

**Does a One Size Fits All Approach Work?: Comparing the Professional Development Needs of
Alternatively Certified and Traditionally Certified SBAE Teachers**

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Introduction/Need for Research

As enrollment in school-based agricultural education (SBAE) continues to trend upward (Jones et al., 2020), the challenge of finding qualified teachers to fill teacher vacancies has become more evident (Eck & Edwards, 2019). With less than 50% of all traditionally certified pre-service teachers accepting teaching positions immediately following graduation (Cowan et al., 2016) and teacher turnover continuing to grow, more and more individuals are entering the classroom through alternative means (Claflin et al., 2020). While some have looked to alternative certification as a remedy to the ongoing teacher shortage, others have been quick to call out alternative certification, as these teachers enter the classroom with little to no pedagogical skills and are presented with far more challenges than their traditionally certified colleagues (Bowling & Ball, 2018; Hoerst & Whittington, 2009; Porter, 2011; Roberts & Dyer, 2004; Stair et al., 2018; Touchstone, 2015). If alternative certification is going to be a viable solution in addressing teacher recruitment and retention, considering the developmental needs of all SBAE teachers will be important (Bowling & Ball, 2018). Offering professional development based on their needs will impact their behaviors and improve their effectiveness as educators (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Wenglinsky & Silverstein, 2006).

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Fessler and Christensen's (1992) teacher career cycle model served as the framework for this study. This model focuses on adult growth and development with teacher career phases, and personal and organizational ecologies serving as influencers. This model, which has been referenced in previous literature, suggests that the professional development needs of teachers vary based on their career phase and experiences (Smalley & Smith, 2017; Sorensen et al., 2014). While a myriad of research exists on the professional development needs of SBAE teachers, specifically as it relates to the pedagogical and content-based training needs (Layfield & Dobbins, 2002; Myers et al., 2005; Boone & Boone, 2007; McKim & Saucier, 2011; Sorensen et al., 2014) there still appears to be limited research examining the professional development needs of SBAE teachers by career phase and licensure type. Identifying the career phase and path to licensure of SBAE teachers may prove valuable in determining their professional development needs, ensuring that provided professional development is worthwhile.

Methodology

This study's purpose and primary objective was to describe the professional development needs of traditionally certified and alternatively certified SBAE teachers through survey feedback. As part of a larger descriptive relational study, the target population was all SBAE teachers from the Northeast region of the United States (NAAE Regions IV and VI) who were actively teaching during the 2021-2022 school year. During June of 2022, an online survey instrument (i.e., Qualtrics) was administered. The survey instrument for this specific analysis consisted of one open-ended question asking participants about their professional development needs. Participants had the option to omit this question or type a response. As part of a larger study, four hundred eighty-five participants participated, with 73.6% (N = 357) identifying as traditionally certified and 28.4% (N = 128) identifying as alternatively certified. From the survey, 81.2% (N = 290) of traditionally certified

teachers and 98.4% (N = 126) of alternatively certified teachers provided commentary on their individual professional development needs. Comments were categorized and thematically coded into professional development topic areas.

Results/Findings

Participant comments were categorized into professional development topics (see Table 1).

Table 1

Professional Development Needs of TC (N = 290) and AC (N = 126) SBAE Teachers

Professional Development Area	TC <i>f</i>	TC <i>%</i>	AC <i>f</i>	AC <i>%</i>
Content-Specific Topics (ex., Ag Mechanics)	137	47.24	46	36.51
Curriculum Development	28	9.66	19	15.08
FFA & SAE	25	8.62	12	9.52
Technology (ex., integrating technology in the classroom)	21	7.24	4	3.17
Classroom Management & Student Engagement	19	6.55	9	7.14
Instructional Strategies/Teaching Methods	13	4.48	17	13.49
Supporting Students (ex. EL learners, SEL, Spec. Ed)	10	3.45	6	4.76
Burnout/Work-Life Balance	9	3.10	1	0.79
Retirement	7	2.41	2	1.59
Standards/Industry Alignment	7	2.41	1	0.79
Work-Based Learning/Project-Based Learning	6	2.07	4	3.17
Funding (ex., grant writing, permissible use of grants)	3	1.03	0	0.00
Program Direction	3	1.03	3	2.38
Community Involvement	1	0.34	0	0.00
Time Management	1	0.34	2	1.59

Conclusions/Recommendations/Impacts

Our findings show that traditionally certified teachers reported Content-Specific Topics, Curriculum Development, FFA & SAE, Technology, and Classroom Management & Student Engagement/Motivation as the areas of greatest need. On the contrary, alternatively certified teachers reported Content-Specific Topics, Curriculum Development, Instructional Strategies/Teaching Methods, FFA & SAE, and Classroom Management & Student Engagement/Motivation as the areas of greatest need. While both groups of teachers reported needing professional development in similar areas, traditionally certified teachers placed greater emphasis on the areas of Content-Specific Topics and Technology, whereas alternatively certified teachers placed greater emphasis on the areas of Curriculum Development and Instructional Strategies/Teaching Methods.

Professional development in these areas would impact both groups of SBAE teachers the greatest. Therefore, as a recommendation, teacher preparation programs should continue to work with pre-service teachers in the areas of greatest need. Furthermore, state staff should work closely with their SBAE teachers, offering tailored professional development opportunities to meet their individualized needs. Lastly, it is recommended that this study be replicated with TC and AC teachers at different career phases to determine if the areas of greatest need remain the same for each cohort.

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