSS facilitates the data analysis process by automating calculations, generating tables, and conducting

various statistical tests. According to Kelley (2022), quantitative data analysis assesses data based on statistics or responses that can be easily converted into numbers, enabling the researcher to find pertinent information. It is based on analyzing and describing objects and responses to examine better the data obtained (Taylor, 2020). As such, quantitative numerical data analysis was applied in the present study, where the following procedures was carried out. The researcher ran descriptive statistics (mean, mode, range, median, and standard deviation) and arrange open-ended responses into codes to generate themes and triangulate with the Likert scale questions to illicit continual improvement process results of the Smart Teacher Certification website.

#### **Data Validation:**

This was used to evaluate information acquired through various channels to determine whether the data conforms with preset requirements (Kabir, 2016). Data validation is achieved by ensuring that the protocol is followed and the results are equally thorough (Ofem, 2022). The researcher checked the accuracy of data entry and transcription processes. Double-checking entries and conducting random checks for accuracy will help identify and rectify any errors. The researcher ensured that variables fall within appropriate ranges and that there are no unexpected or implausible values. For example, checking for ages outside a realistic range or verifying that categorical variables are correctly coded can help identify and resolve data entry errors. The researcher also addressed missing data appropriately by excluding them from the data. Additionally, it was important to identify and examine outliers in the data. Outliers are extreme values that deviate significantly from the bulk of the data. Determine whether the outliers are valid data points or the result of errors (Brown et al., 2018). If they are legitimate, decide

whether they should be retained or if any transformations or statistical techniques should be applied to address their impact on the analysis.

**Data Coding:** This process can organize data based on the given values. The data must adequately describe tables and structures (Ofem, 2022). Quantitative data analysis tends to rely heavily on computational and statistical methods, which focus on the mathematical and numerical or statistical examination of the data sets (Surendran, 2020). This study used computational software to analyze better the results of the pre-existing relationships between the variables. The survey results was interpreted based on categories, percentages, and contingency tables.

### ***Product***

A certification roadmap website for immigrant educators would help these aspiring educators determine the pathway that is right for them at any point in their careers. The present study answered the research questions by investigating the effectiveness of the Smart Teacher Certification website that encompasses the Teacher Certification Process and the barriers that prevent citizens from the Caribbean from becoming certified teachers. It was crucial to consider the teacher certification process, the role played by technology, and the barriers teachers from the Caribbean face in becoming certified K-8 teachers. Sections on the website include: Why Teach in Florida; Becoming a Teacher; and Testimonials. Becoming a teacher will cover the product model (Appendix F). The model is used to help teachers be successful in becoming certified educators who are ready to make a difference in our student's life. Phase one addresses the official letter of eligibility, while phase two encompasses the processes required for obtaining a temporary certificate and, lastly, outlines the steps necessary for acquiring the professional certificate.

**Limitations**

The study surveyed at least 80 respondents via the Internet, such as Survey Monkey and social media platforms. These participants allowed the researcher to effectively apply purposeful sampling and ensure that the responses represented the larger population sample. The researcher assumed that the sample size was representative and that responses were forthcoming. The dissertation's findings may be limited by the size and representativeness of the sample. If the sample size was small or not diverse enough, the generalizability of the results to the broader population of immigrant educators in Florida may be limited. This dissertation relies on self-reported data, such as surveys or interviews. Therefore, it was possible that there might be inaccuracies in participants' recollection of events. Language and cultural factors may influence the communication and interpretation of the research instruments. Immigrant educators with limited English proficiency or diverse cultural backgrounds may face challenges in expressing their experiences or understanding the questions. This limitation could affect the accuracy and completeness of the data collected. The dissertation may be influenced by external factors beyond the researcher's control, such as policy changes, socioeconomic conditions, or cultural shifts. These external factors could impact the generalizability and relevance of the findings, and it's important to acknowledge their potential influence.

**Delimitations**

Theofanidis & Fountouki (2018) defined delimitations as boundaries established by the researcher to achieve the aim and objectives of the research. The dissertation focuses specifically on Florida and the certification process for immigrant educators within the state. Therefore, the findings and conclusions may not be directly applicable to other regions or states, as certification requirements and support systems can vary across different jurisdictions. The dissertation

focuses on a specific subset of immigrant educators, such as those with linguistic backgrounds, educational qualifications, or immigration statuses. The findings may not generalize to the entire population of immigrant educators in Florida or those from different backgrounds.

The dissertation may primarily examine the challenges, support mechanisms, and outcomes related to the certification process for immigrant educators. Other aspects of their professional development or employment conditions, such as job placement, ongoing training, or workplace experiences, may be outside the scope of the study. The dissertation adopted a specific research methodology, such as a quantitative approach. The choice of methodology could influence the depth and breadth of the findings, as well as the ability to capture certain aspects of the topic. Additionally, this study was subjected to resource limitations, which include time, budget, and personnel. These constraints could influence the scope of data collection, sample size, or the extent of analysis that can be conducted.

### **Summary**

This descriptive research study aimed to examine the barriers that prevent teachers from the Caribbean from becoming certified in grades K-8 in the state of Florida. To achieve this research goal, three main questions are posed. The first question investigated the effectiveness of the current model in certifying teachers in grades K-8 from the Caribbean. The second question sought to understand how the design and user interface, affected how users experienced and navigated the Smart Teacher Certification website. The third question examined how the information and resources provided on the website supported prospective teachers in understanding the certification process. A descriptive research methodology was deemed appropriate for the present study because it has direct real-world applications, providing valuable insights that can be used for problem-solving and decision-making. This method was used to



address the research question, and purposeful sampling which ensured that respondents met the criteria. The median was used to measure central tendency in this study as it applied to the quantitative survey approach.

In line with the Ethical codes of research, research participants were informed about their right to continue or quit the research process at any time. This information ensured that respondents were protected, and all the results were saved for up to one year and only shared with the relevant authorities. The research was conducted in line with the ethical codes of conduct presented in the Belmont report. Chapter IV outlined and guided the results by the research questions presented above.

## Chapter IV: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the perceived effectiveness of the current Florida certification model in certifying teachers in grades K-8 from the Caribbean, to describe the impact of the user experience with the Smart Teacher Certification website, and to determine what information and resources are provided on the Smart Teacher Certification website to support prospective teachers in understanding the certification process from their perspectives. Study participants included certified teachers from the Caribbean in the state of Florida teaching in grades K-8. The researcher utilized purposeful sampling to recruit research participants. Specifically, the researcher gained access to the potential participants with flyers (Appendix B) posted on LinkedIn and Facebook groups that the researcher deemed to be feasible for sourcing data. Quantitative and qualitative survey responses were collected online through Survey Monkey. Data were collected from December 19, 2023 to January 30, 2024. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What is the perceived effectiveness of the current Florida certification model in certifying teachers in grades K-8 from the Caribbean?

