

Coping with Transitions During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic: A Case Study of Early Career Teachers' Experiences in Secondary Agricultural Education

Abstract

The year 2020 marked an era of change and demanded that educators across the globe adapt in new and innovative ways. In secondary agricultural education, teachers experienced significant transitions as a majority of K-12 schools shifted to remote, distance, and online instructional models. Therefore, teachers' position requirements, obligations, and expectations began to shift dramatically, creating unique challenges for early career teachers. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the transitions that early-career SBAE teachers in Louisiana experienced while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through our analysis, four themes emerged: (1) situation, (2) self, (3) support, and (4) strategies. In the first theme, the early career teachers gave voice to how situational factors greatly influenced the professional transitions they underwent as a result of COVID-19. Self, the second theme, represented the different internal mechanisms, or sources of strength, participants used during the transition process. Meanwhile, support reflected the external support systems participants used during their time of transition into a virtual teaching format. The last theme, strategies, provided insight into the approaches that participants used to address and reduce the negative effects of the pandemic on their teaching. Going forward, we provide critical implications to stoke changes so that early career teachers can better cope with transitions during periods of stress in the post-COVID-19 era.

Keywords: COVID-19; distance education; early career teachers; global pandemic; online instruction; remote instruction; transitions

Introduction and Literature Review

The year 2020 marked an era of change and demanded that educators across the globe adapt in new and innovative ways. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators' responsibilities were forced to evolve because of stay-at-home orders, decreased household incomes, sickness, and increased levels of stress (Keels, 2020). According to Lund et al. (2020), "as of March 30 [2020], three-quarters of Americans were living under state or local stay-at-home mandates or advisories" (p. 4). By June 2022, the U.S. surpassed over 86 million confirmed COVID-19 cases (Johns Hopkins University, 2021). With conditions vulnerable, educators faced significant challenges politically, professionally, and socially (Beaty, 2020; Lund et al., 2020).

As an illustration, Lund et al. (2020) reported that over 1.5 million jobs in education and educational services were lost in the U.S. because of the COVID-19 global pandemic (Lund et al., 2020). Job insecurity was also experienced in other industries and professions, such as agriculture, food service, retail, trade, and others. As a result, over 10 million U.S. citizens became jobless and vulnerable to food insecurity (Lund et al., 2020). In secondary agricultural education, teachers also experienced significant transitions as a majority of K-12 schools shifted to remote, distance, and online instructional models (Lindner et al., 2020). Therefore, teachers' position requirements, obligations, and expectations began to shift dramatically, creating unique challenges for early career teachers.

Even before the pandemic, early career teachers have reported they desired additional support during this phase of their professional development (Roberts et al., 2020b). For example, one of the

most common challenges reported by early career teachers has been balancing their personal and professional lives as they begin to establish their careers (Buchanan et al., 2013). As such, high levels of support have been crucial for early career teachers because of existing trends that demonstrate poor job retention and mixed job-related satisfaction (Figland et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2020a). To this point, Blackburn and Robinson (2008) explained, “a high percentage of agriculture teachers will leave the profession well before retirement. Those teachers who leave the profession are often dissatisfied with their chosen career and exhibit low levels of teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction” (p. 1). With an influx of 1,680 school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers entering the national workforce during the 2020-2021 school year (Smith et al., 2012), it is critical to address the needs of early career agricultural educators due to the transitions they endured during the COVID-19 era.

Before the added career, financial, health, and social complications resulting from the global pandemic, in-person instructional challenges faced by early-career agricultural educators included classroom management, science instruction, time management, and student engagement (Blackburn & Robinson, 2008; Lambert et al., 2011; McKim & Velez, 2015). Further, Lambert et al. (2011) reported: “teacher workload, school structure, and personal life are all micro-level external stressors in the teachers’ schedule, and teachers have developed coping mechanisms to deal with these stressors” (p. 59). To complicate this issue further, McKim and Sorensen (2020) reported that secondary agricultural education teachers’ job satisfaction had a statistically significant decrease since the pandemic began. Similarly, other empirical evidence (Barry & Easterly, 2021; Eck, 2021; Clemons et al., 2021; Shoulders et al., 2021) has suggested that as a result of the pandemic, agricultural education teachers have struggled with advising their students’ FFA and SAE learning experiences as well as their personal coping strategies, motivation, and stress. As a result, a need emerged to understand early career teachers’ transitions and coping mechanisms as they adapted to instructional changes during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Conceptual Framework

