

FACTORS RELATED TO THE SUCCESS OF NEW MEXICO VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE TEACHERS AS FFA ADVISORS

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Introduction

Since its inception, the field of teacher education has been plagued with the persistent problem of effectively relating the preparation of teachers to the job they are expected to do. Controversy over the skills and competencies an individual must possess before he/she is considered competent for the teaching profession continuously leads to a barrage of articles and presentations concerning the quality of today's teacher preparation. Agricultural educators are among those who are acutely aware of this problem and controversy. Within the field, there is a constant search to identify more and better ways to prepare Vocational Agriculture teachers for their chosen profession.

One of the major concerns of teacher educators in agriculture is how to prepare teachers for their roles as FFA advisors. The integral relationship of the FFA to the total Vocational Agriculture program has created a situation in which every instructional program for future teachers of Vocational Agriculture includes the development of professional competency pertaining specifically to the role of an FFA advisor. However, upon reviewing the related research and literature, one will find that not only is there a great diversity in methods of preparation for future FFA advisors, there is also a general lack of background information concerning what it takes to be an effective or successful FFA advisor. A study could not be found which has related factors which are supposed to be characteristic of successful FFA advisors to their actual degree of success in advising and supervising FFA activities.

Purpose of Study

The lack of agreement among teacher educators led the author to conduct a research study concerning the preparation of Vocational Agriculture teachers as FFA advisors. Basically, the purpose of the research was two-fold: (1) to identify characteristics which are related to the degree of success of an FFA advisor, and (2) to identify competencies in which a teacher's perceived proficiency are related to his success as an FFA advisor.

Vocational Agriculture instructors who taught during the 1974-1975 school year in the state of New Mexico provided the population for the study. In order to identify advisors with varying degrees of success in advising and supervising FFA activities, the teachers were divided into three groups, based upon a chapter rating scale predetermined by the National FFA Organization and the New Mexico State FFA Association.

A two-part instrument was developed to secure information related

to the two aforementioned objectives. Part I was designed to collect information concerning teacher characteristics which were purported to be associated with the degree of success of an FFA advisor. These characteristics were developed through a review of literature and research. Part II of the instrument was designed to secure pertinent data regarding a teacher's perceived level of proficiency in advising and supervising FFA activities. Twenty-nine competencies that had been identified in a study by Cotrell et al.,¹ were used to measure the teacher's perceived level of proficiency. The data were collected by mailed questionnaire, and 98 percent of the questionnaires were returned.

Findings

The results from the multiple regression of degree of chapter success on the independent variables in the study revealed that a combination of four variables explained the most variance in the degree of success of an FFA advisor (Table 1). However, only 12 percent of the variance could be explained by the multiple regression of chapter success on these four variables. The individual significance levels within the regression equation indicate that when the contribution of the other variables were held constant, only the teacher's degree of participation in either Alpha Tau Alpha or Collegiate FFA was significantly related to the degree of success of his FFA chapter.

Table 2 indicates that no combination of the independent variables in the study could be found which showed a significant multivariate relationship between the independent variables in the study and a teacher's perceived proficiency in advising and supervising FFA activities. The data also reveal that when other selected independent variables were held constant, none of the variables, by themselves, were significantly related to a teacher's perceived proficiency in advising and supervising FFA activities.

Conclusions

The author developed the following conclusions, based on the interpretations of the data presented in the study:

1. When other factors are held constant, there tends to be no significant relationship between New Mexico Vocational Agriculture teachers' perceived degree of proficiency in the 29 student organizational competencies identified by Cotrell et al.,² and the degree of success of their FFA chapter.
2. When other factors are held constant, there tends to be no significant relationship between the success of New Mexico Vocational Agriculture teachers' FFA chapter and the following factors:
 - (a) Former FFA membership
 - (b) Degree of participation in a collegiate student organization other than Alpha Tau Alpha or Collegiate FFA

TABLE 1

STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION OF CHAPTER RATING ON SELECTED VARIABLES
(n = 75)

Independent Variable ^a	R	R ²	R ²	Partial Regression Coefficient	F
	Degree of participation in either Alpha Tau Alpha or Collegiate FFA	.25	.06	.06	.10
Location of vocational agriculture department (ranked according to popu- lation size)	.30	.09	.03	-.14	2.41
Average perceived level of proficiency in advising and supervising FFA activities	.34	.11	.02	.23	2.38
Degree of assistance with FFA activities during student teaching experience	.35	.12	.01	-.08	.84

Independent Variable ^a	R	R ²	R ² Change	Partial Regression Coefficient	F
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R² = .12; F (4,70) = 2.61; p .05

^aFor a detailed explanation of how these variables were coded, refer to Appendix C.

^bSignificant at the .10 level.

TABLE 2

STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF TEACHER'S
 AVERAGE PERCEIVED PROFICIENCY LEVEL ON SELECTED VARIABLES
 (n = 80)

Independent Variable ^a	R	R ²	R ² Change	Partial Regression Coefficient	F
Membership in FFA	.18	.03	.03	.27	2.49

R² = .18; F (1,78) = 2.48; p .05

^aFor a detailed explanation of how this variable was coded, refer to Appendix C.

