

## **Attitudes Held Toward FFA Proficiency Awards**

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FFA proficiency awards have been a part of the FFA awards program since 1944 (Bender & Taylor, 1974). Many agricultural educators continue to support the proficiency awards program for its educational value.

However, a problem appears to exist in this aspect of the high school vocational agriculture program in Louisiana and possibly in other states. For example, less than 15% of the teachers in Louisiana had students apply for these awards in 1985. In addition, it appears that the same teachers have students apply for these awards on an annual basis while most teachers in the state do not have students participate in this program at all (R. Sullivan, personal communication, May 8, 1985).

A review of the literature revealed that a limited amount of research had been conducted in the area of proficiency awards. In a related study, White and Christiansen (1978) reported that the teaching interests of vocational agriculture teachers were correlated with over half of the contests entered by their students.

Ricketts and Newcomb (1984) studied the leadership and personal development abilities possessed by high school seniors who were members of superior and non-superior FFA chapters and by seniors who were never enrolled in vocational agriculture. They reported that chapter activeness had a higher relationship to leadership and personal development abilities possessed by FFA members than activeness at district or regional, state, and national levels.

Drake (1982) may have addressed one reason why teachers do not have students applying for proficiency awards. He maintains that it is a fantasy to believe that teachers of agriculture can or are willing to carry out the many expectations held for their positions. Drake stated that the super person fantasy may well be the most serious professional problem currently facing agricultural education.

This study was initiated to determine why some Louisiana teachers have students apply for proficiency awards on a regular basis while most teachers never have students apply. The results of this study should help the state staff in their efforts to improve the proficiency awards program in Louisiana.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to assess vocational agriculture teachers' attitudes toward the FFA proficiency award program and to determine what factors are related to whether a teacher had students apply for these awards. The objectives were to:

1. Determine the attitudes held by Louisiana vocational agriculture teachers toward the FFA proficiency awards program.
2. Determine if selected factors were predictors of whether a teacher had students apply for proficiency awards. The factors included

years teaching experience, years vocational agriculture in high school, number of vocational agriculture teachers in the school, and percent rural students in the program.

3. Determine if differences existed in teachers' attitudes toward the proficiency awards program between those teachers who had students apply in 1985 and those who did not.

#### Procedure

##### Instrumentation

A questionnaire was developed to secure the information needed for this study. Items for the questionnaire were selected after a thorough review of the literature. The semantic differential scale used in the instrument was modified so that pairs of terms relative to proficiency awards were used in the scale rather than the 28 pairs of terms developed by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957). It should be noted that semantic differential scales "attempt to get at connotative, rather than descriptive, meanings" (Popham, 1981). Popham also stated that since the evaluative dimension is the strongest of the three dimensions of meaning (semantic space, evaluation and potency), "it is generally recommended for use in semantic differential scales dealing with affect."

The questionnaire was examined for content validity by eight vocational agriculture teachers selected from those teachers who were not in the sample or population for the study. Two of these teachers had students apply for proficiency awards in previous years. The teachers reported that the instrument possessed content validity.

After the initial content validity procedure, the instrument was field tested with 15 teachers who were not in the sample selected for the study. Four of these teachers had students who had applied for proficiency awards in previous years. No modifications were indicated as being necessary by the field test.

The instrument that resulted from these procedures included a demographic information section, a 15-item section containing statements pertaining to proficiency awards with responses recorded on a 6-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 6), and a modified semantic differential scale.

Reliability estimates calculated using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) for the two scales in the questionnaire yielded the following estimates: attitudes toward proficiency awards -  $r = .89$ ; semantic differential scale -  $r = .92$ . These data indicated that the instrument possessed internal consistency.

##### Populations and Sample

Two populations were identified. One consisted of all vocational agriculture teachers in Louisiana who had students apply for FFA proficiency awards in 1985. The other consisted of all teachers who did not have students apply for FFA awards in 1985. The year 1985 was used because this was the only year for which an accurate listing of applications was available. As a result of this limitation, the findings of this study apply to 1985 only.

All 37 teachers who had students apply for FFA proficiency awards were surveyed, and 100% responded. This list was secured from the state supervisor of vocational agriculture programs.

A sample of 126 teachers out of the 235 teachers who did not have students apply was randomly selected based on Cochran's formula (Snedecor & Cochran, 1980). A total of 106 teachers responded after two mailings and a telephone follow-up of all non-respondents for a response rate of 84.1%. Independent sample t-tests were used to determine if differences existed between the mail and phone responses to the Likert and semantic differential scale items. The alpha level used for these tests was .01 which was the level preset for this study. Since no differences existed, the data were combined. As a result of these procedures, it was determined that the respondents were representative of the population of vocational agriculture teachers in Louisiana in 1985 who did not have students apply for proficiency awards.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data for Objective 1, stepwise multiple regression was used to analyze the data relative to Objective 2, and one sample student t-tests were used to analyze the data for Objective 3 (Snedecor & Cochran, 1980). For the one sample t-tests, those teachers who had students apply for proficiency awards in 1985 were treated as the population, and those teachers who did not have students apply were treated as the sample. The t-test was used to determine if the responses from the sample were statistically similar to the population or if they were different. The alpha level was set at .01 to minimize the problems associated with multiple t-tests.

