

**Investigating Identity and the Integration of Female Teachers in the School-Based
Agricultural Education Profession**

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Introduction/Need for Research

Professional identity is central to a teacher's sense of belonging, identification, and dedication to their role. It includes their understanding of duties, beliefs about teaching, and emotional ties to the profession, leading to higher job satisfaction and engagement in professional development (Beijaard et al., 2000). In agricultural education, strong professional identities correlate with greater teaching commitment (Knobloch & Whittington, 2003). Despite this, teacher attrition remains a significant issue, especially among female educators, due to gender-specific challenges that undermine their self-efficacy and professional longevity (Foster et al., 2023; Shoulders, 2018). Thus, enhancing support for female SBAE educators, who make up 54% of the profession and have lower retention rates, is imperative to boost the profession's appeal and sustainability (Shoulders & Myers, 2011).

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Female agriculture teachers' professional identities are influenced by both classroom and external experiences (Shoulders, 2018). Bandura (1997) highlights self-efficacy as a key component of professional identity, affecting teachers' views on their own competence and commitment (Ashton & Webb, 1986). High self-efficacy promotes professional pride and is vital for career satisfaction and longevity (McKim & Velez, 2015). However, female teachers face gender-specific challenges like biases, external commitments, and a lack of role models, adversely impacting their self-efficacy (Shoulders & Myers, 2011). These challenges necessitate higher competence and resilience, complicating their professional identity. Addressing these barriers through tailored interventions can enhance female teachers' success, reduce turnover, and contribute to the sustainability of the SBAE profession.

Methodology

This study aimed to describe the professional identities of female SBAE teachers and their integration into the SBAE profession. 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. Cluster sampling was employed to determine participation, categorizing teachers by NAAE region. Then, random sampling was used to select states or a series of states within each 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. Before administering, the instrument was piloted with SBAE teachers in three states ($n = 74$), yielding a Cronbach alpha value of .80. The survey instrument for this analysis consisted of thirteen statements adapted from Starr et al. (2006), assessing the professional identities of SBAE teachers. Participants ranked each statement using a five-point Likert-type scale. As part of a larger study, 398 teachers participated, yielding a 16.6% response rate. From the survey, 58.4% of teachers identified as female.

Results/Findings

Our study revealed that female SBAE teachers generally view their professional identities favorably. They rated the following statements highest: (1) I see myself as a teacher; (2) It is important to me to develop my teaching skills; and (3) I would miss teaching if I stopped doing it. In contrast, the statements receiving the lowest ratings were: (1) I know very few agriculture

teachers in the profession; (2) I feel that my building/district administration support my efforts as an agriculture teacher; and (3) It is important for me to work in the teaching profession. Compared to their male counterparts, female SBAE teachers stated that they feel less skilled and have developed fewer personal relationships with other agriculture teachers. Still, they talk with colleagues about teaching more frequently.

Table 1

Self-Assessment of Professional Identity among SBAE Teachers by Gender

	Male		Female	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
It is important for me to develop my teaching skills	4.33	.700	4.43	.591
I see myself as a teacher	4.45	.702	4.44	.694
I would miss teaching if I stopped doing it	4.25	.824	4.29	.689
Students and colleagues view me as an effective teacher	4.21	.728	4.09	.756
I feel skilled as a teacher	4.24	.811	3.95	.915
I belong to a community of teachers	4.24	.833	4.15	.930
I frequently talk to colleagues about teaching	3.83	.941	4.01	.827
I feel that state staff support my efforts as an agriculture teacher	4.09	.936	4.06	.947
I feel that my building/district administration support my efforts as an agriculture teacher	3.75	1.23	3.74	1.11
It is important for me to work in the teaching profession	3.88	.958	3.81	.940
I know very few agriculture teachers in the profession	1.83	1.04	1.95	1.13
I have developed personal relationships with other agriculture teachers in the profession	4.32	.841	4.15	.966
I have developed personal relationships with other teachers in the profession	4.10	.908	4.05	.927

Note: Male (*n* = 165), Female (*n* = 232)

Conclusions/Recommendations/Impacts

The study on professional identity among SBAE teachers reveals distinct gender-based differences in how female teachers perceive and engage in their roles within agricultural education. Female teachers are more committed to developing teaching skills and view themselves as effective educators more frequently than their male counterparts. They are also actively involved in professional discussions, indicating strong community integration. However, they perceive less effectiveness as viewed by students and colleagues and report lower support from state and district administration. These insights suggest areas where female teachers may feel less integrated or supported.

The findings underscore the importance of creating targeted support systems and professional networks that cater to female SBAE teachers' unique challenges. Future research should explore administrative support that can boost female teachers' efficacy and sense of belonging, such as mentoring, tailored professional development, and initiatives to increase visibility and recognition in the field. Additionally, further examination of the personal and professional relationships female teachers develop is crucial. This research could provide strategies to enhance their professional identity and commitment to the profession, offering a broader understanding of gender dynamics in SBAE.

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