

Factors That Positively Affect Agricultural Educator Longevity and Retention in Kentucky

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Introduction/ Need for Research

Kentucky is fortunate enough to have five accredited post-secondary institutions which certify agricultural educators. Kentucky also has the highest rate of attrition of agricultural educators at 7% while NAAE Region IV overall attrition rate is 4.7% according to 2017 to 2018 data (National Association of Agricultural Educators, 2018). One of the most influential and impactful factors which can be present in a student's academic career is the presence of a good teacher (Crutchfield et al.,2013). Attrition of agricultural educators' ties into the national trend of an overall shortage of qualified educators to go in the classroom, one can notice that the trend of leavers is not being resupplied at a sustainable rate (CooperGibson Research, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

When examining the influences which are present in an educator's career that push them toward the decision to remain in the profession or leave it for a more appropriate opportunity cost trends are seen which align with Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation (Darling-Hammond et al.,2016 ;Maslow, 2000). Maslow's Theory postulates a hierarchy of needs that have to be met in order for a person to be able to reach a level of self-actualization, or an internal desire to become their best self (Maslow, 2000). Maslow's work was used as a foundation for understanding the needs of educators to feel fulfilled in their careers.

Methodology

The investigation was a multi-phased, mixed-methods study using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Initially in the Delphi study the following three research questions guided the work: 1) Discover the reasons why agricultural education teachers chose this profession; 2) Identify agricultural education teachers with five or more years' classroom experience; 3) Uncover the motivational factors of agricultural education teachers in Kentucky to stay in the profession. These statements were broken down by the investigator into appropriate thematic categories (Hsu & Sandford, 2012). Round II of the Delphi study had individuals reach initial consensus on these statements, with Round III having participants reach final consensus on statements. Appropriate techniques for consensus validity were used (Hsu & Sandford, 2012) and descriptive statistical measures were applied to the data to look for trends or patterns in responses received.

The target population for the purpose of this investigation was all Kentucky Agricultural Educators with five or more years of classroom experience who were engaged in the profession at the time the instrument was administered. It was found that 252 agricultural educators fit the parameters of the investigation, and among the sample of $n = 51$ (or 20.2%) agreed to initially

participate. Among participants, 27 (52.9%) were male, and 24 (47.1%) were female. Eleven of the 13 Kentucky FFA regions were represented in the data collected in this investigation.

Findings/Conclusions

Question one sought to discover the reasons why agricultural education teachers chose this profession. The question was posed in all three rounds as “What are the primary reasons you decided to become an agricultural teacher?” After round III consensus was reached with the statement “I grew up on a family farm and understood the importance of showing the world what it is that agriculturalists do,” having been cited by 44% ($n = 25$) of respondents.

Question two worked to identify characteristics of agricultural education teachers with five or more years’ classroom experience. Respondents answered the question, “Why have you decided to stay in the agricultural education profession for five or more years?” Consensus this round found 54.55% ($n = 22$) citing the following statement as primary motivation, “Agricultural educators in this state receiving extended employment compensation.”

Question three worked to uncover the motivational factors of agricultural education teachers in Kentucky to stay in the profession. The final statement posed was “What are some of the barriers that you have encountered during your teaching career which you have had to overcome that may have caused you to leave the profession?” Consensus was reached with 30.43% ($n = 23$) citing the following statement as their number one hurdle, “Time management between being a teacher, advisor, spouse, parent, and/or any other roles which we fill.”

Implications /Recommendations

When assessed by the investigator data was disseminated from Round I and Round III separately. Round I does not imply specific factors that had the greatest influence, rather it allows for generalizations about the population to be made and give a holistic understanding of the views and experiences they possess. Round III provided numerical analysis and consensus allows for outright implications to be seen without potential investigator interpretation biases present or errors due to missed trends.

The following recommendations can be drawn: 1) Further study into the factors cited as helping an individual retain commitment should be studied for their effect on educator job satisfaction; 2) Use the data gathered in Round I and Round III to create workshops that highlight the areas educators mentioned overcoming to remain in the profession; 3) Create a curriculum or experience for new teachers to encounter which highlights all the positives of the profession listed by veteran teachers to help new teachers find the positives in their careers rather than the negatives which can become overwhelming.

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