

When and How Far Will Potential Participants Travel to Participate in Educational Leadership Programs?

Lavetta Henderson, Ed.D.

Florida A&M University

Contact Information:

Dr. Lavetta Henderson

Assistant Professor

Florida A&M University

College of Education

Gore Education Complex

501 Orr Drive

Tallahassee, Florida 32307

Email: lavetta.henderson@fam.u.edu

Phone: 850-561-2792

When and How Far Will Potential Participants Travel to Participate in Educational Leadership Programs?

Abstract: Online education and virtual distance learning programs have increased in popularity and enrollment since their inception. With this increase of popularity, where does this leave the traditional educational leadership programs? This study examined the preferences of potential participants, K-12 instructional staff, for when they were willing to travel and what distances they were willing to travel to participate in educational leadership programs. The method used to collect data for this study was a survey instrument. The survey outcomes focused on obtaining information that may be useful in the redesign of an educational leadership program.

Keywords: educational leadership program; travel preferences for educational leadership programs; days of the week preferences for educational leadership programs; time preferences for educational leadership programs; online educational leadership programs

Introduction

Distance learning has been practiced in a multitude of forms since the early 1990s (Beqiri, Chase, & Bishka, 2010; Campbell, Floyd, & Sheridan, 2002). The traditional classroom has been long considered the standard for educational quality, but recent technological advances have brought dramatic growth in the delivery of educational content using the internet (Bramorski & Madan, 2016; American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2014; Hopewell, T. M., 2012; Kearns, Shoaf, & Summey, 2004). The number of graduate students participating in online education has annually increased (Gauvreau, Hurst, Cleveland-Innes, & Hawranki, 2016).

There are mixed perspectives on the quality of online degrees. Although the number of online business courses offered at many universities has increased, the perception of the value of online degrees has remained somewhat negative and the traditional full-time degree still rules with corporate recruiters (Beqiri, Chase, & Bishka, 2010; Alsop, 2004, p.2).

Bramorski and Madan (2016, p. 33) suggested that the course delivery mode did not significantly affect the perception of learning. Face-to-Face course delivery incorporates human connections and interactions that may be limited or nonexistent in an online course delivery platform (Tseng & Walsh, 2016; Woo & Reeves, 2007; Bonk & Graham, 2006). Students may harbor conflicted feelings when they really do not want to learn through distance education but they need to because of challenges related to time and distance (Parkinson, Greene, Kim & Marioni, 2003).

Purpose

The increase in popularity of distance learning has stimulated conversation about traditional educational leadership programs. There continues to be the issue in higher education of maintaining or increasing student enrollment in educational programs. Colleges and universities are increasing online offerings in an attempt to address economic and enrollment decline (Wagner, Garippo, & Lovaas, 2011). In addressing enrollment numbers, should program planners consider the preferences of the potential applicants in reviewing and revising current traditional educational leadership programs? This study seeks to identify time and travel preferences of potential educators regarding participation in educational leadership programs.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the preferences for specific days of the week to participate in Face-to-Face or On-line Synchronous Educational Leadership Master's Programs?
2. What are the preferences for travel distances to participate in Face-to-Face Educational Leadership Master's Programs?

Methodology

This study targeted public school instructional staff located in the northern region of a state in southeastern, United States. This study examined the preferences of public school

instructional staff in terms of their preferences for when they were willing to travel to participate in educational leadership programs and for what distances they were willing to travel to participate in educational leadership programs. Public school district superintendents were contacted to share information about the research study and the consent information, as well as to invite superintendents to approve participation of his or her school district in the study.

After obtaining approval from the district school superintendents, potential participants were contacted via email for voluntary participation in the study. Email addresses were obtained from the public use school websites. Paper surveys were provided for some participants with email issues. Potential participants were asked to participate in a study designed to obtain information on preferences for which days of the week potential applicants prefer to participate in educational leadership programs, and to obtain preferences regarding the distances potential applicants were willing to travel to participate in educational leadership programs.

The population for the study was those instructional staff whose superintendent approved district participation and those individuals who voluntarily consented to participate in the study. The targeted instructional staff were teachers, instructional coaches, and guidance counselors. The survey included one rank order question related to days of the week preferences, one rank order question on travel distance preferences, one current position question, and two voluntary demographic questions related to sex and age ranges. The survey included open-end comment response opportunities. The survey was deployed via SurveyMonkey. The research design was a descriptive study.

