

Challenges at Different Career Stages Among Secondary Family and Consumer Sciences Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges faced by secondary family and consumer sciences (FCS) teachers in Illinois. Specifically, the study sought to identify and categorize a list of challenges encountered during their first years in the FCS profession as well as challenges that veteran FCS teachers are facing in their current teaching assignments and to determine job satisfaction levels at each career stage. FCS teachers in Illinois within the state's directory completed an online questionnaire. Twenty challenges were identified. Only two of the top five challenges, equipment and funding, continued to be areas of concern throughout teachers' teaching careers. Overwhelmingly, FCS teachers indicated strong satisfaction levels with their jobs. Knowing the challenges identified by FCS teachers at different career stages can assist school administrators and FCS professionals in providing specific support to address these problematic areas in efforts to improve retention rates among FCS teachers.

Background

Family and consumer sciences (FCS) education was identified as a teacher shortage area in many states, including Illinois, by the United States Department of Education (2017). Werhan and Whitbeck (2017) confirmed that states were struggling to fill FCS teacher vacancies, and the shortage of FCS teachers was expected to grow. Teacher retirement and attrition are two of the main culprits for the increased need of FCS teachers (Gaytan, 2005). Retirement is an inevitable reason for FCS teachers to leave the classroom; however, the reasons teachers choose to leave the classroom early are often linked to the number and types of challenges they face (Boone & Boone, 2007).

Cochran-Smith (2004) suggested that a teacher shortage is in large part a demand problem that can be solved only if retention is increased. Thus, one way to increase the number of FCS teachers is to decrease the number who leave through attrition. However, little evidence exists on the retention and challenges of FCS teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the challenges faced by all secondary FCS teachers in Illinois. A crucial first step to preserve the future of the profession is to gather empirical data that accurately identifies the current challenges facing FCS teachers. An understanding of the concerns of teachers at

different stages in their careers allows FCS professionals and school administrators to identify more specific ways to provide support. This in turn could improve the retention rates among FCS teachers.

Attrition and Reasons for Leaving

Attrition among teachers is the single largest factor determining the demand for additional teachers in all subjects in the United States (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Specific to Illinois, 60% of school districts reported difficulty filling positions and 16% had to cancel programs or classes because of teacher shortages (Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools, 2016). The reason many are exiting the teaching profession is due to the education-related problems encountered; thus, the ability to handle the challenges faced can result in a teacher staying or leaving the classroom.

Challenges faced by career and technical education (CTE) teachers are quite extensive (Arnett-Hartwick & Cannon, 2020; Arnett-Hartwick & Halger, 2018; Dainty, Sandford, Su & Belcher, 2011). Frequently reported challenges for teachers were classroom management and discipline, motivating students, insufficient supplies, insufficient preparation time due to high teaching loads, and relationships with colleagues. Other challenges cited by CTE teachers included the following: (a) time management; (b) facilities and equipment; (c) working with special populations; (d) budgets and funding; (e) curriculum development; (f) student motivation; (g) school policies and procedures; (h) mentorships; and (i) poor or lack of administrative support. Although the challenges identified above are true for teachers, are they also true for the subgroup of FCS teachers?

Challenges

Teaching in CTE, of which FCS is a service area, is a rigorous yet frequently underrated challenge (Cushall, 2002). Lack of state mandates for curriculum, funding, and the need for educating the community about what FCS education truly about is just three of the challenges faced by today's FCS teachers.

Lee (2013) found the biggest challenges causing frustration among FCS teachers was students' lack of motivation and poor behavior in class. Other challenges included lack of funding for supplies, larger than desired class sizes, and lack of time to prepare for lessons. Additionally, Arnett and Polkinghorne (2010) identified five factors causing dissatisfaction among FCS teachers. These factors were (a) role of high school counselors, (b) image of FCS, (c) lack of administrative support, (d) inclusion of special needs students, and (e) impact of *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Furthermore, Dainty, Sandford, Su and Belcher (2011) found that student respect was considered extremely important as a retention factor among FCS teachers. Particular to beginning FCS teachers, Nichols and Mundt (1996) found that classroom control,

equipment, and budgets were the most important competencies necessary for surviving the first years of teaching. Additionally, reflecting on their first-year teaching experiences, FCS teachers reported that confidence needs to be improved in the area of curriculum development (Dainty, Sandford, Su & Belcher, 2011) as well as implementing routines and procedures (Cook, 2020). Although some research exists of the challenges among FCS teachers, there is a need to research current challenges faced by beginning and veteran teachers in FCS to determine if challenges change or continue at the different career stages.

