

Perceptions of Agricultural Educators Entering the Profession through Alternative Means

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Abstract

With the ongoing national shortage of agricultural educators, alternative certification has become increasingly important. The preparation programs for alternatively certified educators to enter the profession vary in content and length due to state requirements. This study sought to determine South Dakota Alternatively Certified SBAE Teachers' decisions to teach and describe their perceived satisfaction associated with their decision to become a SBAE teacher. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight SBAE Teachers with alternative certification. Two main themes and two sub-themes emerged from the data derived from the interviews, which included (1) no plan to teach but the opportunity arose and (2) satisfaction with the decision to teach (i.e., regret not being certification sooner and passion for youth and agriculture). Conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future practice and research were provided.

Keywords: alternative certification; teacher education; motivations

Introduction

Teacher shortages have been a perpetual issue for school-based agricultural education (SBAE) programs for many decades (Kantrovich, 2010). This chronic shortage beckons the need for recruitment efforts and the development of a deeper understanding of why candidates choose to enter or not enter the SBAE teaching profession (Stripling & Ricketts, 2016). Previous research has outlined various factors which influence individuals to choose SBAE as a career choice. Specifically, factors such as previous involvement in SBAE programs in high school (Edwards & Briers, 2001; Ingram et al., 2018; Lawver & Torres, 2012), encouragement from SBAE teachers to pursue agricultural education (Ingram et al., 2018; Lawver & Torres, 2012; Park & Rudd, 2005), passion for the agricultural industry (Ingram et al., 2018; Lawver & Torres, 2011, 2012; Marx et al., 2017), and a desire to positively impact students (Ingram et al., 2018).

Previous agricultural education literature indicated the extreme shortage of SBAE teachers has bolstered the number of alternative certification teachers who join the profession (Bowling & Ball, 2018; Marx et al., 2017). Alternative certification pathways are designed for individuals who do not have a baccalaureate degree in education. According to Ruhland and Bremer (2002a), "The individuals are often certified based upon work experience, completion of coursework, or completion of a baccalaureate degree in the subject area they were hired to teach" (Ruhland & Bremer, 2002a, p. 2). It was reported, 28% of the 632 CTE teacher respondents indicated they were certified through alternative certification.

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CTE can be viewed as an application of both life skills and core curriculum (DelliCarpini, 2010; Stone et al., 2008). These areas can be broken down into more specific fields. Many SBAE programs include “environmental science, agribusiness, natural resources, aquaculture, food science and safety, animal and plant sciences, entrepreneurship, and many other areas” (National Association of Agricultural Educators, n.d., p. 1).

While enrollment in SBAE courses is growing, the demand for teachers is continually not met (Smith, et al., 2017) directly impacting thousands of students across the country who are unable to engage in SBAE programs (Blake, 2017). Programs face the possibility of shutting down when agricultural education positions are left unfilled (Loscalzo & Gensler, 2015). Schools across the nation are expanding their current programs, and many schools are looking at starting their agricultural programs (Boyd, 2017; Husar, 2017; Teitz, 2017; Weber, 2017). More agricultural educators are needed to fill these positions.

The National Council for Agricultural Education (2016) stated every teacher should be “state certified to teach agriculture, food, and natural resource education” and someone who “actively participates in state and national professional agriculture, food, and natural resource education associations” (p. 95). There are few national regulations for the content that pre-service teachers are required to learn (The National Council for Agricultural Education, 2016) despite there being nine standards for the teacher preparation programs (American Association for Agricultural Education, 2001). Therefore, programs for certifying agricultural educators greatly vary across the nation by state and regional needs (Houck & Kitchel, 2010).

Washburn and Myers (2010) noted: “less than half (44%) of the [studied] teachers reported that their undergraduate major was agricultural education” (p. 91). Jeff Perry, a senior lecturer at Cornell University, was interviewed by John Christensen (2017) and said that while there are more than enough students interested in agricultural education degrees, “a certain percentage of those will enter the agriculture industry rather than teaching, due to high demand for agriculture graduates with those skills” (para. 11). Cornell’s Agriculture Outreach Education program and New York State’s Education Department are working together to improve the certification process for non-traditional teachers to fill vacant teaching positions (Christensen, 2017).

Alternative certification pathways are designed for individuals who were not certified to teach in a traditional teacher preparation program. While these educators may have extensive knowledge in their fields, they tend to lack knowledge in pedagogy and instructional activities (e.g., lesson planning, objectives, explaining content, and navigating controversial topics; Roberts & Dyer, 2004; Robinson & Hayes, 2011). The lack of pedagogical knowledge can negatively impact the students’ experiences despite the high technical knowledge that alternatively certified teachers possess (Robinson & Hayes, 2011). Previous researchers have pointed out the need for pedagogy-based professional development for alternatively certified teachers in SBAE programs (Entz, 2007; Robinson & Edwards, 2012; Ruhland & Bremer, 2002a).

