

Identifying Strategies used by SBAE Teachers to Implement the National Chapter Award Program

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Introduction/Theoretical Framework

Agricultural education programs are designed to provide a diversified experience for students enrolled in coursework related to agriculture, food, and natural resources (AFNR) (Baker et al., 2012; Coleman et al., 2021; Phipps et al., 2008). These experiences can be constructed around and highlighted through completion of the National Chapter Award (NCA) Program within the National FFA Organization. “The National Chapter Award Program is designed to recognize FFA chapters that actively implement the mission and strategies of the organization” (National FFA Organization, 2022). The NCA Program rewards FFA chapters that provide educational experiences through their local Program of Activities (POA) that focus on growing leaders, building communities, and strengthening agriculture for all students (National FFA Organization, 2022). The POA is a tool used by FFA chapters to plan, organize, and implement events for the year. The POA, along with the National Quality Chapter Standards (NQCS), can then be used to complete the NCA application. Applications are ranked at the national level after state submission and receive a ranking with three-star being the highest ranking. In 2021, 563 FFA chapters across the nation completed the NCA application (FFA Results). Albeit 563 seems like a healthy number of submissions, this number represents a mere six percent of FFA chapters nationwide. The low percentage of participation, coupled with a gap in literature pertaining to participation in National FFA award programs, suggests a need to provide opportunities for FFA advisors to see potential benefits and techniques for participating in the NCA program. The focus of this study was on the programs and activities implemented by FFA chapters to meet the goals of their agricultural education program as outlined in their local FFA chapter POA.

The use of the three-circle model to showcase classroom instruction, supervised agricultural experience (SAE), and FFA as integral parts of a total agricultural education program can be traced back as far as 1975 (Croom, 2008). The three-component model of agricultural education was used as a conceptual frame for this study. In addition, the local community should serve as a context when implementing the comprehensive three-circle model of school-based agricultural education (Croom, 2008; Hughes & Barrick, 1993). “The instructional components of agricultural education programs include classroom instruction, supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs, laboratory instruction, and student leadership development through participation in programs and activities of the National FFA Organization” (Phipps et al., 2008, p. 4). The three-circle agricultural education model depicts how classroom/laboratory instruction, SAEs, and FFA overlap to create a complete agricultural education program consisting of instruction, experiential learning, and leadership education (NAAE, 2022).

“Experiential learning through SAE and FFA has been a hallmark of agricultural education” (Hughes & Barrick, 1993). Experiential learning is woven into agricultural education through student experiences in the classroom, SAE, and FFA programs (Baker et al., 2012; Coleman et al., 2021; Hughes & Barrick, 1993; Roberts, 2006). As such, students should have the opportunity to engage in concrete experiences, reflect, conceptualize abstract thoughts, and

actively experiment in agricultural education programs (Baker et al., 2012). Hughes & Barrick (1993) suggest awards and degrees through FFA programs are incentives for motivating students to engage in experiential learning in their school and community to prepare for future careers. This study suggests that as an FFA award program, the process of competing in the NCA program and carrying out activities in the local community is experiential in nature.

Purpose/Objectives

The purpose of this study was to identify strategies implemented by FFA chapters to attain a three-star ranking at the national level in the NCA Program. Data were collected from school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers in Region II of the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) who have advised three-star chapters a minimum of two times in the last five years (2017-2021). Two research objectives guided this study:

- 1) Identify strategies used by FFA chapters to achieve a three-star ranking in the National Chapter Award Program.
- 2) Identify themes that could help facilitate achievement of a three-star ranking in the National Chapter Award Program.

Methods

A modified Delphi technique was used to conduct this study by utilizing online Qualtrics instruments and forming an expert panel to create a list of strategies used to implement the NCA Program (Dalkey, 1969). An expert panel of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers were identified by using the three-star national rankings as reported by National FFA over the last five years. Participants were recruited by email invitation utilizing a Qualtrics link to collect email addresses of interested participants. Criteria for inclusion in the panel were: (a) must be an SBAE teacher in a NAAE Region II state (i.e., Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas), (b) must have completed the NCA application and received a three-star ranking at least twice in the last five years, (c) minimum of three years teaching experience, and (d) only one teacher per FFA chapter will be included in the study.

From the list of National FFA results, 77 chapters from NAAE Region II were identified as receiving a three-star ranking at least twice in the last five years and were sent an email request to participate. Of these 77 chapters, 29 teachers consented to participate in the study and 17 completed round one for a 59% response rate. Ultimately, the panel consisted of SBAE teachers from five of the NAAE Region II states as there were no teachers from Arkansas or New Mexico who met the criteria of having a chapter ranked as a three-star chapter at the national level at least twice in the last five years. Only one of the initial 17 teachers was alternatively certified while all others were traditionally certified teachers. Their number of years teaching SBAE ranged from three to 41 years. Five teachers were employed in single teacher programs, while four were in two teacher programs and the remaining eight were from programs with three or more SBAE teachers. Panelists received NCA honors such as Model of Excellence Finalist, Premier Chapter Finalist, and Top Premier Chapter in Growing Leaders or Strengthening Agriculture for a combined thirteen occurrences.