RQ2: How does the design and user interface of the Smart Teacher Certification website impact user experience and ease of navigation?

RQ3: What information and resources are provided on the Smart Teacher Certification website to support prospective teachers in understanding the certification process?

Chapter four is organized by an introduction, a discussion of the preparation of the data, sample demographics, results, additional findings, and a summary. Data were analyzed with

SPSS 23 for Windows and Pro Word Cloud. The following provides a discussion of data preparation.

### **Data Preparation**

The data was exported from Survey Monkey directly to SPSS 23 for Windows and Pro Word Cloud. It was apparent that 95 participants entered the survey. These participants all completed the inform consent form. Columns labeled “Email address, First Name, Last Name and Custom Data” was a default of survey monkey and were therefore deleted since there was no data in the columns because participants were anonymous. The researcher scanned the data set visually for missing data and observed that there was some data missing. To facilitate ease of identification, the researcher sorted columns in ascending order. It became apparent that 9 participants who entered the survey did not answer any questions beyond the Informed Consent question. Those cases were deleted from the dataset, which left a sample size of 86. The Likert scale items on the survey were reverse-coded so that the higher the score, the more favorable the attitudes toward the perceived effectiveness of the current Florida certification model in certifying teachers in grades K-8 from the Caribbean, and the more favorable the attitudes toward user experience with the Smart Teacher Certification website. For example, a strongly agree would be coded as a four and a strongly disagree would be coded as a one. The reliability was computed for the attitudes toward user experience with the Smart Teacher Certification website. A composite score was computed for user experience with the Smart Teacher Certification website. A categorical variable was also computed for user experience with the Smart Teacher Certification website to facilitate ease of score interpretation. Frequency distributions were generated for the demographic and Likert-type items. Pie graphs were

generated to illustrate the descriptive findings. Word Clouds were generated to illustrate the qualitative findings. The following provides a discussion of the sample demographics.

### Sample Demographics

The sample consisted of 86 certified teachers from the Caribbean in the state of Florida teaching in grades K-8. Participants were asked, “Which of the following best describes your current occupation?” Participants were allowed to select more than one response. Therefore, the 86.0% ( $n = 74$ ) were teachers, whereas 14.0% ( $n = 12$ ) were not; 10.5% ( $n = 9$ ) were building administrators, whereas 89.5% ( $n = 77$ ) were not; 1.2% ( $n = 1$ ) were district administrators, whereas 98.8%, ( $n = 85$ ) were not; and 3.5% ( $n = 3$ ) were other, whereas 96.5% ( $n = 83$ ) were not. Current occupation is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

#### *Current Occupation*

Current Occupation	Not Selected		Selected	
	<i>n</i>	Row %	<i>n</i>	Row %
Teacher	12	14.0	74	86.0
Building Administrator	77	89.5	9	10.5
District Administrator	85	98.8	1	1.2
Other	83	96.5	3	3.5

*Note.* Participants were allowed to select more than one occupation.

Participants were asked, “Which of the following best describes your area(s) of certification? Select all that apply.” Therefore, the percentages reported reflect those that selected the choice relative to those that did not. Thus, 45.3% ( $n = 39$ ) of respondents were certified in 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade, whereas 54.7% ( $n = 47$ ) were not; 26.7% ( $n = 23$ ) were certified in K-6<sup>th</sup> grade, whereas 73.3% ( $n = 63$ ) were not; 22.1% ( $n = 19$ ) were certified in Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade, whereas 77.9% ( $n = 67$ ) were not; 11.6% ( $n = 10$ ) were certified in K-12<sup>th</sup> grade, whereas 88.4% ( $n = 76$ )

were not; and 3.5% ( $n = 3$ ) were certified in other area(s); whereas 96.5% ( $n = 83$ ) were not. Area of certification is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Areas of Certification*

Certification Area	Not Selected		Selected	
	<i>n</i>	Row %	<i>n</i>	Row %
Pre-K- 3rd Grades	67	77.9	19	22.1
K-6th Grades	63	73.3	23	26.7
6th -12th Grades	47	54.7	39	45.3
K-12th Grades	76	88.4	10	11.6
Other	83	96.5	3	3.5

*Note.* Participants were allowed to select more than one area of certification.

Regarding educational attainment, 48.8% ( $n = 42$ ) had baccalaureates, and 37.2% ( $n = 32$ ) had master's degrees. However, educators who had specialist degrees (5.8%,  $n = 5$ ) and doctorates (5.8%,  $n = 5$ ) were equally distributed. Educational attainment is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Educational Attainment*

Educational Attainment	<i>n</i>	%	Valid %
Bachelor's Degree	42	48.8	49.4
Master's Degree	32	37.2	37.6
Specialist Degree	5	5.8	5.9
Doctorate (Ph.D. or Ed.D.)	5	5.8	5.9
Other	1	1.2	1.2
Total	85	98.8	100.0
Not Answered	1	1.2	
Total	86	100.0	

## Results for Survey Questions

There were 86 total responses to the survey, which included 74 teachers, nine building administrators, one district administrator and three others. Participants were allowed to select more than one responses.

### Research Question 1

Research question one asked, “What is the perceived effectiveness of the current Florida certification model in certifying teachers in grades K-8 from the Caribbean?” This was answered by item number five the survey, which asked, “Based on your experience how effective is the current Florida Department of Education certification model in certifying teachers in grades K-8 from the Caribbean? Please select one of the following.” Most respondents (62.8%,  $n = 54$ ) selected “not effective at all,” whereas 16.3% ( $n = 14$ ) selected “not so effective.” The remaining 20.9% ( $n = 18$ ) responded “somewhat effective” to “extremely effective.” The perceived effectiveness of the current Florida certification model is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

