The Opinions of Vocational Agriculture Teachers Toward State Supervision and Teacher Education in Agriculture

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"Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making" John Milton (1608-1674).

Although state supervisors and teacher educators are regularly called upon to evaluate vocational agriculture teachers in the field, rarely, except through the use of state or university advisory committees, are teachers asked to offer their opinions on the performance of state supervisors and teacher educators. Except for two recent studies which used the opinions of state and national officers of vocational agriculture teachers' associations for evaluation purposes, research in this area has been limited (Kotrlik & Lelle, 1986). Even when the review of literature is broadened to include all of education, few examples can be found of formal evaluation of teacher education or state supervision programs where teachers were the primary evaluators (Creaser, 1972).

As McCormick (1985) stated, the opinions of vocational agriculture teachers are a valuable tool to use in assessing the general state of teacher education in agriculture. Sadler (1985) believes that, although opinion surveys do not provide penetrating critical insights into policy and the manner in which policy finds expression, they do provide the strongest base for generalization when used in evaluation. Creaser (1972) and Conant (1963) also suggest using teachers to evaluate teacher education programs.

After a review of related literature, the authors determined that vocational agriculture teachers' opinions represented one way to evaluate the performance of state supervisors and teacher educators. Despite responsibilities in such diverse areas as teacher preparation, research and management of the state FFA program, state supervision and teacher education share many common responsibilities (Lelle, 1984). The primary purpose of this study was to determine vocational agriculture teachers' opinions of the performance of state supervisors and teacher educators in these shared areas of responsibility.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

1. To determine vocational agriculture teachers' opinions of state supervision and teacher education in agriculture in the United States.

2. To determine if differences existed in the perceptions of teachers toward selected aspects of state supervision and teacher education according to the levels of the demographic variables: age, sex, years of vocational agriculture teaching experience, educational level, years of vocational agriculture the teacher completed in high school, length of teaching contract, population of the area in which the teacher's school was located, primary taxonomy of the vocational agriculture program, number of vocational agriculture teachers in the school, number

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of visits by university agricultural education faculty in the last five years, number of visits by state department agricultural education staff in the last five years, and status as a past or present officer in a state or national vocational agriculture teachers' association.

3. To determine the teachers' ranking of actions needed to improve teacher education and state supervision in agriculture.

Procedures

The population (N = 12,464) consisted of teachers of vocational agriculture who were teaching in ninth-grade programs, senior high school programs, or secondary joint vocational agriculture programs at the time of the study. The sample was drawn from the 1984 Agriculture Teachers Directory (Henry, 1984). Cochran's sample size formula (Snedecor & Cochran, 1980) indicated that a minimum of 173 returned questionnaires was needed. A sample size of 245 was used in the study in anticipation of a response rate as low as 70%. After the sample size was determined, each eligible teacher from the 1984 Agriculture Teachers Directory was numbered, and a table of random numbers was utilized to select the completely random sample.

A closed-form questionnaire developed during an earlier study by Kotrlik and Lelle (1986) was used to secure the information needed to satisfy the objectives of the study. Changes indicated from their study were incorporated into the instrument. In addition, the updated instrument was field tested using 12 teachers of vocational agriculture from several areas of the United States. The final instrument used in this study yielded the following reliability estimates using Cronbach's alpha: State supervision scale, alpha = .88; teacher education scale, alpha = .89.

After three mailings and a telephone follow-up, a response of 177 out of 245 (72.2%) was achieved. This exceeded the minimum requirement of 173 returned questionnaires. Oral responses to the entire instrument were requested by the author during the telephone follow-up. Since comparisons between those who responded after each of the three mailings and those who responded by telephone yielded no differences, the four groups were combined for data analysis.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential t-tests. The level was established a priori at .01 to minimize the problems associated with multiple t-tests.

