

questions by actually checking and looking at appropriate evidence. These specific questions arise within the span of activity between the present status of a behavior, for example, and the desired behavior or objective.

In educational situations where emphasis is on changing behavior of learners, at least three fixes will play an important part in the evaluation process. One fix would be on the present status of the learners at the beginning of the planned experience. A second would be on the objective or outcome sought. One can realistically expect the learners to progress toward the objective, but not all will reach it, or at least not all at the same time. It is normal to expect a gap to exist between the anticipated and the attained at any point in time. Through the evaluation process a fix may be established on where the learner is. This fix can be used in determining progress in terms of the beginning point and the anticipated final point.

Evaluation is not restricted just to systematic attempts in gathering evidence. Everyone utilizes the evaluation process in his daily activities. He makes judgments whether something is "good" or "bad" in relation to his objectives or the standards he holds. These unstructured or informal evaluations are essential to normal living. In evaluating instruction, agricultural educators must, however, rise above this level to the systematic evaluation of conditions under which the instruction is carried on and of how far the instructional purposes are actually being realized.

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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE VOCATIONAL CHOICES OF VOCATIONAL
AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS IN LOUISIANA

by

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What vocational plans have youth made for themselves? What are the circumstances, and who are the people influencing the educational and occupational plans of high school youth? Answers to these questions are needed to fill the "credibility gap" between occupational training and job requirements.

To obtain this information, a survey was conducted in Louisiana involving 741 vocational agricultural students enrolled in grades 9 through 12 in the public secondary schools. Participating in this research were 17 high schools representing five parish school systems. Cooperating in the design and performance of the study were the Departments of Vocational Agricultural Education and Home Economics Education at Louisiana State University. This report is based upon a fragmentary study which served as a dissertation for the author.

Statistical procedures used in this research were frequency and percentage distributions, chi-square test of independence, and the coefficient of contingency. The null hypothesis was accepted or rejected at the 0.05 level of confidence. Contingency values were defined as low up to 0.20, moderate from 0.21 through .040, and high for 0.41 or above. A correction factor was applied to the contingency values to adjust for fineness of grouping.

A. VOCATIONAL CHOICES

To understand the vocational choices of youth, it is essential to account for the differences between the educational and occupational status to which individuals aspire and actually expect to achieve. These elements are subsequently referred to as "aspirations" and "expectations" when analyzing components of vocational choice behavior.

Vocational choice is herein broadly defined to include educational plans and occupational decisions. An assumption of this research was that crystallization of a preferred job status generally establishes the educational achievement a person must achieve to attain his occupational objectives.

1. Educational Choices

Four categories were used to measure the level of educational aspirations and expectations. The levels were these: (1) college degree or higher; (2) some college, vocational or business school; (3) high school; and (4) less than high school.

Data in Table I reveal that approximately one-half of the students expected to attain an educational status beyond the high school. A high degree of association was observed between the aspired and expected educational levels. Educational expectations were lower in all categories except for the level of some college, vocational or business school. Students tended to develop a greater awareness of the importance of continued education as they progressed through high school.

2. Occupational Choice

Occupational choices were classified according to six prestige levels. These were designed to measure the degree of skill and educational preparation required for performance and the socioeconomic status enjoyed as a result of the occupational position. The six occupational categories as shown in Table II were these: (1) professional; (2) business and farm executives, owners, or managers; (3) clerical, sales, or technical; (4) skilled; (5) semiskilled-unskilled; and (6) miscellaneous.

A total of 57.9 per cent of the students aspired to the professional and skilled occupations, and the responses were equally divided between these two categories. The professional and skilled occupations were expected by 37.5 per cent of the students. The professional category accounted for only 13.1 per cent of the occupational expectations, and the skilled level contained 24.4 per cent of the response.

TABLE I
EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF
VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS

Educational Level	Per cent Students	
	Aspired	Expected
College degree of higher	22.0	19.7
Some college, vocational or business school	28.7	30.4
Complete high school	32.0	31.4
Dropout of high school	3.9	3.4
Uncertain	13.4	15.1
Total	100.0	100.0

TABLE II
OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF
VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS

Occupational Level	Per cent Students	
	Aspired	Expected
Professional	29.3	13.1
Business and Farm Executive, Owner, or Manager	4.8	4.0
Clerical, Sales, or Technical	7.3	5.5
Skilled	28.6	24.4
Semiskilled-Unskilled	5.2	5.8
Miscellaneous	4.2	5.8
No Choice Made	20.6	41.4
Total	100.0	100.0

A moderate statistical relationship was obtained between occupational aspirations and expectations. There was an erratic, but measurable, trend to aspire and expect the higher status occupations as students progressed through the high school grades.

