

**Investigating Identity and the Integration of Alternately Certified Teachers in the School-Based Agricultural Education Profession**

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## Introduction/Need for Research

Professional identity is a crucial factor influencing the success and dedication of educators in the teaching field (Canrinus et al., 2011). This concept involves a teacher's sense of belonging, identification with, and dedication to their role as an educator (Zhao, 2022). It includes their understanding of professional duties, beliefs about the essence of teaching, and emotional ties to their career (Beijaard et al., 2000). Teachers with a robust professional identity tend to experience greater job satisfaction, more involvement in professional development, and a stronger voice in advocating for the teaching profession's interests (Day & Gu, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Specifically in agricultural education, Knobloch and Whittington (2003) observed that novice school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers with high self-efficacy also show strong professional identities, affecting their commitment to teaching. Given the challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified SBAE teachers, particularly as the profession increasingly hires individuals through alternative certification paths, it is essential to explore and support the professional identities of these educators. This research aims to investigate the professional identities of alternatively certified SBAE teachers to determine how these teachers integrate into the SBAE profession.

## Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Self-efficacy is crucial in shaping teachers' professional identity, influencing their self-perception and role engagement. Defined by Bandura as belief in one's abilities to manage tasks and challenges (Bandura, 1997), high self-efficacy is linked to teachers' sense of competence, enhancing their professional pride and commitment (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Cultivating self-efficacy, therefore, is key to empowering teachers and fostering a strong, affirmative professional identity.

Research by McKim and Velez (2015) underscores the impact of self-efficacy on early-career teachers' commitment, indicating that when teachers firmly believe in their abilities to handle various classroom challenges, they are more likely to feel committed to their careers. This highlights the importance of fostering self-efficacy among novice SBAE teachers to ensure their long-term commitment to the SBAE profession. Furthermore, Bandura (1997) also highlighted that strong self-efficacy is essential for teachers to develop and maintain their professional identity. Understanding the professional identities of alternatively certified SBAE teachers is crucial due to the limited research in this area. This understanding is essential for their effective integration into the profession and for supporting them.

## Methodology

The primary objective of this study was to describe the professional identities of alternatively certified SBAE teachers. Our study, which was part of a larger quantitative relational study, focused on SBAE teachers actively teaching SBAE courses throughout the United States during the 2023-2024 academic year. We employed cluster sampling to determine participation, categorizing teachers by NAAE region, and then used random sampling to select states or series of states within each cluster. We invited all teachers within the selected states to participate. In October of 2023, we administered an online survey using Qualtrics. This survey asked respondents to rank a series of professional identity statements using a five-point Likert-type scale. Of the three hundred and ninety-eight participants in the larger study, 35.9% ( $n = 143$ ) identified as alternatively certified.

**Results/Findings**

Our study revealed that alternatively certified teachers generally view their professional identities favorably. They rated the following statements the highest (strongly agree or agree): (1) It is important for me to develop my teaching skills; (2) I see myself as a teacher; and (3) I would miss teaching if I stopped doing it. In contrast, the statements receiving the lowest ratings were: (1) I know very few agriculture teachers in the profession; (2) It is important for me to work in the teaching profession; and (3) I feel that my building/district administration support my efforts as an agriculture teacher.

Table 1

*Self-Assessment of Professional Identity among Alternatively Certified SBAE Teachers*

	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %
It is important for me to develop my teaching skills	47.5	46.9	4.9	0.0	0.7
I see myself as a teacher	51.0	39.2	7.7	1.4	0.7
I would miss teaching if I stopped doing it	38.7	47.9	10.6	2.8	0.0
Students and colleagues view me as an effective teacher	37.1	42.6	18.9	1.4	0.0
I feel skilled as a teacher	34.9	43.4	15.4	5.6	0.7
I belong to a community of teachers	36.3	39.2	16.8	5.6	2.1
I frequently talk to colleagues about teaching	20.3	51.0	20.3	7.0	1.4
I feel that my building/district administration support my efforts as an agriculture teacher	28.0	37.0	16.1	11.2	7.7
It is important for me to work in the teaching profession	25.9	37.7	24.5	8.4	3.5
I know very few agriculture teachers in the profession	27.3	33.5	18.9	12.6	7.7

*Note.* SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

**Conclusions/Recommendations/Impacts**

These findings suggest that while alternatively certified teachers identify with their role and value professional growth, they experience less support from their administration, place less emphasis on remaining in the SBAE profession, and face challenges in integrating into the SBAE community. Regarding integration into the profession, the study results mirror the findings of Clafin et al. (2022), suggesting that the SBAE profession is welcoming yet is an exclusive community where integration can be challenging. It is recommended that future research should focus on exploring the support systems and professional networks available to alternatively certified teachers in the SBAE profession. This research could examine the extent and nature of administrative support these teachers receive and investigate how it impacts their job satisfaction and commitment to the profession. Additionally, the study should delve into the challenges these teachers face in integrating into the SBAE community and seek strategies to enhance their sense of belonging and connectivity within the profession. Moreover, further research should explore how closely the professional identities of traditionally certified SBAE teachers align with alternatively certified teachers. Lastly, the researchers recommend the need for qualitative research, exploring the nuances of professional identity among alternatively certified teachers.

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