

Examining SBAE Teacher Burnout Across Career Stage, Licensure, and Program Size

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Introduction and Literature Review

In 2025 alone, 597 agricultural educators resigned from their teaching contracts to pursue other opportunities outside of the classroom, not including teacher retirements (Smith et al., 2026). A sense of burnout is one of the primary reasons teachers ultimately decide to leave the classroom (Solmonson et al., 2019). Prior work has emphasized the prominence of burnout in the agricultural education profession, especially among early-career teachers in their first five years (Leman & Solomonson, 2025), mid-career teachers in years six through 15 (Smith & Smalley, 2018) and alternatively certified teachers (i.e., those entering the profession without attending a teacher preparation program; Bowling & Ball, 2018; Cannon et al., 2022). Despite the prominence of burnout and ongoing challenges with teacher retention (Queen et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2026), there has been limited work examining burnout among professional factors to examine if there are measurable differences between individuals within these groups (i.e., career stage, pathway to licensure). Further, while multi-teacher programs have been sought to provide relief for teachers in the division of labor and responsibilities (Honeyman & Edwards, 2026; Leman & Solomonson, 2025; Ramstad & Smalley, 2025), there is limited quantitative work examining differences among these programs. As such, the purpose of this study was to examine the prominence of teacher burnout on the basis of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment when evaluating professional factors. This purpose addresses AAEE's research value of advancing public knowledge of AFNR systems, and is guided by three objectives: 1) to evaluate burnout on the basis of career stage, 2) pathway to licensure, and 3) program size.

Theoretical Framework

Maslach's (1993) Multidimensional Model of Burnout serves as the framework guiding this work. In her theory, she posits burnout is a multi-dimensional construct, which takes into account three key symptoms, specifically, one's emotional exhaustion (i.e., fatigue from work and relationships), depersonalization (i.e., a sense of personal detachment from their work), and reduced personal accomplishment (i.e., a lack of gratification or recognition for the work being done). Individuals who experience greater levels of these symptoms are more likely to feel less satisfaction from their work, and ultimately, experience burnout.

Methods

A random sample of 1,200 agricultural educators, taken from a national database, was the frame for this study. Ultimately, 305 educators responded, yielding a response rate of 25.4%, which is strong for survey research (Wu et al., 2022). To maximize response rates, the tailored design method was followed (Dillman et al., 2014). The instrument was adopted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI); it is highly reliable, and has an overall instrument Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Nunnally, 1978). Scales used were also reliable, with emotional exhaustion receiving 0.89 and personal accomplishment receiving 0.74 (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Nunnally, 1978). The instrument presented respondents with a variety of statements related to burnout, and they were tasked with evaluating the frequency of experiencing these feelings, using a scale from 1 (rarely; a few times a year) to 6 (frequently; every day). Respondent scores were computed by averaging respondents' scores across all items within the scale. In addition, demographic items such as years of teaching experience clarified the respondents' background. The total instrument was evaluated for face and content validity by a panel of five experts with background in teacher burnout (Thyer, 2010). Prior to data analysis, any identifiers such as names and email addresses were removed from the data set (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Analysis was conducted on SPSS using *t*-tests, one-way ANOVA, and descriptive statistics.

Findings

Findings are presented in Table 1 on the basis of the three professional characteristics evaluated. While *t*-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted, no significant relationships were found, suggesting no statistical significance between scale scores within the variables of interest.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics Among Three Professional Variables of Interest

Variables	<i>n</i>	Emotional Exhaustion		Personal Accomplishment	
		$\bar{x}$	<i>SD</i>	$\bar{x}$	<i>SD</i>
Career Stage					
Early Career (1-5 yrs.)	105	3.13	1.12	4.20	0.86
Mid Career (6-15 yrs.)	116	3.10	1.05	4.39	0.93
Late Career (>15 yrs.)	84	3.09	1.12	4.18	0.89
Licensure					
Traditionally Certified	238	3.10	1.10	4.22	0.88
Alternatively Certified	67	3.14	1.18	4.40	0.92
Program Size					
Single-Teacher	152	3.09	1.09	4.34	0.83
Multi-Teacher	153	3.13	1.14	4.19	0.95
Overall	305	3.11	1.12	4.26	0.90

Note. Evaluated on a scale from 1 to 6; higher scores indicate greater frequencies of burnout.

Conclusions

Objective 1 examined burnout on the basis of career stage. While no statistically significant relationships were found, overall, early- and mid-career teachers reported higher frequencies of burnout, with early-career teachers reporting the greatest level of emotional exhaustion and mid-career teachers reporting more frequent lack of personal accomplishment, which is consistent with the literature and framework (Leman & Solomonson, 2025; Maslach, 1993; Smith & Smalley, 2018). Objective 2 evaluated burnout on the basis of licensure. Alternatively certified teachers reported marginally higher burnout frequencies in emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment, though these differences were not significant. This may be attributed to these teachers overcoming additional barriers as they work toward obtaining licensure compared to traditionally certified teachers (Bowling & Ball, 2018; Cannon et al., 2022). As supported by the framework, these additional responsibilities may lead to greater fatigue (Maslach, 1993). Lastly, Objective 3 evaluated burnout on the basis of program size. Teachers in multi-teacher programs reported higher frequencies of emotional exhaustion; this may be attributed to needing to maintain close, working relationships with co-teachers (Honeyman & Edwards, 2026; Ramstad & Smalley, 2025). Depending on the context, the framework would suggest this may lead to additional fatigue and emotional strain for educators (Maslach, 1993).

Recommendations

Recommendations are grounded in the findings and literature. Future research should interview teachers representing different career stages, licensure pathways, and program sizes to explore their perceptions of burnout; potentially coupling with the MBI for a mixed methods approach. Future quantitative work should achieve a larger sample size to establish greater generalizability. For professional practice, it is recommended to continue to provide accessible resources, especially for early- and mid-career teachers. For example, offering the NAAE XLR8 conference more at the state or regional level to eliminate barriers of travel to the national conference.

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