While a multitude of research has been conducted on the quality of instruction provided by alternatively certified teachers (Roberts & Dyer, 2004; Robinson & Edwards, 2012), research is needed to understand why alternatively certified teachers did not take the traditional route of certification (Bowling & Ball, 2018; Marx et al., 2017). Moreover, Marx et al. (2017) indicated the need to understand alternatively certified teachers’ decisions to enter and remain in the profession.

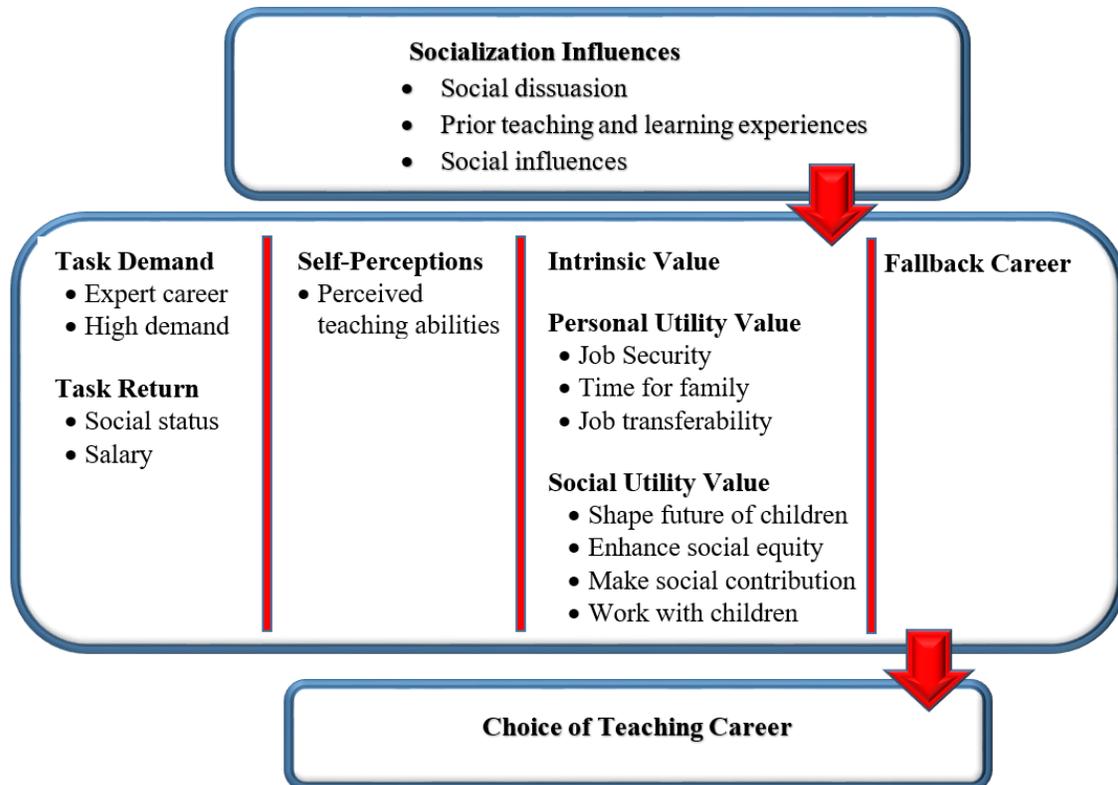
Theoretical Framework

The factors influencing the teaching choice (FIT-choice) model served as the framework for assessing alternatively certified teachers’ decisions to become SBAE teachers. The FIT-choice model provides insight into motivational factors (i.e., altruistic-type, utilitarian, intrinsic, and ability-related belief motivations) associated with an individual’s decision to become a teacher (Watt & Richardson, 2012). The model is divided into two main motivational factors, positive motivations (e.g., task demand and return, perceptions of teaching self-efficacy, personal and social utility value) and negative motivations (e.g., choosing teaching as a fallback career choice) (Watt & Richardson, 2007, 2008, 2012). According to Watt and Richardson (2012), the FIT-choice framework provides a means for evaluating the motivations of various individuals from different settings and to “explore correlates and consequences of motivational dimensions” (p. 188).

The FIT-Choice model introduces three main value classes (intrinsic value, personal utility value, and social utility value) and self- and task-perceptions that are related to the choice of teaching. This focuses on a core part of the models intrinsic value which refers to the enjoyment of and interest in teaching. Personal utility value refers to extrinsic motivations such as job security, job transferability, and time for family. Social utility value refers to altruistic motivations like shaping the future of children and adolescents, enhancing social equity, and making a social contribution. An individuals’ perception of their teaching abilities is also a part of this model focusing on the demands (difficulty and required expertise) and returns (salary and social status) related to the teaching profession. The model also contains motivation to select teaching as a fallback career. This also focuses on the socialization influences on career choices such as an individual’s prior teaching and learning experiences and social influences.

