

Exploring SBAE Teacher Professional Development Experiences: A National Study

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Introduction, Literature Review, and Frameworks

Historically, an overwhelming majority of teachers in the United States have participated in professional development (PD) events (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). The structure of PD implementation has followed a predictable trend where teachers attend a series of formal, workshop-style events targeting content knowledge (Mizell, 2010; Yopp, et al., 2020). While attendance is high, resulting change in educational practices has not been effectively increased (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Smalley et al. (2019) posited that teachers engaging in professional development are seeking content-related professional growth opportunities.

Within the context of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) research related to PD effectiveness is lacking. In a study conducted by Easterly and Myers (2019), SBAE teachers in several states reported a high level of engagement in a variety of PD formats but did not subsequently implement educational practices from those events. It was also found that PD engagement was correlated with career satisfaction (Easterly & Myers, 2019). PD, as a component of professional commitment, had been previously linked with career satisfaction (Sorensen &McKim, 2014). This study sought to fill the gap in the literature related to SBAE teacher satisfaction with PD sources and motivations to engage in PD.

This study was guided by the interconnected model of professional growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). According to Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), teacher professional growth is experienced in four interconnected domains: personal, external, practice, and consequence. Growth in these domains is purported to be a function of enactment and reflection from experiences within each domain (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore professional development event experiences of SBAE teachers. The following objectives guides this exploration:

1. Describe SBAE teachers' level of satisfaction with professional development providers.
2. Describe SBAE teachers' motivations to attend profession developments.

Methods

This descriptive study consisted of a researcher-developed online survey of SBAE teachers in the United States. A cluster random sample of 40 FFA advisors per state was provided by the National FFA Organization. All advisors were included in the sample for states fewer than 40 FFA advisors. The final sample was 251, resulting in a response rate of 13.4%. This low response rate has been documented for this population and sampling frame (e.g., Hile, 2019; McKim & Sorensen, 2020). Respondents answered questions about PD satisfaction and how opportunities were identified. Descriptive statistics were computed to organize and summarize the phenomenon (Ary et al., 2010). This research is part of a larger project on SBAE teacher PD.

Results and Conclusions

There were respondents from all 50 states ($N = 250$), ranging from 1 to 14 respondents per state in the final sample. Average age of respondents was 38.6 years ($SD = 12.04$), with a range of 21 to 82 years of age. Respondents were predominately White (91.6%), female (62.5%), not ethnically Hispanic or Latino (92%). Respondents reported an average of 12.4 years of teaching experience ($SD = 10.3$), with 37.1% ($n = 93$) teaching 5 or fewer years, 29.9% ($n = 75$), between 5 and 15 years, 27.1% ($n = 68$) between 15 and 30 years, and 6.0% ($n = 15$) over 30 years. A majority of SBAE teachers (78.5%) were found to be traditionally licensed through an agricultural education undergraduate program.

PD Satisfaction

SBAE teachers were asked to rate their satisfaction with various providers of professional development if they had utilized that provider. The two providers utilized by less than 50% of SBAE teachers within the sample were the Association of Career & Technical Education and United States Department of Education. A majority of SBAE teachers reported overall satisfaction for those providers who are directly related to agricultural education or agricultural content. Additionally, while local teaching organizations was utilized the most ($n = 228$), SBAE teachers reported over 2:1 mixed or dissatisfied versus satisfied experiences with this provider.

SBAE Teacher Motivating Factors

To answer the research question two, SBAE teachers were asked to rank and report their motivations for participation. SBAE teachers ranked PD topics as interesting as their leading motivator ($M = 2.11$) for participation. Additionally, on average SBAE ranked provided curriculum materials and resources ($M = 2.59$) and provided materials and supplies ($M = 3.36$) as higher motivating factors. Non-financial incentives, for example provided meals or raffles, was ranked the least motivating ($M = 5.85$).

Discussions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, teachers find more satisfaction with PD opportunities provided by more locally focused agencies as opposed to national bodies. Anecdotally, this phenomenon may be a result of beliefs that education is locally controlled. Additionally, SBAE teachers reported higher satisfaction with agriculturally related PD opportunities and providers mirroring Smalley et al.'s (2019) assertions. While content knowledge development is one facet of PD, providers seeking to perpetuate educational reform within SBAE programs will need to imbed pedagogical and pedagogical content knowledge into content focused PD events. SBAE teachers reported motivation by content, resources, and peer engagement as highly influential. We assert that this demonstrates the strong SBAE culture of community. This sense of community offers an avenue to design intentional collaborations that would encourage constructive reflection on teaching enhancements (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). It is recommended for practice that PD provides work to structure intentional community of practice engagement for quality reflection on PD content. It is recommended for research that effects of PD on SBAE teacher's educational practices be studied.

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