3. Realism of Choices and Failure to Choose Vocations

The inability to establish a realistic vocational choice is partially responsible for the loss of potential talent to society. The crystallization of vocational choices at an early age is beneficial to efficiency in career planning. An awareness of the extent of dysfunctional career choices is essential to planning in vocational education.

A moderate to high relationship exists between educational choices and the educational prerequisites of the occupations chosen by the students. However, occupations chosen by 3.7 per cent of the respondents required a higher educational level than they expected to achieve.

Many students lack the scholastic aptitude for attaining the educational background required for their chosen occupation. Only 23.8 per cent of the students had achieved greater than a "c" average over the high school years.

Data indicate that a large number of students have not made vocational choices. Educational aspirations and expectations were undecided by 13.4 per cent and 15.1 per cent of the students, respectively. Occupational aspirations and expectations were not crystallized by 20.6 per cent and 41.4 per cent of the students, respectively.

B. FACTORS INFLUENCING VOCATIONAL CHOICES

Persons involved in the guidance of youth and program planning in vocational education should be aware of the circumstances and people considered influential in student career choices. One of the objectives of this research was to determine the influence of seven selected factors on the vocational choices of high school students. Data concerning these factors are presented in summary under each heading.

1. Availability of Occupational Information

It was assumed that the availability of occupational information would influence students to crystallize their vocational choices earlier in the high school years. Knowledge of occupations should help students to assess their capabilities more accurately and to establish realistic career choices as a result. Guidance counselors and teachers are some of the resource persons in the school setting who may provide occupational information to students.

Course choices are occupationally related for students who plan for their careers through selection of high school curricular offerings leading to the attainment of their vocational objectives. Course choices were discussed with counselors and teachers by 48.7 per cent and 44.1 per cent of the respondents, respectively. These results clearly indicate that over one-half of the students had not been counseled in their course selections.

Conferences with guidance counselors concerning occupational plans may be considered a direct appeal by the student for occupational information. In many school settings, the student must initiate a request for counsel concerning occupational plans. This policy, in association with a low counselor to student ratio, places certain limitations upon non-college bound students to obtain counsel on occupational plans. Only 35.9 per cent of the respondents had ever discussed occupational plans with counselors, and 35.1 per cent of the students indicated they had been advised on these matters by teachers.

Educational and occupational expectations were influenced only to a limited extent by discussion of course choices or occupational plans with guidance counselors or teachers. A majority of the students were uninformed of the duties, responsibilities, qualifications, and rewards of the world of work. Data reveal a weakness in the ability of high school youth to use occupational information in vocational decisions. Occupational expectations are not statistically related to student awareness of the requirements of their chosen careers.

2. Home Environment

The home environment has been shown to exert a very profound influence on the vocational choices of high school youth. The lack of parental encouragement and financial support may impose severe limitations upon the career choices of disadvantaged youth. The amount of support provided to students by their parents is dependent upon socioeconomic background and educational status. It was assumed that the vocational choice levels of students were directly related to the educational and occupational status enjoyed by the parents.

It was noted that continued education was highly valued by parents. It was reported by 70.7 per cent of the respondents that their parents were very encouraging toward their education beyond high school. Some encouragement for continued education was received by 21.7 per cent of the respondents.

The educational status of the parents was found to be more influential in student career choices than any of the other home environmental variables measured.

Parental occupational status appeared to be associated only to a limited extent with student vocational choices. The paternal influence was significantly greater in occupational choices, and the maternal influence appeared dominant in educational decision making of students.

3. School Environment

An evaluation of the school environmental influence upon career choices was made through student appraisal of the high school contributions to vocational decision making. Courses taken in high school, teacher encouragement for continued education, and participation in extra-curricular activities were among the aspects studied.

The subjects considered most influential in career choices were vocational agriculture and physical education. Other subjects influencing career choices in descending order of importance are mathematics, science, English, and history.

A majority of the students reported their teachers had encouraged them to acquire education beyond the high school. It may be paradoxical that many of those encouraged lack scholastic ability to achieve their expectations.

A low to moderate relationship exists between the extent participation in extra-curricular activities and vocational choice levels, with the exception that a statistically significant association was not observed concerning occupational expectations.

4. Persons Influencing Vocational Choices

Educational choices were influenced to a greater extent by mothers than by fathers; however, the opposite was true for occupational decisions. This observation was found statistically significant at the 0.05 level of confidence.