Figure 1

FIT-choice empirically validated theoretical model (Watt & Richardson, 2012)



Marx et al. (2017) noted the need to determine why alternatively certified SBAE teachers didn't initially choose to teach and to better understand their motivations for later joining the profession. In the context of this study, the FIT-choice framework serves as a means to assess the nature of their motivations (i.e., negative or positive) associated with the decision to teach.

Purpose and Objective

The American Association for Agricultural Education's national research agenda outlines the need for conducting this research study. This study addresses research priority area five "Efficient and Effective Agricultural Education Programs" (Thoron, Myers, & Barrick, 2016). This qualitative study aimed to determine alternatively certified SBAE teachers' motivations to teach and describe their perceived satisfaction associated with their decision to become SBAE teachers. The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

- How do alternatively certified SBAE teachers in South Dakota describe their decisions and motivations (socialization influences) to teach in SBAE programs?
- How do alternatively certified SBAE teachers in South Dakota describe their satisfaction associated with their decision to teach in a SBAE program?

Methods

This study sought to determine alternatively certified SBAE teachers' motivations to teach and to describe their perceived satisfaction associated with their decision to become SBAE teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in this case study. The interviews were guided by three main, open-ended questions along with probing questions (see Table 1).

Table 1

Open-ended and Probing Questions Included on the Interview Protocol

Questions

1. Tell me about your background and professional experience(s) outside of SBAE.
 - Describe your experiences with Agricultural Education as a youth.
 - How would you describe the ties you had to the agricultural industry while growing up?
 - Please describe your formal educational experiences. (What was your college major, and how did you decide to pursue the given degree?)
 - Tell me about any professional positions you have held outside of SBAE.
 - *If applicable*: How would you describe your job responsibilities at your previous jobs?
 - *If applicable*: What was the duration of your employment, and how did you decide to leave the position(s)?
2. Please describe the experiences or influences which helped you decide to become a SBAE teacher.
 - When did you decide you wanted to gain employment in a SBAE program?
 - Were you encouraged by a certain individual or individuals to join the SBAE teaching profession?
 - *If applicable*: Please tell me more about the guidance or motivation you received from [individual / individuals].
 - What other influences guided your decision to become a SBAE teacher?

Table 1*Open-ended and Probing Questions Included on the Interview Protocol, continued...*

3.	Describe your experiences as a SBAE teacher.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please describe the setting in which you currently teach (e.g., middle school, high school). • How would you describe the content of the courses you teach? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>If applicable</i>: How does the content of your courses align with your previous experiences in industry? ○ Do you have any regrets associated with previous educational / career choices or path to teacher certification? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>If applicable</i>: What would you do differently if you were to do it all over? • How would you describe your future career plans associated with retaining in the SBAE program?

The contact information of alternatively certified SBAE teachers ($N = 18$) in South Dakota was provided by the South Dakota Department of Education. The alternatively certified SBAE teachers were sent an initial email which invited them to take part in this qualitative study. Moreover, the email included a consent form that provided information about the study (i.e., purpose and procedures of the study, voluntary nature of study involvement, confidentiality assurance, and potential risk associated with participation) and prompted interested individuals to complete the consent form. Follow-up emails were sent to non-respondents. The alternatively certified SBAE teachers who completed the consent process were contacted via email to schedule an interview.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted via phone and were recorded using a basic audio recording device. Field notes (i.e., descriptive and reflective) were taken for each interview which provided another source of recorded information to aid in the interpretation of interview transcripts (Creswell, 2013). The items on the interview protocol and additional probing questions prompted the alternatively certified teachers to provide thick, rich descriptions regarding their decisions to teach in SBAE programs. Similarly, thick descriptions were included in this manuscript in an attempt to provide a holistic description of the participants' perceptions on this issue—thus enhancing the transferability of our findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

After the interviews were conducted, we transcribed the interviews verbatim. The transcriptions assisted the members of our research team to identify significant statements, develop descriptions, and recognize parallels among the participants and their responses (Creswell, 2013). To bolster the trustworthiness of our study, we maintained an audit trail for all study materials (i.e., raw interview data, coding analysis products, and interview protocol development information). Investigator triangulation was facilitated by having all members of our research team analyze and code the interview transcripts and associated field notes individually (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Once we individually analyzed the data, notes were compared, and themes were identified (Braun & Clark, 2006). The initial themes were then sent to the interview participants for review (i.e., member checking) to ensure credibility. The participants were asked to review the initial themes and determine if any information was missing or if any of their sentiments were misrepresented.

