

Intent to Implement CASE Curriculum: Participant Perspectives

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Introduction

Teachers are the greatest value add to a student's future success (Chetty et al., 2014), but quality support in the form of curriculum, resources, professional development, and communities within the profession is essential for supporting teachers in their practice as effective teachers (Eck et al., 2019). Just as high-quality educational standards support the value of courses, providing equity for all learners (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Ravitch, 1995), high-quality curriculum and resources support effective classroom instruction for all learners (Mercier, 2015). Phipps et al. (2008) defined curriculum as activities, experiences, and sequenced coursework that are outlined by educational program standards. Quality curriculum is essential for supporting effective teaching, but not all curriculum sources are able to meet the teachers' needs and support their practice (Brown, 2009). Some resources are aligned with specific content or skill areas but are incomplete, while others offer complete and prescriptive content and scripts, leading materials to feel rigid (Brown, 2009). Others are developed to be educative resources designed to support and develop teacher's self-efficacy through the implementation of curriculum as well as increase the gains of students receiving the instruction (Davis et al., 2017).

These differences in curriculum resources make it essential for school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers to connect with the curriculum resources that align with their personal and professional needs (i.e., experience, career tenure, and preferred teaching style), as well as their programmatic needs (Brown, 2009; Moser & McKim, 2021). Previous recommendations surrounding SBAE curriculum research (Barrick et al., 2018; Mercier, 2015), have demonstrated the continued need to better understand, a) what is valued by SBAE teachers in a curriculum resource, b) how SBAE teachers evaluate curriculum resources, and c) what factors impact the modifications and implementation of those resources by teachers. The purpose of this study was to determine SBAE teachers' drive to participate in CASE AFNR professional development and their intentions related to integrating the curriculum in their programs.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Self-determination theory (SDT) describes the physiological needs of individuals as autonomy, competency, and belonging, which can drive individuals' motivation to continue their personal and professional growth by satisfying their needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Contrastingly, when individuals' psychological needs for autonomy, competency, and relatedness are not met, the lack of support results in the reduction of capacity, alienation, and the individual's ill-being, impacting their wellness and ability to cope with stress (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The SDT framework allows for the alignment of participants experiences to the three psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competency, and relatedness) to understand the motivational satisfaction or frustration as a result of CASE AFNR professional development and curriculum training (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Methods

This study evaluated the impact of a week-long in-person CASE AFNR institute on SBAE teacher participants ($N = 23$). Participants are limited to those who enrolled in the CASE AFNR institute but included first year teachers to those with over 20 years of SBAE experience. Thirteen states were represented by the participants, of which the majority were female ($n = 18$). Data were collected using two questionnaires, which asked open-ended questions to allow participants to explain their interest in CASE training and their intentions related to the implementation of the curriculum. The first questionnaire was distributed prior to the institute,

and the second was distributed two weeks after the institute. All 23 participants responded to the first questionnaire, and 21 of the 23 responded to the follow-up questionnaire. Written responses were evaluated using the constant comparative method to share the participants voice in answering the proposed research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Findings

SBAE teachers identified the CASE institute as an opportunity “to learn great curriculum and collaborate with other educators from across the country” prior to the in-person institute. They hoped the institute would provide “the necessary knowledge and skills to implement CASE” while “explaining the practical application of the curriculum” and “best practices for implementation.” The week after the in-person institute participants expressed the value of “the hands-on learning”, “added rigor to ag classes”, and the “creative teaching strategies.” Participants overarchingly agreed that the CASE curriculum will help them to be better prepared, ultimately “helping with work-life balance.” In addition to the personal benefits for the teachers, it was communicated that “our students will benefit, especially considering the engaging content and challenging activities.” Three to four weeks into the 2023-2024 school year, CASE participants completed an electronic questionnaire to further consider the value of the in-person institute, which all reported the training being helpful or very helpful. Concluding that “CASE training left me feeling confident in my abilities to teach agriculture and implement the curriculum.” Others commented that the impact was even greater for them as they started a new program and transitioned into the ag classroom as an alternatively certified teacher. Participating teachers reported the most beneficial components of the CASE institute were the weeklong in-person training, the expansion of their professional network with other SBAE teachers and university faculty, and the access to a regularly updated curriculum via MyCASE. While many positives were shared, teachers were concerned with the cost associated with CASE implementation, the time associated with set-up and clean-up of labs, and realistic expectations for completing the curriculum in a school year. Sixty-three percent of participants reported that participation in the CASE institute and the curriculum access as having a positive impact on their SBAE career intentions (i.e., they plan to remain in the profession longer).

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

SBAE teachers' reflections on their CASE AFNR institute were, at large, a positive experience aligning with the goals of an educative curriculum to develop teacher’s self-efficacy regardless of previous experience, training, and skills (Brown, 2009; Moser & McKim, 2021). Effectively satisfying SBAE teacher's basic needs for competency and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Competency is expressed in statements related to “creative teaching strategies,” “best practices for implementation,” and “feeling confident in my ability to teach,” representing the level of efficacy SBAE teachers have as a result of the CASE AFNR institutes. Relatedness was positively reflected in statements regarding “...collaborate with other educators,” depicting SBAE teachers value toward the expansion of their professional network (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy was reflected as an area of potential limitation found in statements when considering the curriculum timeline, costs, and preparation needed to facilitate labs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Future research should further investigate CASE institutes and curricula to better understand its implications as an educative curriculum and the role it plays in teacher autonomy.

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