Limitations

Some limitations of the study included:

1. District superintendent must approve district participation in the study before school instructional staff could be contacted for voluntary participation.
2. Email addresses obtained from public school or district websites may or may not contain accurate information which could result in emails not being delivered.
3. Potential participant's email box may be full and email invitations may not be deliverable.
4. Instructional staff position title must be indicated on the website to identify the appropriate potential participant.
5. There may be human error in online data entry.

Conceptual Underpinnings

This study was situated in the context of the preferences of adult learners' participation in face-to-face or on-line learning that may determine enrollment in an educational leadership program. Rogers (2002), identified three modes of education that adults experience: vocational (occupation driven), social transformation, and personal growth. These three modes could also be defined as the "needs" of education.

On-line learning for adult students brings a new paradigm to what motivates adult students to participate in a synchronous environment. A student's competence includes their

readiness, study skills, and for online students their technological skills. According to researchers, improving competence increases motivation and persistence (Hall 2009; Tsui, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Context

Currently, many colleges of education are experiencing low student enrollments. There are private organizations offering various programs that prepare educators and leaders for today's schools. Educational leadership programs are under attack and the question is being asked if these traditional programs are still needed. Higher education programs are being urged to move to some type of online or hybrid/blended delivery model, in spite of infrastructure, professional development, and support issues. Allen & Seaman (2013) indicated that a major change has occurred in online offerings and that there has been an increase in not just online courses but an increase from 34.5% in 2002 to 62.4% in 2012 in universities offering complete online programs.

New state and program standards are being implemented as the level of accountability increases. Across the country educational leadership faculty have and are continuing to review, revise, and/or redesign current educational leadership programs to address current expectations. Best practices for program review and redesign include involving stakeholders in the process. In addition, best practices encourage the utilization of data-driven decision-making. Adult students provide a myriad of reasons for choosing to further their education, such as economic, physical health, divorce, occupational changes and adjustment, dissatisfaction with current employment, and seeking fulfillment of life goals (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007; Hayes & Flannery, 2000). The preferences of adult learners have motivated colleges and universities to consider changes in program delivery modalities (Singleton, Bowser, Hux, & Neal, 2013). Surveying school districts' instructional staff regarding time and travel preferences supports the best practices of stakeholder involvement and utilizing data to make decisions for program review and redesign. Seeking stakeholder preferences may help to increase the understanding of the educational leadership market needs.

Results

A total of 155 participants responded to some or all of the survey questions. The demographics for survey participants included 127 (81.9%) teachers, 11 (7.1%) instructional coaches, and 12 (7.7%) guidance counselors, and 5 (3.2%) of survey participants did not respond to this question. Of the 155 survey participants, 125 (80.6%) were female and 25 (16.1%) were males, and 5 (3.2%) did not respond to the question. The age ranges of the 155 survey participants included 19 (12.3%) with ages under 30 years of age, 46 (29.7%) between the ages of 30 and 39, 38 (24.5%) between the ages of 40 and 49, 31 (20.0%) between the ages of 50 and 59, 16 (10.3%) age 60 or higher, and 5 (3.2%) did not respond to the question.

Participants were asked "If you were to participate in a Face-to-Face or Online Synchronous (occurring in real time) Educational Leadership Program, which day of the week would you prefer to participate?" In addition, the participant was asked to rank each day of the week on a scale from 1-7, with "1" being the first choice and "7" being the least preferred day. Findings in Table 1 indicate that Tuesday was the most preferred day for participation in an educational leadership program for 25.2% of respondents. Saturday ranked second in terms of day preference for 21.9% of respondents. Monday ranked third with 20.6% of respondents,

Wednesday ranked fourth with 11.6% of respondents, and Thursday ranked fifth with 9.0% of respondents. The least preferred day was Friday with 1.9% of respondents. Of the respondents, 3.2% had no preference for day of the week, and 6.5% did not respond to the question.

Table 1

First Choice Preferences for Days of the Week Participation in Educational Leadership Programs

Day of Week	First Choice n	First Choice Percent
Monday	32	20.6
Tuesday	39	25.2
Wednesday	18	11.6
Thursday	14	9.0
Friday	3	1.9
Saturday	34	21.9
No Preference	5	3.2
No Response	10	6.5

Findings in Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 indicate the distribution of days of the week preferences across age ranges.