Creswell (2013) signified the need for qualitative researchers to “position themselves in their writings” (p. 216). The research team engaged in reflexivity exercises to reflect on our perceptions and biases associated with the topic of this study, as well as our professional relationships with the SBAE teachers who were interviewed. Every member of our research team obtained SBAE teacher certification in the traditional manner. Two of us are agricultural education faculty members who are involved in teacher preparation (i.e., traditional licensure), and both previously served as SBAE teachers. In our former role as SBAE teachers, we both had experience with working with alternatively certified SBAE

teachers. One of us had a SBAE teaching partner who was alternatively certified. Creswell (2013) noted the importance of not only reflecting on experiences with a given phenomenon, “but also be self-conscious about how these experiences may potentially have shaped the findings, the conclusions, and the interpretations drawn in a study” (p. 216). Our bracketing exercises revealed that our experiences with obtaining traditional certification, and the fact that we are employed in a state with less than seven percent of alternatively certified SBAE teachers, might lead us to hold certain biases associated with SBAE teachers who were alternatively certified. We recognize that we have differing and converging experiences associated with alternatively certified teachers, as one of us previously worked with an alternatively certified teacher, and the other two of us have had minimal exposure. The dispersion of experiences of the members in our research team served to balance potential biases which had the propensity to influence our findings, conclusions, and implications (Creswell, 2013).

Eight (44%) of the 18 alternatively certified SBAE teachers in South Dakota participated in this study. Four of the SBAE teachers were employed in other occupations before teaching, while the other four began teaching in SBAE programs immediately after graduating from college. To provide additional context, we created pseudonyms for each participant and provided a brief description of the participants’ backgrounds.

Sarah grew up on a cow / calf ranch but did not take agricultural classes in high school. She majored in animal science production and began teaching high school agriculture directly out of college. Concerning course content, Sarah indicated she was currently teaching “Intro to AFNR (full year), Animal Science (full year), Food Science (semester)/Companion Animals (semester) on rotation with Ag Business / Biotechnology.”

Lisa raised sheep during high school. Many people in her town were farmers, so she was exposed to agriculture from a young age. She took agricultural courses from seventh through 12th grades. Lisa chose to teach in a SBAE program after graduating with her animal science degree. Lisa noted that she taught introduction to agriculture courses at the middle- and high school levels.

Ryan grew up on a farm and was involved in his hometown SBAE program while in high school. He took many SBAE classes during high school and majored in animal science with a specialization in science and agriculture leadership before becoming an agricultural educator upon graduating. Ryan noted he served as the adviser for their FFA chapter and taught Agribusiness, Animal Science, Wildlife and Fisheries, and Companion Animals courses.

Adam did not take SBAE courses in school and did not grow up on a farm. However, he had grandparents and friends who were farmers, so he had some level of familiarity with the agricultural industry. He wanted to major in wildlife and fisheries but was persuaded to study medical technology. Adam eventually switched his major to biology and finished his education. After graduating, he worked as a wildlife game warden before teaching in a SBAE program. At the time of the interview, Adam was currently finishing his master’s degree in agricultural education. In his current position, he indicated he taught introduction to AFNR, plant science, animal science, natural resources, agricultural business, and agricultural mechanics.

Spencer took SBAE courses throughout high school and his family had a beef cattle operation until he was in second grade. Spencer studied electrical engineering and agricultural education before finishing his degree in agricultural business. His first career after graduating college was teaching in a SBAE program. Spencer indicated he taught a myriad of course content (i.e., Intro to Agriculture, Plant Science, Animal Science, Agricultural Mechanics, Welding, Structures, Horticulture, Leadership, and Agricultural Business) at both the middle school and high school levels.

Alex did not grow up around agriculture or take high school agricultural courses. He studied Bible and ministry and taught a field biology lab while in college. After graduating, Alex worked for a landscaping company, a ranch, and was employed as a school administrator. He started to teach SBAE full-time eight years after graduating college. Alex indicated he served as the FFA adviser at his high school and taught Animal Science, Plant Science, Agricultural Mechanics, Agricultural Business courses.

Wesley took several SBAE courses while in high school. Although he did not grow up on a farm, he raised rabbits in middle school and was exposed to agriculture in his community. Wesley obtained his Associate Degree in animal science, continued his education studying dairy manufacturing, and then took a break and later returned to finish his degree in general agriculture. After graduation, he worked as a cheesemaker, and as a department manager at another company before leaving the profession to teach in a SBAE program. Wesley indicated he currently taught middle school and high school courses related to Agricultural structures, Agricultural metals, Agricultural Mechanization, Animal Science, Plant Science, Food Production, Landscape Design, Agricultural Business, and Youth Internship.

