# Preservice Educators' Perceived Abilities to be Effective Educators/Advisors

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## Introduction/Need for Research

Preservice agricultural educators face a number of challenges as students, teachers, schools, curricula, and legislation are constantly changing (Duncan, Ricketts, Peake, & Uesseler, 2006; Myers, Dyer, & Washburn, 2005). Administrators in teacher preparation programs must continually reevaluate content in order to remain relevant and create highly prepared agricultural educators (Duncan et al., 2006). There is a need to structure teacher education programs to more adequately prepare graduates for evolving content (Barker, Burris, Rayfield, Ritz, & Choate, 2017; Burris, Robinson, & Terry, 2005) and overall program preparation (Myers et al., 2005). By exploring perceived levels of preparation, as well as major problems facing beginning agricultural educators, teacher education programs can engage in self-evaluation to ensure preservice needs are being met (Breeding, Rayfield, & Smith, 2018; Myers et al., 2005). The purpose of this study was to describe preservice educators' perceptions regarding their abilities to teach certain content areas, accomplish specified teaching tasks, and execute programmatic responsibilities.

## Theoretical Framework

Agricultural education researchers have consistently utilized Bandura's (1977, 1986) foundations of self-efficacy to link higher teacher self-efficacy with an increased commitment to teaching (McKim, Sorensen, Velez, & Henderson, 2017). Teacher self-efficacy is operationalized as an individual's confidence in the ability to successfully accomplish a given task as a teacher. McKim and Velez (2017) iterated the importance of enacting teaching practices in preservice educators to provide a roadmap for continued success as an early career educator. This study primarily utilized Bandura's theory of self-efficacy to provide guidance in formulating recommendations for preservice agricultural educator preparation.

## Methods

The target population of this study included all 2017-2018 senior-level preservice agricultural education teacher candidates who attended the 2018 National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) Region I preservice educator seminar (N = 21). Participants' perceived levels of preparation were assessed with a researcher modified, online survey. Following Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2009) recommendations for maximizing survey response rate, efforts yielded $n$ = 18 completed surveys (85.71%). Non-response error was not addressed because data collection efforts resulted in a sufficient response rate (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996). Although NAAE Region I encompasses 11 states, only four participated in the preservice educator seminar. Results were not intended to be generalized beyond sample parameters.

The survey instrument was based on a modified Delphi study by Breeding et al. (2018) that utilized the 2010-2014 NAAE Outstanding Young Member regional award winners to identify how teacher preparation programs influenced professional success. Based on the findings of Breeding et al. (2018), our anonymous online survey was divided into three primary teacher preparation constructs: *Teaching Content Areas*, *Teaching Tasks*, and *Program Areas*. Within each construct, participants utilized a five point Likert scale to rank their perceived level of preparation on a scale from one (not prepared at all) to five (completely prepared). In the *Teaching Content Areas* section, respondents indicated their level of preparation in eight subject areas: Agribusiness, Leadership, Mechanics, Animal Science, Floriculture, Natural Resources, Plant Science, and General Science. Participants were then asked to assess their perceived abilities to accomplish the following

*Teaching Tasks*: Communicate with administrators/parents, Develop curriculum, Design assessments, Differentiate instruction, and Manage the classroom. Finally, participants were asked to evaluate their perceived abilities to accomplish tasks within specified *Program Areas*: Managing Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE's), Completing FFA paperwork, Coaching CDE/LDE's, Maintaining laboratories/farms, and Providing FFA leadership.

## Results/Findings

This study sought to identify participants' perceptions regarding overall ability to be an effective educator/advisor. Participants reported feeling most prepared to teach Agricultural Leadership and Communications content, with all ($n$ = 17; 100.00%) indicating they felt moderately to completely prepared. On the other hand, over half ($n$ = 9; 52.94%) reported feeling unprepared when teaching Floriculture. Regarding *Teaching Tasks,* almost 90.00% of participants ($n$ = 16) felt adequately prepared to maintain a positive classroom environment. Within the *Program Area* construct, the majority of participants ($n$ = 15; 88.23%) believed they were moderately to completely prepared to provide leadership training to FFA student leaders. However, participants felt less prepared to manage a land laboratory/farm ($n$ = 10; 58.82%).

Table 1

*Participant Indicated Areas of Least Preparedness*

| Constructs | $f$ [a] | % |
|---|---|---|
| Teaching Content Areas ($n$ = 17) | | |
| Teaching Floriculture | 9 | 52.94 |
| Teaching Agribusiness | 7 | 41.18 |
| Teaching Tasks ($n$ = 18) | | |
| Communicating with administrators | 5 | 27.78 |
| Communicating with parents | 5 | 27.78 |
| Program Areas ($n$ = 17) | | |
| Managing a land laboratory/farm | 10 | 58.82 |
| Completing required FFA paperwork | 7 | 41.18 |

*Note.* Scale: 1 = *Not Prepared at All*, 2 = *Slightly Prepared*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Moderately Prepared*, 5 = *Completely Prepared*. [a]Frequencies were tallied from participants indicating *Not Prepared at All* to *Slightly Prepared*

## Conclusions/Discussion/Implications

Results offer opportunity for discussion based on participants' perceived levels of preparation regarding their abilities to teach certain content areas, accomplish specified teaching tasks, and execute programmatic responsibilities. Perhaps the reason behind preservice educators feeling more prepared to teach Agricultural Leadership and Communications lies within receiving exposure to the content during their preservice programs and/or student teaching experience. Whereas, participants felt less prepared to manage land laboratories and complete FFA paperwork perhaps because of less exposure to these hands-on experiences during their preparation programs. These experiences often come later when they become professional educators in the field.

The deficiencies in preparation found in this study highlighted areas of reevaluation for teacher preparation programs represented in the population. Specifically, teacher education programs should examine the relevancy of state curriculum to determine how extensively they should focus on the identified preservice educator deficiencies. Preparation programs should continue to examine self-efficacy of preservice and early career educators to help identify programmatic weaknesses and areas for improvement. Ensuring preservice educators are confident and qualified in all areas before certification (McKim et al., 2017) could increase commitment to stay within the teaching profession.

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