

Evaluation of Student Teacher Mentor Teachers and Placements: A Five-Year Retrospect

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Introduction/Theoretical Framework

The time that a student teacher spends in their mentor school should prepare the student teacher to feel confident in becoming an agricultural science teacher and advisor. According to Doss et al. (2020), there is a 77.6% rate of early career teachers entering the field based on their time and experiences during student teaching. Student teachers in 2019 experienced an average of 931.23 hours in a 15-week period for student teaching (Doss et al., 2020). A student teacher is likely to form their own intentions of emphasizing co-curricular activities based on numerous factors during their time in the classroom and on co-curricular events. Factors could include their student environment, impact of administration, and their mentor teacher during the student teaching experience. The purpose of our study was to identify the factors that affect a student teaching placement. In a time when we see an increase of over 150 openings available in the state of Texas in the summer of 2022 (ATAT, 2022), establishing a stable student teaching placement is vital for the upkeep of the industry. We used expectancy-value theory (EVT) (Atkinson, 1957; Roberts et al., 2009) as a framework for our study to relate student teachers' outlook of student teaching based the effectiveness of the student teaching placement.

Methodology

The 118 student teachers from 2016-2021 at Sam Houston State University were sent to a multitude of different schools with a variety of different student teaching mentors. The student teachers assisted with classroom lesson planning and instruction, along with conducting and/or supervising co-curricular activities during their 14-week field placement. Once the student teachers came back to Sam Houston State University after their 14-week field placement they completed a 13 question Likert scale survey that assessed the following areas from *Very Poor* to *Excellent* on a 1-7 scale. The survey asked about *classroom facilities, agriculture mechanics facilities, horticulture facilities, support from administration, teaching resources, discipline, orderliness / cleanliness of facilities, FFA activities / involvement, professionalism of classroom mentor, classroom mentor emphasis on teaching, classroom mentor emphasis on extracurricular activities, opportunities available to participate in a well-rounded program, and overall evaluation of student teaching center*. After collecting the data for 5 continuous years we used Microsoft Excel and ran a descriptive analysis. Then, we ran a regression analysis on all the variables in overall student teaching center placement to find which variables mean the most to a student teacher from the student's perspective.

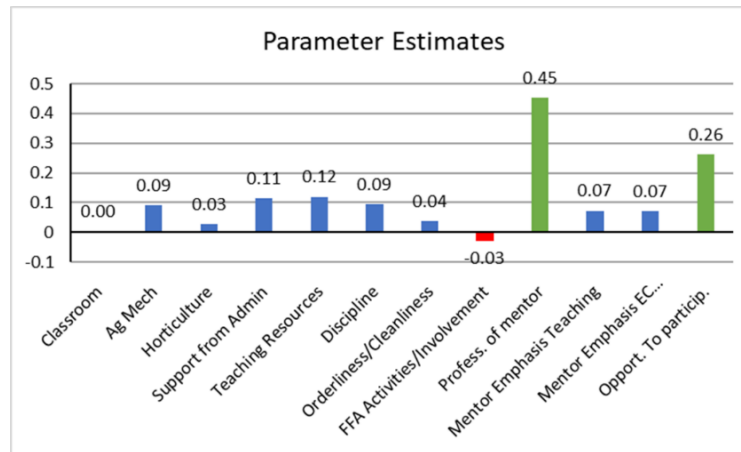
Results/Findings

First, we found the average for all of inputs for the overall evaluation of the placements ($\bar{X} = 5.98/7.00$). The overall lowest average scoring was horticulture facilities ($\bar{X} = 4.24/7.00$). The highest average was the professionalism of the mentor ($\bar{X} = 6.27/7.00$). However, when looking at the correlation through regression, we could see overall evaluation in comparison to the other variables ($r^2 = .78$) listed in the survey revealed a moderately strong correlation. Four of the factors were shown to be considerably higher in their parameter estimates with *support from administration as one, and discipline being another*. The two highest regression analysis results were *opportunities to participate*, and overwhelmingly *professionalism of mentor*. We found a positive regression between *opportunities to participate* and *professionalism of mentor* ($r^2 = .70$)

thus, that all the other variables mentioned in the survey only made a slight difference ($r^2 = .04$) on how a student teacher evaluated their student teaching placement.

Figure 2

Regression analysis of student teachers' evaluation of placement



Note. Parameter Estimates on the responses of each variable connected to Overall Student Teaching experience in a regression analysis of the data.

Conclusions

The results show that when student teachers evaluate their student teaching placements after their placement, the two most important factors that they had when evaluating the overall placement was *professionalism of mentor*, and *opportunities to participate*. The lowest estimates of *horticulture*, *classroom*, and *FFA Activities and involvement* revealed a slight difference in the overall evaluation based on the student teachers' surveys. Therefore, these two factors are important when evaluating where to send student teachers for their placements during their student teaching semester. The mentor teacher plays a key role in the student teacher's performance. Furthermore, what student teachers learn from their mentor teacher during their 14-week placement is vital in a transformative lens as to what kind of instructor they will be in their own teaching career.

Recommendations/ Implications

It is essential that the dynamic between the mentor and student teacher is conducive to concepts such as maintaining respect with students and creating a good rapport for the student teacher, providing the opportunities to participate in other areas of teaching (i.e., meetings, staff development, advisory board meetings, etc.), give adequate and formal evaluations on student teaching performance, and model high quality instruction and reflective practices (Temple College, 2020). Our findings inform teacher education institutions that highly professional mentors are effective for a positive student teaching experience and in return assist with the fulfilment of open positions by novice teachers. From the student teachers' perspectives, we discovered that overall professionalism and opportunities to participate in a well-rounded program does make an impact during a student teaching placement. A future study can be done to obtain qualitative interview data to gain more insight into mentor teacher expectations, and student teacher experience evaluations.

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