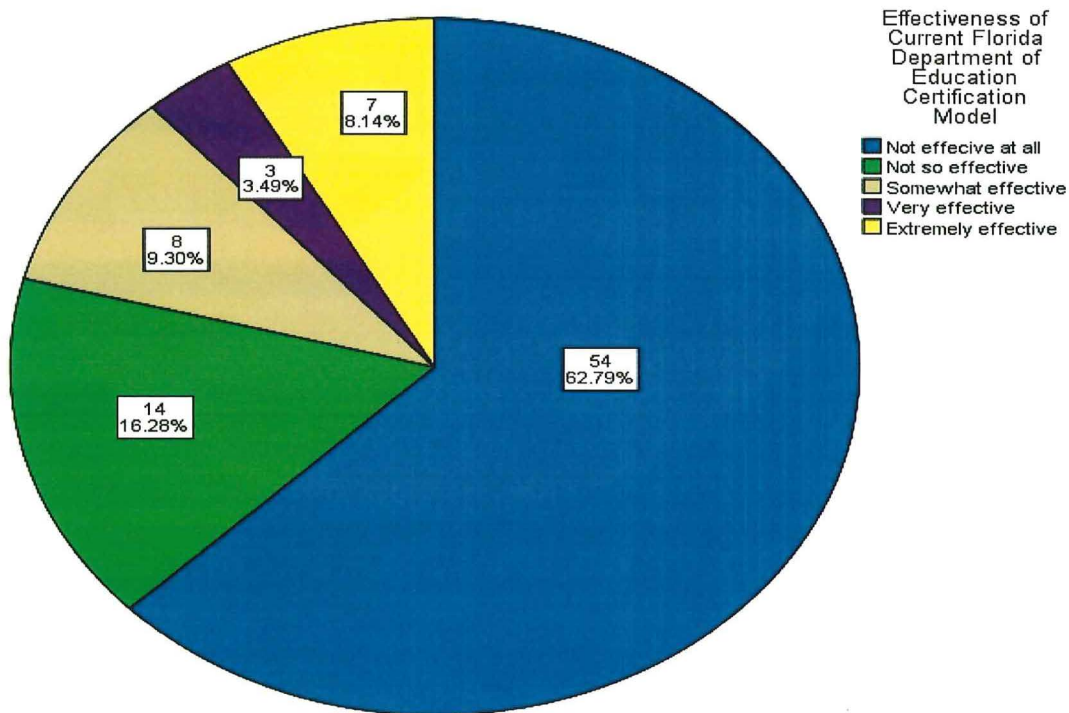
*Perceived Effectiveness of Current Florida Certification Model*

Response	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative %
Not effective at all	54	62.8	62.8
Not so effective	14	16.3	79.1
Somewhat effective	8	9.3	88.4
Very effective	3	3.5	91.9
Extremely effective	7	8.1	100.0
Total	86	100.0	

Among those who responded favorably, 9.3% ( $n = 8$ ) selected “somewhat effective,” 3.5% ( $n = 3$ ) selected “very effective,” and 8.1% ( $n = 7$ ) selected “extremely effective.” To underscore the disparity in responses, a pie graph was generated. Results are illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Perceived Effectiveness of Current Florida Certification Model*



## Research Question 2

Research question two asked, “How does the design and user interface of the Smart Teacher Certification website impact user experience and ease of navigation?” Research question 2 was answered by items 6-13 on the survey. Items 6-10 were Likert-scale items. Item #6 stated, “I found the Smart Teacher Certification website easy to navigate. Please select one of the following.” Most respondents (95.3%,  $n = 82$ ) agreed or strongly agreed. Item #7 stated, “The Smart Teacher Certification Model provides clear and concise explanations of the certification process.” Most respondents (96.5%,  $n = 83$ ) agreed or strongly agreed. Item #8 stated, “The layout and design of the Smart Teacher Certification website was visually appealing and user-friendly.” Most respondents (96.5%,  $n = 83$ ) agreed or strongly agreed. Item #9 stated, “The available resources and materials on the Smart Teacher Certification website

were adequate.” Most respondents (96.5%,  $n = 83$ ) agreed or strongly agreed. Item #10 stated, “The Smart Teacher Certification website adequately explains any fees or costs associated with the certification process.” Most respondents (96.6%,  $n = 83$ ) agreed or strongly agreed. Survey responses to items 6-10 are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Survey Responses to Items 6-10*

Survey Item		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the Smart Teacher Certification website easy to navigate.	<i>n</i>	1	2	1	10	72
	%	1.2	2.3	1.2	11.6	83.7
The Smart Teacher Certification Model provides clear and concise explanations of the certification process.	<i>n</i>	1	2	0	7	76
	%	1.2	2.3	0.0	8.1	88.4
The layout and design of the Smart Teacher Certification website was visually appealing and user-friendly.	<i>n</i>	1	1	1	11	72
	%	1.2	1.2	1.2	12.8	83.7
The available resources and materials on the Smart Teacher Certification website were adequate.	<i>n</i>	1	2	0	11	72
	%	1.2	2.3	0.0	12.8	83.7
The Smart Teacher Certification website adequately explains any fees or costs associated with the certification process.	<i>n</i>	1	0	2	12	71
	%	1.2	0.0	2.3	14.0	82.6

The reliability of survey items 6-10 was tested with Cronbach’s alpha. Reliability is a measure of consistency. The reliability of the items was excellent ( $\alpha = .954$ ) for measuring user experience with the Smart Teacher Certification website. Since the reliability was excellent for items 6-10, it was apparent that the construct of user experience with the Smart Teacher



Certification website could be represented by a composite score. The composite score was computed by summing the values for each response, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Thus, scores for user experience with the Smart Teacher Certification website ranged from 1.00 to 5.00 ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) with higher scores indicating more favorable user experiences. To facilitate ease of interpretation, a categorical variable was computed for user experience with the Smart Teacher Certification website. Scores that ranged from 1 to 1.49 were rounded to 1 and labeled “strongly unfavorable”. Similarly, scores that ranged from 1.50 to 2.49 were rounded to 2 and were labeled “unfavorable,” and so on and so forth. This is a way of “qualitizing” quantifying data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Variable coding and labels for the newly created categorical variable are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Variable Coding and Labels*

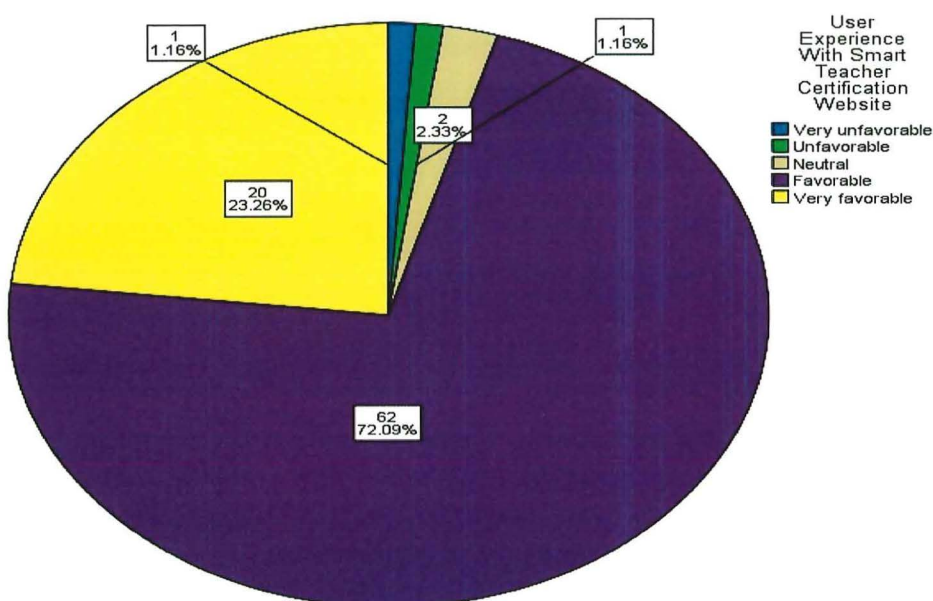
Score Range	Value	Label
1-1.49	1	Strongly unfavorable
1.50-2.49	2	Unfavorable
2.50-3.49	3	Neutral
3.50-4.49	4	Favorable
4.50-5.00	5	Strongly favorable

A frequency distribution was subsequently generated. Thus, 72.1% ( $n = 62$ ) of participants had a favorable user experience, whereas 23.3% ( $n = 20$ ) had a very favorable user experience. This represented 95.4% of the sample. User experience with the Smart Teacher Certification website is summarized in Table 7.

