

State FFA Leaders' Educational Beliefs and Attitudes about Homeschooling

Matthew J. Kararo

Purdue University

Neil A. Knobloch

Purdue University

615 W. State Street

West Lafayette, IN 47907

(765-494-8439)

mkararo@purdue.edu

nknobloc@purdue.edu

State FFA Leaders' Educational Beliefs and Attitudes about Homeschooling

Introduction & Need for Research

Agricultural Education is responding to a shift in demographics by evolving to include non-traditional audiences and focusing on making food, agriculture, and natural resources relevant and useful to a broader and more diverse audience (Conroy & Kelsey, 2000; Henry, Talbert, & Morris, 2014; Powell, Agnew, & Trexler, 2004). The National FFA Organization also has a goal of increasing access to non-traditional audiences (Crutchfield, 2013), including homeschool students. Homeschool students have been identified previously as a population that would take advantage of a potential increase in access to Agricultural Education and FFA (Frick & Brennan, 1998; Walls, Flowers, & Moore, 2001). The homeschool population is increasing and recent estimates place the number over two million (Ray, 2011). Homeschool parents desire access to Agricultural Education for their children (Walls et al., 2001), and this increasing population represents an opportunity to grow Agricultural Education programs. However, key stakeholders' educational beliefs about homeschool students and homeschooling have not been studied. It is important to know state-level FFA leaders' educational beliefs to better understand how beliefs inform assumptions (Pajares, 1992), which may help identify potential barriers regarding the goal to increase Agricultural Education and FFA access for homeschool students. State FFA leaders (i.e., state FFA advisors, executive secretaries, executive directors, program specialists, and state supervisors) were the target study group due to examples of homeschool students in FFA chapters within multiple states (e.g., Johnson, 2012; Massey, 2015) and FFA being a publicly visible portion of homeschool students participating in an Agricultural Education program. The purpose of this study was to explore educational beliefs and attitudes about homeschooling of state-level FFA leaders.

Theoretical Framework

Fishbein's (1967) theory conceptualizing attitudes as multidimensional and comprised of beliefs was used to frame this study. Drawing upon Fishbein's theory, items were adapted from a previously validated instrument (McGraw, 1989) that measured specific educational beliefs comprising the foundation of attitudes about homeschool academic quality (5 items), instructional quality (5 items), and socialization quality (6 items). Connecting Fishbein's theory to context, state-level FFA leaders were assumed to have existing educational beliefs and attitudes about homeschooling and homeschool students, although it was possible that leaders with no prior interactions with the homeschooling community were prompted to form educational beliefs and attitudes about homeschooling when completing the questionnaire, meaning that there was a resulting expectation of future interaction with or questioning about the topic (Fazio, Lenn, & Effrein, 1984).

Methods and Procedures

A targeted census was attempted for all 50 state FFA leaders with 41 complete and six partial responses being collected. Multiple points of contact were used to maximize response rate (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). An electronic Qualtrics[®] questionnaire was distributed followed by weekly reminder emails continuing for about six weeks. Non-respondents were

contacted after four weeks by the Local Program Success team at the National FFA Organization. Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was pilot tested with a sample of 20 former state FFA leaders and current teacher educators and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were acceptable. Data were analyzed using SPSS (v. 23) and included descriptive statistics due to the exploratory nature of the study. Respondent anonymity was maintained by aggregating data to current FFA regions: Eastern, Central, Southern, and Western (National FFA Organization, 2015).

Results

Questionnaire items regarding state FFA leaders' attitudes about homeschooling and homeschool students (Table 1) were measured using a 6-point Likert-type scale for belief items. The range for items and grand means was 1 to 6, with the mathematical "middle" point being 3.50, that is, any mean 3.50 or higher was on average more on the "agree" side of the scale (positive) and any mean below a 3.50 was on average more on the "disagree" side of the scale (negative).