## Results

### Attitudes Toward the Proficiency Award Program

The teachers' responses to statements about the proficiency award program are displayed in Table 1. The data show that both groups of teachers were in greatest agreement with the statement that FFA awards motivate students. This statement received mean ratings from teachers who had students apply and those who did not of 5.70 (strongly agree) and 5.24 (agree), respectively.

Teachers who had students apply for awards gave their lowest rating (1.62, disagree) to the statement that awards applications are a waste of time. Teachers who did not have students apply gave their lowest rating (1.97, disagree) to the statement that having students apply for awards is not a part of my job.

Significant differences existed between the responses of the two populations for 12 of the 16 statements. Those teachers who had students apply for awards were in stronger agreement with the statements that awards help students to learn skills, FFA awards motivate students, winning awards is an indicator of student achievement, winning awards results in favorable local publicity, awards provide opportunity for recognition of student achievement, and winning an award results in improved self concept for the student. Those teachers who did not have students apply for awards were in stronger agreement with the following statements: awards applications aren't judged fairly, awards aren't available for the agricultural/agribusiness skills my students have, winning awards is not important to me, awards applications are a waste of my time, my students' SOE projects aren't good enough to compete against other students, and I don't know how to fill out proficiency applications. These data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Attitudes Held Toward Proficiency Awards by Whether Respondents Had Students Apply

Statements About Proficiency Awards	No Students Applied <sup>a</sup>	One or More Students Applied <sup>b</sup>	t
I have time to help students fill out applications	4.22 1.26 104	4.24 1.36 37	-0.16
Winning awards is an indicator of student achievement	4.29 1.40 104	4.86 1.25 37	-4.51*
Class time should be used to fill out applications	3.90 1.57 104	3.89 1.68 37	.06
FFA awards motivate students	5.24 1.03 104	5.70 .46 37	-4.55*
Winning awards results in favorable local publicity	5.06 .98 103	5.51 .65 37	-4.66*
Awards provide opportunity for recognition of student achievement	5.07 .87 104	5.57 .56 37	-5.86*
I don't know how to fill out proficiency applications	3.15 1.43 103	2.30 1.13 37	6.03*
Awards applications are a waste of my time	2.07 .96 103	1.62 .86 37	4.76*
Winning of an award by a student results in an improved self concept	4.95 .95 102	5.54 .56 37	-6.27*
Awards help students learn skills	4.59 1.09 104	5.14 1.03 37	-5.15*
My students' SOE projects aren't good enough to compete against other students in the state	3.23 1.46 104	2.16 1.28 37	7.47*
Awards applications aren't judged fairly	2.57 1.24 98	2.06 .94 35	4.07*

(table continues)

Statements About Proficiency Awards	No Students Applied <sup>a</sup>	One or More Students Applied <sup>b</sup>	t
Awards aren't available for agriculture/agribusiness skills my students have	2.44 1.10 102	1.92 1.01 37	4.77*
Winning awards is not important to me	2.64 1.19 104	2.14 1.29 37	4.28*
Having students apply for awards is not a part of my job	1.97 .81 103	1.89 1.24 37	1.00
Schools that apply for FFA Best Chapter Award should be required to have proficiency awards applications at the state level during the same year	3.53 1.67 103	3.95 1.93 37	-2.55

Note. 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Slightly Agree; 5 = Agree; 6 = Strongly Agree.

$$\frac{a_m}{\frac{sd}{n}} \quad \frac{b_M}{\frac{SD}{N}}$$

\*p<.0001.

#### Stepwise Regression Analysis

Stepwise regression analysis was used to determine if selected factors were predictors of whether a teacher had students apply for an award. The variables used in this analysis were years of teaching experience, years of vocational agriculture in high school, number of vocational agriculture teachers in the school and percent rural students in the program.

Two variables, number of teachers and years teaching experience, were found to be statistically significant predictors of whether the teachers had students apply. The likelihood of a teacher having students apply for an award increased as the number of teachers in a department increased and as the number of years teaching experience decreased. Even though these variables were found to be statistically significant predictors, they are not of practical significance since they only accounted for an R<sup>2</sup> of .08. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

#### Connotative Evaluation of Proficiency Awards Program

The teachers were also asked to evaluate the proficiency award program using a modified semantic differential scale. This evaluation was designed to further evaluate their attitudes toward proficiency awards. Those teachers who had students apply responded in a more positive manner toward the concept of proficiency awards than did those who did not have students apply. These data are presented in Figure 1.