- (c) Degree of participation in school or community activities as a high school student
 - (d) Grade-point average upon completion of bachelor's degree
 - (e) Size of community where Vocational Agriculture department was located
 - (f) Age
 - (g) Degree of assistance with FFA activities during student teaching experience
3. When other factors are held constant, there tends to be no relationship between a New Mexico Vocational Agriculture teacher's perceived level of proficiency in advising and supervising FFA activities and the following factors:
- (a) Former FFA membership
 - (b) Degree of participation in any collegiate student organization
 - (c) Degree of participation in school and community activities as a high school student
 - (d) Grade-point average upon completion of bachelor's degree
 - (e) Size of community where Vocational Agriculture department was located
 - (f) Age
 - (g) Degree of assistance with FFA activities during student teaching experience
4. New Mexico Vocational Agriculture teachers who have participated to a high degree in either Alpha or Collegiate FFA tend to advise FFA chapters that are more successful than teachers who have participated to a lower degree in either Alpha Tau Alpha or Collegiate FFA. This same relationship holds true when other factors are held constant.
5. The degree of participation in either Alpha Tau Alpha or Collegiate FFA, the perceived level of proficiency in advising and supervising FFA activities, the degree of assistance with FFA activities during student teaching experience, and the size of the community where the Vocational Agriculture department was located account for approximately one-eighth of the total variance in the degree of success of a New Mexico Vocational Agriculture teacher's FFA chapter.
6. No significant proportion of the variance in a New Mexico Vocational Agriculture teacher's average perceived proficiency in advising and supervising FFA activities can be accounted

for by any combination of the following factors:

- (a) Former FFA membership
- (b) Degree of participation in any collegiate student organization
- (c) Degree of participation in school or community activities as a high school student
- (d) Grade-point average upon completion of bachelor's degree
- (e) Size of community where Vocational Agriculture department was located
- (f) Age
- (g) Degree of assistance with FFA activities during student teaching experience

Implications

Although this study was limited to Vocational Agriculture teachers in New Mexico, the findings may have some important implications for all teacher education programs in the field of Agricultural Education. Based upon the findings, the author has developed the following implications and suggestions for further research:

1. Collegiate preservice programs which prepare Vocational Agriculture teachers should devote more time to preparing teachers for their role as FFA advisors. If former FFA membership is not related to an individual's degree of success as an FFA advisor, then it is apparent that even former FFA members who were extremely active in the FFA will need further instruction concerning the FFA before they can become successful FFA advisors. The findings from the study reveal that as an individual becomes older and therefore, more experienced, he does not necessarily become a more effective FFA advisor. A teacher education program which concludes that it can give cursory instruction on how to advise FFA activities based on the assumption that the individual teacher will learn what he "needs to know" on the job may be seriously and permanently handicapping that individual's ability to become a successful FFA advisor. It is worthwhile to note that of all the factors which are normally associated with the degree of success of an FFA advisor, the only one which was significantly related to that success was one which occurred during an individual's collegiate preservice program. Individual characteristics of teachers, as well as the location of the Vocational Agriculture program, appear to have no relationship with the degree of success of the teacher's FFA chapter. This would imply that many reasons which are now given to explain the lack of successful FFA program are, in reality, excuses for improper preparation of Vocational Agriculture teacher for his role as an FFA advisor.

2. An individual's perceived degree of proficiency in advising and supervising FFA activities should not be utilized to measure the effectiveness of any program, preservice or otherwise, which prepares teachers for their role as FFA advisors. The findings from this study indicate that there is no significant relationship between the teacher's perceived ability as an advisor and the actual degree of success of his FFA chapter; and therefore, his perceptions should not be used to measure that success. This also implies that using perceived proficiency is not an acceptable research method for identifying competencies which a successful FFA advisor should possess. This raised the question: Is it also an unacceptable method for identifying competencies for areas of instruction other than FFA? The validation of competencies identified by such methods should be suspect, and continued research should be developed to determine if a person's perceived proficiency in a competency is actually related to his success as a teacher.
3. Collegiate preservice programs for Vocational Agriculture teachers should offer and encourage participation in activities of organizations designed specifically for agricultural education majors and should continue to improve this phase of the teacher education program. It appears that an individual's degree of participation in a collegiate student organization designed specifically for Agricultural Education majors may be the best preparatory method now being utilized in a preservice program. It may also be possible that by participating in such an organization, a teacher is influenced in his attitude toward the value of a student organization, which in turn, could be related to the success of his FFA program. Research should be conducted to ascertain specific activities in which participation by the student during his preservice instruction increases the degree of his success as an FFA advisor.
4. There is a great deal which contributes toward the success of an FFA advisor beyond what is currently thought to be important. If all the factors which are now thought to be related to the success of an FFA advisor explain only 12 percent of the variance, then it is obvious that there must be other factors which are of greater importance. Research should be conducted to identify these factors as well as means for maximizing their development in a preservice or in-service training program.

Footnotes

¹ Contrell, Calvin J. ; Chase, Shirley A. ; and Molnar, Marilyn J. Model Curricula for Vocational and Technical Teacher Education: Report No. V -- General Objectives, Set II. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, (1972).

² Ibid.