Emily grew up on a ranch and took every SBAE course her high school offered. Her degree in range management and natural resources helped with her professional careers, which included a customer service representative, technician with the governmental agency, and a secretary in the sheriff's office. She chose to become a SBAE teacher after moving to a small, rural town. Emily indicated she was currently teaching a wide variety of course content (i.e., Food Science, Landscaping, Floriculture, Animal Science, Agricultural Structures, and Agricultural Leadership) at a high school in South Dakota.

Findings

This study sought to determine alternatively certified SBAE teachers' decisions to teach and describe their perceived satisfaction associated with their decision to become SBAE teachers. Two main themes and two sub-themes emerged from the data derived from the interviews of alternatively certified SBAE teachers in South Dakota. The themes and sub-themes included *no plan to teach but the opportunity arose* and *satisfaction with the decision to teach* (i.e., *regret not being certified to teach sooner* and *passion for youth and agriculture*).

No Plan to Teach but the Opportunity Arose

When asked about their decision to become a SBAE teacher, all eight alternatively certified teachers indicated they had no intentions to teach in a SBAE program while they were completing their undergraduate degrees. In consideration of the FIT-choice model, this theme encompasses many influencing factors (i.e., socialization influences, personal utility value, fallback career) which explain their decision to teach. The teachers' non-traditional certification routes can be interpreted as a fallback career as some of the teachers applied for teaching positions based on the need for a career in the location they were in. However, their decision to teach was also influenced by socialization influences (prior teaching and learning experiences and social influences) and aspects of personal utility value. Every participant noted their rationale for choosing to teach in a SBAE program was because the opportunity arose. While the alternatively certified SBAE teachers agreed their current placement was not pre-meditated, the motivational and socialization factors and influences (e.g., support from family and community, significant life event, etc.) which persuaded them to teach agricultural education varied amongst the teachers who were interviewed.

Spencer, who was currently finishing up his senior year as an agricultural business major, was contacted by his cousin who informed him the SBAE teacher at the high school he was teaching at was leaving and he thought Spencer would be a good candidate for the position. When considering the FIT-choice framework, his cousin's encouragement to teach served as a social influence on his decision to pursue teaching. Spencer indicated he was not certified to teach when he was contacted by his cousin, but

he called the school about the opening and they offered him a long-term substitute position. After starting as a long-term substitute teacher, Spencer indicated the school “worked with the state to get me started on alternative certification.” While reminiscing on how he ended up in a SBAE teaching position, Spencer noted “it kind of just fell into my lap.”

Lisa, who originally aspired for a career in veterinary science, graduated with an animal science degree without having a specific career in mind. She explained that after she graduated from college, she got married to someone in a rural part of South Dakota and moved to his family ranch. Lisa stated, “There’s not much here for jobs other than ranching, and when we decided to get married, we knew I would need a town job to bring in some money while he worked on the family ranch.” While she knew she needed to acquire a job, she was not sure what positions would be available. She decided to contact the local school district to inquire about available positions, based on recommendations from her husband, and after a few friends informed her that she could get her “teaching certification after college while working.” She indicated the local high school did not have a SBAE program and was not actively searching for an SBAE teacher. Lisa noted “[i]t was a total shot in the dark, but I sent the school administration an email introducing myself and stating how important Agriculture Education is for such a rural community.” Soon after sending the correspondence to the administration, they offered to hire her as a SBAE teacher in the district.

Similar to Lisa, Sarah was heading back to her hometown to work on her family’s ranch while she decided which career path she wanted to take. Two weeks before graduating from her bachelor’s degree, she was approached about a SBAE teaching position in her hometown. She indicated she heard “the previous agricultural teacher wouldn’t be teaching in [School district] anymore and thought it was a bummer since the agricultural program was brand new and I thought it was important for our town to have since we’re a rural community.” Sarah decided to accept the SBAE teaching job in her hometown while working on alternative teacher certification. Sarah’s notion of the importance of the agricultural education program for her community indicated she was intrinsically motivated to serve in this position.

When Emily and Ryan were questioned about their rationale for becoming a SBAE teacher through alternative teacher certification, they both mentioned they took the positions due to needing a job in their hometowns. Emily stated there was an SBAE teacher position opening in her rural hometown and explained “when you live in a small town when a good job becomes available, you take it.” Emily admitted she had no background in teaching, but she felt that her well-rounded background in agriculture would somewhat prepare her to take this position. Ryan noted he never formally pursued Agricultural Education as a major, but he indicated that his motivation to become a SBAE teacher was positively influenced by his high school SBAE teachers and his college professor who told him he should consider teaching—representing a socialization influence on his decision to teach. While discussing the SBAE teaching profession, Ryan said “I thought [teaching SBAE] would be something I would enjoy so I kept it in the back of my mind that if the opportunity would ever present itself, that I would apply.” The high school in his hometown originally had a failed search for a SBAE teaching position due to a lack of applicants, “so they started to look for people they could alternatively certify.” Ryan noted the Career and Technical Education Director of the school contacted him about the job, and he quickly decided to accept the SBAE teaching position offer.

