

Agricultural Education Teacher Priority Differences Among Early-, Mid-, and Late-Career Teachers and Among Traditionally and Alternatively Certified Teachers.

Introduction/Relevant Literature

According to the National Agricultural Education Supply & Demand Study (Foster et al., 2021) there is a teacher shortage nationwide in the field of Agricultural Education. The first five years of an agriculture teacher's career are crucial to the future of the profession. In those five years, the trend is that teachers decided to either leave or continue in the profession for years to come (Hughes et al., 2020). In a study by Johnson et al. (1998), 1st and 2nd-year agriculture teachers had similar responses to experienced agriculture teachers, indicating that the use of time is related to why teachers leave the profession.

During the 2022-2023 school year, out of 37,885 teachers, it was estimated that the minimum number of teachers not completely certified for their teaching assignments was 1,578 (Tan et al., 2024). In a study comparing traditional and alternative certified teachers, evidence suggests that an increase in organized support programs (mentoring programs) for new teachers is likely to reduce the rate of turnover (Redding & Smith, 2016). However, they also said traditional certified teachers are less likely to leave the profession compared to alternative certified teachers. This information is relevant for further research, as approximately 18% of teachers enter the profession as alternative certified teachers, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022).

To quote Banks (2012), “Understanding personal priorities and goals associated with the specific dimensions of our life is integral to the development of sustainable scholarly trajectories (p.354).” While teachers have many tasks and items that demand their attention, they must be prioritized in some form. According to Rabinowitz (n.d.), priorities are determined by ordering things from high importance to low in relation to one another. Priorities may adjust with changes to the community or with changes to one’s concerns and knowledge. Evans (1996) stated that teachers’ priorities reflect their exposure to training, the school’s climate, and or the school’s administrative focus. By determining priorities among early-career and alternative certified agricultural education teachers, mentoring programs can tailor their teaching to the group's needs.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study was grounded in the adaptation of Super’s Career Development Theory (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). This theory reinforces the idea that career choices are the culmination of many continuously changing factors instead of a singular or linear decision. Super’s theory revolves around five main stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). This resonates well when compared to the recurring categories of early, mid-, and late-career teachers used throughout this study. Growth & Exploration = Early-career teachers, Establishment & Maintenance = Mid-career teachers, Maintenance & Disengagement = Late-career teachers.

Purpose and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine the priority differences and similarities among early, mid-, and late-career Kansas Agricultural Education middle school and high school teachers. Additionally, it determined the priority differences and similarities between traditional and alternatively certified Agricultural Education middle school and high school teachers.

Objectives

1. Identify top priorities in early-, mid-, and late-career middle school and high school agricultural education teachers.
2. Determine priority differences and similarities of early, mid-, and late-career middle school and high school agricultural education teachers.
3. Identify top priorities in traditional and alternative middle school and high school-certified agricultural education teachers.
4. Determine priority differences and similarities between traditional and alternative middle school and high school-certified agricultural education teachers.

Methodology

For this quantitative research design, the priority instrument (Ulmer et al., 2009) was distributed to 41 Kansas Agricultural Education teachers who were present at the Ag Ed Winter Symposium Priorities workshop presented by Emma Lehmann and Dr. Jonathan Ulmer. The population of this study included all Agricultural Education teachers and Agricultural Education Student Interns, which totaled 281 individuals. There are 265 teachers, with 16 individuals serving as student teachers. It is important to note that both traditionally certified and alternative certified teachers are counted in the 265 teachers. Of this, 41 teachers and/or interns completed the instrument, with 40 individuals allowing their responses to be used for this study. The participation rate was 14.23%. Of those in attendance for the data collection process, there was a response rate of 97.56%.

A paper priorities instrument that contained the 32 items was dispersed to all attendees. Additionally, 64 candy markers were given to those in attendance along with a writing utensil. The scale of the instrument is 0-4, with 0 serving as no priority, 1 meaning little priority, and 4 meaning most important priority. Once individuals placed all markers they were told to use their writing utensil and place an "X" in the box of highest priority for each item. For example, if an individual placed 3 candy markers next to an item, they would put an "X" in the 3-box. If the item had no priority, they would put an "X" in the 0-box.