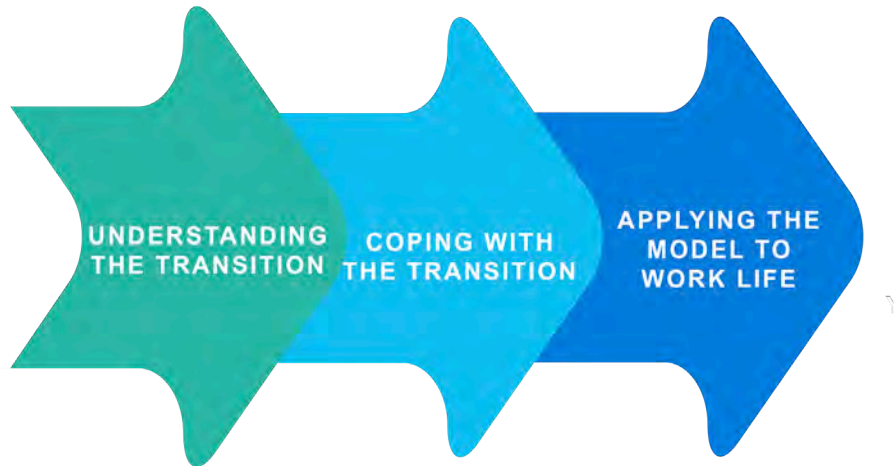
This investigation was guided by Schlossberg’s (2011) transition model. The framework presents the cycle individuals undergo as they adjust to unprecedented change. In particular, the model depicts a process that explains how educators cope with novel changes through three primary phases: (1) understanding transitions, (2) coping with transitions, and (3) applying the model to work and life (Schlossberg, 2011; see Table 1). A variety of contextual-based sources can initiate transitions. As such, Schlossberg (2011) conjectured that educators usually endure three distinct shifts that can begin the transition process: (1) anticipated transitions, (2) unanticipated transitions, and (3) non-event transitions. Although individuals experience changes throughout their lives, such often does not require them to make extensive transitions in their professional lives. Therefore, the model focuses solely on the changes that reshape individuals’ professional “roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 159).

Through this lens, anticipated transitions represent life changes, expected or planned, such as a graduation or a career change (Schlossberg, 2011). Meanwhile, an unanticipated transition occurs through the occurrence of an unplanned event, which is often disruptive. These disruptions can positively or negatively affect individuals. As such, Schlossberg’s (2011) lens was useful for making sense of our emergent findings regarding the COVID-19 global pandemic, which presented many unanticipated transitions for teachers. For example, the pandemic was an unanticipated transition for teachers that affected their career-related roles because it required them to convert their instructional delivery approaches to remote, distance, or online instruction. Further, personal external factors, such as increased stress because of family illness associated with the pandemic, may have led to critical

internal changes for secondary agricultural education teachers. As a result, this lens allowed us to better understand the transitions that early career teachers may have experienced initially, as well as how they coped with such changes in their professional lives.

Table 1

Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Model



Note. Adapted from “*Overwhelmed: Coping with life’s ups and downs,*” p. 42. Copyright 1991 by Evans and Company.

After an initial transition, individuals then move into the second phase as they begin to cope with the transition. In this study, we focused primarily on the second phase of Schlossberg's (2011) model to better understand how participants actively applied coping mechanisms during this era of change. To understand the coping processes initiated by a transition, the evolution must be understood as a linear process that spans varying periods. Each period reflects how an individual begins to make meaning of the transition and cope with such professionally through utilizing various sources of support (Schlossberg, 2008).

In this study, the sources of support that the teachers used may have occurred through teachers' school officials or the Louisiana Agriscience Teachers Association (LATA) since both could have provided resources that might have alleviated stressors associated with the transitions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is critical to note that the strategies individuals used during a transition were not limited to a single approach. Instead, they often used multiple strategies (Schlossberg, 2011). As individuals move through these periods of transition, they finally learn how to apply these strategies to navigate their altered professional life successfully.