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analysis of Whether Teachers Did or Did Not Have Students Apply for Proficiency Awards

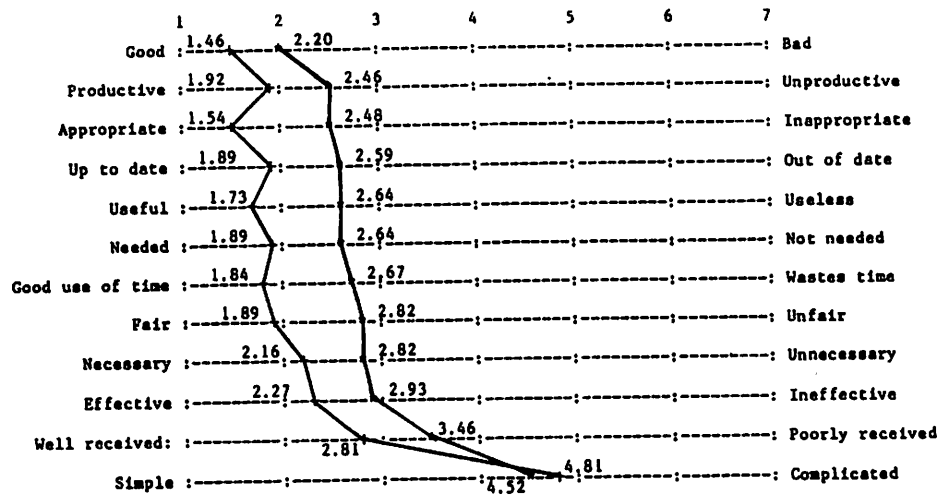
Source	df	SS	MS	F
Regression	2	2.22	1.11	6.21*
Residual	137	24.52	.18	
Total	139	26.74		

Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis on FFA Proficiency Awards Application Status

Factor	R <sup>2</sup>	Cumulative R <sup>2</sup>	F
Number of teachers in vo-ag department	.055	.055	7.99*
Years teaching experience	.028	.083	6.21*

\*p<.01.

The FFA proficiency award program is:



Note. Numbers in the body of this figure represent the mean values for each pair of terms based on a seven point scale.

Figure 1. Teachers' Connotative Evaluation of the Proficiency Award Program.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the findings of this study.

1. Teachers who had students apply were more likely to perceive that proficiency awards: (a) help students to learn skills; (b) motivate students; (c) result in favorable local publicity; (d) provide opportunity for recognition of student achievement; and (e) result in improved self concept for the student. These factors relate to the qualitative aspects of the program. It was concluded that teachers who had students apply had more positive attitudes toward the proficiency award program than those who did not.

2. Those teachers who did not have students apply for awards did not disagree as strongly with the statements that their students' SOE projects weren't good enough to compete against other students and that they didn't know how to fill out proficiency applications. It was concluded that the quality of student SOE projects and knowledge of how to fill out the award applications may be factors that resulted in teachers failing to have students apply for the awards. These conclusions are valid for 1985 only. However, there is no reason to believe that the findings and conclusions would differ if the study would have been conducted using teachers who had students apply for proficiency awards over a period of several years. It is recommended that the state staff conduct workshops or other sessions for teachers on how to fill out the proficiency award applications and to acquaint them with the types and quality of SOE projects that are appropriate for the state proficiency awards program. Teacher educators should place more emphasis on these factors in the pre-service teacher education program.

3. The likelihood of a teacher having students apply increased as the number of teachers in a department increased and as the number of years teaching experience decreased. Even though these were significant predictors, they did not account for a practically significant portion of the variance. Further research should be conducted to determine the teacher related factors that contribute to a teacher either having students apply or failing to have students apply.

4. In the connotative evaluation of the program, teachers who had students apply for awards gave a better rating to the proficiency award program than did those teachers who did not have students apply. It was concluded that teachers who had students apply had a higher opinion of the program than the other group. These conclusions are valid for 1985 only; however, there is no reason to believe that the findings and conclusions would differ if the study would have been conducted using teachers who had students apply for proficiency awards over a period of several years. The state staff should work with those teachers who do not have students apply for awards to improve the teachers' opinions of the program.

### Recommendations for Further Research

1. This study should be replicated in five years to determine whether changes have been made as a result of this study.

2. Additional research should be conducted to determine the variables that are significant predictors of whether teachers have students apply for FFA proficiency awards. Knowledge of these variables could be used in designing and conducting pre-service and inservice training on proficiency awards applications.

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