**Table 7***User Experience with the Smart Teacher Certification Website*

User Experience	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative %
Very unfavorable	1	1.2	1.2
Unfavorable	1	1.2	2.3
Neutral	2	2.3	4.7
Favorable	62	72.1	76.7
Very favorable	20	23.3	100.0
	86	100.0	

Moreover, 2.3% ( $n = 2$ ) had a neutral user experience, whereas the proportion of respondents who had unfavorable (1.2%,  $n = 1$ ) or very unfavorable (1.2%,  $n = 1$ ) user experiences were equally distributed. A pie graph was generated to illustrate the descriptive findings. See Figure 2.

**Figure 2***User Experience with the Smart Teacher Certification Website*

Survey item #11 asked, “How long did it take you to find the information you needed on the Smart Teacher Certification website? Please select the appropriate time range.” It took less

than half the participants (46.5%,  $n = 40$ ) 0-15 minutes to find needed information, and it took 39.5% ( $n = 34$ ) 16-30 minutes. This represented 86% of the sample. However, it took 11.6% ( $n = 10$ ) of respondents 31-45 minutes to find information and 2.3% ( $n = 2$ ) over 45 minutes. See Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Time Taken Reviewing the Smart Teacher Certification Website*

Time to Find Information	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative %
0 - 15 minutes	40	46.5	46.5
16 - 30 minutes	34	39.5	86.0
31 - 45 minutes	10	11.6	97.7
Over 45 minutes	2	2.3	100.0
Total	86	100.0	

Survey item #12 asked, “On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. How would you rate the Smart Teacher Certification website's overall quality and professionalism?” Responses ranged from 1 to 5 ( $M = 4.84$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ). With a mean ranking of 4.84, on average, the sample rated the overall quality and professionalism of the website to be of the highest quality and professionalism. Similarly, survey item #13 asked, “On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. How satisfied were you with the overall user experience of the website?” Responses ranged from 1 to 5 ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ). With a mean ranking of 4.83, on average, the sample rated the overall user experience of the website as the highest.

**Research Question 3**

Research question number three asked, “What information and resources are provided on the Smart Teacher Certification website to support prospective teachers in understanding the certification process?” Research question 3 was answered by open-ended responses to two survey items (items 14 and 15). Respondents suggested that the “visuals were interesting and

helpful.” “The website had lots of information” and that it was “very detailed.” They also indicated that the website was simple, relevant, and user-friendly. One participant added,

I would recommend the Smart teacher Certification website to teachers because it makes the process of certification easier. You can find information on ever [sic] step of the process. you [sic] are able to find all the information about how to get certifies [sic] in one place. I have not seen any other online tool that gives such clarity in the requirement process overall.

Another respondent remarked, “The site not only has relevant information for the certification of Caribbean teachers, but the information is easy to find, reliable, and tailored to the needs of teachers seeking certification in the state of Florida.”

### **Additional Findings**

Survey item #14 asked, “Is there anything specific you want to see improved or added to the Smart Teacher Certification website to enhance the user experience?” Participants responded, videos, live chat feature, hyperlinks, testimonials, interview tips, the reciprocity process, and test samples. They preferred to see more videos. They also recommended a thumbnail video on the “About Us” tab.

Regarding the live chat feature, a participant noted that it would “be useful especially for new teachers seeking certification or have questions about certification.” Another use for hyperlinks was direct links to do coursework for certification if the degree is not in education. One participant added, “Include more hyperlinks to the Florida Department of Education website.” In addition, one participant recommended “Links to resources for exam certification. It may be that there are these things, and [she] did not see them.” One participant asserted that the website was okay, but that human interaction was lacking in case any questions arose.





## Summary of Results

Three research questions were formulated for investigation. Most respondents (79.1%) perceived the current Florida certification model in certifying teachers in grades K-8 from the Caribbean as being ineffective. Regarding the user experience and ease of navigation of the Smart Teacher Certification website, 72.1% ( $n = 62$ ) of participants had a favorable user experience, whereas 23.3% ( $n = 20$ ) had a very favorable user experience. This represented 95.4% of the sample. Respondents suggested that the “visuals were interesting and helpful.” “The website had lots of information” and that it was “very detailed.” They also indicated that the website was simple, relevant, and user-friendly. One participant added,

I would recommend the Smart teacher Certification website to teachers because it makes the process of certification easier. You can find information on ever [sic] step of the process. you [sic] are able to find all the information about how to get certifies [sic] in one place. I have not seen any other online tool that gives such clarity in the requirement process overall.

Another respondent remarked, “The site not only has relevant information for the certification of Caribbean teachers, but the information is easy to find, reliable, and tailored to the needs of teachers seeking certification in the state of Florida.”

On ways to improve the Smart Teacher Certification website, participants recommended more videos, a live chat feature, hyperlinks, testimonials, interview tips, information about the reciprocity process, and test samples. Due to the many positive features attributed to the Smart Teacher Certification website, however, the majority of respondents (98.8%) would recommend it to Caribbean teachers seeking certification in the state of Florida.

## Chapter V: Executive Summary

### Introduction

Florida is the fourth largest school system in the nation, with 67 public school districts that service almost 3 million students (Florida Department of Education, 2021). Obtaining a teaching certification in Florida is crucial for educators to ensure they meet state standards and possess the necessary skills to educate students effectively. Certification validates a teacher's qualifications, enhancing their credibility and employability in the education system. It also demonstrates a commitment to professional development and ethical standards, fostering a higher quality of education for students in the State. Florida desperately needs certified educators, and several school districts are hiring teachers from half a world away to fill vacancies at their schools. Florida teacher shortage is getting worse and teaching licensing rules are making it much worse for educators to be certified.

The lack of certified educators can drastically affect the quality of students' education, hindering their academic development and understanding of the curriculum. Addressing this shortage and ensuring a qualified teaching workforce is essential for fostering a robust and equitable education system. In 2018, the Florida Department of Education extended its teaching options for veterans of the armed forces by granting them a waiver of their initial certification to teach grades K-12. Although this initiative was commendable, it needed to address the teacher shortage significantly. While the researcher appreciates the service of our military veterans and their spouses for our country, the idea of veterans, or anyone for that matter being able to teach without licensure is a concern. In some school districts, students test poorly compared with their peers internationally, and full-time equivalency funding continues to increase drastically. A



reasonable response to this situation would be to have qualified teachers in the classroom. The million-dollar question lingers: How do we help?