Statement of Purpose and Research Question

This qualitative investigation's purpose was to explore the transitions that early-career SBAE teachers in Louisiana experienced while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the pandemic created an era of unprecedented change, it is likely the event created additional stress and job dissatisfaction for early career teachers (McKim & Sorensen, 2020; Shoulders et al. 2021). Consequently, the study aligned with the American Association for Agricultural Education's National Research Priority 7: *Addressing Complex Problems* (Andenero et al., 2016). One research question

guided this investigation: What sources of influence did the early career teachers in Louisiana identify as a result of their transitional professional experience during the COVID-19 global pandemic?

Reflexivity

To uphold this study's purpose, the researchers understood the importance of recognizing their biases to ensure transparency throughout the research process. To achieve transparency, a brief background of the researchers was provided to identify our prior experiences and preconceptions, which may have influenced the study. The lead researcher was a graduate student at Louisiana State University (LSU) studying agricultural education. She began her graduate program in the spring of 2020 and had to transition her academic career remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An additional research member was a graduate student at LSU University in the same degree program, focusing on agricultural leadership and international development. The other researchers previously worked as SBAE teachers in two different states. They now serve as faculty members at LSU, where they conduct annual early career teacher professional development sessions. The COVID-19 pandemic required the two faculty members to adapt the format of their courses to online and remote instruction. These biases and experiences uniquely influenced how we approached the current investigation.

Methodology

The study used an *instrumental case study approach* since participants were part of a bounded system (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) explained that a *case* was a "specific, a complex, functioning thing" (p. 4). As a result, we strove to present the complex and unique experiences of participants. In particular, we bounded the case by place and time, i.e., during the summer of 2020 in Louisiana. Further, all participants were secondary agricultural education teachers in Louisiana. We also built Tracy's (2010) qualitative quality standards into each phase of the investigation. Following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, data were collected purposefully from early career teachers in Louisiana. For the purpose of this investigation, early career teachers were defined as having five years or less of teaching experience.

In March 2020, the Louisiana governor instated stay-at-home orders that required all teachers in the state to transition to distance, virtual, or remote instruction because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The guidance from the governor remained in place until October 2020, when teachers began to transition to a hybrid teaching format, i.e., many students completed two or three days in person, and the remainder of the week they learned online. This format stayed in place until August 2021, when students transitioned to a fully in-person approach.

To help combat the challenges associated with the pandemic, the researchers created a virtual professional development opportunity that occurred in July of 2020, which targeted early career teachers and provided them with additional resources for this phase of their professional careers. The participants in the current study were recruited based on their attendance at the virtual professional development. Of the participants, four were female, and three were male. Further, each participant taught in a diverse school, from rural to urban areas. The participants were employed at varied program sizes, including single and multiple-teacher programs. Participants were also primarily traditionally certified ($f = 4$). Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' personal and professional characteristics.

Table 1

Personal and Professional Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Program Type	Years of Teaching Experience	Certification Type
Ashley	23	F	Urban	5	Traditionally Certified
Colby	27	M	Suburban	4	Alternatively Certified
Julia	24	F	Rural	2	Traditionally Certified
Matt	26	M	Rural	1	Traditionally Certified
Rachael	22	F	Rural	4	Traditionally Certified
Samuel	31	M	Urban	3	Alternatively Certified
Sarah	22	F	Rural	1	Alternatively Certified

Data Collection

In our first phase of data collection, we facilitated a 45-minute focus group interview with participants ($n = 7$). The interview protocol was semi-structured and probed the participants’ stressors and coping strategies during the pandemic. Because data saturation was not achieved after the focus group, we then requested that participants provide a written narrative of their experiences teaching during the COVID-19 global pandemic. In the second phase of data collection, the participants were asked to provide a minimum of a 500-word response to the following writing prompts: (1) what opportunities have you observed in your career as a result of the pandemic? (2) what challenges have you observed in your career as a result of the pandemic? and (3) how will the pandemic influence your career in the future? The collection of this additional data allowed us to achieve data saturation (Stake, 1995). However, it should be noted that two of the original focus group interview participants elected not to submit data for the second phase of the investigation, i.e., only five participants submitted responses and two did not submit written responses.

