

**Ringling the Schoolhouse Bell: Identifying Competencies, Attitudes and Perceptions of
Teacher Success and Longevity**

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Introduction

Agricultural education journals are replete with the causes and factors limiting agriscience teacher's tenure in the classroom. Therefore, the value of successful agricultural education teachers and their longevity in the secondary classroom is vital to the continued training and development of future agricultural professionals. Agricultural Education teacher shortages create negative consequences on secondary agricultural education programs and student learning nationwide. A potential solution to the attrition of agriscience education professionals is the assessment of repeatable experiences found in successful agriscience teachers. Walker, Garton, and Kitchel (2004) investigated agriscience teacher retention in relation to the level of job satisfaction at different career stages. After their first year of teaching, agriscience teachers were generally satisfied with their position (Walker et al., 2004). Job satisfaction is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to teacher retention. The characteristics determining teachers' expectations of teaching longevity was examined by Edwards and Briers (2001). Relationships between departmental size, agricultural work experience, and gender were found to be significant when examining additional expected teaching years (Edwards & Briers, 2001). Knobloch and Whittington (2003) investigated teacher efficacy related to different levels of career commitment. Teachers with higher career commitment did not experience a change in their teacher efficacy during a ten-week period, while teachers with lower career commitment did experience a decline in their teacher efficacy during the same period (Knobloch & Whittington, 2003). The need for agriscience teachers is well documented. Replicable traits and experience impacting teacher retention in agriscience classrooms is worthy of further examination.

Theoretical Framework

Weiner (1972) conceptualized Attribution theory as an assumption of why people make the choices and actions leading to an event or behavior. Attribution theory (Weiner, 1972) served as the conceptual framework for this study and was bound using Wiener's (1972) three-stage process: 1) behavior must be observed or perceived, 2) behavior must be determined to be intentional, and 3) behavior should be attributed to internal or external causes. Each process supports successful habits and classroom longevity of secondary agricultural education teachers and provides context for teacher choices and experiences. Schunk (2008) reported attributions are the "perceived causes of outcomes" (p. 455). Knowing that teachers make professional and personal decisions based on experience, education, family, and career needs, understanding the rationale for these decisions is paramount for teacher retention and success. Heider (1958) cited by Weiner (1972) distinguished behavioral choice as a means of two determinants: "can: the characteristics of the individual including intelligence and ability" (p. 204) and "try: determined by the momentary intentions and effort expenditure of the individual" (p. 204). The purpose of this research study aligns closely with research priority three of the American Association of Agriculture Education's research area, question two "what methods, models, and practices are effective in recruiting agricultural leadership, education, and communication practitioners (teachers, extension agents, etc.) and supporting their success at all stages of their careers" (Stripling, et. al., 2016, p. 31).

Methodology

This qualitative study had a semi-structured interview discussion approach. Ten secondary agriscience teachers from Alabama participated in this study aimed to identify factors

influencing teachers to remain in the classroom. Participants were selected based on geographic location in Alabama, a minimum of five years teaching experience in agriscience education, and were certified through undergraduate or graduate training in agriscience education. Two of the questions pertained to teacher satisfaction in the classroom; 1) how would you describe your feelings of satisfaction in the teaching and advising you provide to students as a factor of your remaining in the classroom? 2) In your opinion, how has assisting students to attain their individual goals been an important factor of your remaining in the agricultural education classroom?

Results

Given the two questions pertaining to teacher satisfaction, three themes emerged. Participants indicated their desire to teach as a calling. Participants emphasized that they couldn't imagine doing anything else than teaching. Teaching was indicated as a passion and participants noted they felt drawn to teach. Participants also felt more involved in community events. This helps them feel more connected to their students and a desire to stay in the classroom because of the students they teach. Participants also indicated their students' success as a driving factor for remaining in the classroom. Student success was indicated to be closely linked to teachers' job satisfaction. The success of their students fuels agriscience teachers. Participants emphasized how you cannot put a price on seeing your students achieve.

Conclusions

Participants in this study indicated the reason agriscience teachers remain in classroom is related to their connection with the students and their students' success. The unique nature of agriscience teachers contributes to their ability to feel more connected with their students. Feeling more connecting and being more involved in your students' achievements, directly relates to teachers' feelings of job satisfaction when seeing their students succeed.

Implications and Recommendations

This study was completed with a small sample size and focused on only one geographical area of the county. Future studies should be completed in differing geographical areas. They should also include larger sample sizes. Follow-up also needs to be conducted with study participants on the nature of what techniques they use in the classroom to promote the success of their students. Their teaching methodology and practices should be evaluated for impacts on student success.

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