### **Methodology**

This descriptive study was designed to evaluate the content and functionality of the Smart Teacher Certification website. SurveyMonkey, an online survey, was the chosen evaluation method due to its user-friendly interface, versatile survey design options, and robust data analysis tools. Utilizing SurveyMonkey allowed the researcher to ensure the anonymity of the participants by disabling the IP tracking devices. The platform's accessibility and wide range of features made it the best fit for this research. The Survey included twelve close-ended questions such as a checklist, rating scale, and Likert scale multiple choice questions to collect specific, quantifiable data. The Survey also included two open-ended questions, which provided qualitative insights, allowing respondents to express their thoughts in their own words. By administering these fifteen questions, the researcher was able to solicit information and feedback in the following areas:

- Current position and Area of Certification
- Educational Attainment
- Rationale for the Smart Teacher Certification website
- Website Layout and Design
- Website Engagement and ease of navigation
- Key Elements of the Smart Teachers Certification Model
- Value of the resources provided on the website.

The participants of this study were volunteers who were teachers from the Caribbean living in Florida with a professional certification in grades K-8. The population for this study

included individuals from diverse cultures, linguistic and educational backgrounds, and teaching disciplines. The researcher was able to gain access to potential participants with flyers (Appendix B) posted on LinkedIn and Facebook groups that the researcher deemed to be feasible for sourcing data. These groups included Caribbean educators from Ph.D./FinishEdD (Drs/Future Drs) #WhoGotNext and members of the researcher's personal social media network. Snowball sampling was also employed, where participants referred other eligible immigrant educators they are acquainted with. Participants were allowed to move to the first question once they agreed with the informed consent. The anticipated sample size was approximately 80 completed surveys; however, after the Survey closed, there were 86 respondents with varying degrees of background knowledge.

Prior to collecting data, approval was obtained from the Lynn Institutional Review Board regarding the instrumentation of this study. Obtaining the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this dissertation helps to ensure that this study meets all the conditions of ethical research, including human subjects, full disclosure, voluntary, and confidential for exemption from institutional oversight. The Survey was released via social media and email on December 19, 2023, and was closed on January 30, 2024. During this six-week window, the researcher reposted the flyers on social media, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook. The data collected from the surveys were aggregated and subjected to statistical analysis designed to answer the research question. The data was imported into the SPSS 23 for Windows and Pro Word Cloud directly from Survey Monkey, then cleaned and prepared for analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the data into key metrics, such as measures of central tendency (mean) and measures of dispersion (Standard deviation and range), making the data easy to understand and interpret.

The data was presented in tables and graphs, providing concise and informative summaries of the findings.

### **Findings**

The analysis of survey questions confirms that most participants did not consider the current Florida certification model effective for certifying Caribbean educators who reside and teach grades K-8 in Florida. Additionally, the collective feedback from survey respondents provided evidence that the website effectively disseminated information about the Florida certification process. The survey data also indicated that the website provided adequate justification for creating the Smart Teacher Certification website and that the general overview of the site was of good quality. Although the website provided thorough information, there were areas where details could be enhanced and expanded to better support teachers from the Caribbean who seek help with becoming certified in Florida's K-8 schools.

### **Recommendations and Improvement**

Based on feedback received from the study the researcher made updates to the Smart Teacher Certification website as indicated through survey responses. This website now provides hyperlinks to relevant Florida Teacher Certification Examination resources. The site also included enhancing user interactivity with more videos, incorporating multimedia resources, and offering regular updates based on educator feedback. By doing so, the Smart Teacher Certification website will continue to adapt to reflect the changing needs and demands of the educational field.

### **Implications for Further Research**

The data collected through this study presents opportunities for future research to be explored as it pertains to teacher certification for Caribbean educators living or relocating to the

State of Florida. Further research could include conducting surveys or focus groups to gather insights into the cultural relevance of the certification materials and resources for Caribbean educators. Future investigation can also examine the website's accessibility for users with diverse educational backgrounds and collaborate with local educational institutions or community organizations to provide tailored support and outreach initiatives.

### **Conclusions**

The Smart Teacher Certification website was geared toward helping prospective education from the Caribbean become certified in the State of Florida. Statistical analysis was run to identify the data's patterns, relationships, and trends. These findings were used to draw valid conclusions. The data suggested that most respondents (95.3%) perceived the Smart Teacher Certification website was easy to navigate and could support Caribbean educators who found the Florida Department of Education difficult to maneuver. According to the majority of the survey participants (96.5%) the explanations provided are clear, concise, and leave no room for confusion, guiding users through each step effortlessly. The data suggested that most respondents (96.5%) agreed that the website provided a user-friendly design, allowing individuals to find what they need quickly and efficiently. Several participants (96.5%) found the resources on the Smart Teacher Certification website to be comprehensive and invaluable for advancing their teaching career. Additionally, the website transparently outlines any fees associated with the certification process, providing a complete picture of what to expect. The feedback from the website was mostly positive, highlighting its user-friendly interface, informative content, and helpful resources. With its straightforward navigation, informative content, and transparent fee structure, the Smart teacher website stands out as an excellent resource for aspiring educators.

This study sought to help foreign educators from the Caribbean navigate the teacher certification process by utilizing a reliable and easy-to-use platform. The researcher hoped to attract and retain foreign educators living in Florida who are uncertified and interested in teaching in grades K-12. The researcher also believed that foreign educators make instructional decisions that profoundly influence students' understanding of other cultures and global issues. The literature provided suggested that the lack of certified educators can drastically affect the quality of students' education, hindering their academic development and understanding of the curriculum. The methodology used during this study provided a framework for organizing the research process, making it easier to manage and interrupt the data. As a result, this study produced a website that provided immigrant educators from the Caribbean with the resources, information, and guidance that will allow them to navigate the Florida Teacher Certification process successfully.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Subject: Request for Survey Participation



Dear Caribbean Educators Certified in Florida,

I hope this message finds you well. We are reaching out to you as certified educators in the state of Florida, with a request to participate in an important survey. We are conducting an evaluation of the Smart Teacher Certification website, and your valuable input can greatly contribute to this process. Your feedback will help us enhance the platform and make it more effective for educators like yourself. Kindly review the site then complete the survey on the Site Survey Form.

Survey Period: December 15, 2023, to January 30, 2024.

Smart Teacher Certification Site: <https://www.smartteachercert.com/>

Your responses will be kept confidential, and the survey will only take a few minutes to complete. Your feedback matters to us, and we sincerely appreciate your time and insights. To access the survey, please click on the provided link above. If you encounter any issues or have questions regarding the survey, please feel free to reach out to me at [ksatchellsimpson@email.lynn.edu](mailto:ksatchellsimpson@email.lynn.edu).

