

Tracing the Turnover Intentions of SBAE Teachers by Certification Path and Career Stage

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Introduction/Need for Research

Teaching, while rewarding, imposes significant challenges on educators, leading to stress and burnout. This is substantiated by studies from Chenevey et al. (2008) and Kitchel et al. (2012), which point to the demanding aspects of the profession, often spilling beyond regular working hours. These factors contribute to a substantial exodus of educators, with Haynes (2014) revealing that nearly half a million U.S. teachers leave or switch roles annually and Ingersoll et al. (2014) finding that 41% depart within the first five years.

In School-based Agricultural Education (SBAE), the attrition issue has been persistent, with a chronic shortage of qualified teachers (Foster et al., 2023). Despite longstanding recognition of the issue, SBAE teacher recruitment and retention remains a critical challenge, as National Supply and Demand figures indicate (Foster et al., 2023). SBAE teachers juggle numerous tasks, including Supervised Agricultural Experience visits, FFA events, awards ceremonies, and conferences (Hainline et al., 2015). These responsibilities, combined with routine stressors such as facility upkeep and chapter management, further exacerbate the attrition problem (Solomonson et al., 2018). As a result, this research aims to identify the turnover intentions of SBAE teachers by path to certification and career stage.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Fessler and Christensen's (1992) teacher career cycle model served as the framework for this study. This model focuses on the career stages of teachers, with personal and organizational ecologies serving as influencers. Similarly, previous literature in the SBAE profession has identified personal and organizational factors that influence teachers' turnover intentions (Tippens et al., 2013). While Sorensen et al. (2016) and Claflin et al. (2020) found that SBAE teachers generally had low intentions to leave the profession, literature cites dissatisfaction among SBAE teachers and factors like burnout and out-of-classroom expectations as reasons for SBAE teachers leaving the profession (Kitchel et al., 2012). While previous studies have explored the turnover intentions of SBAE teachers, there remains a gap in understanding how these intentions vary by career stage and path to certification. Identifying trends among teachers most likely to leave the profession could enable the development of targeted support measures, such as tailored professional development programs. Such interventions are crucial for retaining the existing pool of educators and addressing the ongoing challenge of teacher attrition in agricultural education.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to describe the turnover intentions of traditionally certified (TC) and alternatively certified (AC) SBAE teachers by career stage. As part of a larger study, this research focused on SBAE teachers across the United States teaching SBAE courses during the 2023-2024 academic year. To determine participation, cluster sampling was employed, categorizing teachers by NAAE region. Then, random sampling was used to select states or a series of states within the cluster to sample. All teachers within the selected states received an invitation to participate.

During October 2023, an online survey instrument (i.e., Qualtrics) was administered. Prior to administering, the instrument was piloted with SBAE teachers in three states ($n = 74$), yielding a

Cronbach alpha value of .93. The survey instrument for this analysis consisted of twenty statements adapted from Sorensen (2015), assessing the turnover intentions of SBAE teachers. Participants ranked each statement using a five-point Likert-type scale. As part of a larger study, 398 teachers participated, with 65.1% ($n = 259$) identifying as TC and 34.9% ($n = 139$) identifying as AC, yielding a 16.6% response rate. From the survey, 19.1% ($n = 76$) of teachers had 1-3 years of teaching experience, 20.6% ($n = 82$) of teachers had 4-8 years of teaching experience, 26.4% ($n = 105$) of teachers had 9-17 years of teaching experience, and 33.9% ($n = 135$) of teachers had 18 or more years of teaching experience. Based on these ranges and the recommendations of Katz (1972), teachers were put into four categories: Survival, Renewal, Late Phase, and Wind Down.

Results/Findings

Our findings show that TC and AC teachers exhibit a relatively consistent pattern in their turnover intentions. Notably, both cohorts' of early career teachers (Survival stage) have the lowest turnover intentions. In contrast, those in the later stages, particularly AC teachers in the Wind down phase, display greater turnover intentions, likely due to factors related to stress and burnout (Table 1)

Table 1

Turnover Intentions of Traditionally & Alternatively Certified SBAE Teachers by Career Stage

Career Stage	Traditionally Certified		Alternatively Certified	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Survival (1-3 years)	2.87	0.29	2.78	0.28
Renewal (4-8 years)	2.89	0.31	2.94	0.38
Late Phase (9-17 years)	2.96	0.31	2.87	0.33
Wind Down (18+ years)	2.86	0.50	3.04	0.48

Note: Construct variable scale, 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

Conclusions/Recommendations/Impacts

Our study reveals that SBAE teachers' turnover intentions are intricately linked to their career stage and certification path, resonating with Fessler and Christensen's (1992) model, intertwining teachers' professional development with personal and organizational influences. It is recommended that targeted retention strategies be implemented to address the specific needs and concerns of teachers at different career stages. For early career teachers, the focus should be on providing support systems and professional development opportunities that help them transition effectively into the profession. In contrast, for more experienced teachers, particularly those in the Wind down phase, the strategies should include recognition of their contributions, opportunities for career advancement, and flexible work arrangements. Tailoring retention efforts in this manner acknowledges the evolving professional development needs of SBAE teachers and fosters a more supportive teaching environment, potentially reducing turnover in the long term.

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