Data Analysis

After data collection, each data source was transcribed verbatim. Following transcription, we engaged in first and second-cycle coding approaches. Codes were developed through the researchers’ interpretation of the data by which we created words and phrases that represented the “summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative” elements shared by participants (Saldaña, 2021, p. 4). In the current study, we employed first-cycle approaches of in-vivo, emotion, and descriptive coding. In particular, *in-vivo* coding was used to develop new codes based on the participants’ words. Next, we used emotion coding to capture a deeper understanding of participants’ intrapersonal responses, and their feelings resulting from work-life transitions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interpretation of emotion codes allowed for a more in-depth insight into the participants rather than those provided through only words. Finally, we used descriptive coding to delve deeper into participants’ support, especially in regard to the transition strategies and mentors they used to cope with the experience during the pandemic. As a result of our first cycling coding approaches, 162 unique codes emerged. These codes were then organized into a single document to help facilitate a greater

reduction of the data through our second-cycle coding procedures. Second-cycle coding approaches have been used to reduce initial codes into categories (Saldaña, 2021). Therefore, we used an axial coding approach to distill specific connections among our findings. Axial coding allowed us to concentrate on the relationships among our first cycle codes and reduce them into distinct categories. Examples of axial codes included: “advancement of SAE,” “unison among participants to others in the field,” “perceived benefits of their age,” and “forced into new resources.” We then began to evaluate different frameworks to help further interpret our findings from various perspectives. As a result, Schlossberg’s (2011) transition model emerged as the most appropriate lens to ground the study’s findings. Thereafter, we used a thematic coding approach to interpret the categories through Schlossberg’s (2011) lens and condensed them into themes (Saldaña, 2016). Through this process of data reduction, four themes emerged: (1) situation, (2) self, (3) support, and (4) strategies.

Building Quality into the Study

We used Tracy’s (2010) criteria to ensure rigor and trustworthiness. For instance, in the design of this study, we identified a *worthy topic* concerning the importance of the COVID-19 pandemic. The topic also provided insight into participants’ relevant experiences as they navigated the challenges of the pandemic in their careers during this formative career phase. Our procedures throughout the study also met the criteria to ensure *rich rigor* by using efficient and relevant theoretical concepts, followed by rigorous data collection and analysis procedures. The research was also conducted in a manner that upheld *ethical* considerations to protect all participants’ identities and well-being. Finally, we established *sincerity* and *credibility* by being transparent about our methods and procedures while also providing rich descriptions that yielded deeper insight into the lived experiences of participants, which is presented in our discussion of the investigation’s findings.

Findings

The findings of the study were described through four stages of coping with a professional transition: (1) situation, (2) self, (3) support, and (4) strategies (Schlossberg, 2011). Schlossberg (2011) explained that unique contextual forces largely influence each stage. As such, we used participants’ words, written reflections, and other sources of data to provide an in-depth depiction of their coping experiences as they adapted their instructional practices during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Theme #1: Situation

In this study, participants shared the unique situational factors that influenced their professional transitions during the pandemic. For example, the early career teachers having to adopt new instructional delivery formats presented considerable challenges. Case in point, Matt and Colby shared the difficulties of teaching in rural areas in which many students did not have access to the Internet. Colby explained: “with 40% of our district not having Internet access, it’s been pretty difficult.” Matt also had considerable challenges. He shared his experience attempting to establish agricultural classes virtually by explaining: “[I] just threw my hands up in the air and said I’m going to try this again next year.”

Meanwhile, Julia and John explained how their circumstances during the pandemic resulted in them feeling more “stress[ed], unsure, and uncertain.” Julia, who taught at the Louisiana School of the Deaf and Blind, where students live on campus, stated: “my school actually sent home all of our students...we have a lot of accommodations...it was really stressful.” Matt also articulated the stress he experienced was largely due to the length of the pandemic. He explained: “nothing is back to normal... I’m kind of concerned [for my students].” Samuel continued the notion of uncertainty when he explained that his school only used virtual learning for one month before abruptly “ending the school

year.” To this point, Rachel shared: “I also really have no idea what’s going on [at my school].” And Sarah responded: “we just kind of have to do the best we can.”

In addition, participants shared challenges concerning how to “manage and supervise students” from a distance. Further, Julia, an early career teacher at a new program, expressed concern that the pandemic might dramatically set back the growth of her program and, perhaps, place it in danger of being cut from the school funding. Meanwhile, other participants shared the challenge of providing authentic FFA experiences for students. For instance, Ashley wrote in her narrative response that the experience of teachers and students: “have been stripped of everything they know, and how they [students] learn best.”

