

Motivations and Needs of Volunteers within SBAE Programs

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Introduction/ Need for Research

A critical shortage of well-trained agriculture teachers has plagued the profession for decades (Smith et al., 2019), with teacher turnover and excessive work hours being cited as contributing factors (Sorensen et al., 2016). School-based agricultural education (SBAE) is a demanding profession (Torres et al., 2008), but one way to relieve the excessive workload and possibly prevent turnover among agriculture teachers is through the utilization of volunteers. Understanding the motives for why people volunteer in SBAE programs can provide insights and recommendations for preservice teacher training, inservice teacher professional development, and stakeholder (e.g., national and state FFA alumni organizations) programming.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to identify the motivations and needs of volunteers within SBAE programs. The specific objectives included: 1) describe the characteristics of SBAE volunteers; 2) describe SBAE volunteer motivations; and 3) describe training needs of SBAE volunteers. Utilizing a snowball convenience sample, we distributed an anonymous online survey to SBAE volunteers in Utah and Oregon. The survey instrument consisted of the 30-item Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) scale (5-point Likert-type scale) to measure motivations to volunteer (Clary et al., 1998). The VFI consists of five constructs each with five items: (1) Career motives (e.g., volunteering to improve career prospects), (2) Social motives (e.g., volunteering to develop or strengthen social relationships), (3) Values motives (e.g., volunteering because of altruistic and humanitarian values), (4) Enhancement motives (e.g., volunteering for personal growth and development), (5) Protective motives (e.g., volunteering as a way of protecting the ego from difficulties of life), and (6) Understanding motives (e.g., volunteering as a way to gain knowledge, skills, and abilities). Reliability was established for each construct with a pilot test administered in Utah with 37 teachers. All of the constructs in this study's instrument exceeded the alpha of .70 (range $\alpha = .908 - .840$) except Values motives ($\alpha = .647$), which was left out of the analysis (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). We also asked participants to list topics they thought they needed for professional development training. The survey instrument also consisted of questions to elicit information about their volunteer roles, amount of time they volunteer, and some demographic questions. A pilot test was

Findings

A total of 112 usable surveys were collected and analyzed. Objective 1 was to describe SBAE volunteers. The majority of respondents were female (72.0%), the mean age of the participants was 44.89, and the mean number of years participants reported as SBAE volunteer was 11.58 years. The most common volunteer role reported was a member of an organized FFA Alumni group (36.8%), followed by a non-formal group of volunteers (21.5%), Advisory committee (13.9%) and formally organized group of volunteers not affiliated with the FFA Alumni (11.1%). When asked what percentage of their time the volunteers focus their efforts on different aspects of the SBAE program, participants reported focusing most of their volunteering efforts on FFA activities ($M = 56.49\%$ of the time) followed by community engagement

activities ($M = 29.45\%$ of the time), classroom-related activities ($M = 23.66\%$ of the time), program support activities (e.g., maintain equipment and labs, paperwork) ($M = 22.00\%$ of the time), and SAE activities (17.38%). Objective 2 sought to describe motivations for volunteering. The findings indicate the three greatest motives for volunteering were career motives, protective motives, and enhancement motives (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Motivations for Volunteering among SBAE Volunteers

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation
Career Motives	3.94	1.214
Protective Motives	3.93	0.958
Enhancement Motives	3.39	0.978
Social Motives	2.99	1.035
Understanding Motives	2.80	1.043

Objective 3 sought to describe training needs of SBAE volunteers. We asked participants which topics would be most beneficial for training to help them be more effective volunteers. We categorized the open-ended responses into three categories for training: (1) information about opportunities and resources available; (2) volunteer leadership-related topics (how to establish a formal organization, recruitment strategies, officer/leadership training, etc.); (3) CDE coaching and SAE supervision training. Participants also suggested a lack of communication between the local SBAE teacher and the volunteers needed improvement and suggested training with agriculture teachers on how to communicate expectations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

One limitation to this study was the snowball sampling methods utilized, which is a nonprobability sampling technique. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized beyond this study's participants. We suggest replicating this study utilizing probability sampling techniques. Based on the findings of this descriptive study, it seems SBAE volunteers in this study are mostly motivated because of the benefits to their own career pursuits. With this in mind, SBAE teachers in Utah and Oregon might develop volunteer recruitment resources that capitalize on career advancement or opportunities for volunteers. More research should be conducted in other states to determine if this finding is common among all SBAE volunteers. SBAE volunteers in this study also seemed to volunteer as a way to cope with life's challenges (protective motives). More research should be conducted exploring the nuances of protective motives among SBAE volunteers. With volunteers devoting the least amount of time to SAE and SAE supervision being a top need for training, perhaps volunteers would be able to assist teachers more in SAE if they received training in it. We recommend that state and national alumni organizations work with SBAE teachers in providing training resources for volunteers. We also recommend SBAE teachers improve the quality and quantity of communication they have with their volunteers. Perhaps more training to preservice teachers could be provided by teacher educators regarding the utilization and management of volunteers in SBAE programs which addresses communication, leadership training, and opportunities with volunteer groups. This training should include how to utilize volunteers in more than just FFA and community engagement (e.g., SAE).

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