Theoretical Framework

Career satisfaction has been a determinant of a teacher's decision to remain or leave the profession (Ubom & Joshua, 2004). Previous research indicated beginning teachers expressed strong dissatisfaction as the primary reason they left their jobs due to problems within their teaching assignment (Voke, 2002). Self (2001) suggested that teachers resolve the question of whether to remain in education through "satisficing" rather than through optimizing. That is, the level of satisfaction is the rationale basis for a teacher leaving as opposed to trying to improve the situation.

Several researchers have studied the job satisfaction among FCS teachers and have found positive results. Arnett and Polkinghorne (2010) found that 95% of Illinois FCS teachers were very satisfied or satisfied in their teaching career with less than 5% indicating dissatisfaction with their job. Other previous job satisfaction studies yielded similar results. Lee (2013) and Tripp (2006) found more than 80% of FCS teachers were satisfied with their teaching career.

The theoretical framework that has guided research related to job satisfaction primarily focused on intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Garton and Robinson (2006) stated that the Motivation-Hygiene Theory centered on intrinsic and extrinsic factors could explain why teachers leave their positions.

Herzberg (1966) developed the Two-Factor Theory of Job Satisfaction, also known as the Motivation-Hygiene Theory. The central tenet of this theory was that job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction were influenced by two substantially different sets of work-related factors termed *motivators* and *hygiene*. Motivators are intrinsic factors of work while hygiene (maintenance) factors refer to extrinsic factors. Examples of motivator (intrinsic) factors include recognition, achievement, growth, and responsibility; whereas job instability, poor collegial relationships, and negative supervision are associated with hygiene (extrinsic) factors. Both motivator and hygiene factors have been reported to influence job satisfaction or dissatisfaction among teachers.

The Motivation-Hygiene theory operates on two mutually exclusive continuums. On the one hand, the job satisfaction continuum is impacted by motivator (intrinsic) factors and varies from a level of satisfaction to a level of no satisfaction. On the other hand, the job dissatisfaction

continuum is impacted by hygiene (extrinsic) factors and operates from a level of dissatisfaction to a level of no dissatisfaction. Both the motivator and hygiene factors, however, may prove to facilitate negative experiences in the classroom.

As applied to this study, if FCS teachers encounter problems, they may be more likely to be isolated within their work environments, be non-participatory in school functions or professional development, or discontinue their interest in their jobs. If so, teachers are more likely to leave the teaching profession as a result and seek alternative types of employment due to dissatisfaction with the job (Garton & Robinson, 2006). For example, a FCS teacher who receives little administrative support may become frustrated, which becomes a hygiene factor that would push the teacher to the negative end on the dissatisfaction continuum and, ultimately, may cause job dissatisfaction with perhaps a voluntary exit from teaching. Therefore, because job satisfaction is determined by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, understanding these categorical factors among beginning and veteran FCS teachers can prove beneficial for teacher retention.

Methodology

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges faced by secondary FCS teachers in Illinois. The primary objective was to identify and categorize a list of challenges encountered by FCS teachers during their first years in the education profession as well as challenges faced by veteran FCS teachers. The secondary objective was to determine the level of satisfaction among FCS teachers at different career stages.

The following research questions provided direction for the study: (a) What are the challenges faced by beginning FCS education teachers? (b) What are the challenges faced by veteran FCS teachers? (c) Are there differences in the challenges faced by beginning teachers and the challenges faced by veteran teachers? (d) What is the level of satisfaction among FCS teachers at each career stage?