Even those who had careers before teaching said they chose to pursue teaching SBAE as a career after someone or something persuaded them to consider it. Wesley, who was engaged in three different occupations (i.e., cheesemaker, dairy farm worker, and department store manager) before choosing to teach in a SBAE program, indicated that he had various local and state-level advisors reach out to him in high school and encourage him to pursue a career as a SBAE teacher. Along with previous encouragement from agricultural educators to join the profession, he noted the frustrations he was experiencing with his career at the time made him open-minded to explore other career paths. Wesley

explained, "I had a rough week at [work] and when the principal called me, I had enough and went to teaching... I choose it because a door opened."

Congruent to Wesley, Adam worked in construction, landscaping, woodworking, and was a wildlife game warden for 12 years before deciding to become a SBAE teacher. Adam noted he enjoyed many parts of his job as a game warden such as "talking to the public and doing outdoor education programs for youth," but he indicated the philosophical differences between him and his supervisor and his general lack of enjoyment with his position led him to leave. Adam stated, "I needed to find a happier and more satisfying career that would work long-term with my strengths." While searching for a profession that would fit his needs, he noted that his mother-in-law and brother-in-law were both teachers and strongly encouraged him to consider becoming a teacher (i.e., social influences). He decided to reach out to his local school district to see if there were any open teaching positions and the only opening they had was for a SBAE teaching position. In describing his reaction to learning about this job opening, Adam said

I did not know anything about what [teaching in a SBAE program] entailed, but had some experience in almost all portions of Agricultural Education and wanted to learn about the things I didn't know. I was also intrigued by the hands-on learning opportunities.

Adam noted the SBAE teaching position in his local school district "offered a really good opportunity and I could add to my state retirement. I could have earned more money doing anything else, but I wanted a job that I found interesting."

Satisfaction with Decision to Teach

Despite having no plan to teach agriculture and not having completed a formal agricultural education certification program in college, the participants felt satisfied with the decision to teach. Several of the participants explicitly stated they enjoyed teaching.

Adam offered, "I could have earned more money doing anything else, but I enjoy teaching agriculture, and at this point, I don't want to do anything else." Wesley and Ryan both individually said, "I love teaching," and Spencer stated, "I love what I do... This is my full-time job and passion." Lisa indicated, "...though [teaching agriculture] was not a plan of mine until [the school] offered me the job, I am extremely happy in the decision I made."

The alternatively certified SBAE teachers' passions for Agricultural Education were illustrated by their expressed intentions to remain in the profession. For example, when Spencer was asked if he saw himself choosing another career before retirement, he said "I hope not. I enjoy what I do." Congruent to Spencer, Emily stated, "I cannot imagine doing anything else." Adam, who previously worked 12 years in other industries, indicated he was about to complete the coursework and research requirements for his master's degree in Agricultural Education. His dedication to earn a master's degree in Agricultural Education showed his commitment to stay in the profession.

Lisa's satisfaction with teaching in a SBAE program and intentions to stay in the profession were illustrated by her comments associated with possible course augmentations for the following year. Lisa said, "Next year I plan to add animal science and will continue adding classes for years after that." Within the theme of SBAE teacher satisfaction with their decision to teach, two distinct sub-themes emerged: Regret not being certified sooner and passion for youth in agriculture.

Regret Not Being Certified Sooner

While expressing their satisfaction with teaching in SBAE programs, the alternatively certified teachers expressed regret for not becoming certified to teach sooner. None of the participants initially

finished a degree in Agricultural Education during college and thus were not certified to teach Agricultural Education upon graduation. The alternatively certified teachers' sentiment of regret was associated with career choices, academic choices, and the path they took to obtain SBAE teacher certification.

While discussing his decision to become a SBAE teacher, and the path he took to obtain teacher certification, Ryan noted "I knew [teaching in a SBAE program] was something that always interested me, but I never made it my major in college. That is something I regret." He went on to say, "I like the career choice I made, and just wish that I had made that choice in college and not after I graduated." Spencer, who previously majored in Agricultural Education before switching his major to agricultural business, expressed regret with this educational decision. Specifically, Spencer said "I do regret not finishing out my Agricultural Education degree. I have learned a lot in the six years I've taught and have worked hard to fill in the blanks on what I missed out on." He also felt that taking the alternative certification path to teacher licensure might have damaged his credibility as a teacher. Spencer said, "I don't want to be considered any less of an educator because of my background." In contrast to Spencer and Ryan, Adam mentioned regret and thankfulness for not pursuing SBAE teaching as an initial career choice. Adam explained:

In many ways, I regret not changing careers sooner. I hated the last few years of working as a wildlife game warden. In other ways, I am glad I didn't work as a teacher sooner. I gained a lot of experience and maturity in addition to being able to develop more skills in dealing with people. I have lived in the city I teach in for five years before changing careers. That allowed me to develop relationships and a reputation locally which helped with the school administration.

