

**Using Students' Chosen Gender Pronouns in School-Based Agricultural Education:  
Preservice Teachers' Perceived Knowledge and Preparedness – Phase II**

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## **Using Students' Chosen Gender Pronouns in School-Based Agricultural Education: Preservice Teachers' Perceived Knowledge and Preparedness – Phase II**

### **Introduction/Conceptual Framework**

Many U.S. teachers are unprepared to instruct and mentor lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ+), and non-gender conforming youth (Clark, 2010). The use of gender-neutral language is one way to assist transgender and gender diverse youth feel included and supported (Cross & Hiller, 2021; Matsuno, 2019) in school and other spaces in their lives. “Efficient and Effective Agricultural Education Programs” was identified as an area of importance by the American Association for Agricultural Education in its National Research Agenda (Roberts et al., 2016, p. 42). However, literature on school-based agricultural education (SBAE) is limited regarding gender inclusive language (Murray et al., 2020). With scant research in this area, the question stands – How prepared are preservice SBAE teachers to address situations involving gender pronouns in their programs? This poster, therefore, will report on the Phase II results of a longitudinal, descriptive investigation. Our overall goal was to assess preservice students' knowledge and preparedness as they matriculate through their teacher preparation program at Oklahoma State University (OSU). The purpose of this portion of the study was to describe the changes in attitudes since our baseline observation regarding knowledge and preparedness of preservice SBAE teachers regarding gender pronouns. Two research objectives guided our inquiry: (1) determine the knowledge of preservice SBAE teachers regarding gender pronouns, and (2) determine the preparedness of preservice SBAE teachers to understand and properly use gender pronouns at the end of their first three-credit hour course on teaching methods.

A three-part framework guided this study: (1) gender pronouns knowledge and preparedness, (2) proper use of gender pronouns, and (3) perceived benefits of proper use are realized. Bandura's social cognitive theory posits that a person will be more willing to adopt an action or object if they perceive benefits exist (Vasta, 1989). Making preservice teachers aware of the benefits to their students when they feel comfortable in a learning space supports the need for gender pronouns curriculum in teacher preparation. During the teacher preparation program, they engage in campus events and some course activities on issues regarding the inclusivity of members of the LGBTQ+ community. These experiences likely play a role in building their knowledge of gender pronouns and prepare them for situations that involve using such as student teachers and as in-service professionals but to what extent or impact is not well-understood.

### **Methods**

The population for the initial observation included 45 preservice SBAE teachers enrolled in *AGED3103/5203: Foundation and Philosophy of Teaching Agricultural Education* at OSU in Fall 2021. The second observation included 29 of the same preservice teachers enrolled in *AGED4103/5333: Methods and Skills of Teaching and Management in Agricultural Education* in Fall 2022. All students were asked to participate at each observation. At the second observation or Phase II of our study, the students completed a Qualtrics questionnaire with six Likert-type items assessing views on their knowledge and preparedness regarding gender pronouns using a seven-point agreement scale: 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*. The second observation also included an open-ended question that asked the participants to describe their attitudes regarding the use of gender pronouns in SBAE as well as any experiences they had that

may have influenced their views about the importance of teachers' preparedness to properly use such in SBAE. We computed the means ( $M$ ) and standard deviations ( $SD$ ) as well as the mean differences ( $MD$ ) between observations for the Likert-type items.

### Results

About one-half (26) of the students participated in the first observation. Most students (23) also responded in the second observation. These respondents *agreed* that it was important for SBAE teachers to be knowledgeable and prepared to properly use gender pronouns with a slight increase from the first observation ( $M = 5.48$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ,  $MD = 0.21$ ). Students also agreed that their understanding of the meaning of gender pronouns had improved between the observations ( $M = 5.52$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ,  $MD = 0.40$ ). Even though students' perceived importance and understanding increased, the other items all saw mean score decreases from the first observation. For instance, students perceived that they were less prepared by their teacher preparation program to understand and properly use gender pronouns ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ,  $MD = -0.20$ ). They also *agreed* that teachers using gender pronouns aligned with their students' choices was less important after having completed the methods course ( $M = 5.48$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ,  $MD = -0.29$ ). When asked to share their thoughts on SBAE teachers' use of gender pronouns through an open-ended response item, the students mostly indicated that it was important. One participant stated: "It's important to respect a students' needs on how they want to be addressed." However, others stated not being well-enough informed to properly use students' chosen gender pronouns. One participant said: "I think this is something that's definitely important and will be very prevalent in the years to come. However, I'm not sure I feel prepared to handle this type of situation if it arises." When asked what experiences impacted their understanding of gender pronouns, about two-thirds of the 23 participants said they had not had any related experiences. Those with experiences impacting their understanding expressed their lab instructor, as associated with the recently completed course, was passionate about inclusivity. A participant stated: "In [instructor's name] lab we had great conversations about his experiences with gender pronouns in the classroom . . . other than that we did not talk about gender pronouns in the classroom throughout our time here at OSU." While other students also expressed it was important and that they needed more training, another said: "You are what you are."

### Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The participants continued to *agree* with the importance of understanding how to properly use gender pronouns in SBAE. However, they still saw themselves as somewhat unprepared regarding their future practice, a finding supported by Clark (2010). We recommend that efforts continue at OSU to prepare aspiring SBAE teachers to understand and use students' chosen pronouns (Cross & Hiller, 2021; Murray et al., 2020). An instructional unit is likely needed to provide appropriate content on gender pronouns and making gender diverse students feel welcomed and included. Participants' comments implied the need for discussion and guidance on situations specific to SBAE that may arise due to students' gender identities such as overnight rooming assignments during travel as well as appropriate official dress standards for student with a chosen gender identity other than their assigned sex. These preservice teachers will be surveyed after their student teaching internship to identify whether they experienced situations that better prepared them to use students' chosen gender pronouns in SBAE. Similar studies should be conducted with in-service teachers of SBAE.

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