Method

A questionnaire adapted from Boone and Boone (2007) was used for this qualitative study. The questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions and one Likert-scale question. The first question asked respondents to describe two challenges they encountered as a beginning

teacher in FCS. The second question asked respondents to describe two challenges they were currently facing. The third question asked respondents to identify their current level of satisfaction as a FCS teacher using indicators of extremely satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied and extremely dissatisfied. Beginning teachers were classified as the first four years of their teaching career. The questionnaire was placed online using SurveyMonkey.com. IRB approval was received from the primary researcher's university before the study began. The sampling frame was established using the state's secondary FCS teacher directory, and the entire population was studied.

A cover letter that included the questionnaire link was emailed to every teacher in the accessible population. They were given one week to complete the questionnaire. To increase the response rate, Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2009) method was used. The methodology of Dillman et al. (2009) called for two subsequent weekly emails to be sent to remind respondents to participate in the research study. The response data from the two open-ended questions was divided into three stages for analysis. In stage one, the researcher transcribed the data. In stage two, the researcher and two other reviewers independently coded the data to establish themes; results were then compared for consensus to establish trustworthiness of the data. In the third stage, the data was summarized and interpreted (Ary et al., 2006).

Findings

The 128 respondents, which included 38 beginning and 90 veteran FCS teachers, provided responses to the questionnaire. The majority of the respondents were female (98%) and worked in a school located in suburbia (42%) or a town (less than 3,000) (33%). Data analysis produced 20 categories, which Table 1 ranks by beginning teacher problems. The categories included classroom management, image, equipment, funding, lab management, time management, student motivation, lack of administrative support, number of class preps, curriculum, faculty relationships, students with special needs, extracurricular responsibilities, knowing policy and procedures, parents, job security, enrollment numbers, mentorships, variance in student abilities, and professional development (Table 1).

Of the top five challenges, only two, equipment and funding, were identified as a continuous challenge at each career stage (Table 1). Respondents beginning their teaching career were most concerned with classroom management, image, equipment, funding, and lab management. Whereas, veteran respondents indicated they were most concerned with student motivation, curriculum, funding, lack of administration support, and equipment.

Classroom Management

The number one challenge for beginning teachers was classroom management (25.0%). Seven respondents indicated classroom management was a current challenge (5.5%), giving it a rank of 8 out of 20 challenges identified in this category. Examples of responses included “classroom control,” “how to handle behavioral problems on the spot,” “students swearing, blatantly not following directions, talking back, and sleeping in class” and “students would test their limits making classroom management a constant struggle.”

Table 1

Challenges Experienced by Beginning and Veteran FCS Teachers

	Beginning Problems			Veteran Problems		
	Rank	<i>f</i>	%	Rank	<i>f</i>	%
Classroom management	1	32	25.0	8	7	5.5
Image	2	25	19.5	7	10	7.8
Equipment	3	19	14.8	5	14	11.0
Funding	4	17	13.2	3	19	14.8
Lab management	4	17	13.2	0	0	0.0
Time management	5	15	11.7	9	7	5.5
Student motivation	6	13	10.2	1	29	22.7
Lack of administrative support	7	12	9.4	4	15	11.7
Number of class preps	8	11	8.6	13	3	2.3
Curriculum	8	11	8.6	2	25	19.5
Faculty relationships	9	8	6.3	11	4	3.1
Students with special needs	10	7	5.5	12	3	2.3
Extracurricular responsibilities	11	4	3.1	13	2	1.6

Knowing policy and procedures	12	3	2.3	0	0	0.0
Parents	13	2	1.6	14	1	0.8
Job security	13	2	1.6	10	6	4.7
Enrollment numbers	13	2	1.6	6	11	8.6
Mentorships	14	1	0.8	0	0	0.0
Variance in student abilities	14	1	0.8	13	2	1.6
Professional development	14	1	0.8	12	3	2.3

Image

Twenty-five respondents (19.5%) indicated that the image of FCS education was a challenge during the beginning stage of teaching. The image problem decreased to 7.8% and ranked seventh as a challenge among veteran teachers. Both beginning and veteran FCS teachers shared similar comments which included “constantly educating the administration, parents, and other staff members of the value of FCS and that it is not just cooking and sewing!” “FCS classes are seen as a dumping ground for students who do not ‘fit’ into other classes or have worn out their welcome – we are the last resort,” “FCS is considered a blow-off class or an easy A,” and “just lack of respect.”