According to Bradford (2016), Creswell (2012) defines validity as the level at which a response exposes the intended interpretation of the question's purpose. A panel of experts (n=5) reviewed the instrument for face and content validity. Goode and Steward (1981) established the reliability of the instrument with a test-retest reliability coefficient of .94. With only minor changes to the instrument, such as Vocational Agriculture being changed to Agricultural Education, it was determined that the original reliability remained applicable. The instrument consists of 32 items related to the personal and professional life of

agricultural education teachers. Each activity has a 0-4 rating scale, with 0 indicating no priority, 1 being the lowest priority, and 4 indicating the highest priority.

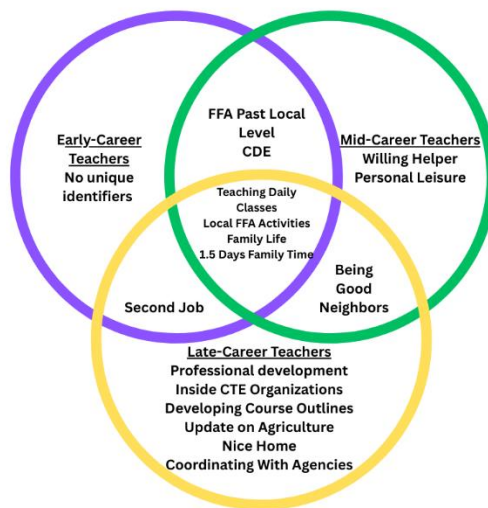
Results

Collected data shows that a majority of early career teachers (n=24) find the following items as the highest priority (level 4) or as a high priority (level 3): teaching local daily classes (n=21, 87.5%); FFA local activities (n=15, 62.5%); FFA activities past the local level (n=12, 50.0%); CDEs (n=16, 66.7%); family life (n=18, 75.0%), spending one-and-a-half days of family time (n=16, 66.7%), and having a second job or means of employment (n=13, 54.2%).

Comparing mid-career teachers (n=9) a majority of them stated that the following items were a level 4 or 3 of priority importance: teaching local daily classes (n=6, 66.7%); local FFA activities (n=6, 66.7%); FFA activities past the local level (n=8, 88.9%); CDEs (n=5, 55.6%); being a willing helper (n=5, 55.6%); being a good neighbor (n=7, 77.8%); personal leisure time (n=5, 55.6%); family life (n=6, 66.7%); and spending one-and-a-half days of family time (n=5, 55.6%).

As for late-career teachers (n=6) a majority reported that levels of most importance and high importance (level 4 or 3) priorities included teaching local daily classes (n=6, 100.0%); local FFA activities (n=5, 83.3%); inside CTE organizations (n=3, 50.0%); professional development (n=4, 66.7%); keeping up to date about agriculture (n=3, 50.0%); coordinating with agencies (n=3, 50.0%); developing course outlines (n=4, 66.7%); being a good neighbor (n=3, 50.0%); having a nice home (n=3, 50.0%); family life (n=4, 66.7%); spending one-and-a-half days with family (n=4, 66.7%); and having a second job or means of employment (n=3, 50.0%).

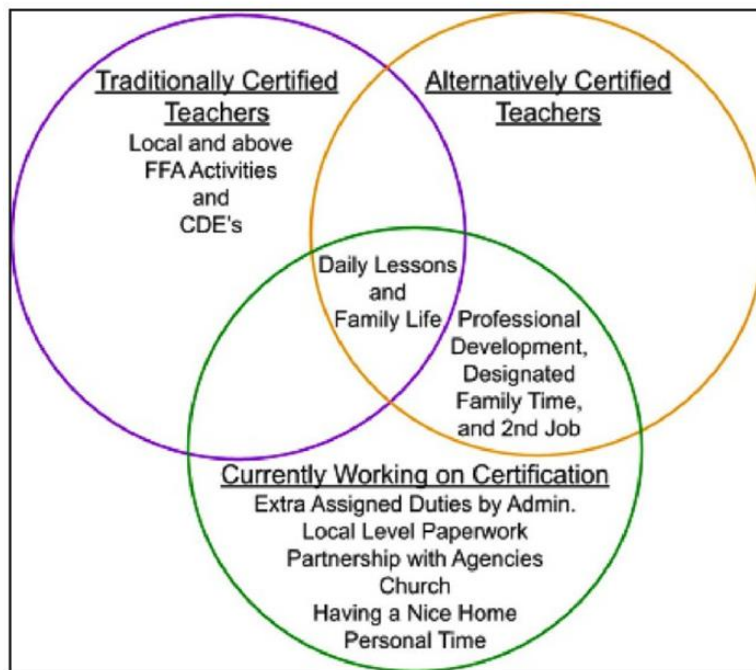
Figure 3.1 Top Priorities of Early-, Mid-, and Late-Career Teachers.