Congruent to the sentiment expressed by Adam, Lisa had mixed feelings regarding the path she took to teacher certification and the latency of her decision. While reflecting on her educational decisions, Lisa said:

Looking back, I wish I had considered Agriculture Education when I made my switch from pre-vet my freshman year. At the time, I didn't know I would get married and move to a small town, so animal science seemed like the best route at the time.

Lisa noted her animal science degree and associated coursework greatly aligns with her educational interest and have helped her "extensively teaching in a community that has mostly cattle farmers." Lisa admitted, "I do wish I could have graduated with a teaching certificate..., but overall I guess I didn't see this coming." Aside from teaching animal science course content, Lisa noted that other aspects of teaching in a SBAE have been challenging for her. Lisa said, "it hasn't been easy, especially not having any formal educator education and only being schooled in animal science and a little business management." Moreover, she indicated it has been difficult as a "non-traditional [teacher] to be starting a new program that has been absent for many years" and she felt that majoring in Agricultural Education, and taking the traditional route to teacher licensure would have better prepared her to implement a complete SBAE program.

Passion for Youth and Agriculture

While we did not directly ask the participants if they were passionate about youth and agriculture, all participants alluded to it. Regardless of the participants' backgrounds, teaching experience, and path to education, they all expressed a strong passion for working with youth and promoting the agricultural industry. The participants' expressions related to their passion for working with the youth, serve as an indicator of the social utility value (i.e., intrinsic value) they associate with the teaching profession.

Many of the participants expressed their fondness for the agricultural industry and the importance of teaching students about the importance of the industry. For example, when Alex was reflecting on the importance of Agricultural Education, he said "I love agriculture and see the opportunities students have

for a future in the field of agriculture.” In his retrospective reflection on the importance of Agricultural Education, he noted “I wish I was able to have the FFA experience in high school and I know I would have benefited greatly from it.” Sarah indicated that she never imagined teaching high school students, but she expressed that she has “always been passionate about learning and agriculture.” Wesley noted his passion for Agricultural Education and respect for the agricultural industry were acquired through heavy involvement in the National FFA Organization. Unlike some of the alternatively certified teachers who were interviewed in this study, Wesley did not come from a traditional farming / ranching background. He noted that he “loved ag classes and FFA. I was a state officer and ran for national office.”

Along with their passion for the agricultural industry, the alternatively certified SBAE teachers expressed their passion for working with students. Alex stated “I love working with youth and enjoyed working in camps. In college, I also taught field Biology labs and that is where my passion for teaching began.” Alex explained that he chose to become a SBAE teacher because he wanted to “have an impact on students and show them the opportunities that are out there.” He noted his passion for working with youth which motivated him to become a teacher was further realized once he accepted a SBAE teaching position. Specifically, Alex said:

I chose to leave the landscaping and livestock professions because I knew that education was my passion. I chose to teach full-time after we developed an FFA program at the school and realized that I enjoyed the classroom more than an administrative job.

Similar to Alex, Adam’s passion for working with students motivated him to become a SBAE teacher, and the position provided him with a means to progress as a lifelong learner. Adam indicated that he chose to become a SBAE teacher because he “likes working with kids” and “really enjoys learning.” He further stated, “I personally enjoy learning about plants, animals, and mechanics and then taking that information and trying to distill it into something that students understand.”

Lisa indicated her main motivation to work in a SBAE program was to enhance the agricultural literacy of young people. When describing her rationale for becoming a SBAE teacher, she said: I felt it was extremely important for the young people of such an agriculture-based community to get some agriculture education in high school. The 4-H program is not very strong here, so they are only learning what their parents teach at home. Some kids don’t go to college, just graduate high school and stay at the family ranch. It is important that they learn why mom and dad do what they do and why things happen and what they can do about it, and they don’t always get a solid education on those things at home.

Ryan and Spencer both noted they loved working with youth, and they wanted the students in their SBAE programs to have the same learning opportunities they enjoyed so much as high school students.

Conclusions / Recommendations / Implications

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the self-reported perceptions of South Dakota SBAE teachers who entered the profession through alternative means. Although this study has the propensity to be transferable in other settings, the findings, implications, and conclusions of this research study should not be generalized beyond the alternatively certified SBAE teachers which were interviewed. Moreover, the alternative certification processes which were described in this study were specific to teachers in South Dakota, and it is important to note alternative teacher certification processes / regulations are state-specific.