Equipment

Equipment issues ranked third among identified challenges for a beginning teacher (14.8%); whereas, it was the fifth-ranked challenge cited by veteran teachers (11.0%). Mutual comments were shared by beginning and veteran FCS teachers regarding equipment challenges. The most common statement was “working with outdated or broken equipment.” Other shared statements included “having to hold food labs in a regular classroom” and “how to keep students productively busy when there aren’t enough machines for everyone.”

Funding

Funding (13.2%) was the fourth-most reported concern by beginning teachers and ranked third as a current challenge (14.8%). Beginning FCS teachers indicated that they did not know

how to budget: “I did not learn how to budget in my undergrad so I had to learn by trial and error and hoped I had money at the end of the semester,” and one questioned the budgeting process: “Where and how does the budget for FCS work?” A veteran FCS teacher noted that she met budget shortfalls with her own money: “With the lack of funding, often times I just buy my own materials.” Other concerns mentioned by teachers include “shrinking budgets,” a desire “to find other sources of funding opportunities,” as well as the consequences of uncertainty related to funding: “With an uncertain budget, will my program and position be cut?”

Lab management

Lab management was within the top five challenges (13.2%) listed by beginning FCS teachers, but this was not a concern for veteran FCS teachers (0.0%). Beginning FCS teachers questioned “how to have students make up missed labs?” and listed “students not taking labs seriously,” not having “the time to shop for groceries,” being “unsure how to budget for foods lab for the entire year,” “having different expectations of cleanliness, procedures, and content when there are multiple foods teachers teaching the same class,” “overcrowding in labs – more than 6 students in a kitchen unit and how to handle this?” and “time management in labs” as concerns.

Student motivation

The number one challenge cited by veteran teachers was student motivation (22.7%). Beginning teachers ranked student motivation as the sixth-most identified challenge (10.2%). The most common response among veteran teachers was “lack of student motivation.” Other statements included, “students doing just enough to get by,” “student apathy,” and “students just don’t want to learn or be there.”

Curriculum

Twenty-five veteran FCS teachers indicated challenges with curriculum (19.5%) whereas, curriculum was only identified by 11 beginning teachers as a challenge (8.6%). Comments from veteran FCS teachers included “coming up with new and interesting teaching strategies,” “seeking learning activities that provide interdisciplinary learning,” “finding ways to engage the students is difficult,” and “rewriting my lesson plans because I feel they are outdated or not interesting anymore.” Several beginning teacher respondents noted “that being expected to teach in all areas of FCS with limited experience or knowledge in the subject matter.”

Differences between Beginning and Veteran Teachers

Noticeable differences between challenges shared by beginning and veteran teachers included the number of class preps, time management, enrollment numbers, and job security. Challenges communicated by beginning teachers that were not ranked as high by veteran teachers included number of class preps, which was 8.6% and declined to 2.3%; and time management decreased from 11.7% to 5.5%. On the reverse, enrollment numbers were mentioned by two respondents as a beginning teacher challenge but increased to 8.6% as a veteran challenge and job security increased from 1.6% to 4.7%.

Several challenges were mentioned by teachers at the beginning of their career that were not cited as problems for the veterans and vice versa. Early career challenges included lab management (13.2%), mentorships (0.8 %), and knowing policy and procedures (2.4%). Whereas, veteran challenges that were less of an issue among beginning FCS teachers included job security (2.4%) and professional development (2.4%).