Evaluating the most important (level 4) and high importance (level 3) priorities in traditionally certified teachers (n=32) that list the following: teaching local daily classes (n=28, 87.5%); local FFA activities (n=22, 68.8%); FFA activities past the local level (n=21, 65.6%), CDEs (n=20, 62.5%); personal leisure time (n=16, 50.0%); family life (n=21, 65.6%); and spending one-and-a-half days with family (n=19, 59.4%).

Data shows that alternatively certified teachers (n=7) assigned level 4 or 3 priority to teaching daily lessons (n=5, 71.4%); local FFA activities (n=4, 57.1%); professional development (n=5, 71.4%); keeping up to date about agriculture (n=4, 57.1%); family life (n=6, 85.7%); spending one-and-a-half days with family (n=6, 85.7%); and having a second job or means of employment (n=5, 71.4%).

Figure 4.1 Top Priorities of Traditionally and Alternately, Certified Teachers and Currently Working on Certification Teachers.



Overall, the trend in the reported data shows early career teachers placing a level of 4 or 3 priority on seven items and a level of 2 or 1 priority on 23 items. Whereas mid-career teachers place nine items in a level 4 or 3 category and 19 items in a level 2 or 1. Furthering this trend, late-career teachers place a level 4 or 3 priority on 12 items and a level 2 or 1 priority on 15 items. This shows an increase in level 4 and 3 items as teachers advance in their career and a decrease in level 2 or 1 priorities.

Recommendations/Discussion/Conclusions/Implications

From the reported data, mentoring programs need to place a high amount of focus on daily lessons, FFA activities, CDE’s, and how to allocate time for family. It can be inferred that early-career teachers prioritize all items and tasks to some extent, so covering all areas of

agricultural education is necessary for their development. Due to high response rates though, topics such as field trips, projects at fairs, advisory council, SAE's and records, potential students visits, extra duties assigned by administration, paperwork, public relations, CTE organizations, professional development, agriculture issues, collaboration with agencies, course outlines, being a willing helper and a good neighbor, organized classrooms and filing systems, extracurricular activities, public service, and personal time should also be discussed as they respondents did place some level of priority on these items. Mentoring programs should also help early-career teachers identify the areas that require the highest level of priority to focus their effort.

Professional development programs, such as state Associations for Agricultural Educators, have a goal to help and support agricultural educators throughout their professional careers. However, these programs should be heavily focused on daily lessons, FFA activities, CDEs, being a willing helper and good neighbor, and allotting personal and family time should be designed for mid-career teachers. Focus should still be placed on field trips, FFA Alumni Associations, projects at fairs, Advisory Councils, SAEs and record, extra duties by administrations, paperwork, public relations, inside CTE organizations, professional development, agriculture issues, other agencies, course outline development, organization of classroom and filing system, and balancing a second job.

While late-career teachers may not need mentoring programs, they do value and want professional development opportunities. Professional development for late-career teachers need to focus on daily lessons, local FFA activities, inside Ag Ed CTE organizations, other professional development aspects, agriculture issues, coordination with other agencies, developing course outlines, being a good neighbor, and allocating time to have a nice home, be with family, and maintain a second job or means of employment.

Additionally, agricultural education programs at universities need to modify this study and administer it to their students at the beginning of the semester before student teaching. Then their final classes could be designed and modified in a way to better prepare students for student teaching and for their future teaching careers. In a recent study (Hepburn et al., 2021), early career teachers (ECTs) oftentimes feel unprepared, lack certainty, feel confused, and have self-doubt; this unsurprisingly leads to ECTs being more susceptible to work stress.

An assessment relating to how teachers determine their priorities should be conducted. Understanding the thought process behind one's decision allows for a better comprehension of teachers' reasoning for their priorities. It is recommended that a qualitative and quantitative study be conducted to determine the process of how priorities are determined within agriculture education teachers. Additionally, a study should also be conducted in comparing how female vs. male agriculture teachers prioritize things differently, as more male teachers leave the profession in comparison to female teachers (Parker, 2015). It is suggested to complete qualitative research on determining what a second job consists of regarding Agricultural Educators and more specifically how does it affect their priorities.

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