Round one of data collection was conducted using an online Qualtrics survey consisting of a demographic questionnaire and one open-ended question: *What strategies does your FFA chapter implement to achieve a 3-star ranking in the National Chapter Award Program?* After

one week, follow up emails were sent to participants and at the end of two weeks the 17 panelists' responses were analyzed to compile a list of 50 items. In round two, the items were then sent back to the panelists to rate their level of agreement with each item using a six-point, summated scale: 1= *Strongly Disagree*, 2= *Disagree*, 3= *Somewhat Disagree*, 4= *Somewhat Agree*, 5= *Agree*, 6= *Strongly Agree* (Lundry et al., 2015; Spector, 1992). Textboxes were included at the end of each of the four themed sections in the round two instrument for additional comments to be made related to strategies that may have been overlooked in round one. A one week follow up email was sent, and round two was closed after receiving 14 panelists' responses in two weeks. Those items which received below 50% agreement were dropped from the list and items with 50-75% agreement were included in the round three questionnaire. The round three instrument consisted of the same six-point, summated scale to collect the agreement level of panelists with those statements to compile the final list of strategies. Statements that reached an agreement level of 75% or more by the 13 panelists who completed round three were included in the final strategies list.

Findings

Concerning research objective one, 50 strategy statements were identified and assigned to four themes as a result of round one: (1) Planning and Resources, (2) Implementing Activities, (3) Application Writing, and (4) Reflection (Glesne, 2016; Saldana, 2009). After three rounds, panelists identified 37 strategies used to implement the NCA Program that met at least 75% agreement. The 37 strategies accepted by the panelists are shown by theme in Tables 1-4.

Table 1

Theme 1: National Chapter Award Program Planning and Resources Strategies Identified by SBAE Teachers (N=16)

Planning and Resources Strategy	Agreement (%)
Schedule major activities across the school year	100
Identify deadlines	100
Identify activities that provide a service to students, school and community	100
Develop a systematic schedule	93
Develop a year-long plan for activities	93
Host an officer retreat to generate activity ideas	93
Identify locally relevant activities	93
Utilize FFA NCA Rubrics	93
Volunteer to judge applications at the state level	93
Plan one activity per standard	92
Utilize a Program of Activities	86
Use national chapter application as template for the chapter POA	86
Utilize the 15 quality standards as guides for activities	79
Establish SMART goals	79
Develop action plans	79
Think big	79

Table 2

Theme 2: National Chapter Award Program Implementing Activities Strategies Identified by SBAE Teachers (N=8)

Implementing Activities Strategy	Agreement (%)
Officer investment	100
Persistence	100
Be open to opportunities that arise throughout the year	100
Student ownership	86
Take/capture photographs (action shots)	83
Committee accountability	79
Consider student impact	79
Involve as many students as possible	77

Table 3

Theme 3: National Chapter Award Program Application Writing Strategies Identified by SBAE Teachers (N=9)

Application Writing Strategy	Agreement (%)
Follow the NCA Rubric	100
Integrate proper grammar	100
Select a uniform writing format	100
Utilize divisions and quality standards	93
Select quality pictures	93
Reinforce writing skills	93
Assign student teams to complete portions of the application	86
Write/develop application throughout the year	79
Incorporate state level judging feedback	79

Table 4

Theme 4: National Chapter Award Program Reflecting Strategies Identified by SBAE Teachers (N=4)

Reflecting Strategy	Agreement (%)
Perform teacher reflection	92
Review the National Chapter Awards Recognition Guide	85
Guide student reflection	85
Assess program needs	79

Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications

This study yielded 37 strategies that could be utilized by SBAE teachers to reach a three-star ranking in the NCA Program. Strategies were categorized into four themes: (1) Planning & Resources, (2) Implementing Activities, (3) Application Writing, and (4) Reflecting. The themes suggest that strategies could align with the experiential learning process. Throughout the NCA Program, students are guided by their SBAE teacher to potentially conceptualize abstract ideas, conduct concrete experiences, actively experiment, and reflect.

The Planning and Resources theme revealed teachers were focused on providing service activities that impacted the local community which aligns with the mission and purpose of FFA to provide opportunities for students to become productive citizens. Additionally, the POA was only seen as a strategy for planning by 86% of teachers while scheduling major activities across the year and identifying deadlines were a strategy for all panelists. The POA is intended to become the road map for chapter activities, therefore this finding will be highlighted in future professional development. Most strategies in the Implementing Activities theme show that student involvement and engagement are crucial to the success of the activities. This suggests that both teachers and students should be provided with resources and training for implementing activities to involve and engage all students. In the theme Application Writing, following the NCA rubric along with proper grammar and formatting were agreed upon as vital strategies by 100% of teacher panelists. Incorporating state level judging feedback was agreed upon by only 79% of teacher panelists and may indicate judging feedback at the state level is not seen as valuable to teachers from all states but is still an important part of NCA applications moving to the national level. Only four strategies reached agreement in the Reflecting theme. This shows a need for professional development on teacher self-reflection as well as guiding their students in reflection if the NCA program is meant to be experiential learning.

These themes and respective strategies can be used by teacher educators and state staff to guide professional development for SBAE teachers and students interested in competing in the NCA Program. It is recommended that further research be conducted to identify barriers to participating in the NCA Program to address the low participation in the program. Research should also be conducted to identify student, school, and community perceptions of the NCA Program. This data could be used to guide an inquiry into the effectiveness of an FFA chapters' POA. The implementation of the NCA Program and chapter POA could be further investigated to assess their alignment with the experiential learning process. This study could also be replicated in other NAAE regions or at the national level to compare the strategies used by FFA chapters nationwide. Overall, further research should be conducted to identify resources for FFA chapters and further investigate how programs implement experiential learning via FFA programming i.e., awards and applications.

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