Overall, 96% of both beginning and veteran FCS teachers were either extremely satisfied (46.1%) or satisfied (54.0%) with their career as an FCS teacher. Of the 38 beginning FCS teacher respondents, 37 indicated extremely satisfied (14.8%) or satisfied (14.0%) with their satisfaction level with only one respondent having marked dissatisfied (0.7%). Veteran FCS teachers indicated their level of satisfaction as extremely satisfied (31.1%) or satisfied (40.0%) and four were dissatisfied (3.13%) (Table 2).

Table 2

Satisfaction Level among Beginning and Veteran FCS Teachers

	Extremely Satisfied		Satisfied		Dissatisfied		Extremely Dissatisfied	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Beginning FCS Teacher	19	14.8	18	14.0	1	0.7	0	0.0
Veteran FCS Teacher	40	31.3	46	40.0	4	3.13	0	0.0
Totals	59	46.1	64	54.0	5	3.9	0	0.0

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges faced by FCS teachers in Illinois at different career stages. The primary objective was to categorize a list of challenges identified by respondents who were beginning teachers and those with more experience, and to determine if the challenges differed between the two career stages. The secondary objective was to determine the level of satisfaction among FCS teachers at different career stages.

Challenges Identified

Nearly all 20 challenges identified by FCS teachers have been reported in previous studies as challenges among teachers. The findings in this study provide reference solely for FCS teachers offering school administrators and FCS education professionals' evidence on which to base retention efforts.

The number one challenge for beginning FCS teachers was classroom management (25.0%). Respondents were more likely to experience discipline issues as a beginning teacher than as a veteran teacher (5.5%). Consistent with Lee (2013) and Nichols and Mundt (1996), classroom control continues to be a major concern for beginning FCS teachers. As a continuous early career stage challenge, more attention needs to be dedicated to classroom management in teacher preparation programs and for induction programs to provide continuous professional development on the topic. Without classroom control, instructional time is narrowed to deal with inappropriate student behavior.

Image was indicated to be more of challenge for beginning FCS teachers (19.5%) than as a veteran teacher (7.8%) challenge. Arnett and Polkinghorne (2010) also found the image of FCS as a dissatisfaction factor among FCS teachers. While established, more stakeholders need to take advantage of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences FCS Branding Initiative that raises awareness on the importance of FCS. This initiative offers a toolkit containing ideas, activities, and resources as well as use of conceptual icon for FCS teachers to use in the education and advocacy efforts. Even with this national initiative and with marketing not directly part of the job description, FCS teachers need to educate and communicate the importance of FCS to administrators, colleagues, counselors, parents, students and the community to garner and sustain support for the local program. Ways to tout the FCS discipline is to partner with local community entities such as the farmer's coop to host a community or school garden, establish a sewing club that occupies a community space (rotation) to repair minor clothing issues for community members, engage the broader community for authentic evaluation of student projects, or engage in service-learning projects to design gowns or bags for nursing home occupants. With each activity, publicize the events in the local newspapers, submit for spotlights to new stations or within the school new feeds, social media, and on the

school/community websites. Constant and consistent messaging of the importance of the FCS curriculum can help change the image of FCS education.

The challenges of equipment and funding, which go hand-in-hand, were challenges for both the beginning and veteran respondents. These two challenges were consistent with results from previous research (Arnett-Hartwick & Cannon, 2020; Arnett-Hartwick & Halger, 2018; Nichols & Mundt, 1996). Specifically, for equipment, beginning FCS teachers (14.8%) and veteran FCS teachers (11.0%) had similar concerns with outdated, broken, or lack of equipment and inappropriate instruction facilities. Given the economic times, most schools are reducing line items from the budget thus equipment cannot be improved without money. The comments associated with the funding challenge experienced by beginning (13.2%) and veteran (14.8%) FCS teachers revealed different concerns for each career stage. Beginning FCS teachers were more concerned with the surface challenges of funding such as how does funding work within the school system or budgeting for classes, whereas the veteran FCS teachers described deeper concerns. These concerns centered on self-initiative in terms of using personal money to obtain necessary classroom supplies, seeking alternative external funding sources, and their own job security.