Thank you for your dedication to education, and for helping us improve the Smart Teacher Certification website. Your input is invaluable, and we look forward to receiving your feedback.

Warm regards,

*Ksatchellsimpson*  
Karen Satchell-Simpson  
Lynn University  
9545735463

## Appendix B:Flyer For Smart Teacher Certification Website



### FAST FORWARD NIGHT- 6TH GRADE

#### I NEED YOUR HELP!!!

Smart Teacher Certification is requesting feedback about our website. The result of this study will be used to help Caribbean educators navigate the Florida Teacher Certification Process.

#### HOW TO PARTICIPATE?

Visit: [smartteacher-cert.com](https://smartteacher-cert.com)  
and complete the survey on the site feedback form

#### WHEN IS THE DEADLINE?

The survey will be available from  
December 19, 2023 to January 30, 2024  
Don't wait!

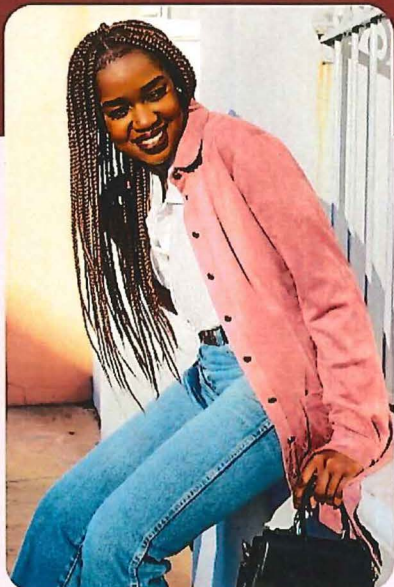
**Let your opinion be heard today!**

#### CONTACT INFORMATION:

For additional information please contact  
Mrs. Simpson at [ksatchellsimpson@email.lynn.edu](mailto:ksatchellsimpson@email.lynn.edu)  
Dr. Kiser at [bkiser@lynn.edu](mailto:bkiser@lynn.edu)  
Dr. Grodzki at [egrodzki@lynn.edu](mailto:egrodzki@lynn.edu)



## Appendix B: Fyler for Instagram Post



*For additional  
information contact:*

For additional information please contact:  
Mrs. Simpson at [ksatchellsimpson@email.lynn.edu](mailto:ksatchellsimpson@email.lynn.edu)  
Dr. Kiser at [bkiser@lynn.edu](mailto:bkiser@lynn.edu)  
Dr. Grodzki at [egrodzki@lynn.edu](mailto:egrodzki@lynn.edu)

**CALLING ALL CARIBBEAN EDUCATORS  
WHO ARE CERTIFIED IN THE STATE OF  
FLORIDA.**

*I need your help*

Smart Teacher Certification is requesting feedback about our website. The result of this study will be used to help Caribbean educators navigate the Florida Teacher Certification Process.

*How to participate?*

Visit: [smartteachercert.com](http://smartteachercert.com)  
and complete the survey on the site  
feedback form

*When is the deadline?*

The survey will be available from  
December 19, 2023, to January 30, 2024.

**Don't wait!**

Let your opinion be heard today

## Appendix B: Fyler for LinkedIn



**SMART TEACHER  
CERTIFICATION**  
BELONG.BELIEVE.BECOME

**CALLING ALL CARIBBEAN  
EDUCATORS WHO ARE CERTIFIED  
IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA**

**I NEED YOUR HELP!!**

Smart Teacher Certification is  
requesting feedback about our  
website.

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How To Participate?

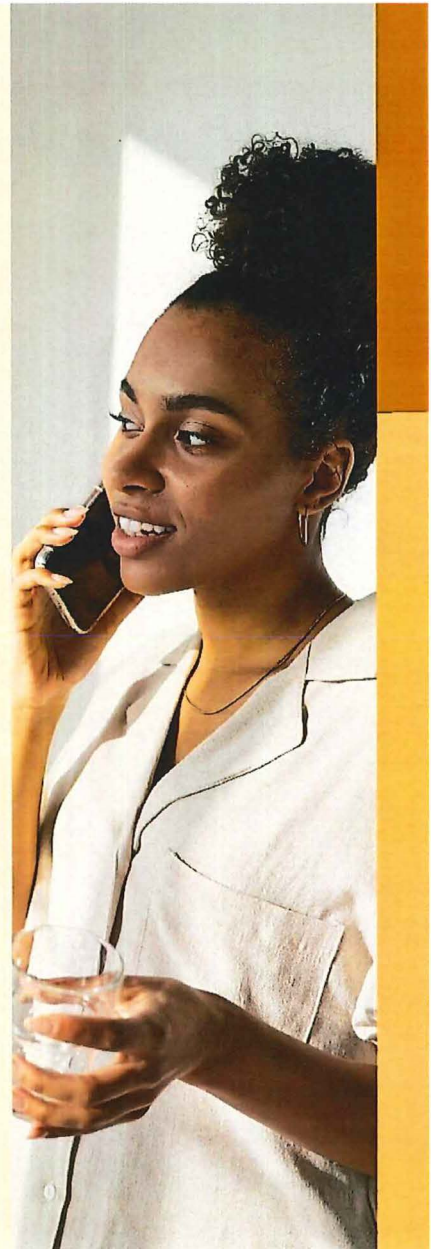
Visit: [smartteachercert.com](https://smartteachercert.com) and  
complete the survey on the site  
feedback form.

**WHEN IS THE DEADLINE:**

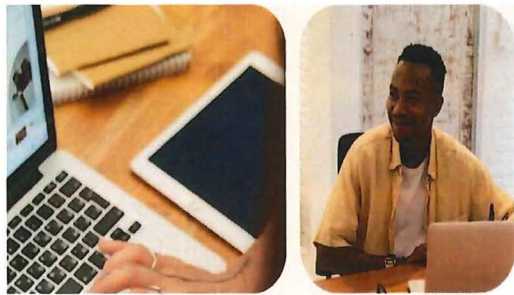
The survey will be available from  
December 19, 2023 to January 30, 2024

**Don't wait!**

For additional information please contact  
Ms. Simpson at [ksatchelleimpson@emial.lynn.edu](mailto:ksatchelleimpson@emial.lynn.edu)  
Dr. Kiser at [bkiser@lynn.edu](mailto:bkiser@lynn.edu)  
Dr. Grodzki at [egrodzki@lynn.edu](mailto:egrodzki@lynn.edu)



## Appendix B: Flyer For Facebook Post



**CALLING ALL CARIBBEAN EDUCATORS WHO  
ARE CERTIFIED IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA**

**I NEED YOUR HELP!!**



Smart Teacher Certification is requesting feedback about our website. Visit [smartteachercert.com](http://smartteachercert.com) and complete the survey on the site feedback form.