Table 2

Monday Preferences Across Age Ranges for Participation in Educational Leadership Programs

Day of Week	Age Ranges
Monday (N = 32)	<30 years of age (N=5) 15.6%
	30 to 39 years of age (N=9) 28.1%
	40 to 49 years of age (N=10) 31.3%
	50 to 59 years of age (N=4) 12.5%
	60+ years of age (N=4) 12.5%

Table 3

Tuesday Preferences Across Age Ranges for Participation in Educational Leadership Programs

Day of Week	Age Ranges
Tuesday (N = 39)	<30 years of age (N=5) 12.8%
	30 to 39 years of age (N=6) 15.4%
	40 to 49 years of age (N=12) 30.8%
	50 to 59 years of age (N=11) 28.2%
	60+ years of age (N=5) 12.8%

Table 4

Wednesday Preferences Across Age Ranges for Participation in Educational Leadership Programs

Day of Week	Age Ranges
Wednesday (N = 18)	<30 years of age (N=2) 11.1%
	30 to 39 years of age (N=12) 66.7%
	40 to 49 years of age (N=2) 11.1%
	50 to 59 years of age (N=2) 11.1%
	60+ years of age (N=0) 0.0%

Table 5

Thursday Preferences Across Age Ranges for Participation in Educational Leadership Programs

Day of Week	Age Ranges
Thursday (N = 14)	<30 years of age (N=2) 14.3%
	30 to 39 years of age (N=7) 50.0%
	40 to 49 years of age (N=3) 21.4%
	50 to 59 years of age (N=0) 0.0%
	60+ years of age (N=2) 14.3%

Table 6

Friday Preferences Across Age Ranges for Participation in Educational Leadership Programs

Day of Week	Age Ranges
Friday (N = 3)	<30 years of age (N=0) 0.0%
	30 to 39 years of age (N=2) 66.7%
	40 to 49 years of age (N=1) 33.3%
	50 to 59 years of age (N=0) 0.0%
	60+ years of age (N=0) 0.0%

Table 7

Saturday Preferences Across Age Ranges for Participation in Educational Leadership Programs

Day of Week	Age Ranges
Saturday (N = 34)	<30 years of age (N=4) 11.8%
	30 to 39 years of age (N=8) 23.5%
	40 to 49 years of age (N=6) 17.6%
	50 to 59 years of age (N=13) 38.2%
	60+ years of age (N=3) 8.8%

The results of the days of the week question were reviewed and the distribution of respondents across age ranges indicated that the most preferred day was Tuesday. The second rank preferred day was Saturday. The third preferred day was Monday. The fourth rank preferred day was Wednesday. The fifth ranked day of the week was Thursday. The least preferred day of the week was Friday. The no preference respondents included 1 (20%) <30 years of age, 1 (20%) 30-39 years of age, 1 (20%) 40-49 years of age, 0 (0.0%) 50-59 years of age, and 2 (40%) 60+ years of age. The no response participants included 0 (0.0%) <30 years of age, 1 (10%) 30-39 years of age, 3 (30%) 40-49 years of age, 1 (10%) 50-59 years of age, 0 (0.0%) 60+ years of age, and 5 (50%) with no response on age range.

Participants were also provided an open-ended “Comments” section on the survey. Sample comment responses for days of the week were as follows:

- Participant 33: Starting after 4 p.m. and ending before 9 p.m.
- Participant 39: Saturday is most ideal if the student is a full time worker.
- Participant 57: Since weekends are usually family time and often involve travel, Friday, Saturday, and Monday are no go.
- Participant 95: No weekends.
- Participant 105: Face to face is really not an option for me.
- Participant 144: I would prefer Saturday.

Participants were asked “What distances would you be willing to travel to participate in a Face-to-Face Educational Leadership Program?” In addition, the participant was asked to rank each distance option on a scale from 1-6, with “1” being the first choice and “6” being the least preferred distance. Findings in Table 8 indicate 86.5% of respondents preferred to travel distances less than or equal to 30 miles to participate in an educational leadership program. The second ranked travel distance was from 31-60 miles as indicated by 5.8% of the respondents. Distances of greater than 60 miles received 0.0% of respondents indicating first choice. The results revealed that 1.3% of the respondents did not have a preference to travel distances, and 6.5% did not respond to the question.