Lab management was a concern for the beginning FCS teacher (13.2%) and not for veteran FCS teachers (0.0%). This challenge has not been described as a concern in previous research. Beginning FCS teachers in this study indicated they need more instruction on how to manage a lab and more direct observations during clinical experiences in their university education program. Time management, operation budget, policies, and student roles are examples of topics to be addressed. From the results, lab management becomes less of a concern with more experience.

Respondents, particularly veteran FCS teachers, struggled with student motivation and curriculum. These challenges were identified in the literature as problems FCS teachers encountered (Cook, 2020; Dainty, Sandford, Su & Belcher; Lee, 2013). Student motivation and curriculum can be a cause and effect result. For example, if the instruction is not interesting, students will not be engaged in the material thereby decreasing student motivation, involvement in discussions, and work produced. Veteran FCS teachers in this study stated they want to learn new teaching methods and activities to update their curriculum. Seeking professional development opportunities or belonging to social networks such as the FCS teacher Facebook page are avenues to modernize or generate new ideas with their instruction habits.

Three challenges were identified for beginning, but not veteran, teachers were lab management, mentorships, and knowledge of policy and procedures. Learning the school culture and assimilating into the teaching profession is part of the induction phase, which can be daunting and overwhelming, all while maintaining the daily tasks of teaching. Arnett-Hartwick and Halger (2018) and Cook (2020) also found that school policy and procedures and working conditions (mentorships) were identified as retention factors for beginning teachers. As teachers

invest and have tenure, their mind-set shifts to job security and the need for professional development, which were identified as problems in this study for veteran FCS teachers.

Challenges as Motivator and Hygiene Factors

Applying the results to this study's theoretical framework, the challenges can be classified as noted above into two categories based on Herzberg's (1966) theory: motivator (intrinsic) and hygiene (extrinsic) factors. According to Herzberg, the challenges identified can be located on the negative end of the two factors' respective continuums: no satisfaction (motivator's continuum) and dissatisfaction (hygiene's continuum). That means both factor sets can contribute to unfavorable experiences for a teacher, thus decreasing their satisfaction level. Attempts to intervene to alleviate challenges can shift the levels of satisfaction towards the positive ends of each factor's continuum. However, if the identified challenges are not resolved, it could potentially impact teachers and cause them to leave the teaching profession.

For example, image was identified as a challenge, which is considered a hygiene factor, located on the negative end of the dissatisfaction continuum. If measures are taken, such as educating others to have a better understanding of the FCS curriculum or garnering support from administrators, which can impact the perception of other stakeholders such as guidance counselors and students, image is no longer an explicit problem. Thus, the image problem slides to the positive end of the continuum. If nothing is done to correct the problem of a poor image of FCS, the problem stays at the negative end of the continuum, and according to the Motivation-Hygiene Theory, it is more likely the teacher will leave their teaching position.

Despite the number of challenges, the FCS teacher respondents as a whole, were either very satisfied or satisfied with their teaching career (96.0%). The positive satisfaction levels are consistent with other results from Arnett and Polkinghorne (2010, Lee (2013), and Tripp (2016). Strong satisfaction needs to be communicated as a reason to pursue FCS teacher education as a career path.

Conclusions

Many FCS teachers potentially leave the profession because of problems they face in their teaching assignments. This study identified the challenges of FCS teachers at different career stages, both as beginning teachers and veteran teachers. Despite the identified challenges, FCS teachers as a whole in Illinois are satisfied within their teaching assignment.

Those responsible for the preparation and retention of FCS teachers must recognize problems faced by FCS teachers in order to identify specific ways to support its teachers. FCS professionals can develop and coordinate in-service workshops and opportunities for

professional development on topics based on the challenges identified from this study. Additionally, these results pinpoint potential problematic areas for administrators to be aware of and address for beginning FCS teachers as well as FCS veteran teachers to be successful. A limitation of the study is that it only surveyed teachers in one state. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other populations.

An understanding of the concerns from beginning and veteran teachers is a first step. Adequately preparing FCS teachers and supporting experienced teachers to handle potential problems can increase job satisfaction and reduce teacher attrition in efforts to eliminate the FCS teacher shortage in Illinois.

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