The survey is available from  
December 19, 2023 to January 30, 2024



For additional information, please contact  
Mrs. Simpson at [ksatchellsimpson@email.lynn.edu](mailto:ksatchellsimpson@email.lynn.edu)  
Dr. Kiser at [bkiser@lynn.edu](mailto:bkiser@lynn.edu)  
Dr. Grodzki at [egrodzki@lynn.edu](mailto:egrodzki@lynn.edu)

## **Appendix C: Informed Consent**

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this study is to find a way to remove barriers to help teachers from the Caribbean become certified in the state of Florida.

### **Specific Procedures**

The information gathered from this survey may assist future educators who need help navigating the certification process in Florida. Participation in this study will help the researcher analyze and assess the overall quality of the content and functionality of the Smart Teacher Certification website. There will be fifteen questions about the site's navigation, layout, design and content.

### **Duration of Participation and Compensation**

The total duration of your participation shall be no longer than 10-15 minutes. There will be no compensation for participation.

### **Risks**

Participating in this survey will have minimal risks, such as possibly feeling uncomfortable or anxious if specific areas are mentioned. Participants are free to exit the survey at anytime. This online survey is strictly voluntary and no penalty will be imposed for non-participation.

### **Benefits**

There are no benefits for answering the survey questions. However, you may enjoy using the resources provided by the website at anytime.

### **Confidentiality**

Participants feedback and opinions will be keep privately. The feedback provided by individuals will not be linked to any IP addresses. The identity of individuals will not be requested at any time. Your answers to questions will be stored for two years on a password protected computer and after that time will be deleted. This projects research records may be reviewed by the departments at Lynn University responsible for regulatory research and oversight.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions about the research project you may contact my Chair, Dr. Brittany Kiser at [bkiser@lynn.edu](mailto:bkiser@lynn.edu). For any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may call Dr. Erika Grodzki, Chair of the Lynn University Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects, at [egrodzki@lynn.edu](mailto:egrodzki@lynn.edu).

### **Documentation of Informed Consent**

I have had an opportunity to read the consent form and have the research study explained. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the research project and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to participate in the research study described above.

By clicking "Agree" I am consenting to participate in the study.



## Appendix D: Email Seeking Permission To Use Questions For Survey



Dear Dr. Orndorff,

I hope you are doing well. My name is Karen-Satchell Simpson, and I am one of the students pursuing an Ed.D at Lynn University. I recently came across your research at the Lynn Library, and I was impressed by the quality and relevance of the survey questions you developed. I am working on my study, and your survey questions would be a valuable addition to my research. The questions align perfectly with the objectives of my study, and they will provide valuable insights into my area of interest, which is on teacher certification for immigrant educators.

Given your expertise in education, I would like your permission to use your survey questions for my project. I assure you that I will use the questions solely for my research and will not distribute or publish them without your explicit consent. If I get permission, I will credit your work by citing your research and acknowledging your contribution to my study. I am committed to upholding academic integrity and recognizing your intellectual property.

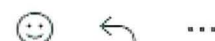
I understand that you may have specific guidelines or requirements for the use of your survey questions. Please let me know if there are any you would like me to follow, and I will be more than happy to comply with them. I appreciate your consideration of my request and look forward to your favorable response. If you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time and contribution to the research community.

Warm regards,

*Karen Satchell-Simpson*

**Appendix D: Email Granting Permission To Use Questions For Survey**

Amanda Orndorff <amanda.orndorff@me.com>



To: Karen Satchell-Simpson

Sun 7/16/2023 4:38 PM

Cc: Brittany Kiser <BKiser@lynn.edu>; **+2 others**

Hi Karen,

I'm flattered. Please feel free to use whatever can be beneficial for your work.

Amanda  
VP of the Orndorff A's  
Amanda.Orndorff@me.com

Sent from my iPhone

## Appendix E: Survey Questionsrtification



1. Dear Participant,

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this study is to find a way to remove barriers to help teachers from the Caribbean become certified in the state of Florida.

### **Specific Procedures**

The information gathered from this survey may assist future educators who need help navigating the certification process in Florida. Participation in this study will help the researcher analyze and assess the overall quality of the content and functionality of the Smart Teacher Certification website. There will be fifteen questions about the site's navigation, layout, design, and content.

### **Duration of Participation and Compensation**

The total duration of your participation shall be no longer than 10-15 minutes. There will be no compensation for participation.

### **Risks**

Participating in this survey will have minimal risks, such as possibly feeling uncomfortable or anxious if specific areas are mentioned. Participants are free to exit the survey at any time. This online survey is strictly voluntary and no penalty will be imposed for non-participation.

### **Benefits**

There are no benefits to answering the survey questions. However, you may enjoy using the resources provided by the website at any time.

### **Confidentiality**

Participant's feedback and opinions will be kept private. The feedback provided by individuals will not be linked to any IP address. The identity of individuals will not be

requested at any time. Your answers to questions will be stored for two years on a password-protected computer and after that time will be deleted. This project's research records may be reviewed by the departments at Lynn University responsible for regulatory research and oversight.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions about the research project you may contact my Chair, Dr. Brittany Kiser at [bkiser@lynn.edu](mailto:bkiser@lynn.edu). For any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may call Dr. Erika Grodzki, Chair of the Lynn University Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects, at [egrodzki@lynn.edu](mailto:egrodzki@lynn.edu).

### **Documentation of Informed Consent**

I have had an opportunity to read the consent form and have the research study explained.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the research project and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to participate in the research study described above.

- Agree  
 Disagree

### Florida Teacher Certification For Caribbean Educators

\* 2. Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

- Teacher  
 Building Administrator  
 District Administrator  
 Other

\* 3. Which of the following best describes your area(s) of certification? Select all that apply.

- Pre-K- 3rd Grades  
 K-6th Grades  
 6th -12th Grades

K-12th Grades

Other

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed? Please select one of the following.

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Specialist Degree

Doctorate (Ph.D. or Ed.D.)

Other

\* 5. Based on your experience how effective is the current Florida Department of Education certification model in certifying teachers in grades K-8 from the Caribbean? Please select one of the following.

Extremely effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not so effective

Not at all effective

\* 6. I found the Smart Teacher Certification website easy to navigate. Please select one of the following.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 7. The Smart Teacher Certification Model provides clear and concise explanations of the certification process. Please select one of the following.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 8. The layout and design of the Smart Teacher Certification website was visually appealing and user-friendly. Please select one of the following.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 9. The available resources and materials on the Smart Teacher Certification website were adequate. Please select one of the following.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 10. The Smart Teacher Certification website adequately explains any fees or costs associated with the certification process. Please select one of the following.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 11. How long did it take you to find the information you needed on the Smart Teacher Certification website? Please select the appropriate time range.

