

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Texas FFA Building Excellence Conference

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Introduction/Need for the Study

The American Association for Agricultural Educators has established a National Research Agenda for the years 2016-2020 with multiple Research Priorities. Research Priority Three of the agenda calls for a “Sufficient Scientific and Professional Workforce That Addresses the Challenges of the 21st Century” (Roberts et al., 2016, p. 29). Employers are seeking workers with soft skills (National Research Council, 2012) which includes leadership skills (Crawford et al., 2011). Students enrolled in secondary agriculture courses can become FFA members and participate in activities designed to develop their leadership skills. Leadership workshops or conferences hosted by Texas FFA aim at teaching participants leadership skills (Texas FFA Association, 2019). However, the effectiveness of these workshops needs to be researched to determine if the workshops should be continued. This study analyzes the effectiveness of one of the Texas FFA’s leadership workshops- Building Excellence Conference- by assessing the participants’ self-efficacy in 16 objectives.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura’s (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory was used for this study. Bandura’s theory claimed that one’s self-efficacy is their belief to accomplish a task or behavior. Self-efficacy influences a person’s actions and outcomes of their actions. Four strategies can be used to adjust Self-efficacy 1) performance accomplishments, 2) various learning and modeling, 3) verbal persuasion, and 4) emotional arousal. These techniques were all used as teaching strategies in this workshop and therefore grounded this study in the Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977).

Methodology

A single-group, pretest-posttest design was used to compare participants’ self-efficacy before and after attending the workshop. Between October 2019 and January 2020, Texas FFA hosted seven Building Excellence workshops in different regions of the state. These workshops utilized the same curriculum and were presented by trained facilitators. The facilitators planned activities which utilized all four of the techniques Bandura (1977) claimed to modify self-efficacy. The curriculum for the Building Excellence Conference sought to teach 16 objectives. The facilitators provided the researchers with the objectives and the researchers created statements to gauge the students’ self-efficacy for each of the 16 objectives (one statement per objective). For example the statement created for the objective “Differentiate between dreams and goals” was “I can differentiate between dreams and goals”. A questionnaire was developed which included a Likert-type scale for each statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Slightly Agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree). A panel of experts reviewed the instrument for validity. All 158 workshop participants took the pre-assessment just prior to the workshop starting and took the post-assessment at the conclusion of the workshop. Since this study used convenience sampling, caution should be used in generalizing these findings beyond this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Since the means being compared were from the same group of students, a dependent *t-test*, also known as paired-samples *t-test*, was calculated ($p < .05$) (Field, 2009).

Results/Findings

A statistically significant difference in the means of the pre-test and post-test self-efficacy scores were found in all 16 objectives. The most significant difference was seen in “I can explain the steps to creating effective goals” ($t = -17.777$) and the least significant difference was in “I know how to identify positive traits in people around me.” ($t = -10.403$) (See Table 1).

Table 1.

A Comparison of Pre-Test and Post Test Students Self-Efficacy (N = 158)

Variable	Pre-Test		Post-Test		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
I can explain how peer pressure can affect personal actions	4.84	0.739	5.72	0.542	-14.880	.000
I know how to identify positive traits in people around me	4.98	0.848	5.65	0.554	-10.403	.000
I can explain why goals are important and necessary to success.	5.11	0.722	5.88	0.363	-12.041	.000
I can explain how to build positive relationships.	4.53	0.915	5.73	0.522	-15.645	.000
I can explain the steps to creating effective goals.	4.33	0.961	5.70	0.561	-17.777	.000
I can describe how to confront bullying effectively.	4.32	1.072	5.58	0.698	-15.325	.000
I can identify the benefits of setting goals.	4.89	0.856	5.87	0.334	-15.083	.000
I know how to describe my personality.	4.66	1.126	5.60	0.638	-10.449	.000
I can show someone how to identify personal barriers to attaining their goals.	4.11	1.106	5.56	0.653	-15.863	.000
I can show someone ways to overcome peer pressure.	4.27	1.018	5.61	0.636	-16.587	.000
I know what self-image is and can define it.	4.27	1.207	5.59	0.588	-13.323	.000
I can describe the steps to be taken to change the way I view my personal self-image	4.04	1.254	5.70	0.561	-17.161	.000
I can differentiate between dreams and goals.	4.65	1.083	5.82	0.383	-13.485	.000
I am able to describe how I perceive myself.	4.49	1.051	5.65	0.639	-13.558	.000
I know what a strong and healthy relationship looks like.	4.89	1.003	5.77	0.531	-12.611	.000
I can identify the characteristics of effective goals.	4.65	0.964	5.74	0.494	-14.555	.000

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

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

The results of this study show that this workshop was effective in increasing students' self-efficacy in all 16 objectives. Means from the pre-test to post-test were compared and each objective had a statistically significant difference. This implies that the curriculum for the workshop and the strategies used by the facilitators were effective in teaching the target objectives and resulted in higher student self-efficacy and therefore should be continued in the future. This study did have several threats to internal validity so it cannot be assumed that all gains in self-efficacy were due to participation in the workshop alone (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) but it does show these participants did increase their self-efficacy in all 16 objectives and thus shows the workshop was effective. This research should be continued to further test the effectiveness of these workshops. Research could also test to see if there are some correlations between gender or workshop size and change in self-efficacy.

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