

**A Comparison of Principal and Agricultural Education Teacher Perceptions of the
Importance of SAE Activities**

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Introduction/Theoretical Framework

The environment of a school is critically important, and according to Barth (1984), is affected by the relationship that exists between school principals and agricultural education teachers. A study completed by Thomas (1997) found that the performance of the teacher can differ based on the relationship with their administrators. This relationship can influence the extent to which agriculture teachers allow their students to participate in events within agricultural education programs. Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs) are the component of the three-circle model of agricultural education that allows students to create a personalized experience based upon their interests and career goals (National FFA Organization, 2018). SAEs consist of a project or enterprise planned and carried out by the student while under the supervision of the agricultural education teacher. The National FFA Organization (2018) notes that although SAEs are primarily student-led, there is time dedicated to assisting students that can involve time spent outside of the classroom for the teacher. This time spent outside of the classroom is a portion of agricultural education teacher responsibilities, therefore knowing principals' perceptions of SAE practices and events is necessary to provide agriculture teachers the support they need to have successful programs and careers.

The educational leadership theory is the foundation of this study. According to Rayfield and Wilson (2009), this model suggests that teachers are influenced, either positively or negatively, by the degree to which administrators value SAE programs. Positive views of SAEs can ultimately influence the participation of students and promote success within their programs (Rayfield and Wilson, 2009). Since actions from school leaders can both directly and indirectly affect outcomes within the school, administrators and teachers need to be in agreement on which agricultural education program activities are important, including SAEs (Pitner, 1988; Rush & Foster, 1984). Having an understanding of principal perceptions toward SAE activities can help determine how much influence they will have, positive or negative, on student achievement. Identified areas of disagreement could be addressed to strengthen support for SAEs.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to compare Texas principal and agricultural education teacher perceptions of the importance of SAE activities. A cross-sectional, descriptive, survey design (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015) was used. There are currently 1,055 FFA chapters in the state (National FFA Organization, 2018). A teacher and principal were contacted from ($n = 285$) schools with FFA chapters. The online questionnaire used was part of a larger study; however, seven items concerning SAE were analyzed for this study. SAE items were on a 5-point Likert scale, rating the importance of each activity. The instrument was first pilot-tested with ($N = 32$) teachers and principals not included in the main study. An overall Cronbach's alpha of ($\alpha = 0.88$) was calculated. Dillman's tailored design method was used to contact participants through five email contacts, each a week apart (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). A total of ($n = 76$, 26.67%) principals responded and ($n = 86$, 30.18%) teachers responded. To account for nonresponse, a comparison of early to late responses was conducted and no significant

differences were found (Lindner, Muphy, & Briers, 2001). An analysis of variance was conducted to find differences between teacher and principal opinions. All assumptions outlined by Field (2018) were met. All data were analyzed in IBM SPSS version 25.0.

Findings

The analysis of variance indicated there was only one SAE activity in which principals and teachers had significantly different opinions. Attending livestock shows was viewed as significantly more important by principals than teachers ($F(1, 160) = 5.12, p = .025, \eta^2 = .03$). The activity viewed as most important by both principals and teachers was supervising SAE projects with ($M = 4.87, SD = 0.34$) and ($M = 4.92, SD = 0.38$) respectively. Advertising student SAE activity participation and success was viewed as the least important by principals ($M = 4.57, SD = 0.94$) and teachers ($M = 4.41, SD = 1.08$). A complete ANOVA summary of the perceived importance of SAE activities can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

One-Way ANOVA Comparing Perceived Importance of SAE Activities (N = 162)

SAE Activity	Principals		Teachers		$F(1, 160)$	p	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD			
Supervision of SAE Projects	4.87	0.34	4.92	0.38	0.77	.382	.00
Attending Livestock Shows	4.76	0.59	4.49	0.90	5.12	.025	.03
Attending Ag Mechanics Shows	4.61	0.69	4.53	0.79	0.36	.551	.00
Keeping Records of SAE Projects	4.80	0.49	4.76	0.57	0.31	.580	.00
Student Internship Supervision	4.59	0.85	4.51	0.72	0.43	.514	.00
SAE Experiential Learning	4.73	0.64	4.72	0.61	0.16	.900	.00
Advertise Student SAE Activities	4.57	0.94	4.41	1.08	0.98	.323	.01

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

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that both high school principals and agricultural education teachers agree that SAEs as a whole are somewhat important. Both principals and teachers agree supervising SAE projects is most valuable, as the other components may not be as successful without this portion. The groups agreed that advertising of student SAE activities was least valuable, however, if more attention were to be given to this aspect, it could have the potential to lead to more participation in SAE programs. Interestingly, principals indicated attending livestock shows was more important than agricultural education teachers. While the data shows that administrators support SAE programs and activities, it is essential to continue to have effective communication to maintain positive perceptions and help prevent loss of SAEs within agricultural education programs. It is recommended to train preservice teachers to effectively communicate with administrators to continue to uphold the importance of SAEs. Exploring why principals viewed attending livestock shows as more critical than agricultural education teachers would be a worthwhile investigation. Further research should be conducted to determine communication practices that have allowed for continued success in SAE programs.

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