Overall, participants indicated they enjoyed teaching in SBAE programs despite having neither the plan nor the formal education to teach. The SBAE teachers seemed to be happy with their decision to join the teaching profession, and many of the teachers expressed regret about not becoming SBAE

teachers sooner. The teachers also indicated their passion for teaching was closely tied to their desire to work with students and teach about the various aspects of the agricultural industry. These aforementioned motivational factors the SBAE teachers mentioned align with influential factors mentioned in previous Agricultural Education research (Ingram et al., 2018; Lawver & Torres, 2011, 2012; Marx et al., 2017), and constitute sources of social utility value of the FIT-choice model (Watt & Richardson, 2012).

Aside from social utility value, the FIT-choice model also encompasses personal utility values (e.g., transferability of job, time for family, or job security), which serves as an expectancy-value component influencing individuals' choice to teach (Watt & Richardson, 2012). This expectancy-value component of the FIT-choice model was not readily mentioned by the teachers in this study, but two of the teachers made statements that implied they chose to teach because it suited their needs. Specifically, Sarah noted she took a teaching job because it was available in her hometown where she wanted to live, and Wesley was looking to leave a career in which he was experiencing high levels of frustration. While these alternatively certified SBAE teachers' decisions to teach in an SBAE program could be linked to negative motivations described in the FIT-choice model (e.g., choosing teaching as a fallback career choice), the teachers noted their decisions to teach were tied to aspects of personal utility value.

Five of the teachers which were interviewed (i.e., Lisa, Ryan, Spencer, Wesley, and Emily) reported previous involvement in SBAE programs as middle / high school students, which has been reported in previous research as a motivational factor associated with choosing to teach in a SBAE program (Edwards & Briers, 2001; Ingram et al., 2018; Lawver & Torres, 2012). Regarding the FIT-choice model, it is implied the alternatively certified SBAE teachers' previous involvement in SBAE courses and various aspects of the agricultural industry were learning experiences which served as socialization influences (Watt & Richardson, 2012).

Congruent with the findings of Ingram et al. (2018) and Park and Rudd (2005), many of the South Dakota SBAE Teachers in this study indicated they received encouragement from certain individuals (e.g., family, local- and state-level advisers, SBAE teachers, etc.) which influenced their decision to become a SBAE teacher. The socialization influences which motivated these alternatively certified SBAE teachers to join the profession were consistent with the findings of a myriad of Agricultural Education research studies focused on traditionally certified SBAE teachers, or pre-service teachers in traditional teacher licensure programs (Harms & Knobloch, 2005; Ingram et al., 2018; Lawver & Torres, 2011, 2012; Park & Rudd, 2005).

This research study mainly focused on the socialization influences and expectancy-value components which influenced alternatively certified teachers to teach in South Dakota SBAE programs. The interviews with the South Dakota alternatively certified SBAE teachers help to illuminate the teachers' motivational factors and influences which led them to choose this vocation. However, many facets of the FIT-choice model were not examined in this study, such as aspects of task demand, task return, and self-perceptions. Future studies are needed to determine how these aspects influence alternatively certified SBAE teachers' decisions to teach and remain in the teaching profession. Moreover, future studies should also include traditionally certified teachers to serve as a source of comparison with the non-traditionally certified teachers in regard to the teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding teaching, along with their motivational influences to teach.

A multitude of previous research indicated alternatively certified teachers commonly struggle with general pedagogical aspects of teaching (Humphrey et al., 2008; Ruhland & Bremer, 2002b; Schonfeld & Feinman, 2012). Therefore, there is a need to determine the pedagogical and content-specific training needs of SBAE teachers with alternative certification. This group of alternatively certified teachers would benefit from professional development focused on pedagogy commonly utilized in agricultural education classroom and laboratory settings. Since alternatively certified teachers enter the

classroom without any preparation, professional development training should be introduced to experiential learning, a variety of instructional methods, classroom management, and assessment.

Concerning self-perceptions, research should be conducted to determine how alternatively certified SBAE preparation requirements for teachers who obtain certification in an alternative manner. Furthermore, this proposed needs assessment could be comprised of traditionally and non-traditionally certified teachers. The inclusion of both groups of teachers will allow for a comparison of teachers' needs based on their certification routes. Teachers' previous professional experience influences their self-efficacy as teachers. This could potentially be facilitated by conducting a needs assessment of alternatively certified SBAE teachers across the nation. A national study could also serve to shed light on the certification and teacher

Future research should be conducted to focus on the specific struggles alternatively certified educators face. Implementing a long-term mentoring program or induction program which lasts for multiple years could be beneficial for alternatively certified educators. While professional development is a great way to further improve both alternatively certified and beginning educators, professional development needs to be tailored differently for alternatively certified educators.

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