Florida School-Based Agricultural Education Teacher Professional Work–Life Management Needs Across Career Stages

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Introduction

Teacher well-being has become an increasing concern as expanding professional responsibilities contribute to burnout and challenges related to work–life management. Work–life balance refers to an individual's overall satisfaction with their ability to manage, organize, and prioritize professional and personal responsibilities in a way that minimizes role conflict and supports work productivity (Bisht et al., 2026; Franco et al., 2021; Aprilinda, 2020). Needs assessment research has consistently demonstrated moderate to high professional development needs among school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers, particularly in areas associated with managing stress, balancing professional and personal responsibilities, and managing time.

Across needs assessments of SBAE teachers, work–life balance has emerged as a recurring area of professional development need. Studies examining professional development needs have further reinforced wellness-related competencies as areas for support, highlighting the importance of addressing teacher well-being alongside instructional practices development (Estepp et al., 2014; Marsh et al. 2023). Career-phase differences have also been documented within the needs assessment literature, with research suggesting that early- and mid-career teachers being more likely to identify higher professional needs, whereas late-career teachers typically have an increased self-efficacy in comparison (Branscum et al., 2025; Thornton, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to assess Florida SBAE teachers' professional development needs related to work–life management, wellness, and burnout. The following research objective guided this work, describe work–life management and wellness professional needs of SBAE teachers across career stages (early-, mid-, and late-career).

Theoretical Frame

This study is framed within the context of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is defined as a person's belief in their capability to organize and execute the actions required to manage prospective situations and produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977). This current study applies the self-efficacy theory to SBAE teachers to compare work–life management and wellness professional needs across the career stages (early-, mid-, late-career). Self-efficacy is typically developed differently throughout the various career states of an educator (McKim & Velez, 2016; Solomonson et al., 2018; Thornton et el., 2020). When measuring agricultural education teachers' self-efficacy in work–life management, the Borich Needs Assessment Model enables teachers to evaluate each content area by comparing their perceived relevance with their perceived skill level (Borich, 1980).

Methodology

The target population for this study was all agriscience teachers who registered for Chapter Office Leadership Training (COLT) Conferences in Florida (N = 427). Data was collected face-to-face via a physical copy of the questionnaire at seven different points in time where COLT was hosted throughout the state. A total of 296 surveys were completed, after removing surveys with 20% or more missing data and surveys without years of experience listed, 263 cases remained for a 61.6% response rate. The questionnaire aimed to identify professional

development needs of Florida SBAE teachers consisting of six sections, including one on work–life management with 7 items. The questionnaire used was originally created by Roberts and Dyer (2004). The instrument was further modified by Saucier et al. (2010) and Branscum et al. (2025). Two Likert-type scales (1= Low; 5=High) for each item were provided to measure teacher perceived current skill level and perceived relevance to their job. Additionally, total years of teaching was asked and divided into three categories: early career (five years or fewer) (n = 95), mid-career (between six and 15 years) (n = 92), and late career (16 years of more) (n = 76). The data was analyzed using the ranked discrepancy model (RDS) which is an alternative to the Borich (1980) needs assessment model (Narine & Harder, 2021). Both Microsoft Excel and SPSS version 31 were used to analyze the data as prescribed by Narine and Harder (2021).

Findings

Ranked discrepancy scores (RDS) were calculated for the seven items associated with work–life management practices of SBAE teachers. Table 1 prioritizes each of the items based on RDS as ranked by the participants overall and further highlights where each item fell in RDS ranking across the three career stages. Overall, all seven items resulted in a negative RDS indicating self-efficacy is less than perceived importance, leading to additional training needs.

Table 1

Ranked Discrepancy Scores of Work-Life Management Practices Among Florida SBAE Teachers Across Career Stages (Early-, Mid-, and Late-Career) (n = 268)

Work-Life Management Practices	Overall RDS	Early-Career Ranking (RDS)	Mid-Career Ranking (RDS)	Late-Career Ranking (RDS)
Strategies for avoiding burnout	-74.52	3 (-75.79)	1 (-80.43)	1 (-65.79)
Managing stress	-72.24	1 (-76.84)	2 (-78.26)	5 (-59.21)
Managing time	-71.10	5 (-72.63)	3 (-76.09)	2 (-63.16)
Maintaining a healthy lifestyle	-71.10	1 (-76.84)	3 (-76.09)	6 (-57.89)
Juggling work and personal life responsibilities	-70.72	4 (-74.74)	5 (-73.91)	3 (-61.84)
Managing paperwork	-66.54	6 (-69.47)	6 (-67.39)	3 (-61.84)
Financial planning	-50.19	7 (-55.79)	7 (-48.91)	7 (-44.74)

Note: Ranked Discrepancy Scores (RDS) are presented on a -100 to 100 scale.

Conclusions, Discussion, Recommendations

Based on these results, there is a need for additional training for SBAE teachers related to work–life management. While we have not analyzed the data from the other five sections of the survey yet, these RDS values are higher than previous studies reporting the highest instructional needs of Oklahoma teachers at -24.316 RDS (Branscum et al., 2025), potentially indicating more need in the area of work–life management versus instructional practice. This data also aligns with previous literature indicating higher needs in all areas for early- and mid-career teachers versus the late-career teachers (Branscum et al., 2025; Thornton, 2020). More professional development should be provided for SBAE teachers around work–life management and further research could look at additional SBAE in-service and pre-service changes to aid work–life management tasks.

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