An Analysis of Time Spent in Activities During Student Teaching Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

Agricultural education relies heavily on the student teaching experience to prepare preservice teachers for their future careers (Coleman, et al., 2021; Gates, 2018). During this time, the goal is to expose the student teacher to a variety of experiences in each of the circles of the three-circle model of agricultural education (Schreurs, 2020). Time spent in activities can increase not only the level of experience of preservice teacher but also increase their efficacy (Putman, 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way many processes operate, including education (Salleh, et al., 2022). More than ever before, schools have had to shift resources including time and staff to manage the consequences of the pandemic. Research has yet to explore if this shift has impacted the opportunities available and time spent in activities by preservice teachers during student teaching in the years succeeding the pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this investigation was shaped by Bandura's (1997) Model of Sources of Efficacy Information which found individuals are more likely to achieve success when they possess confidence in their abilities. Confidence is cultivated through varied experiences and correlates with enhanced performance (Bandura, 1994). Within his model, Bandura (1977) delineated four key sources of efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Two types of experiences that directly impact preservice teachers engaging in their field experience are performance and vicarious experiences. Performance accomplishments arise from personal experiences and significantly impact one's self-assurance in task performance. Vicarious experiences, acquired through both live and symbolic modeling, allow individuals to formulate expectations based on their past encounters and those of others.

Methodology

This study aimed to explore if the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the opportunities and time spent in agricultural education activities for student teachers succeeding the pandemic. This study was guided by the following research question: When comparing 2017-2019 preservice teachers (pre-pandemic) to 2021-2023 preservice teachers (during the pandemic), what differences occurred in the time spent engaged in student teaching activities? This descriptive study employed a survey design that required student teachers (N= 105) at Texas Tech University to log their daily time spent in activities during their student teaching practicum. Preservice teachers utilized a Qualtrics instrument to self-report their time spent and results were compiled on a spreadsheet. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each activity. Preservice teachers in the 2017-2019 teaching blocks (n= 58) completed a 15-week experience and the 2021-2023 student teaching cohorts (n= 47) completed a 17-week experience.

Results/Findings

Table 1 outlines the average hours spent in activities related to student teaching by preservice teacher cohorts prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (the 2017-2019 cohorts) and during the pandemic (the 2021-2023 cohorts). The largest discrepancies occurred in the time spent engaging in the following activities: preparation for instruction (*M*=82.66, *SD*= 51.70; *M*= 108.59, *SD*= 42.01), classroom/laboratory teaching (*M*=188.49, *SD*= 69.21; *M*= 213.71, *SD*= 82.74), and CDE preparation (*M*=63.92, *SD*= 50.81; *M*= 89.94, *SD*= 65.17). Overall, the 2021-2023 cohorts spent more time engaged in activities (*M*=836.75, *SD*= 210.99) than the 2017-2019 cohorts (*M*=803.54, *SD*= 167.71).

Table 1

A Comparison of the Average Hours Spent Student Teaching Between the 2017-2019 and 2021-2023 Cohorts (N=105)

Time Category	2017-2019 Cohorts (n =58)		2021-2023 Cohorts (n =47)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Observing Coop. Teacher	79.15	54.06	66.06	49.11
Conference with Coop. Teacher	37.90	26.90	27.51	12.85
Preparation for Instruction	82.66	51.70	108.59	42.01
Classroom/Laboratory Teaching	188.49	69.21	213.71	82.74
Laboratory Prep/ Maintenance	22.02	23.89	14.22	8.19
Grading/Scoring Students' Work	33.42	20.75	31.75	14.20
Administrative Duties	10.33	19.70	5.20	12.18
Professional Activities	13.31	12.13	19.59	30.95
SAE Observations and Shows	141.33	125.56	149.49	152.91
Local FFA Activities	41.91	46.31	28.02	39.82
District, Area, State FFA Act.	80.43	75.50	61.06	78.58
CDE Preparation	63.92	50.81	89.94	65.17
Adult Education	8.67	22.41	18.63	32.12
Total Student Teaching Hours	803.54	167.71	836.75	210.99

Conclusions/ Discussions/ Implications

The results of this study found overall the time spent in student teaching activities was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as only six of the reported 13 activities decreased for the cohorts succeeding the pandemic. This aligns with Salleh, et al., 2022, who found that the pandemic impacted the use of time and resources within schools. Even though time spent in activities was influenced, overall, time increased post the pandemic for categories such as preparation for instruction, classroom/laboratory teaching, and CDE preparation. This increase could lead to performance and vicarious experiences which could increase student teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Differences found between time spent could also be influenced by the increased length of the student teaching experience for the 2021-2023 cohorts. Based on these results, university supervisors need to capitalize on opportunities to increase engagement with activities that decreased during the pandemic, such as local FFA activities and district, area, and state FFA activities. Further research should employ qualitative methods to delve deeper into the experiences of student teachers during the pandemic, particularly regarding the activities that increased or decreased in time. Understanding the underlying reasons for these shifts could inform strategies for future teacher education programs.

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