

**A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Structural Capital's Impact on Chronic
Teacher Turnover in Texas SBAE Programs**

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Introduction/Need for Research

Dating back to the mid-1930s, the United States has faced a shortage of secondary school teachers and for at least the past 15 years, there has been a shortage of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers within secondary school systems (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016; Smith et al., 2024). Potentially contributing to this issue is chronic teacher turnover. This occurs when schools consistently lose 31% of their teachers each year over a four-year period (Allensworth et al. 2009). According to literature large class sizes, salary, school systems, and contract disputes, all of which are considered structural capital, impacted teachers and their decision to leave a school or even the profession (Queen et al., 2025; Still & Solomonson, 2024; Vaidya & Hanna, 2023). The lack of effective structural capital is a problem within agricultural education that research has yet to explore. The purpose of this study was to identify and examine SBAE teacher experiences with structural capital at schools dealing with chronic teacher turnover. This study was guided by the following research question: How do SBAE teachers describe and interpret challenges related to structural and organizational practices and policies they experienced prior to leaving SBAE programs with chronic turnover?

Theoretical Framework

To frame this study, the four-capital model for teacher retention and recruitment was used (Mason & Matas, 2015). This model contains four capitals related to teacher retention and recruitment: human, social, structural, and positive psychological capital. As part of a larger study, this study focused solely on structural capital. Structural capital is defined as “everything left at the office after employees go home” (Mason & Matas, 2015). Overall, structural capital relates to district and state policies, pay, administrative expectations, and accessibility to various educational resources (Carnoy, 1995).

Methodology

This study utilized hermeneutic phenomenological methods guided by Van Manen's approach (2016). This allowed us to explore and interpret SBAE teachers' lived experiences with chronic teacher turnover in Texas secondary SBAE programs. Participants were identified if they left a SBAE program that lost 31% of the SBAE teachers consistently for four years. They were identified by a panel of experts including: two agricultural education professors, former executive director of the Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas and previous/current agricultural educators. Following IRB approval, seven participants agreed to be virtually interviewed using Microsoft Teams. Through semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to discuss their experiences as an SBAE teacher at their previous employment site. Interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai. and then an analysis of transcripts was conducted using an inductive thematic approach. In-vivo techniques were employed to preserve participants' exact language, which was then followed by pattern coding to identify various themes (Saldaña, 2013). To establish intercoder reliability, two coders independently analyzed the

transcripts. Confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability were used to address rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Tracy, 2010).

Results/Findings

Each participant shared how structural capital impacted their time at a campus dealing with chronic teacher turnover. Three themes were identified related to how structural capital affected their decision to leave the program: *perceived impacts*, *perceived barriers*, and *perceived limitations*. The first theme, *perceived impacts*, showed that the impacts were either *harmful*, *helpful*, or *non-existent*. Five participants described their experiences with structural capital as *harmful* due to employment hierarchy, excessive responsibilities, and difficult district policies. Participant 1 described their view of this capital's impact as, "incredibly taxing...just a real pain." However, participant 6 and two other participants said they had a positive impact because "we got bonuses for the kids obtaining certifications." The second sub theme, *perceived barriers*, showed that SBAE teachers experienced barriers due to *administration* and *resources*. Five participants described how their administration-built barriers affected their teaching due to lack of attention, large class sizes, and lack of accountability. Participant 2 said, "I really wish they would listen to their teachers." Additionally, three participants described how they did not have supportive resources as described by participant 5: "I talked to the counselors about the class sizes, they did not care what I had to say." The third theme, *perceived limitations*, revealed that each participant felt either *limited* or *not limited* relating to how class sizes, facilities, and scheduling affected their teaching. Participants like participant 5 said "large class sizes make it almost unbearable to an unmanageable," which led to a more limited and challenging teaching experience. In contrast, participant 3 said that class sizes and scheduling "were very manageable" leading to little or no limitations.

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

After analyzing data and identifying themes, each participant had different experiences with structural capital on their former respective campuses (Carnoy, 1995). It was concluded that the campuses did not meet the requirements of structural capital as outlined by Mason & Matas (2015). With commonalities in issues with large class sizes, unsupportive administration, and limiting school policies, each campus did not meet the requirements of this capital. This implies that the lack of effective structural capital contributed to SBAE teachers' willingness to leave their programs (Queen et al., 2025; Still & Solomonson, 2024; Vaidya & Hanna, 2023). The results also indicated that if the poor structural capital methods remain in place, these campuses will continue to struggle with turnover. Recommendations for practice include administrators reevaluating policies or practices to create a more structured and organized campus for teachers. Controlling class sizes to fit teacher classroom capabilities or building a supportive relationship with SBAE teachers could provide opportunities for SBAE teacher recruitment and/or retention. Additionally, implementing policies and practices that support teachers, such as implementing scheduling preferences or showing administrative support, could lead to improved structural capital. Recommendations for further research include evaluating structural capital at campuses with high SBAE teacher retention to gain a better understanding of what works. Additionally, completing a comparative study of administrator perceptions of structural capital on campuses with high and low SBAE teacher retention may provide further insights into this topic.

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