Table 1

State FFA leaders' attitudes about homeschooling by National FFA Regions

Attitude scales		Eastern (<i>n</i> = 14)	Western (<i>n</i> = 10)	Southern (<i>n</i> = 7)	Central (<i>n</i> = 12)	Overall (<i>N</i> = 41)
Homeschool academic quality	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	3.43 (.98)	3.47 (1.03)	3.54 (.91)	3.27 (1.01)	3.43 (.98)
Homeschool instructional quality	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	3.41 (.92)	3.30 (.94)	3.00 (.65)	2.88 (.81)	3.20 (.91)
Homeschool student socialization quality	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	3.01 (.99)	3.14 (.96)	3.07 (.92)	3.38 (.99)	3.15 (.94)
Overall	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	3.29 (.88)	3.36 (.93)	3.20 (.72)	3.18 (.85)	3.27 (.85)

Note. Numbers are grand means on a scale from 1 to 6 (Strongly Disagree, Moderately Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Moderately Agree, Strongly Agree).

State FFA leaders overall had a "slightly" negative attitude regarding homeschool academic quality ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .98$), instructional quality, ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .91$) and student socialization ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .94$). Overall, there were no differences by region in the grand mean of state FFA leaders' attitudes about homeschooling (effect sizes = $d < .20$; $r < .10$).

Conclusions & Recommendations

Results indicated that state FFA leaders overall exhibited a slightly negative attitude regarding homeschooling and homeschool students. Because state FFA leaders are major stakeholders, this represents a potential barrier to expanding Agricultural Education and FFA membership access for homeschool students. Educational beliefs comprising attitudes about homeschooling could be a result of personal experience, acquired information, or spontaneous formation (Fazio et al., 1984; Fishbein, 1967). Future research should explore prior interactions with homeschool students and information sources used by state FFA leaders and other stakeholders. Local FFA advisors should also be surveyed prior to any expanded efforts to increase Agricultural Education and FFA access to determine if they hold similar attitudes about homeschooling.

References

- Conroy, C. A., & Kelsey, K. D. (2000). Teacher education response to reinventing agricultural education for the year 2020: Use of concept mapping to plan for changes. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 41*(1), 8-17. doi:10.5032/jae.2000.01008
- Crutchfield, N. R. (Ed.) (2013). National research priority interests: National FFA Organization's research priority areas for 2013-2018. Indianapolis, Indiana: National FFA Organization, Partner Services Division.
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (4th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.
- Fazio, R. H., Lenn, T. M., & Effrein, E. A. (1984). Spontaneous attitude formation. *Social Cognition, 2*(3), 217-234. doi:10.1521/soco.1984.2.3.217
- Fishbein, M. (Ed.). (1967). *Readings in attitude theory and measurement*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Frick, M., & Brennan, J. (1998, May/June). Agricultural education opportunities with home schoolers. *The Agricultural Education Magazine, 70*(6), 6-7.
- Henry, K. A., Talbert, B. A., & Morris, P. V. (2014). Agricultural education in an urban charter school: Perspectives and challenges. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 55*(3), 89-102. doi:10.5032/jae.2014.03089
- Johnson, A. (2012, January 23). Students thrive in United South Central FFA program. *Minnesota Farm Guide*.
- Massey, J. (2015, July 6). FFA program still tiny in big Alaska. *The Country Today*.
- McGraw, R. K. (1989). *Selected aspects of home-schooling as reported by home-schooling parents and reported with perceptions of Indiana public school superintendents and principals of home-schooling in Indiana* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Ball State University.
- National FFA Organization. (2015). National FFA Organization Bylaws. Retrieved from: https://www.ffa.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/about_bylaws.pdf
- Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research, 62*(3), 307-332. doi:10.2307/1170741
- Powell, D., Agnew, D., & Trexler, C. (2008). Agricultural literacy: Clarifying a vision for practical application. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 49*(1), 85-98. doi:10.5032/jae.2008.01085
- Ray, B. D. (2011). *2.04 million homeschool students in the United States in 2010*. Salem, OR: National Home Education Research Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.nheri.org/HomeschoolPopulationReport2010.pdf>
- Walls, J., Flowers, J., & Moore, G. (2001). North Carolina home school providers' perceptions of agricultural education. *28th Annual National Agricultural Education Research Conference, 459-470*.