

**Costs Associated with Work-Life Balance as Perceived by Preservice School-Based
Agricultural Education Teachers**

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Work-life balance has shown to be both a hinderance for graduates entering the school-based agricultural education (SBAE) profession (Eck et al., 2021) and a factor in teacher attrition (Solomonson et al., 2018; Sorensen et al., 2016). As SBAE teachers have duties beyond the traditional classroom tasks (Smalley & Rank, 2019), they often report 50-plus hour work weeks including evenings and weekends (Clemons et al., 2021; Hopkins et al., 2020). These additional work hours take time and energy away from personal and family commitments (Hopkins et al., 2020). A positive work-life balance has been correlated with higher rates of teacher retention, job satisfaction, and teacher effectiveness (Clemons et al., 2021). With the career implications, work-life balance should be discussed and studied within teacher preparation programs (Aydan, 2021).

This study was grounded in the theoretical framework of expectancy value theory (EVT). EVT models motivation around expectations of success and subjective task value, including incentives, utility, and cost (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Tasks which are associated with greater expectations of success along with more benefits and fewer costs are more likely to be approached with greater motivation and persistence (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Most of the existing research in EVT focused on perceived ability (self-efficacy) and task value, with a fleeting or overlooked description of cost (Flake et al., 2015; Raczkoski, 2018). An individual may feel a high likelihood of success and find value in the task, yet a high perceived cost is likely to damper motivation (Raczkoski, 2018). As such, cost is a valuable construct and should be measured independently of other EVT components (Flake et al., 2015).

Purpose and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived work-life balance costs associated with a career in SBAE. The research objectives were to...

1. Describe alternative career choices of seniors in agricultural education at California State University Chico.
2. Describe the relative work-life balance costs in a SBAE teaching career as perceived by seniors in agricultural education at California State University Chico.

Methods and Procedures

This descriptive pilot study utilized a quantitative survey method. The instrument was constructed as a replication of Tan-Wilcon's and Stamp's (2015) work in work-life balance in STEM careers. This study replaced the wording "research based STEM career" with "career as an agricultural education teacher" in Likert-type item stems. Face and construct validity was addressed with review by experts in SBAE. As a limitation of the study, additional replications and larger sample sizes will increase the reliability and validity of the instrument.

The population of interest in this study was seniors majoring in agricultural education at California State University Chico. The class consisted of 9 males and 24 females, with most in their early 20s. Of the 33 students enrolled during the Spring 2022 semester, 27 completed the instrument for a response rate of 81.82%. Due to the high response rate, no attempt was made to control for nonresponse error (Lindner et al., 2001). Means and standard deviations were calculated using IBM's SPSS version 26. Negative means were associated with items perceived

to be easier or less costly to achieve as a SBAE teacher while items with positive means were perceived to be harder or more costly to achieve (Tan-Wilcon & Stamp, 2015).

Findings

Research Objective 1 was accomplished by an open-ended response survey item which asked, “If you didn’t teach agricultural education what is/are the next career choice(s) you would pursue?”. Roughly 50% ($n = 12$) of respondents were interested in alternative careers in the broad agricultural industry. The remaining portions were equally split ($n = 7$ for both) between education and other or undecided. Research Objective 2 is addressed in Table 1. It is important to also note the relatively high standard deviations, indicating some variability across participants.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics (N = 27)

Using the career choice(s) you identified, compare each of the following items to a career as an agricultural education teacher.	M	SD
Engaging in community organizations and activities	-1.54	1.24
Feeling fulfilled in your professional life	-1.15	1.52
Feeling fulfilled in your personal life	-0.09	1.30
Living in your chosen geographical area	0.00	1.85
Meeting your personal wellness goals	0.27	1.08
Meeting your financial goals	0.74	1.24
Balancing quality time between work demands and family/personal demands	1.60	1.35

Note. Negative means indicate areas perceived to be easier to accomplish as a SBAE teacher.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Agricultural industry and other teaching credential areas represented nearly three-quarters of career interests outside of SBAE for study participants. These career options represented the valued alternatives that would be lost upon entrance into the SBAE profession (Flake et al., 2015). What is the perceived additional value in industry or other education fields? How can SBAE address these deficiencies to continue to recruit highly qualified teachers? Solomonson et al. (2018) suggested decreasing expectations of SBAE teachers and providing them with additional instructional and program management support.

Three items were thought to be less costly to achieve as a SBAE teacher. These findings concur with other works in altruism (Eck et al., 2021) and professional fulfillment (Solomonson et al., 2018). Another three items were perceived as more costly for SBAE teachers and are decreasing the value of choosing a career in SBAE (Eck et al., 2021; Tan-Wilcon & Stamp, 2015; Traini et al., 2019). Perhaps inservice SBAE teachers who are proficient in balancing work and home life could serve as cooperating teachers and guest speakers. Barring a paradigm shift in SBAE, teacher work-life balance will continue to be an area of concern in the recruitment and retention of SBAE teachers (Clemons et al., 2021; Traini et al., 2019).

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