The reference groups of persons influencing the vocational choices of youth were these: parents; a heterogeneous grouping of friends, relatives other than parents, and persons in chosen occupations; school personnel; and clergymen. The relative ranking of reference groups remained constant, but there were variations within each group when the persons influencing educational choices were compared.

Among school personnel the ranking was as follows: vocational agricultural teacher, guidance counselor, principal, coach, and academic teacher.

5. Personal Value Systems

Vocational choices are a reflection of personal values. The selection of an occupation is conditioned by a desire to satisfy personal needs. The respondents in this research based their occupational choices primarily upon personal interests, satisfactions, and rewards. A smaller percentage of students were influenced by work experiences, talents and abilities, and tangible assets. Considered least influential on occupational choices were migration requirements and the inheritance of a farm or business.

6. High School Academic Achievement Record

Perhaps the best index of future occupational attainment is the high school academic achievement record. This variable indirectly measures scholastic potential. Such a record is not an accurate measure of intelligence, nor of future success, but it may be accepted as a crude prediction of attainment in occupations requiring scholastic aptitude.

The vocational choice levels of the students were significantly related to their high school achievement records. The existence of a moderate relationship indicates that students having higher academic achievement records usually choose the more prestigious vocations.

7. Vocational Limitations

A significant difference exists between the aspired and expected vocational choice levels of the students surveyed. One of the objectives of this research was to determine the limitations deterring persons from attaining their aspirational levels.

Attainment of educational and occupational aspirations were primarily limited by the same reasons, namely, change of interest, lack of ability or skill, and lack of financial support.

The primary sources of finances for continued education and occupational entry were parents and work to obtain the necessary financial backing. Financial support for educational preparation and occupational entry was not regarded as a serious deterrent to vocational attainment by a majority of the students.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on evidence in this study, the following suggestions were made for the improvement of vocational education in Louisiana public schools.

1. A functional vocational education program, established in the public school system could be very beneficial in preparing persons of all ages and abilities for job entry and advancement. Among the students surveyed were approximately one-fourth who planned to attain a college degree. The existing public secondary school curriculum has generally neglected to provide adequate education for the remaining three-fourths of the students who need occupational training to prepare for worthwhile careers.

2. A study of occupations should be included as a part of the school curriculum. This orientation would make a worthy contribution to student career choices if begun in the elementary grades and continued through placement in a satisfactory occupation. A majority of the students in this study was uninformed of the prerequisites, duties, responsibilities, and rewards of the occupations they chose. Moreover, two-fifths of the students had not established tentative occupational choices. The National Vocational Education Act of 1963, Public Law 88-210, specifically states that each student enrolled in a Federally funded vocational program shall have an occupational objective. The public school systems participating in these programs are therefore charged with providing the education and training needed by students for achieving their occupational goals.

3. The public school system could provide a valuable service through initiation of occupational informational programs for parents. Parents are the most influential persons in the career choices of youth. Accurate and timely vocational information is needed by parents so they may counsel youth more effectively. Conferences regarding student career decisions would be more effective if they involved parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and principals.

4. Professionally trained vocational guidance personnel need to be provided the schools in sufficient numbers to permit frequent conferences with students concerning career plans. Only one-third of the students had been counseled on occupational plans by guidance counselors or teachers. Furthermore, the occupational choices of students who had received counsel were not significantly different from those who had not had such conferences. School personnel could be more effective in career counseling if they were better informed of the conditions in the world of work.

5. A greater student awareness of agricultural careers may be developed through emphasis on training for nonfarm agricultural occupations. Only a limited and insignificant number of the vocational agricultural students in this research chose careers in agriculture. Recent research in Louisiana has indicated that numerous rewarding careers in agriculture are available for qualified persons.

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FUNCTION APPROACH

by

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I have been asked to discuss some experiences we have had in the use of the function approach to the development of curriculum as it applies in vocational agriculture and particularly in the programs for agricultural business and industry.

As part of the background for my discussion, let me review very briefly some of the work that was done by our colleagues and associates back in the late 1950's and on up to more recent times. In 1957 Sutherland and Thompson¹ studied, The Training Required by Workers in Agricultural Business and Industry in California. They found a lack of uniformity from one business to another of the same kind, in terms of job descriptions or in terms of the kinds of things required of workers in approximately the same category. For example, in some shops farm machinery repairmen were expected to meet the customer. In other shops, they never met the customer.

Sutherland and Thompson as well as others have reported an almost universal absence of written job descriptions in agricultural business.

¹ Sutherland, S. S. and E. E. Thompson, The Training Required by Workers in Agricultural Business and Industry in California, Report of a Study: Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1957.