

Assessing Internship Performance: Differences in Ratings Between Cooperating Teachers and Student Interns at the University of Florida

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Introduction

Preservice preparation programs provide student teaching interns (ST) with 10–16 week internship experiences in a school-based agricultural education setting. These internships offer hands-on learning and skill development through lesson planning, student interaction, assessment design, reflection, and collaboration with a cooperating teacher (CT) (Coleman et al., 2021; Miller & Wilson, 2010; Reaves et al., 2023; Smalley et al., 2015; Thi Ngoc Ha & Dakich, 2022). CTs support intern growth by providing mentorship, guidance, resources, and constructive feedback through observation, all of which meaningfully strengthen interns' performance and long-term professional success (Coleman et al., 2021; Hendon et al., 2019; Miller & Wilson, 2010; Roberts, 2006; Smalley et al., 2015; Stephen & Whittington, 2010). STs and CTs should work collaboratively to identify areas where students need to grow.

Effective CTs are selected based on several factors, including years of experience and active engagement in all components of the agricultural education three-circle model. (Miller & Wilson, 2010). A trusting, productive CT and ST relationship is essential for internship success, as mentorship and guidance play a central role and often develop into long-term professional support (Coleman et al., 2021; Hendon et al., 2019; Smalley et al., 2015; Stephens & Whittington, 2010). CTs play a substantial role in shaping ST experiences and support ST development by evaluating their growth and contributing to their overall performance (Coleman et al., 2021; Hendon et al., 2019; Smalley et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to describe the comparison of the CT and ST scores on a bi-weekly teaching internship performance evaluation.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in self-regulated learning theory, which emphasizes learners being metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active in their own progress (Zimmerman, 1989). Because STs must stay self-motivated and engaged throughout their internships, self-regulatory skills are critical to their development (Ganda & Boruchovitch, 2018). The theory outlines three key stages—forethought, performance, and self-reflection—that STs must learn to apply (Zimmerman, 2002). In this study, a bi-weekly evaluation form based on the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices was used as part of the performance stage, helping each ST reflect on their progress and set new goals. Self-regulated learning is especially important for STs, as developing these skills enhances their learning behaviors and ultimately carries over into their future teaching, allowing them to model and pass on self-regulation to their own students (Ganda & Boruchovitch, 2018; Oates, 2019).

Methodology

This longitudinal study included all agricultural education STs at the University of Florida from 2021 to 2024, during which both students and CTs completed a bi-weekly evaluation form assessing the intern's performance from their respective perspectives. Previous studies confirmed the 25 items measure five latent constructs to evaluate the ST's performance. Individual items were selected to develop an index to measure said constructs (Kumar Chaudhary & Israel, 2015). The items measured five latent constructs: (a) instructional design (five items), (b) instructional practice (six items), (c) student-centered teaching (four items), (d), teacher professionalism (five items), and (e) reflective and autonomous (RA) practitioner (five items) (Coleman et al., 2021;

Reaves et al., 2023). This is a continuation and part of a bigger study that analyzed the validity of the instrument used (Waters et al., 2026).

Results/findings

The purpose of this study was to describe the comparison of the CT and ST scores on the bi-weekly teaching internship performance evaluation (Table 1). The construct means were calculated using SPSS.

Table 1

Construct means of performance scores during internship from CT and ST.

Weeks	Instructional Design	Instructional Practice	Student Centered Teaching	Teacher Professionalism	RA Practitioner
ST Data (CT Data)*					
3	2.81 (3.04)	3.01 (3.35)	3.00 (3.24)	3.40 (3.68)	3.59 (3.87)
5	3.14 (3.33)	3.41 (3.61)	3.35 (3.49)	3.74 (3.89)	3.82 (3.99)
7	3.44 (3.60)	3.60 (3.81)	3.55 (3.69)	3.93 (4.10)	3.96 (4.11)
9	3.62 (3.77)	3.84 (3.91)	3.65 (3.80)	4.08 (4.15)	4.02 (4.19)
11	3.76 (3.92)	3.92 (4.02)	3.82 (3.95)	4.12 (4.22)	4.12 (4.25)
13	3.97 (4.09)	4.05 (4.16)	3.98 (4.13)	4.15 (4.29)	4.26 (4.37)

Note. *Student teacher data is listed first and cooperating teacher data is in parentheses

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate consistent growth in student teachers' performance across all five constructs measured in the bi-weekly internship evaluation. Although CT scores start higher than ST scores, both sets of scores show a clear upward trend over the 14-week experience with no lower means reported overtime. A potential reason that the ST begins lower is due to self-efficacy being lower at the beginning stages (Zimmerman, 2002). These results reinforce the value of structured mentorship, ongoing feedback, and opportunities for self-regulated learning within agricultural education internships. As STs progressed through their placements, increased scores in instructional design, instructional practice, and student-centered teaching suggest meaningful development of core pedagogical skills. Changes in professionalism scores plateau at week seven for both CTs and STs, thus highlighting the continued need for intentional support in this area (Coleman et al., 2021; Hendon et al., 2019; Smalley et al., 2015; Stephens & Whittington, 2010).

To strengthen internship outcomes, preparation programs should provide CTs with targeted training on effective feedback, calibration of performance expectations, and strategies for fostering ST self-regulation. Additionally, programs should encourage regular CT–ST dialogue to align perceptions of performance and promote shared goal-setting. Future research should explore factors influencing discrepancies between CT and ST ratings, examine how self-regulated learning behaviors evolve across the internship, and continue validating the evaluation instrument to ensure it captures the full complexity of preservice teacher growth.

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