Table 8

First Choice Preferences for Travel Distances to Participate in Educational Leadership Programs

Travel Distances	First Choice n	First Choice Percent
<= 30 Miles	134	86.5
31 – 60 Miles	9	5.8
61-100 Miles	0	0.0
101-150 Miles	0	0.0
151+ Miles	0	0.0
No Preference	2	1.3
No Response	10	6.5

Findings in Tables 9 and 10 indicate the distribution of travel distances preferences across age ranges.

Table 9

Travel Distances Less Than or Equal To 30 Miles Preferences Across Age Ranges to Participate in Educational Leadership Programs

Distances	Age Ranges
</= 30 miles (N = 134)	<30 years of age (N=19) 14.2%
	30 to 39 years of age (N=44) 32.8%
	40 to 49 years of age (N=34) 25.4%
	50 to 59 years of age (N=24) 17.9%
	60+ years of age (N=13) 9.7%

Table 10

Travel Distances of 31 to 60 Miles Preferences Across Age Ranges to Participate in Educational Leadership Programs

Distances	Age Ranges
31 - 60 miles (N = 9)	<30 years of age (N=0) 0.0%
	30 to 39 years of age (N=1) 11.1%
	40 to 49 years of age (N=3) 33.3%
	50 to 59 years of age (N=3) 33.3%
	60+ years of age (N=2) 22.2%

The results of the travel distance question were reviewed and the distribution of respondents across age ranges indicated that the most preferred travel distance was less than or equal to 30 miles. The second rank preferred travel distance was 31-60 miles. There were 0 (0.0%) respondents for 61-100 miles, 101-150 miles, and 151+ miles. The no preference respondents included 1 (50%) 50-59 years of age, and 1 (50%) 60+ years of age. The no response participants included 0 (0.0%) <30 years of age, 1 (10%) 30-39 years of age, 1 (10%) 40-49 years of age, 3 (30%) 50-59 years of age, 0 (0.0%) 60+ years of age, and 5 (50%) with no response on age range.

Participants were provided an open-ended “Comments” section on the survey. Sample comment responses for distances were as follows:

- Participant 32: For face-to-face course delivery modality, I would not attend if over 30 miles. I would opt to take the course on line.
- Participant 33: Only 1 day per week. 61 miles or more won't happen.
- Participant 39: Face to Face needs to be convenient
- Participant 57: I would not be willing to travel any distance out of town.
- Participant 91: We have plenty of locations to have classes close to us, I would never DRIVE over 100 miles to go to class!
- Participant 93: Travel is time.

- Participant 105: I would not travel, as face to face is not an option I could participate in.
- Participant 139: If traveling is required, I would not want to meet during the week. I would also like advanced notice if I had to travel on the weekend.

Discussion/Recommendations/Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to obtain stakeholder input regarding preferences for day of the week and travel distances regarding participation in an educational leadership program at the master's level. In terms of days of the week, survey respondents did not prefer to have Friday classes. However, there was some support for Saturday classes which seemed to be more convenient for some of those employed full-time during the week. On the other side of the coin, there were respondents that were strongly opposed to weekend classes. Scheduling classes during the first of the week, Monday and Tuesday, were ranked most favorably. Wednesday and Thursday were ranked as positive days for participation in classes. Overwhelmingly, survey respondents do not prefer to travel beyond 30 miles to participate in an educational leadership program. A very small number of respondents indicated that they would be willing to travel up to 60 miles to attend classes. Horspool & Yang (2010) found that students tended to take online classes instead of face-to-face classes because of scheduling issues and to reduce the commute to campuses.

Although the survey results were mixed, program educational leaders should consider the results when scheduling classes each semester if student preferences are valued. This is not to say that student preferences will totally dictate the schedule. Since the target audience for participation in an educational leadership program is practicing educators who are usually working during the day in a school, face-to-face classes will need to be offered in the evenings or on Saturdays. Another option is to offer some types of online courses which would be more convenient to the targeted students for the program. Some of the issues adult learners have today include their financial situation, family responsibilities, travel limitations, employment responsibilities, finding time to continue their education, and other commitments and obligations. Society has undergone changes due to demographic, economic, technological, and sociocultural issues that have shifted us from a "supply-driven" to a "demand-driven" educational marketplace (Fahlman, 2012; Keller, 2008).

