

**Understanding Entry and Retention Using FIT Choice: Motivational Factors Among New
Agriculture Teachers in Florida**

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Introduction

School-based agricultural education (SBAE) in Florida faces a teacher retention crisis. Lambert (2006) estimates that the number of new teachers who leave the classroom each year is around 50%. While this number describes all classroom teachers, SBAE is not immune to teachers leaving for other careers. It is noted that approximately 6.3% of SBAE teachers leave the classroom each year (Kantrovich, 2010). There are currently 545 agriculture teachers in 383 programs across the State. Currently, in Florida, teachers range from zero years of experience to more than 50 years.

Teachers have identified similar reasons for choosing teaching in the last five decades (Watt et al. 2012). Motivations include working with children and adolescents, making a social contribution, making a difference, job security, job benefits, enjoyment of teaching, compatibility with family life, and self-education (McKenzie & Santiago, 2005).

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The Factors Influencing Teaching Choice scale (FIT-Choice) was the theoretical framework used for this study. The FIT-Choice scale was created to determine the motivations behind why teachers in the profession teach. It predicts positive and negative career outcomes relating to teacher satisfaction. There are nine top identified intrinsic motivations for teaching: working with children and adolescents, making a social contribution, making a difference, job security, job benefits, enjoyment of teaching, compatibility with other interests and activities, compatibility with family life, and self-education (McKenzie & Santiago, 2005). Extrinsic motivations that are more impactful include salary, job security, and career status. The FIT-Choice was based on the expectancy-value motivational theory, which offers a motivational framework (Watt & Richardson, 2007).

Social utility value factors relate to "pleasing the masses" or benefitting most of the population. Social utility factors stem from prior positive teaching or teacher experiences. Personal utility value factors align more with life practices than teaching. These factors include more time with family, secure income, and opportunities to travel. These are seen to have a higher impact on career outcomes than those that fall in line with the teaching profession. Each year, teachers gain new expectations and responsibilities within the school environment that can affect their decision to continue teaching year to year. These responsibilities and expectations come from school boards, parents, and community members. The expectations are no longer just to teach the students but include so much more that many teachers are not contracted to complete. Many of these align with social/environmental factors that affect an educator's teaching motivation (Bandura, 1986).

For educators with prior teaching experience in other districts or states, administrators play a role in how long educators stay or if they continue teaching at all. Administrator behavior is directly connected to teacher behavior and motivations (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). In this profession, many educators have a fallback career affected more by salary than job stability in their State.

Methodology

Currently, Florida has 545 agriscience teachers. The target sample for this study was all agriscience teachers ($N = 272$) registered for the Chapter Officer Leadership Training (COLT) Conferences in Florida. Four of the six areas host individual COLT Conferences, with the

remaining two co-hosting. Therefore, data were collected at five different conferences throughout the State. Data were collected using a hard-copy questionnaire during each conference location's face-to-face teacher professional development session. As a result, 156 teachers completed and returned the questionnaire for a 57% response rate. The agriscience teacher respondents in this study were majority white ($f = 143$; 91.7%), female ($f = 114$; 73.1%), held a bachelor's degree ($f = 114$; 73.1%), and taught an average of 6.15 years ($SD = 8.95$; Min. = 1; Max. = 37). Regarding teaching career length, 73 (46.7%) had been teaching five years or less.

Data for this study were collected using the FIT-Choice® scale developed and validated by Richardson and Watt (2006) and Watt and Richardson (2007). The FIT-Choice® scale is an instrument that measures the factors that influence individuals' decision to become a teacher and, for this study, an agriculture teacher (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Nine items were used to measure teachers' perception of teaching ability; the FIT-Choice® scale also consists of four constructs: personal utility value (11 items), social utility value (18 items), task demand (six items), and task return (eight items).

Findings

Table 1 reports the overall mean scores for new teacher participants along with standard deviations. The highest reported motivation of teachers for choosing to teach is prior teaching and learning experiences and make a social contribution. The perceptions with the highest reported score were high demand and satisfaction with choice.

Table 1

Mean Scores of FIT Choice Scale for Teachers with 1-5 Years Experience

Motivations	Mean	SD	Perceptions	Mean	SD
Prior Teaching and Learning Experiences	6.15	1.25	High Demand	6.56	0.65
Make A Social Contribution	5.85	1.06	Satisfaction With Choice	5.60	1.20
Bludging (easy job)	3.26	1.39	Teacher Morale	3.61	1.04
Fallback Career	2.45	1.23	Good Salary	2.28	1.25

Conclusions

This exploratory study has provided detailed insights into the motivations behind the career choices of agriculture teachers with five or fewer years of experience. The findings reveal that "Prior Teaching & Learning Experiences" emerge as the predominant factor influencing these SBAE teachers' decisions to enter and persist in the teaching profession. Additionally, while other motivation categories like personal values and professional aspirations also ranked highly, the "Fallback Career" option was notably less influential, suggesting a genuine commitment among participants to the field of agricultural education.

Recommendations/Implications

This research contributes to our understanding of the factors that encourage entry into and retention within the teaching profession in School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE), offering valuable insights for curriculum developers, policy makers, and educational trainers aimed at enhancing teacher recruitment and retention strategies. Future research should explore the longitudinal impact of these motivations and how they evolve with increased teaching experience.

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