

**Comparing Principal and Agricultural Education Teacher Perceptions of the
Importance of FFA Activities**

Cele Stone
Doctoral Graduate Assistant
Department of Agricultural Education and Communications
Texas Tech University
Box 42131
Lubbock, TX 79409
(806) 241-3644
cele.stone@ttu.edu

Will Doss
Doctoral Graduate Assistant
Department of Agricultural Education and Communications
Texas Tech University
Box 42131
Lubbock, TX 79409
(806) 742-2816
will.doss@ttu.edu

Dr. John Rayfield
Associate Professor
Department of Agricultural Education and Communications
Texas Tech University
Box 42131
Lubbock, TX 79409
(806) 742-2816

Introduction / Need for Research

School administrator support can be an important factor in the success of agricultural education programs. Research has been conducted concerning administration views of agricultural education but there appears to be a gap in modern literature on how principals perceive FFA activities. The relationship between the principal and teacher not only effects teacher performance, it impacts job satisfaction and longevity in the profession (Thomas, 1997; Martin, et al., 1986). The American Association for Agricultural Education's Research Priority Three addresses this need by charging researchers with determining, "What methods, models, and practices are effective in recruiting agricultural leadership, education, and communication practitioners and supporting their success at all stages of their careers (Roberts et al., 2016)? With FFA activities being a substantial portion of agricultural education programs, a current understanding of how principals view FFA activities could provide valuable information for teacher educators and the success of practitioners.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to guide this study is based on educational leadership theory. Pitner (1988) used a mediated effects model, hypothesizing school leaders can affect learning outcomes of students both directly and indirectly. A review of literature revealed several ways principals can impact agricultural education programs resulting in an adapted model modified from Rayfield and Wilson's (2009) direct and indirect progression of principal perceptions on student achievement model. Principal perceptions of FFA activities fit well within the model and can be applied to educational leadership theory.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to compare high school principal and agricultural education teacher perceptions of FFA activities. To accomplish the purpose, a cross-sectional, descriptive, survey design (Fraenkel et al., 2015) was used. Data were collected from both principals and teachers at ($n = 285$) schools in Texas using simple, random sampling from a list of all FFA chapters in the state. The instrument used was designed by the researchers as part of a larger study. Content and face validity of the instrument was established by a panel of three experts at Texas Tech University in survey questionnaire design. A pilot test using ($N = 32$) principals and teachers not participating in the main study yielded a Cronbach's alpha of ($\alpha = 0.88$) to establish instrument reliability. An online questionnaire using Qualtrics asked participants to rate their perceived level of importance of 21 items on a 5-point Likert scale. Responses were emailed using Dillman's tailored design method with five points of contact (Dillman et al., 2014). A total of ($n = 76$) principals responded out of the 285 contacted for a response rate of 26.67%. Agricultural education teachers had a response rate of 30.18% ($n = 86$) out of the 285 contacted. Since response rates were below 85%, a comparison of early to late responders was conducted to control for nonresponse error (Lindner et al., 2001). No statistically significant differences were found on instrument items when comparing early to late responses. To determine differences in principal and teacher perceptions of the importance of FFA activities, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted. All assumptions outlined by Field (2018) were met. For each ANOVA calculation, effect size was reported. All data were analyzed in IBM SPSS version 25.0.

Results/Findings

A one-way ANOVA analysis indicated there were only two activities in which principals and teachers differed significantly in their perception of importance. In both attending state level FFA meetings and conventions ($f(1, 160) = 5.42, p = .021, \eta^2 = .03$) and attending area level FFA meetings and conventions ($f(1, 160) = 4.07, p = .045, \eta^2 = .02$), teachers perceived these activities to be significantly more important than principals. The activity with the highest level of importance for both principals and teachers was having chapter FFA officers with ($M = 4.91, SD = 0.33$) reported for principals and ($M = 4.98, SD = 0.15$) reported for teachers. A partial ANOVA summary table comparing principal and teacher perceptions of selected FFA activities is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
One-Way ANOVA Comparing Perceived Importance of FFA Activities (N = 162)

FFA Activity	Principals		Teachers		$f(1, 160)$	p	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD			
Local FFA Meetings	4.88	0.36	4.94	0.24	1.60	.207	.01
District Meetings/Conventions	4.82	0.45	4.90	0.31	1.74	.189	.01
Area Meetings/Conventions	4.74	0.64	4.89	0.31	4.07	.045	.02
State Meetings/Conventions	4.66	0.72	4.87	0.43	5.42	.021	.03
Chapter FFA Officers	4.91	0.33	4.98	0.15	2.97	.087	.02

Note. Scale was 1=Unimportant, 2=Somewhat Unimportant, 3=No Opinion, 4=Somewhat Important, and 5=Important. f values are significant at $p < .05$.

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

From the findings in this study, it can be concluded that the perceived level of importance for each FFA activity was relatively high compared to previous studies. This is an improvement of perceptions found by Shoemake (1972) and Mattox (1974), indicating agricultural education teachers may be more effectively communicating the importance of program activities with their administrators than in the past. In theory, the positive perceptions of FFA activities should result in administrator support (Kalme & Dyer, 2000). Only two significant differences in perceptions were reported where teachers perceived attending area meetings and conventions as well as state meetings and conventions as more important than principals. These are new areas of disagreement between administrators and teachers. Previous studies did not yield the same results (Foster & Riensenberg, 1985; Shoemake, 1972).

Since there was a significant difference in opinion concerning area and state conventions, teachers should better communicate to principals the benefits of attending. Conventions not only recognize FFA chapter achievements, they allow students to compete and earn awards, as well as provide leadership and scholarship opportunities. Suggestions for highlighting the importance of FFA activities to principals would be to showcase student FFA achievement at the local level as well as inviting principals to attend conventions. Teacher educators should train their preservice teachers to communicate the importance of their program to administrators to prevent future loss of support for FFA and agricultural education. Further research should be conducted to determine how principal perceptions influence agricultural education programs and if positive perceptions of FFA activities translate into increase funding and support for programs.

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