

MORALE LEVELS OF FIRST-YEAR AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN OHIO

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Morale can be defined as the professional interest and enthusiasm a person displays towards the achievement of individual and group goals in a given job situation (Bentley & Rempel, 1980). Morale is set within the framework of organizational theory with an individual progressing toward the achievement of organizational tasks and his or her perceived job satisfaction within the total organization. Morale is a continuous variable that measures an individual's perception of task achievement and job satisfaction. High morale can be characterized by interest and enthusiasm for the job. While low morale is characterized by feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration. Teacher morale can be viewed as teachers striving to achieve their individual goals and the educational goals of the school system and their perceptions of satisfaction that stem from the total school environment.

The morale of agricultural education teachers has been an area of investigation for several years. Experienced agricultural education teachers have higher levels of morale or job satisfaction when compared with beginning agricultural education teachers (Debertin & Priebe, 1984; Grady, 1985). When compared with national morale norms for junior and senior high faculties, beginning agricultural education teachers rank consistently below the 50th percentile (Flowers & Pepple, 1988). Beginning teachers are in an especially vulnerable position during their first few years of teaching (Craig, 1983; Knight, 1978). Achieving individual educational goals and feelings of satisfaction are critical factors as young teachers decide whether to remain in or to leave the teaching profession. By understanding the nature of morale and the relationship between morale and job turnover, educators can assist young teachers in developing effective strategies for maintaining high morale levels.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose was to measure the morale level of first-year agricultural education teachers in Ohio. The specific objectives were:

1. To determine and compare the morale levels of first-year agricultural education teachers in Ohio with national norms for secondary school teachers.
2. To determine if differences exist among first-year, second-year and fifth-year measures of morale for a given group of teachers, and
3. To determine the relationship between levels of first-year teacher morale and job turnover rates.

Methods

Sample Selection: A purposive sample of first-year teachers was identified. The sample consisted of first-year teachers in Ohio who had received a B.S. degree in agricultural education from a four-year university, had obtained a four-year provisional teaching certificate, and were enrolled in a graduate-level, first-year teacher program. A census study was conducted with the 56 teachers meeting these criteria during the 1985-86 to 1989-90 school years. Ten of the first-year teachers were female and 46 were male. Eighty-eight percent of the instructors were teaching production agriculture.

Instrumentation: The Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (PTO) was used to measure teacher morale. The PTO was developed by Bentley and Rempel (1961) and consists of 100 items that ask teachers to make qualitative judgments about their teaching environment. The 100 items are divided into 10 factors that measure the multi-dimensional nature of morale: Teacher Rapport with Principal, Satisfaction with Teaching, Rapport Among Teachers, Teacher Salary, Teacher Load, Curriculum Issues, Teacher Status, Community Support of Education, School Facilities and Services, and Community Pressures. Factor analysis was used by the test developers to identify and describe the

10 dimensions of morale. Inter-factor correlations computed from a sample of 3,023 secondary teachers had a median correlation of .38 (Bentley & Rempel, 1980). Test-retest data were obtained from the 3,023 teachers. Correlation coefficients ranged from .62 to .88 for the 10 factors and .87 for the overall instrument (Bentley & Rempel, 1980). Item responses are weighted for scoring by a four-point scale with 4 = agree, 3 = probably agree, 2 = probably disagree, and 1 = disagree. Reversing the weights for negative items results in a score of 4.0 representing high morale and 1.0 representing low morale. The calculated means for the 10 subfactors were interpreted according to the national PTO norms for junior and senior high school teachers using the following scale:

- Very High Morale - Above the 90th percentile
- High Morale - Between the 75th and 90th percentiles
- Moderately High Morale - Between the 50th and 75th percentiles
- Moderately Low Morale - Between the 25th and 50th percentiles
- Low Morale - Below the 10th and 25th percentiles
- Very Low Morale - Below the 10th percentile

Data Collection and Analysis: Data were collected in October of each year. A 100% response rate was obtained for the 56 teachers in the study. Job turnover data were obtained from state department of education records. An overall morale score was calculated for the 56 teachers in addition to mean scores for the 10 factors. Overall and factor means were interpreted by noting their defined position on the percentile scale. A correlation coefficient was calculated to measure the relationship between overall teacher morale and job turnover rate.

Results

Table 1 (next page) compares the mean morale scores for the 56 teachers with the national norm group. The overall morale score for the 56 first-year teachers was 2.95, indicating a moderately low level of morale when compared with an overall mean of 3.17 for the norm group. Morale scores also were calculated for the 10 factors for the 56 teachers. High morale levels were expressed for two of the factors: teacher salary and community support. Moderately high morale levels were indicated for teacher status and curriculum issues. Moderately low morale levels were expressed for rapport with principal and school facilities. Low morale levels were expressed for rapport among teachers. Very low morale levels were expressed for satisfaction with teaching, teacher load, and community pressures. Although satisfaction with teaching received the highest mean score ($X = 3.20$) for the 56 first-year teachers, the mean was still below the 10th percentile of the norm group. Overall morale scores were similar for the five sets of teachers during the data collection period (Table 2). The overall morale scores consistently ranked between the 25th and 50th percentiles of the norm group.

