

# Professionalism of Vocational Agriculture Instructors as Perceived by Vocational Agriculture Instructors and Superintendents in Nebraska Public Secondary Schools

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Accepted for Publication March 1986

Vocational agriculture instructors, teacher educators and state supervisory staff are expected to demonstrate a high degree of professionalism in their respective positions. At the same time, many of them would be hard pressed to provide a concise definition of "professionalism."

Lee (1981) defined professionalism as "how individuals or groups of individuals conform to the characteristics expected of them by virtue of their occupation." Allen (1978) stated that "being a professional carries with it certain roles and responsibilities. The three areas with which we should be concerned are: professional status, professional improvement and professional organizations."

Nearly all of the studies dealing with "professionalism" refer to the key word "profession." Many definitions and criteria have been discussed by sociological investigators (Hall, 1968; Moore, 1970; Goode, 1960; Friedson, 1970). Generally speaking, most would agree with Moore (1970) "that a profession involves a full-time occupation; a sense of calling or commitment or service orientation; a formalized organization; esoteric, useful knowledge and skills based upon specialized training or education of exceptional duration and difficulty; and an autonomy restrained by responsibility."

While a few researchers have attempted to measure professionalism, perhaps the best known is Hall. Hall (1968) developed and used an instrument commonly known as Hall's Professionalism Scale. His original instrument, comprised of 50 items, was based on four attitudinal elements: "use of the professional organization as a major reference, belief in service to the public, belief in self-regulation, and a sense of calling or autonomy."

There has not been a time in recent years when there has been so much concern over professionalism within the ranks of education at all levels of the educational system. Wright (1981), for example, states that "thousands of educators have strayed from the historic professional fold into what they believe to be the green pastures of contemporary laborism. . . . the time has arrived for professionals to unite and give leadership to a resurgence of professionalism." While a clear need exists to determine perceptions of professionalism for all educators, the lack of information about the perceptions of professionalism for vocational agriculture instructors, as perceived by the vocational agriculture instructors themselves and by school superintendents, became the focal point for this investigation.

## Purposes

The purposes of this study were: (a) to identify existing criteria used to assess professionalism in education, business and industry; (b) to modify, as necessary, the criteria to determine perceptions of professionalism of Nebraska vocational agriculture instructors; and (c) to determine how vocational agriculture instructors and their

respective secondary school superintendents perceive characteristics of professionalism of the local vocational agriculture instructors as affected by position and school size.

### Methodology

The population for this study consisted of 100% of the vocational agriculture instructors in single teacher departments, the designated head instructor in multi-teacher departments, and their respective superintendents in public secondary schools of Nebraska. A total of 136 vocational agriculture instructors and 136 school superintendents received a questionnaire.

The 25-item survey instrument used to collect the raw data was a slightly modified version of an instrument used for similar research conducted by Snizek (1972). Modifications of instrument items were made only in wording to fit the respective respondent groups. Snizek presented a factor analysis of Hall's (1968) Scale and of his data on occupational groups to determine "the degree of empirical fit of the items used to measure each of the five theoretical dimensions of professionalism." Snizek presented a factor analysis of Hall's (1968) scale and of his data on occupational groups to determine "the degree of empirical fit of the items used to measure each of the five theoretical dimensions of professionalism." Snizek found that, using rotated factor matrices, less than one-half of Hall's original items had acceptable factor loading on the appropriate theoretical dimension being considered. Therefore, Snizek recommended using 25 of Hall's original items. The shortened version had a reliability of .84 (Snizek, 1972). As a result, Hall's (1968) Scale with Snizek's (1972) recommended modifications was utilized in this investigation.

A high degree of professionalism is denoted by a high overall score on the instrument. A score for the scale was obtained by scoring each item in the appropriate direction with five being the top score and one being the lowest score for each item and then totaling the 25 items. Fourteen items were stated positively and 11 items negatively. Therefore, it is possible for scores to range from 25 to 125.