Results

The scale used in this instrument was a reverse Likert-type scale, with 1 being excellent and 5 being poor. On the seven state supervision items, the statement which received the most desirable rating was "Quality of working relationship with teachers," while the statement with the least desirable rating was "Efforts to help teachers improve their teaching." The teacher education statement that received the most desirable rating was "Quality of working relationship with teachers," while the statement with the least desirable rating was "Opportunity for teachers to have input in agricultural education policies."

Inferential t-tests were used to determine if differences existed between the ratings assigned to state supervisors and teacher educators. The only significant difference between individual statements was on item five, "Opportunity for teachers to have input in agricultural education policies." State supervisors received a 2.27 mean rating

(just below good) while teacher educators scored 2.78 mean rating (just above fair). These data are listed in Table 1.

The grand mean rating given to state supervisors (2.07) was significantly better than the rating given to teacher educators (2.21). It should be noted that the grand mean was not intended to evaluate the total state supervision and teacher education program, but only a composite of those seven aspects addressed in this study. These data are also listed in Table 1.

The vocational agriculture teachers were also asked to rank, from one to seven, actions that state supervisors and teacher educators needed to take to improve vocational agriculture programs. Teachers believe that both state supervisors and teacher educators need more money to conduct activities and that more workshops need to be conducted

Table 1

Ratings Assigned to Statements About State Department of Education Supervisors and University Faculty

Statement		State Supervisors	Teacher Educators	df	t
1. Usefulness of workshops offered	m sd	2.05 .80	2.01 .79	150	.56
2. Representation of agricultural education to those outside the profession	m sd	2.04 .91	2.20 .85	169	-2.18
3. Quality of working relationship with teachers	m sd	1.90 .78	2.00 .85	172	-1.54
4. Quality of communications with teachers	m sd	2.06 .93	2.12 .84	170	- .87
5. Opportunity for teachers to have input in agricultural education policies	m sd	2.27 .88	2.78 .87	169	-7.32*
6. Efforts to help teachers improve their teaching	m sd	2.33 .93	2.38 .91	171	- .75
7. Efforts to help teachers get up to date information	m sd	2.22 .98	2.35 .95	171	-1.67
Grand mean	m sd	2.07 .64	2.21 .67	143	2.81*

Note. 1 = Excellent, 2 = Good, 3 = Fair, 4 = Poor, and 5 = Unacceptable.

*$p<.01$.

by both groups. Similarities between the two groups become less apparent or cease to exist after these two item rankings. These data are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Ranking of Efforts That Would Result in Improved Programs

Effort	State Staff		Faculty	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
1. More money for activities	2.91	1	3.60	2
2. More staff or faculty	4.15	4	4.69	6
3. More support staff	4.30	6	4.86	7
4. More teacher visits	4.35	7	4.25	5
5. More workshops	3.95	2	3.23	1
6. Better communications	4.16	5	3.55	3
7. More input from teachers	4.12	3	3.84	4

Conclusions and Recommendations

Teachers' opinions of teacher education and state supervision did not vary according to age, sex, years teaching experience, education, years of vocational agriculture in high school, length of teaching contract, school location, program type, number of teachers in the program, number of visits by teacher educators, number of visits by state supervisors, or status as a vocational agriculture teachers' association officer.

Teachers perceived that state supervisors were doing a better job of conducting the specific responsibilities addressed in this study than were teacher educators, and that teachers had less input in teacher education policies than in state supervision policies. Teacher educators should evaluate their responsibilities in the areas addressed by this study to determine why this perception exists.

Teachers believed that more money for state supervision and teacher education activities and more workshops for teachers would result in the greatest improvement in state supervision and teacher education programs. Although acquiring more money might be beyond state supervisors' or teacher educators' control, providing more workshops may be possible. State supervisors and teacher educators should determine if a need exists for more inservice education and workshops in their respective states.

Based upon a review of appropriate literature and the findings of this study, further evaluation of state supervision and teacher education should be conducted to determine what changes, if any, are needed in these two components of agricultural education. Vocational agriculture teachers should be included in these evaluative efforts.

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