Table 2
Overall Means and Standard Deviations for Morale Levels 1985-86 to 1989-90 (N = 56)

1985-86 N = 15	1986-87 N = 11	1987-88 N = 8	1988-89 N = 11	1989-90 N = 11
<u>2.96</u> .57	<u>2.93</u> .55	<u>3.01</u> .49	<u>2.89</u> .47	<u>2.94</u> .36

Six teachers who began teaching in 1985-86 were still teaching in 1989-90. First-year, second-year, and fifth-year morale scores were calculated for these six teachers. Overall morale scores were similar for the three measures (Table 3). For the six teachers, there was an increase in mean morale scores for the five-year period for: satisfaction with teaching, rapport among teachers and teacher load. Moderately low and low morale scores were consistently expressed for teacher salary and school facilities.

A positive low relationship ($r = .13$) was found between overall morale scores and job turnover rate. When considering individual factors, a positive, moderate association was found between job turnover rate and teacher salary ($r = .39$).

Table 1
Comparison of Ohio First-Year Teacher Mean Scores with Norm Group Percentiles

%	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8	Factor 9	Factor 10	Overall
90th	3.64	3.72	3.60	3.23	3.68	3.39	3.18	3.42	3.56	3.72	3.51
75th	3.36	3.64	3.35	2.91	3.58	3.13	2.97	3.08	3.19	3.59	3.28
50th	3.17	3.56	3.21	2.53	3.39	2.90	2.78	2.83	2.86	3.44	3.17
25th	2.86	3.43	3.09	2.12	3.18	2.64	2.62	2.52	2.44	3.24	2.81
10th	2.54	3.31	2.90	1.82	3.02	2.28	2.43	2.14	1.96	3.07	2.55
	<u>3.06^a</u>	<u>3.20</u>	<u>3.08</u>	<u>2.91</u>	<u>2.62</u>	<u>2.90</u>	<u>2.91</u>	<u>3.09</u>	<u>2.71</u>	<u>2.94</u>	<u>2.95</u>
	.65	.43	.39	.57	.46	.55	.46	.49	.72	.45	.35

^aMeans and standard deviations for the 56 first-year agricultural education teachers in Ohio.

Table 3
Means Scores and Standard Deviations for 1st, 2nd, and 5th Year Measures of Morale

Factor	1st Year 1985-86 <u>N = 6</u>		2nd Year 1986-87 <u>N = 6</u>		5th Year 1989-90 <u>N = 6</u>	
	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>
1 Rapport with Principal	3.23	.53	2.88	.34	2.78	.75
2 Satisfaction with Teaching	3.19	.24	3.13	.32	3.28	.53
3 Rapport Among Teachers	2.90	.46	2.93	.34	3.12	.38
4 Teacher Salary	2.48	.81	2.55	.59	2.50	.96
5 Teacher Load	2.58	.54	2.60	.43	2.67	.75
6 Curriculum Issues	2.90	.56	2.80	.83	2.77	.61
7 Teacher Status	2.79	.30	2.40	.35	2.67	.84
8 Community Support	2.97	.41	2.73	.47	2.80	.85
9 School Facilities	2.53	.50	2.23	.53	2.27	.82
10 Community Pressures	3.07	.55	2.83	.50	3.00	.85
Overall Scores	2.95	.34	2.86	.19	2.87	.56

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

The 56 first-year agricultural education teachers in Ohio have moderately low levels of morale when compared with a norm group of junior and senior high school teachers. The first-year teachers rank consistently below the 50th percentile of the norm group for six of the morale factors. Repeated measures of morale are similar for teachers remaining in the teaching profession. Although overall morale levels did not necessarily increase as teachers remained in the profession, satisfaction with teaching and rapport among teachers did increase.

Teacher educators should note the factors that received low morale scores. First-year teachers may need additional assistance in dealing with community pressures and teacher load concerns. When supervising first-year teachers, teacher educators need to highlight the unique aspects of teaching agriculture that may encourage low morale levels. Coping with inadequate school facilities, adjusting to a heavy teaching load, getting along with other teachers and the principal, and handling community pressures are areas that may need to be addressed in the preservice preparation and inservice programs for first-year teachers.

A first-year teacher program could be offered to focus on factors that received low morale scores. Teacher educators should identify those factors that can be affected by teacher input, such as handling community pressures and getting along with administrators and other teachers. Factors such as school facilities, teacher salary, teacher load, and community support of education are not directly controlled or influenced by the teacher and may be sources of frustration.

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