

Female Agricultural Educator Satisfaction with the Arizona
Agriculture Teachers Association Mentoring Program

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Introduction and Theoretical Framework

The Arizona Agriculture Teachers Association (AATA) New Teacher Mentoring Program was designed to support agricultural educators transitioning into the profession. First year teachers suffer the greatest loss in self-efficacy during their first 10 weeks of instruction (Wolf, 2011). Self-efficacy can also be negatively influenced by teachers moving to a new community where they feel unconnected; the stress of culture shock can cause anxiety, which inhibits work and creates an environment for job dissatisfaction (Kennedy et al., 2012; Mumford, 1998). Strong mentor teachers help their mentees be successful by providing advice, giving emotional support, and providing opportunities for mastery experience as their mentee navigates the initial challenges of their first year (Bandura, 1994; Paulsen et al., 2015; Ricketts et al., 2006).

Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explore female agricultural educators' experiences in the AATA Mentoring Program. The following research question guided this study: Which factors influence female agricultural educator satisfaction with the AATA Mentoring Program?

Methods

To answer the research question, both qualitative in-depth interviews and a questionnaire were utilized to acquire narrative and quantitative data. First, a purposeful sample of 12 female agricultural educators was interviewed via Zoom in the late fall of 2020 and early spring of 2021. Participants were asked to identify the factors that had the greatest impact on their experience in the AATA mentoring program. The factors identified in the interviews were used to inform a questionnaire that was disseminated via Qualtrics to all female agricultural educators in Arizona in the spring of 2021 ($N = 58$). Thirty individuals responded, leading to a 51.72% response rate. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 25 and Excel, which calculated descriptive statistics.

Results

Interview participants were asked general questions about their experience with the AATA New Teacher Mentoring Program as either a mentor or a mentee, as well as their overall satisfaction with their experiences. Participants noted that the commitment level from their assigned mentor or mentee had the greatest impact on their experience. Commitment levels were generally viewed to be low by both mentors and mentees. Seeking advice from others outside their assigned mentor was a general theme among mentees. Mentees also noted an additional challenge of being unsure of what they needed as a first-year teacher and how to communicate that with their mentor. Several participants also expressed feelings of being an outsider (not coming from an agricultural education background) as well as a gap between traditional and industry certified teachers. Lastly, 11 of the participants said they believed the gender of the mentor could impact the mentoring relationship.

Respondents who identified as mentees were asked to rate their satisfaction with specific factors relating to their experience using a semantic differential scale from "Extremely Satisfied" to "Extremely Dissatisfied" (Table 1). The results showed that "Years of teaching experience of assigned mentor" had the highest satisfaction level and "Ability to select your mentor" received the lowest satisfaction score.

Table 1*Mentee Satisfaction Level with AATA New Teacher Mentoring Program Features (n = 23)*

Factor	M	SD
Years of teaching experience of assigned mentor	4.00	1.02
Topics offered in New Teacher Induction workshop series	3.95	1.03
New Teacher Induction workshop series	3.89	1.15
Age of mentor	3.86	.99
Gender of mentor	3.80	1.06
Attitude/personality of mentor	3.78	1.20
Mentor program proximity	3.70	1.19
Number of times contacted by mentor	3.26	1.25
Effectiveness of mentorship meetings	3.24	1.60
Electronic communication	3.13	1.22
Number of social gatherings to build mentoring relationships	3.11	1.37
In person communication with mentor	3.09	1.31
Traveling to mentorship meetings	2.62	1.50
Ability to select your mentor	2.57	1.16

Respondents who identified as mentors were also asked to rate their satisfaction with specific factors relating to their experience (Table 2). The results showed that “Confidence in supporting traditionally certified mentees” had the highest satisfaction level and “Mentor training you received” had the lowest satisfaction level.

Table 2*Mentor Satisfaction Level with AATA New Teacher Mentoring Program Features (n = 17)*

Factor	M	SD
Confidence in supporting traditionally certified mentees	4.19	.83
Electronic communication	4.12	.78
Confidence in supporting industry certified mentees	4.00	1.00
Gender of past mentees	4.00	.94
Attitude/personality of mentees	3.94	.90
Number of times you contacted your mentee	3.94	.75
Effectiveness of mentorship meetings	3.93	.92
Mentor support you received from AATA	3.88	.86
Mentee program proximity	3.82	1.13
Mentee contact reminders from AATA	3.79	.80
Traveling to mentorship meetings	3.73	.91
In person communication	3.71	1.12
Number of social gatherings to build mentoring relationships	3.47	.99
Monetary compensation	3.25	.71
Mentor training you received	3.15	1.28

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results indicate a need for more social gatherings among agricultural educators to improve commitment levels and build self-efficacy. It is recommended that the AATA try to conduct more social networking events for female agricultural educators. It is also recommended that the AATA Leadership Committee conduct a needs assessment of mentor training needs to facilitate the creation of a quality mentor training program.

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