These results may have implications to educational leadership programs. Survey respondents indicated preferences for limited student travel time. This suggests that if a program remains in the traditional face-to-face format, programs currently struggling with low student enrollment may continue to struggle with this issue especially if it relies on students who have to travel more than 30 minutes to get to campus. The educational leadership administration and faculty might need to revisit if the goal is to provide a program for the 30-60 mile radius or if the boundaries need to be extended via different course delivery modalities. Cole, Shelley, & Swartz (2014) found that convenience was the greatest factor influencing students' satisfaction with online courses.

"The more strongly the person feels the need, the greater the chances the person will feel an accompanying pressure to attain the related goal" (Wlodkowski, 1993, p. 48). The results of this study could be considered in the program review or redesign process to better meet the demands of professionals seeking admission into educational leadership programs.

References

- Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2013). *Changing course: Ten years of tracking online education in the United States*. Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group LLC, Pearson, and Sloan-C.
- Alsop, R. (2004, September 22). WSJ guide to business schools: Recruiters' top picks (special report); Nose to the grindstone: The secret to Purdue's success: Work hard, work right, work together. *Wall Street Journal*, R5.
- American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2014). Benefits and challenges of teaching nursing online: Exploring perspectives of different stakeholders. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 55(8), 433-444.
- Beqiri, M. S., Chase, N. M., & Bishka, A. (2010). Online course delivery: An empirical investigation of factors affecting student satisfaction. *Journal of Education for Business*, 85, 95-100. Doi: 10.1080/08832320903258527
- Bonk, C. J. & Graham, C. R. (2006). *The handbook of blended learning: Global perspectives, local designs*. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.
- Bramorski, T. & Madan, M. S. (2016). Evaluating student perceptions of course delivery platforms. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*. 13(2), 29-36.
- Campbell, M. C., Floyd, J., & Sheridan, J. B. (2002). Assessment of student performances and attitudes for courses taught online versus onsite. *Journal of Applied Business Research*, 18 (2), 45-51.
- Cole, M. T., Shelley, D. J., & Swartz, L. B. (2014). Online instruction, e-learning, and student satisfaction: A three-year study. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 15 (6), 111-131.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York, NY: Plenum.
- Fahlman, D. (2012). Educational leadership for e-learning in the healthcare workplace. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 13 (2), 236-246.
- Gauvreau, S., Hurst, D., Cleveland-Innes, M., & Hawranki, P. (2016). Online professional skills workshops: Perspectives from distance education graduate students. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 17(5), 91-108.
- Hall, M. C. (2009). A factor analysis of the distance education surveys "Is online learning right for me?" and "What technical skills do I need?". *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 10(4), 339-345.
- Hayes, E. & Flannery, D.D. (2000). *Women as learners: The significance of gender in adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hopewell, T. M. (2012). Risk associated with the choice to teach online. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 15(5), 1-9.
- Horspool, A. & Yang, S. S. (2010). A comparison of university student perceptions and success learning music online and face-to-face. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 6 (1), 15-29.
- Kearns, L. E., Shoaf, J. R., & Summey, M. B. (2004, June). Performance and satisfaction of second-degree bsn students in web-based and traditional course delivery environments. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 43 (6), 280-284.

- Keller, G. (2008). *Higher education and the new society*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Parkinson, D., Greene, W., Kim, Y., & Marioni, J. (2003, July/August). Emerging themes of student satisfaction in a traditional course and a blended distance course. *TechTrends*, 47 (4), 22-28.
- Plimmer, G. & Schmidt, A. (2007). Possible selves and career transition: It's who you want to be, not what you want to do. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 114, 61-74. doi:10.1002/ace.25
- Rogers, A. (2002). *Teaching adults*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Singleton, J., Bowser, A., Hux, A., & Neal, G. (2013). Managing large-scale online graduate programs. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 15(1), 1-9.
- Tseng, H. & Walsh, E. J. (2016). Blended versus traditional course delivery: Comparing students' motivation, learning outcomes, and preferences. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 17(1), 43-52.
- Tsui, L. (2008). Cultivating critical thinking: Insights from an elite liberal arts college. *The Journal of General Education*, 56 (3-4), 200-227.
- Wagner, S. C., Garippo, S. J., & Lovaas, P. (2011). A longitudinal comparison of online versus traditional instruction. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 7 (1).
- Wlodkowski, R.J. (1993). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A guide to improving instruction and increasing learner achievement*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Woo, Y. & Reeves, T. (2007). Meaningful interaction in web-based learning: A social constructivist interpretation. *Internet and Higher Education*, 10, 15-25. doi:10.1016/j.iheduc.2006.10.005.