

Week by Week: Comparing Student Teaching Experiences Across Cohorts

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Introduction

Student teaching is the culminating clinical experience in agricultural teacher preparation, providing preservice agricultural educators opportunities to apply pedagogical knowledge while assuming the instructional, leadership, and programmatic responsibilities associated with school-based agricultural education (SBAE) programs (Phipps et al., 2008). These experiences are critical to preservice teacher development because they provide authentic opportunities to build teaching confidence while applying pedagogical knowledge in real classroom settings (Moore et al., 2023). Clinical experiences also provide opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on instructional practices and professional responsibilities while receiving feedback from cooperating teachers, promoting continued professional growth throughout the student teaching experience (Phipps et al., 2008). Research has shown that teaching efficacy develops throughout student teaching (Harlin et al., 2007) and continues to evolve during the early years of teaching (Swan et al., 2011). Additionally, positive relationships with cooperating teachers have been associated with higher levels of teaching efficacy among preservice agricultural educators (Edgar et al., 2011). Although previous research has examined teaching efficacy and preservice teacher development during student teaching (Sorensen et al., 2018), little attention has been given to comparing weekly student teachers' overall experiences, confidence, and perceived challenges across cohorts. The purpose of this study was to compare weekly student teaching reports from the 2025 and 2026 cohorts to examine differences in overall student teaching experience ratings, student teacher confidence, and perceived challenges. Three research questions guided the study: (1) What differences, if any, exist in overall student teaching experience ratings between the 2025 and 2026 cohorts? (2) What differences, if any, exist in student teacher confidence between the 2025 and 2026 cohorts across weekly student teaching reports? and (3) What challenge categories were reported most frequently among weekly student teacher reports across the 2025 and 2026 cohorts? Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory guided this study by providing a framework for understanding how student teachers' beliefs in their teaching capabilities may influence their confidence and perceptions throughout the clinical experience.

Methodology

This study used a descriptive research design (Fraenkel et al., 2023) to compare weekly student teaching reports completed during the 2025 and 2026 student teaching semesters. Participants were purposively sampled (Fraenkel et al., 2023) and consisted of preservice agricultural educators enrolled in the agricultural teacher preparation program at Texas Tech University. Weekly reports were completed throughout the student teaching semester and included an overall student teaching experience rating, confidence ratings for 13 teaching competencies using five-point Likert-type scales, and an open-ended question asking participants to identify the primary challenge experienced each week. Because reports were completed weekly, they provided an ongoing measure of preservice teachers' perceptions throughout the clinical experience. A total of 206 reports from the 2025 cohort and 282 reports from the 2026 cohort were included in the dataset. Challenge responses were analyzed using established challenge categories. Limitations included purposive sampling, which limited generalizability beyond the study population, and the use of self-reported weekly reports, which reflected participants' perceptions throughout the student teaching experience (Fraenkel et al., 2023). Data

were analyzed using means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages to summarize overall student teaching experience ratings, confidence ratings, and challenge categories.

Results

The 2026 cohort reported a higher mean overall student teaching experience rating ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.83$, $n = 282$) than the 2025 cohort ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.97$, $n = 203$). Student teacher confidence followed similar patterns across cohorts, with the highest confidence reported in observing the cooperating teacher (2025: $M = 4.53$; 2026: $M = 4.69$) and the lowest confidence reported in adult education (2025: $M = 3.20$; 2026: $M = 3.35$). Planning was the most frequently reported challenge for both cohorts, representing 21.8% of responses in 2025 and 16.7% in 2026. FFA management and classroom management were the next most frequently reported challenge categories for both cohorts.

Conclusions and Implications

Overall, the findings suggest that the 2026 cohort reported a more positive student teaching experience while demonstrating confidence patterns and perceived challenges similar to those of the 2025 cohort. Student teachers reported the greatest confidence in observing their cooperating teacher and the least confidence in adult education. The prominence of the cooperating teacher aligns with previous research demonstrating the importance of cooperating teacher relationships in the development of teaching efficacy among preservice agricultural educators (Edgar et al., 2011). Likewise, the consistent identification of planning, FFA management, and classroom management as the most frequently reported challenges suggests these areas should remain priorities for teacher educators. Providing additional opportunities for scaffolded lesson planning, authentic program management experiences, and adult education activities prior to and during student teaching may further strengthen preservice teachers' confidence and preparedness for the diverse responsibilities of school-based agricultural education (Moore et al., 2023; Sorensen et al., 2018). Furthermore, routinely collecting weekly student teaching reports may provide teacher educators with valuable formative information to monitor preservice teacher development, identify common areas of need, and support continuous improvement within agricultural teacher preparation programs (Harlin et al., 2007). These findings also emphasize the value of structured clinical experiences that provide preservice teachers with repeated opportunities to practice instructional and programmatic responsibilities while receiving feedback from cooperating teachers and university supervisors. Intentionally incorporating these experiences throughout student teaching may further strengthen teaching confidence and better prepare future agricultural educators for the multifaceted nature of SBAE programs (Edgar et al., 2011; Phipps et al., 2008). Future research should examine these findings across multiple agricultural teacher preparation programs to determine whether similar patterns exist among preservice agricultural educators in different institutional contexts. Comparing programs of varying sizes, geographic regions, and clinical placement models may provide additional insight into factors influencing student teacher confidence, experiences, and perceived challenges. Longitudinal studies following preservice teachers into their early years of teaching may further improve understanding of how confidence and perceived challenges evolve over time and identify opportunities to better support teacher development and retention (Swan et al., 2011).

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