Theme #2: Self

The second theme, self, represented the different internal mechanisms, or sources of strength, participants used during the transition process. As participants progressed throughout the pandemic, they explained they gained more confidence in their skills. For example, John explained: “as an early career teacher, one of the things that [was] stressed... is adaptability... I firmly believe that this [the pandemic] was more of a confidence booster.” Sarah also expressed: “just do the best you can with the cards you've been dealt, and we've been dealt COVID-19 cards.” Meanwhile, Rachel shared her method of relating to other teachers since they have shared a collective experience, with each having been in uncharted territory. Rachel mused: “just use what you have and do what you can.” Samuel echoed similar sentiments when he shared: “we’re making it the best that we can.” As such, participants’ positive outlooks helped to build confidence. Further, the participants also revealed they used internal mechanisms of reflection and connecting with other colleagues to improve their understanding of the situation and develop “new roles as educators” (Rachel) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After reflection, Julia determined that prioritizing her professional role helped her find clarity and balance. She explained: “the first thing is I’m a teacher, then I’m an FFA advisor.” Similarly, Colby shared: “we’re just trying to get our students educated in any way possible.” In addition to more clearly delineating their professional roles, participants also found meaning in helping late career teachers navigate the complexities of teaching virtually. Samuel explained: “they [other late-career teachers] were calling upon me... and a few of the other younger teachers to say... what are y’all doing... we’ve never experienced this.” Sarah also shared that as a result of the pandemic, she now perceives that she is “more marketable” because of her mastery of new technologies and approaches common to distance and remote instruction.

Participants also voiced some benefits they experienced as a result of the pandemic. In particular, Sarah and Rachel reported that one distinct advantage was improved communication with parents. Sarah explained: “I think they [the parents] are going to communicate more with the teachers... I’m looking forward to that aspect.” Rachel also advanced this notion. She shared: “I remained in contact with the parents as best as she could and tried to be proactive.”

In addition to these internal mechanisms of coping, participants also identified practices and techniques that they planned to continue to implement after the pandemic. Julia shared: “[I] plan on increasing the organization of material, improve the accessibility of students [to learning materials], and being more proactive to save resources and materials.” Likewise, Samuel identified the importance of ensuring he taught students the competencies needed to use technology in their daily lives. He explained the pandemic helped him see the need to better “train kids for the real world.” Therefore, during the second stage of coping, participants were not built their confidence but also reflected on the benefits they could gain from the pandemic.

Theme #3: Support

The next emergent theme, support, reflected the external support systems participants used during their time of transition into a virtual teaching format. Participants indicated that support was offered by their school systems through the school administration providing resources, such as Chromebooks, to ensure students had access to content and assignments. The largest source of support articulated by the early career teachers was the LATA. Julia explained: “our state has done a great job of [adapting agricultural education] events the best way they can.” She also shared in her written narrative: “Louisiana FFA association had done a great job trying to keep things [contest and activities] going on the virtual scale.”

In this study, participants also noted the downsides of losing in-person state FFA contests. For example, they shared that by only holding virtual events, student motivation decreased dramatically. Sarah explained: “I had a bunch of students that were going to submit proficiency award applications, but only one actually completed it.” Rachel advanced this notion by explaining: “none of my kids were able to finish their applications or any of that... we were so close to finishing, and then we didn’t.” In addition to contests being canceled during the transition to virtual learning, the majority of participants shared that the lack of support from school officials to document grades for students effectively was also a downside.

As a result of their students’ loss of motivation, many participants shared they harbored feelings of frustration and aggravation. For example, Rachel revealed that her students had: “absolutely no motivation.” Julia also expanded on this notion: “the student engagement went down.” In their written narratives, participants also anticipated decreased involvement in agricultural education activities throughout the 2020-2021 school year. As Colby shared: “our assignments and things wouldn’t be counted as grades... we were able to give supplemental information.” Samuel expressed the transition of supplemental work as “the one thing that kind of hurt us [the agricultural teachers].” As a consequence, he worked to increase student motivation through weekly student challenges that were moderately successful. Although the early career teachers used technology to reach out to students, such as Zoom, they expressed they experienced a lack of interest, participation, and engagement from students.

