Disability Awareness of Agricultural Education Students

Regan Culp
317 Umberger Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506
219-863-8599
rculp@ksu.edu

Dr. Gaea Hock
315 Umberger Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506
785-532-1166
ghock@ksu.edu

Dr. Jonathan Ulmer
308 Umberger Hall
785-532-1250
julmer@ksu.edu

Disability Awareness of Agricultural Education Students

Introduction/Need for Research

The inclusion of disabled students in all classrooms is mandated by law, but teacher preparation for the instruction of these students in the United States is not a requirement (Teixeira & Edwards, 2020). As students with disabilities become more common within CTE courses, including agricultural education classrooms, the preparation of our future educators to effectively teach these individuals needs to be reconsidered (Smith & Rayfield, 2019). In a study done by Ramage et al. (2021), student teachers acknowledged the need for professional development on providing inclusive educational environments and mentorship on accommodating students with disabilities. The need for universal design in agricultural education is crucial to effectively teach students of all abilities as "universal design is an approach that levels the access to learning for our students and helps them remove boundaries and barriers that might be in place" (Headrick, 2021, p. 13). Because no mandate exists relating to teacher preparation of disability awareness and how to accommodate it (Teixeira & Edwards, 2020) work needs to improve to better prepare future educators to successfully teach this population of students.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based upon LaVergne's Diversity Inclusive Program Model which displays how to formulate inclusive educational culture within a classroom environment that includes all students in all programs. "Diversity inclusion is an educational philosophy that welcomes all learners by actively engaging them in secondary agricultural education programs regardless of their race, ethnicity, or exceptionality" (LaVergne, 2008, p. 5-6).

Purpose and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to describe disability awareness practices of undergraduate seniors majoring in Agricultural Education at Kansas State University (KSU) after a lesson on disability awareness. The objectives were:

1. Examine emotions of Agricultural Education students regarding interacting with individuals with disabilities before and after the lesson,
2. Identify different perspectives of disability, and
3. Determine level of importance of disability awareness.

Methodology

The population for this study was 27 students enrolled in Agricultural Education teaching methods courses in Fall 2021 at KSU. During the course, a lesson was presented about various topics surrounding disability awareness and inclusive classroom practices. At the end of the lesson, students were asked to complete an eight-question survey regarding their emotions towards disabled students in the classroom, how important they feel disability awareness trainings are during their collegiate career, and what they gained from the lesson. The questions were posed as essay and short answer with one question being presented as a Likert Scale. IRB approval was obtained before this data was collected from this study.

Findings

Twenty-one of the 27 students completed the survey (78% response rate). Document analysis method (Bowen, 2009) was used to analyze and interpret the 21 descriptive student responses to the survey. Common themes emerged from the data analysis process to address each research objective.

Objective 1: *Examine emotions of Agricultural Education students regarding interacting with individuals with disabilities before and after the lesson.*
A common theme of anxiety arose when asking participants about their emotions and comfort levels when teaching a student with a disability before this lesson. Many participants stated they were not comfortable or were nervous about having to effectively teach a student with a disability and how difficult it may be to provide accommodations for them due to lack of resources. One participant responded, "I didn't quite feel comfortable teaching them in an Ag classroom. I didn't think anyone with a disability would consider taking an Ag class."

Objective 2: *Identify different perspectives of disability.*
The common perspective among the participants was that disability is not a disadvantage, but rather a limitation that we must know how to accommodate. Two participants shared, "students cannot help their disabilities and as educators it is our job to accommodate them and make them feel as 'normal' as possible in our classroom" and "no matter what the disability is we should include everyone to give them the best possible experience in life." This showed participants recognize disabilities do not define students and they feel it is their responsibility to provide accessible learning for students to feel enabled and included.

Objective 3: *Determine level of importance of disability awareness.*
Utilizing a Likert Scale, participants were able to rank the importance of disability awareness lessons implemented into Agricultural Education with 1 being *not at all important* and 5 being e*xtremely important*. Over 52% of participants felt it was very important to include disability awareness lessons within the agricultural education curriculum.

Conclusion

Overall, students expressed they felt anxious about teaching students with disabilities. Many stated their comfort level was moderate when it came to providing student accommodations, but it was acknowledged participants viewed disability not as a disadvantage rather a limitation that must be accommodated to effectively teach students of all abilities. Participants felt implementation of disability awareness lessons within agricultural education curriculum at KSU was very important (Smith & Rayfield, 2019).

Implications/Recommendations

Future research should investigate current agriculture teachers' perceptions and preparation to work with students with disabilities. We recommend more disability teaching instruction in undergraduate agricultural education programs. Professional development is also needed to help agricultural education professionals at all levels identify potential inaccessibility within their classroom and methods to create a more inclusive learning environment (Headrick, 2021; Ramage et al., 2021).

References

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *9*(2), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.3316/qrj0902027

Headrick, J. (2021). Building equity in our classrooms through universal design approaches. *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, *94*(1), 11–13. https://doi.org/https://www.naae.org/profdevelopment/magazine/archive_issues/Volume94/2021%2007%20--%20July%20August.pdf

LaVergne, D. D. (2008). *Perceptions of Texas agricultural education teachers regarding diversity inclusion in secondary agricultural education programs* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

Ramage, R., Roberts, R., & Stair, K. S. (2021). Accommodating Students with Exceptionalities in Secondary Agricultural Education: Experiences During Student Teaching. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, *62*(4), 207–220. https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2021.04203

Smith, K., & Rayfield, J. (2019). Stem knowledge, learning disabilities and experiential learning: Influences of sequencing instruction. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, *60*(2). https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2019.02222

Teixeira, K. L., & Edwards, M. C. (2020). Teaching students with special needs in school based, agricultural education: A historical inquiry. *Journal of Research in Technical Careers, 4(1), 75*. https://doi.org/10.9741/2578-2118.1066