

Teacher-Parent Relationships and Their Role in Agricultural Science Teachers Retention

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Introduction

Qualified teachers in agricultural education have been in short supply for the last four decades (Smith et al., 2017; Wolf, 2011). Researchers have found that although agricultural science teachers are satisfied with their jobs, they still leave the profession (Sorensen et al., 2016). In 2017, it was reported that there were 520 agricultural science teachers leaving the profession before becoming retirement-eligible (Smith et al., 2017). In 2021, Smith et al., (2021) reported 674 positions were open nationally and those who left would not be returning to the classroom. Additionally, there are issues and factors such as self-efficacy, alternative opportunities, time, stress, and burnout that affect agricultural science teachers' decision to stay or leave the profession (Lemons et al., 2015; Harrell, 2022; Solomonson, 2017). According to Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2010), teacher-parent relationships are an important factor that affects teachers' job satisfaction and self-efficacy, which ultimately affects retention. Due to the hands-on nature of the FFA and SAE portions of the three-circle model, agricultural science teachers are in constant communication with parents in their program. However, minimal research has been conducted on teacher-parent relationships at the secondary level and how they may affect teachers' decision to leave the profession. This study aims to determine if teacher-parent relationships may contribute to the shortage of qualified agricultural science teachers.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was influenced by the Theory of Teacher Attrition (Grissmer and Kirby, 1987) and the Teacher Retention Model (Chapman, 1983). The Theory of Teacher Attrition suggests characteristics and compensation of alternative job opportunities affect teacher retention. The Teacher Retention Model suggests that to understand teachers' decisions to leave the profession, it is necessary to look at personal characteristics, satisfaction teachers derive from their careers, and external environmental influences (Chapman, 1983). The purpose of this professional paper was to analyze teacher-parent relationships and their effect on agriculture teachers' decision to leave the classroom before retirement. The objectives of the study were: (1) Determine how agricultural science teachers perceived parental support and involvement, and (2) Determine if teacher-parent relationships currently affect agricultural science teachers' decisions to stay or leave the profession.

Methods

The target population was agricultural educators who currently teach or formerly taught in Texas. The sample was a purposive sample consisting of agricultural science teachers still in the profession (n=6), and former agricultural science teachers (n=3). Participants were asked to meet for an interview. The interview consisted of standardized open-ended questions in combination with closed fixed-response questions. Participants were assigned a number for confidentiality purposes and identified as male (M1-8) or female (F1). Data was analyzed by using the constant comparative method and open coding to determine themes of the study.

Results/ Findings

There were four themes that developed throughout the study. **Theme 1- Parental Support.** Five participants believed that parental support was an asset to their program. Four participants stated

that they did not believe that parental support was necessary for their program or student success. **Theme 2- Parental Involvement.** Participants in this study did not indicate that parental involvement was necessary for their programs. One stated “I have always loved for parents to be involved as much as possible but sometimes you have the overbearing parents that expect you to do everything for their child and them” and another stated (M4) “No, it seems that they want to control the program to fit themselves.” Four of the participants' programs had booster clubs to aid in scholarships and travel, and five of their programs operated without a parental booster club and perceived their program successful. **Theme 3- Positive Communication.** Agricultural science educators have a positive view on communication with parents. All participants reported that two-way professionalism occurred most of the time. Two participants shared they have had negative experiences on very few occasions where the parents were “screaming and yelling the whole time.” However, they followed with, “If you treat them with respect, most of the time, they will treat you with respect.” **Theme 4- Passion for the Profession.** Two former teachers stated that they would re-enter the profession for various reasons. One stated (M6), “I would have considered re-entering the profession because new teachers need help,” and (M7) said “Parents never influenced my decision to quit teaching. I applied for a CTE Director position and got it.” Not all the comments were positive, however, (M3) who has stayed in the profession stated “There have been situations with parents over the last nine years that make me question whether to stay in the profession...if you love what you do, then you continue through all the stress and problems that parents cause.”

Conclusions

These findings somewhat align with Chapman (1984) as they postulate that external influences contribute to the decision to remain or leave the classroom. The participants who left the profession did not report parents as the reason for their departure, and also did not see parental involvement or support as a necessity for their program or students to be successful. There was variation in teachers who were still in the classroom about their views on parental support and involvement. The participants expressed that they had great passion for the profession, but not all responded that they would encourage others to join the profession. Overall, teacher-parent relationships were not reported by these participants as a reason for remaining in or leaving the profession. The findings of this study were not consistent with Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2010) who reported teachers' need for positive relationships with parents affects their ability to plan, organize, and execute activities. Their study also found that self-efficacy and depersonalization relating to burnout affected their job satisfaction. Overall, parental support and parental involvement were mostly seen in a positive light.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

Recommendations for future research should include larger sample sizes to quantify teachers' and former teachers' relationships with parents. Additionally, investigations from the parents' perspective regarding involvement and relationships with their children's teachers should be explored. The gender of the agricultural science teacher should also be investigated as more than one half of them in Texas are female [Ray Pieniasek, personal communication, July 28, 2023].

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