Theme #4: Strategies

The last theme, strategies, provided insight into the approaches that participants used to address and reduce the negative effects of the pandemic on their teaching. For instance, the early career teachers shared they used the following software programs to engage students: Blackboard, Google Classroom, Remind101 messaging, and Zoom. In particular, the use of web-based software helped the participants to facilitate ethical communication with students while social distancing. Participants also spoke about their strategies for maintaining the three-circle model during this period. Samuel shared his experience of using Zoom and Blackboard as a way to hold “virtual video sessions with students” and allow them to provide a visual presentation of their SAEs. Additionally, Colby explained he used Remind101 for his classes and to help students keep engaged with the FFA chapter. Through this technique, he was able to promote direct communication with specific groups and reduce his students’ feelings of isolation.

Samuel also discussed his approach to maintaining FFA events throughout the pandemic. As an illustration, he would task his FFA officer team to “develop events that may be conducted at a distance.” Samuel noted a positive reaction from the officer team when using this approach. He explained, “a lot of my kids, we took that an[d] ran with it.” In addition to Remind101, Colby also used

Google Classroom to transfer educational materials to his students easily. Julia also used Google Classroom with a specific section for FFA in which she posted virtual events that students could attend. Through this approach, Julia felt there were benefits to having “distinct online spaces for students” to help them find information and clearly respond to issues pertaining to the classroom, FFA, and SAE, which helped to decrease confusion.

Notably, SAEs emerged as a component that many early career teachers felt had increased as a result of the pandemic. Emily shared: “I feel that this pandemic g[ave] the SAE component a chance to grow.” John also highlighted the pandemic served as a “blessing” for students’ SAE projects since the excess time allowed for greater project exploration” in comparison to students’ normal busy schedules. John also identified the additional time allowed students to: “broaden the horizons of which aspect of the SAE they want to continue.” In the same vein, Jacob shared that the “increased time at home helped strengthen students’ projects.” Similarly, Colby revealed: “my big push was to get SAEs implemented, get projects started [during the pandemic].” Other participants reported they perceived that community-based projects and service-learning opportunities would play a more prominent role for SAEs after the pandemic because students can now organize online and mobilize their peers from a distance.

Conclusions

In this investigation, we provided insight into how early career teachers coped with transitions during the COVID-19 global pandemic. We concluded that such could be interpreted using Schlossberg’s (2011) transition model through four themes of meaning: (1) situation, (2) self, (3) support, and (4) strategies. Although the challenges introduced in 2020 were unprecedented, the early career teachers reported they drew upon various coping mechanisms to facilitate student learning during the pandemic successfully – this notion appears to conflict with the findings reported by Shoulders et al. (2021).

In the first theme, the early career students gave voice to how situational factors greatly influenced the professional transitions they underwent as a result of COVID-19. For example, the participants illuminated how changes concerning instructional delivery – distance, online, and virtual – presented unique challenges. Similarly, Lindner et al. (2020) reported that agricultural education teachers in Alabama and Georgia also had mixed views of remote instruction and distance education. Therefore, our findings support existing literature in this regard. The participants also reported that the pandemic made them feel increased pressure and uncertainty in their careers. In an analysis of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work and life variables, McKim and Sorensen (2020) found that agricultural education teachers’ career satisfaction and work domains had a statistically significant decline as a result of the pandemic. Therefore, our findings support McKim’s and Sorensen’s (2020) work. However, they also provide additional insight into why early career teachers may have been particularly vulnerable to negative job-related sentiments during this period.

Despite the negative aspects of the pandemic, the early career teachers expressed they also used internal mechanisms to help them cope with key transitions. As an illustration, many participants reported they began to gain confidence in delivering distance, online, and remote instruction. Further, they reported they had become more adaptable and began to reprioritize aspects of their career. Such notions do not appear to have been explored in the literature on agricultural education.

In the third theme, support, participants articulated how external support systems provided critical encouragement as well as resources during COVID-19. For instance, the early career teachers

suggested that two primary sources offered the most support: (1) school administration, and (2) the LATA. They explained that their administrators helped by securing tablets and computers for their students to effectively teach class remotely and the LATA provided a plethora of web-based resources to augment their programs. Previous research regarding the role of external support systems in helping early career teachers has been addressed in the literature on agricultural education (Figland et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2020b). However, evidence of the influence of such individuals during the era of COVID-19 has been scant.

