Who Teaches and Why? Analyzing Why Individuals Choose to Pursue a Career Teaching Secondary Agricultural Education

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Introduction

Implementing agricultural education in the secondary school setting is becoming increasingly crucial as our society and environment continue to grow and change rapidly. Agricultural education courses provide hands-on experiences that meet the demands for cross-curricular programming and the needs of students in non-traditional settings (Dailey et al., 2001). Secondary agricultural education teachers are a significant piece of this puzzle as they will be tasked with educating future generations on how to use their resources efficiently and effectively. Agricultural education is an essential part of our society, yet there is a lack of individuals who choose to teach and educate the public about the subject. So, what drives individuals to pursue a career teaching secondary agricultural education? The purpose of this study was to determine why individuals choose to pursue a career teaching secondary agricultural education by analyzing factors that influence an individual's choice to enter the agriculture teaching profession. This study focused on current secondary agricultural education teachers in Texas.

Theoretical Framework

The expectancy-value theory, developed by Jacobs and Eccles (1983), was utilized to guide this study. The expectancy-value theory suggests that achievement-related choices are influenced by two main factors: an individual's expectations for success and subjective task value (Leaper, 2011). According to Eccles et al. (1983), values, ability beliefs and expected success are all factors that contribute to an individual's motivation to make certain academic choices or perform certain behaviors.

Methods/Procedures

The study was administered via an online questionnaire which consisted of a descriptive survey. The survey aimed to gather information about factors influencing individuals to pursue a career teaching secondary agricultural education. The population used in this study consisted of secondary agricultural education teachers in Texas. The accessible population of secondary agricultural education teachers in this study was 2,518. This was the number of contacts listed in the online agricultural education teacher directory utilized for this study. Thus, the sample size used for this study was 333 individuals, based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) recommendations. The survey instrument used in this study was adapted and developed from a review of relevant literature and the Ag Ed FIT-Choice scale developed by Lawver (2009). The instrument was split into different sections and asked about demographics, decision to teach, attitude toward teaching, beliefs about teaching and career satisfaction. Dillman's et al. (2008) web survey implementation process was followed during the data collection process, which included using the three-email contact strategy. Data were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Science Version 28 (SPSS). There were 333 individuals who received the survey, of which 124 individuals started the survey, but only 116 individuals fully completed it, which resulted in a response rate of 34.83%.

Findings/Results

The data describes the level of agreement participants had with factors influencing their decision to teach agricultural education. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements related to their decision to become an agricultural education teacher. A five-point Likert-type scale was utilized for participants to rate their level of agreement/disagreement.

Eight items regarding the participants decision to become a secondary agricultural science teacher fell into the category of agree, which included: "passion" ($M = 4.60$; $SD = 0.66$);

"personal experiences" (*M* = 4.48; *SD* = 0.79); "happy with decision" (*M* = 4.46; *SD* = 0.74); "satisfied with decision" (*M* = 4.36; *SD* = 0.79); "past teachers" (*M* = 4.36; *SD* = 0.89); "carefully thought about decision" (*M* = 4.11, *SD* = 0.87); "personal qualities" (*M* = 4.10; *SD* = 0.81). Seven items regarding the participants decision to become a secondary agricultural science teacher fell into the category of neither agree nor disagree, which included: "pursing other careers" (*M* = 3.79; *SD* = 1.03); "student teaching experience" (*M* = 3.73; *SD* = 1.05); 'teaching abilities" (*M* = 3.70; *SD* = 0.97); "cooperating teacher" (*M* = 3.63; *SD* = 1.10); "job security" (*M* = 3.36; *SD* = 1.10) "others opinions" (*M* = 3.03; *SD* = 1.11); and "family" (*M* = 3.00; *SD* 1.21). Nine items regarding the participants decision to become a secondary agricultural science teacher fell into the category of disagree, which included: "parents' opinion" (*M* = 2.99; *SD* = 1.25); "job location" (*M* = 2.94; *SD* = 1.14); "public perception" (*M* = 2.90; *SD* = 1.12); "job benefits" (*M* = 2.84; *SD* = 1.19); "friends opinions" (*M* = 2.79; *SD* = 1.13); " work hours" (*M* = 2.50; *SD* = 1.03); "children" (*M* = 2.46; *SD* = 1.03); "income" (*M* = 2.38; *SD* = 0.99); and "spouse" (*M* = 2.36; *SD* = 1.01). No statements regarding the participants decision to become a secondary agricultural science teacher fell into the category of strongly disagree.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The findings from this study challenge the suggestion that hours worked by student teachers make an impact on their decision to teach Fives et al. (2007). This brings forth the recommendation that student teachers and young teachers in their first years of teaching should be involved in as much as they possibly can, regardless of the number of hours that would be demanded. From this data, it can be concluded that the student teaching experience plays an important role in the decision to teach. In addition to student teaching, it was apparent that cooperating teachers can have an influence on their student teacher's choice to teach. Cooperating teachers must understand and realize the influence/ impact, whether it be positive or negative, they can have on their student teacher's decision to become a teacher. This supports Kasperbauer and Roberts (2007) who concluded the student-teachers relationship with their cooperating teacher is essential to positive field experiences. Personal experiences were also an area that many of the participants felt as though influenced their decision to teach. The researcher recommends that further analysis be conducted on the participant's personal experiences, what those experiences entail, and how they influenced their decision to teach. Perhaps one of the most interesting results was in relation to income. More than half of the participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that income influenced their decision to teach. Job security was identified as a major factor influencing the participant's decision to teach. Agricultural education teacher preparation programs need to make it a point to discuss and use this as a selling point when recruiting potential students into their programs and the profession. Many of the participants noted their personal qualities influenced their decision to teach.

One recommendation is for agricultural education teacher preparation programs to look into different ways they can better recruit students into the programs and advocate for the job. How could the findings of this study regarding the participant's decision to teach be highlighted to help in this recruitment process of younger generations? A second recommendation is to analyze the public's perception of being a secondary agricultural education teacher. This recommendation is suggested due to the finding that individuals are still being encouraged to pursue careers other than teaching agricultural education.

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