Although previous researchers have not attempted to categorize degrees of professionalism, Bobo (1979), using Hall's Professionalism Scale on a group of classic professionals and public school teachers, found a range of scores from 62 to 116, with a mean of 90.24, a median of 90.06 and a standard deviation of 10.40, thus approximating the normal curve. The classic professionals included accountants, attorneys, physicians and university faculty.

Of the 272 instruments originally mailed, 251 were returned, representing a 99% return from respective secondary school superintendents. The data were analyzed using frequencies, means and standard deviations. Comparisons were also made in relation to school size. Public school size designation in Nebraska (Figure 1) is based on secondary enrollment of grades 9 through 12 of the previous school year.

Class A:	527 - 1175 students
Class B:	172 - 526 students
Class C:	71 - 171 students
Class D:	70 students or less

Figure 1. Public school size designation in the state of Nebraska.

## Findings

In only one of four comparisons made between vocational agriculture instructors and school superintendents did the instructors rate themselves higher than their superintendents. Overall, the superintendents ranked their vocational agriculture instructors higher than the vocational agriculture instructors did themselves in a majority of the possible comparisons.

A high level of agreement exists between the instructors and superintendents across all school class categories. The largest variation came from responses by vocational agriculture instructors in schools having the lowest (70 or below) enrollment ( $\bar{x}=76.00$ ) and by school superintendents in schools having an enrollment between 172-526 ( $\bar{x}=80.06$ ). These differences represent a mere 4.06 point difference across all categories on a 125-point scale.

Both school superintendent and vocational agriculture instructor respondent groups in schools having the lowest enrollment (70 or below) had the lowest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=78.46$  and  $\bar{x}=76.00$ , respectively). Overall, mean ratings of professionalism tended to increase slightly as school size increased, as indicated by both school superintendent and vocational agriculture instructor respondent groups.

In comparisons made between vocational agriculture instructors and school superintendents across all school size categories, as shown in Table 1, the means range from 76.00 to 80.37 for vocational agriculture instructors and from 78.46 to 80.06 for school superintendents. These comparisons would indicate a very stable and cohesive perception of professionalism of vocational agriculture instructors by school superintendents and a slightly less stable perception across all school class categories by vocational agriculture instructors.

Bobo (1979) conducted similar research of classic professionals which included teachers. Across all school size categories on both

Table 1

A Comparison of Perceptions of Professionalism for Vocational Agriculture Instructors by Vocational Agriculture Instructors and School Superintendents by School Size

Enrollment <sup>a</sup>	Present Position					
	Instructors			Superintendents		
	N	Mean <sup>b</sup>	S.D.	N	Mean <sup>b</sup>	S.D.
0 - 70 (D)	33	76.00	5.12	26	78.46	7.63
71 - 171 (C)	55	77.25	6.06	49	78.89	5.62
172 - 526 (B)	39	76.28	6.89	35	80.06	5.68
527 - 1175 (A)	8	80.37	8.31	6	79.33	5.89

<sup>a</sup>Total secondary school enrollment, grouped by Nebraska school class size designation. <sup>b</sup>Range is from 25-125 on a 25-item scale.

respondent groups, Nebraska vocational agriculture instructors were perceived at least 10 points lower than Bobo's "classic professionals" on a similar 125-point scale used in both studies.

### Conclusions

From this study, it was concluded that:

1. A high level of agreement exists with respect to perceptions of professionalism when Nebraska vocational agriculture instructors and superintendent respondent groups were compared, regardless of school size.
2. Nebraska vocational agriculture instructors were perceived to be less professional than the classic professionals included in previous research.

### Recommendations

1. The findings of this study should be used in evaluating instructor/administrator relationships and expectations.
2. Research should be conducted to determine how to raise the level of professionalism found in teaching vocational agriculture.
3. More inservice activities should focus on professionalism within vocational agriculture.
4. Additional research should be conducted on perceptions of professionalism held with school boards, students and community leaders.

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