In the final theme, the early career teachers provided insight into the approaches they used to reduce the negative effects of the pandemic on their careers. To accomplish this, participants reported they adopted new technologies that helped them better deliver instruction remotely as well as communicate with their students and parents effectively – a notion supported by the work of Lindner et al. (2020). The early career teachers also reported they used technology to reimagine the ways in which they facilitated the FFA and SAE components of agricultural education’s comprehensive, three-circle model. For example, multiple participants reported they facilitated FFA events remotely for the first time during the pandemic. Further, the early career teachers also explained they perceived their students’ SAEs were strengthened during quarantine because they had more time to focus on enhancing their individual projects. These sentiments do not appear to have been explicitly explored in agricultural education.

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The COVID-19 global pandemic has created frightening headlines and immense challenges for individuals across the globe (Keels, 2020). Almost every day, news outlets reported rapidly increasing cases and death, a lack of knowledge about how the disease functioned, and a scarcity of resources to protect our vulnerable populations (Beaty, 2020; Lund et al., 2020). Perhaps one of the few positives during this period was the resiliency of teachers as they began to rethink how to deliver effective instruction while in quarantine. In the current investigation, we added to a growing knowledge base concerning how to facilitate education during times of crisis. As a result, this study provided important implications for future research and practice.

To begin, because changes to the instructional delivery of content created additional stress for participants, we recommend that teacher preparation programs in agricultural education begin to more prominently feature pedagogical training for distance, online, and remote instruction. For example, perhaps agricultural education majors could deliver microteaching experiences using each of the aforementioned delivery models to help them build greater self-efficacy if another pandemic occurs. This study also illuminated how early career teachers need additional support during stressful events. Moving forward, we recommend that Louisiana establish a formal mentoring program in which early career teachers are partnered with more experienced teachers (Ramage et al., 2021). Through the creation of such a program, perhaps early career teachers would feel more comfortable asking for advice during stressful moments. We also recommend that future research explore how early career teachers’ instructional experiences during the pandemic may influence their future pedagogical decisions. Further, we also recommend that additional research explore the most successful delivery strategies for teaching secondary agricultural education students at a distance, especially those considered special needs (Minus et al., 2021; Ramage et al., 2021, 2022).

In this investigation, the participants reported they used internal mechanisms to help them cope with key transitions during the pandemic. As such, we recommend that professional development sessions be created for early career teachers to purposefully highlight strategies for how to make

meaning of their struggles and gain a more nuanced perspective on how to be resilient during challenging points in their careers (LeJeune & Roberts, 2020). We also recommend that future research distill the specific internal mechanisms that could most profoundly affect early career teachers' work-life balance in powerful, transformative ways (Trani et al., 2020).

Participants in this study also spoke overwhelmingly positive of the external support they received to navigate the complexities of the pandemic. As such, additional research is warranted to understand the types of resources that may be needed to better support early career teachers with distance, online, and remote instruction. We also recommend that LATA begin to create a database so that video and textual-based resources created during the pandemic can be preserved for future use.

Moving forward, we also call for future research to examine the instructional approaches, such as service-learning, that early career teachers reported were most effective during the pandemic (Roberts & Edwards, 2015, 2018, 2020; Roberts et al., 2019a, 2019b, 2019). In the post-COVID-19 era, schools have largely returned to face-to-face instruction. However, participants in this investigation reported they intended to continue to incorporate aspects of the instructional skills they acquired during the pandemic as they switched to a different delivery format. Therefore, we suggest that additional research examine how agricultural education programs, including classroom instruction, FFA, and SAE, change after the pandemic ends. Further, because the early career teachers in this study reported a greater focus on SAEs, future research should also examine the best practices for supervising these projects virtually (Roberts & Robinson, 2018). We also recommend that researchers examine the long-term impacts of the pandemic on early career teachers' anxiety, stress, and resilience moving forward. And finally, since Schlossberg's (2011) transition model served as a productive lens, future theory-building efforts should be dedicated to refining the stages of coping – situation, self, support, and strategies – that emerged in our analysis to better understand the transitions that early career teachers endure during the stressful moments in their careers.

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