0 - 15 minutes

16 - 30 minutes

31 - 45 minutes

Over 45 minutes

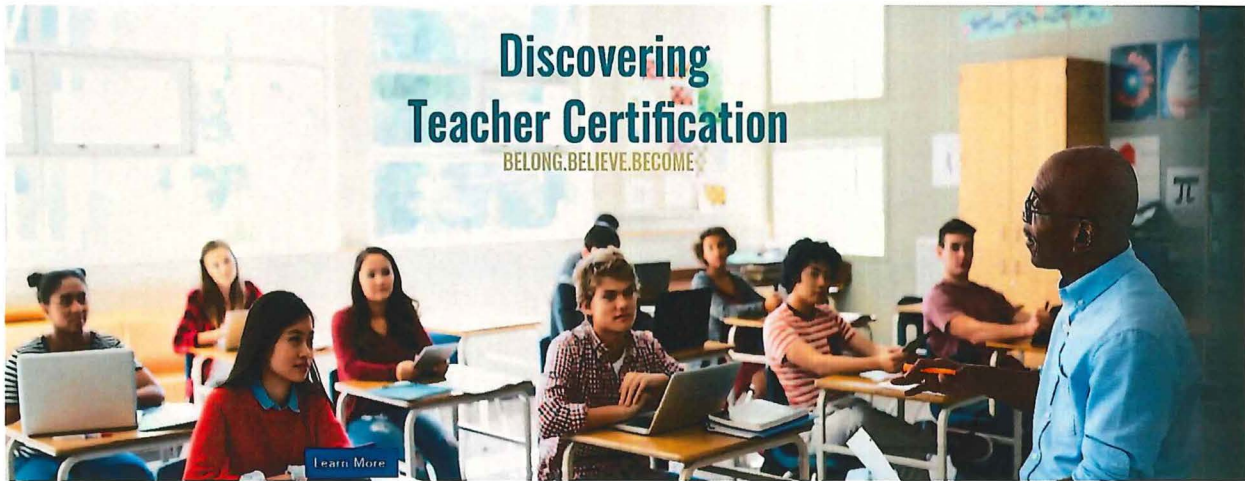
\* 12. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. How would you rate the Smart Teacher Certification website's overall quality and professionalism?

\* 13. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. How satisfied were you with the overall user experience of the website?

\* 14. Is there anything specific you want to see improved or added to the Smart Teacher Certification website to enhance the user experience?

\* 15. Would you recommend the Smart Teacher Certification website to Caribbean teachers seeking certification in the state of Florida? Why or why not?

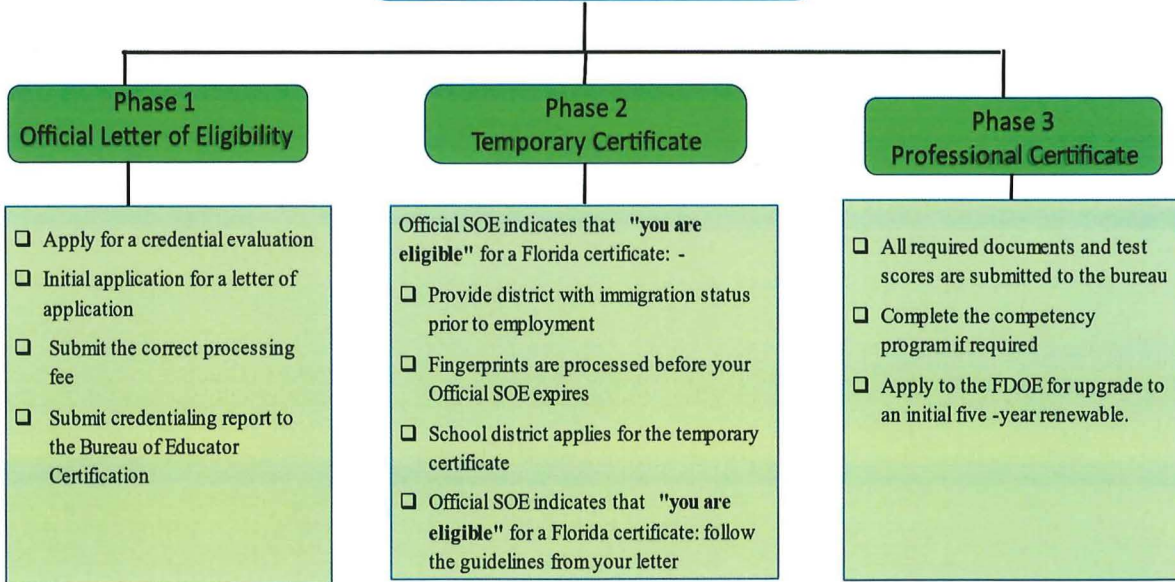
## Appendix F: Smart Teacher Certification Website And Product Model



"A certification helpline that helps teachers belong to a community, believe in themselves, and become amazing educators."



### Florida Educators Certification for Caribbean Teachers





**Appendix G: IRB Approval**

Institutional  
Review Board  
3601 North  
Military Trail  
Boca Raton, FL  
33433 T: 561-  
237-7348 Erika  
Grodzki, Ph.D.,  
IRB Chair

DATE: 12/19/23

TO: Karen Satchell-Simpson

FROM: Erika Grodzki

PROJECT NUMBER: 23.10

PROTOCOL TITLE: Removing barriers to help teachers from the Caribbean to become certified in grades K-8 in the state of Florida

PROJECT TYPE: New

REVIEW TYPE: Expediated

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: 12/19/23

EXPIRATION DATE: 12/19/24

Thank you for your submission for this research study. The Lynn University IRB has APPROVED your NEW Project. This approval is in accordance with 45 CFR §46.111 Criteria for IRB approval of research. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

It is important that you retain this letter for your records and present upon request to necessary parties.

- This approval is valid for one year. IRB Form 4: Application to Continue (Renew) a Previously Approved Project will be required prior to the expiration date if this project continues beyond one year.
- Please note that any revision to previously approved materials or procedures must be approved by the IRB29 before it is initiated. Please submit IRB Form 5 Application for Procedural Revisions of or Changes in Research Protocol and/or Informed Consent Form 1 of a Previously Approved Project for this procedure.
- All serious and unexpected adverse events must be reported to the IRB. Please use IRB Form 6 Report of Unexpected Adverse Event, Serious Injury or Death for this procedure.
- At the completion of your data collection, please submit IRB Form 8 IRB Report of Termination of Project.

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact the chair of the Lynn University IRB, Erika Grodzki ([egrodzki@lynn.edu](mailto:egrodzki@lynn.edu)).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Grodzki".

Dr. Erika Grodzki, Institutional Review Board Chair  
Institutional Review Board  
Lynn University  
3601 North Military Trail  
Boca Raton, FL 33433