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ABSTRACT

A study determined predictors of youth leadership life skills development among 400 1992-93 Future Farmers of America (FFA) members in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. The design of the study was descriptive-correlational-predictive. For the prediction portion, the dependent variable was youth leadership life skills development; the main independent variable was participation in FFA leadership activities. Control variables were achievement expectancy, self-esteem, years in FFA, age, ethnicity, gender, and place of residence. The Youth Leadership Life Skills Development Scale (YLLSDS) was used to measure the dependent variable. Mailed questionnaires colected data from March-June 1993. Findings indicated that achievement expectancy had a positive relationship with youth leadership life skills development, explaining nearly 14% of the variance in YLLSDS scores. Three variables--achievement expectancy, participation in FFA leadership activities, and gender--explained significant amounts of the variance in scores. Recommendations were made for a focus on satisfying FFA members' achievement motives when developing FFA leadership activities, encouragement of youth to join FFA and participate, and further research. (Contains 21 references.) (YLB)

FFA PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: A TRI-STATE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

The Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) has identified many leadership skills and qualities among groupings of basic skills, thinking skills, personal qualities, resource allocation skills, interpersonal skills, and organizational skills that will be needed by workers for "productive and meaningful employment in today's workforce" (Brock, 1992, p. 22). By focusing on developing agricultural leadership, cooperation, and citizenship, the National FFA Organization also focuses on skills for today's workforce. It is almost taken for granted by agricultural and other educators that youth who participate in youth organization leadership activities such as public speaking, holding an office, or attending meetings are developing leadership skills. How true is this perception?

Brannon, Holley, and Key (1989) found Oklahoma community leaders who participated in vocational agriculture and FFA in high school were more likely to be involved in community affairs organizations, school organizations, church groups, agricultural groups, and educational groups. Townsend and Carter (1983) found a significant positive relationship between FFA participation scores and leadership scores for 12th-grade vocational agriculture students in Iowa. Participants in 18 different FFA activities had a higher perception of their leadership skills than nonparticipants. In Tennessee, vocational agriculture/FFA students from superior FFA chapters had higher leadership and personal development scores than students from nonsuperior chapters (Riketts & Newcomb, 1984). Vocational agriculture/FFA students from nonsuperior chapters had higher scores than nonvocational agriculture students from schools with superior FFA chapters.

Miller (1976, p.2) defined youth leadership life skills development as self-assessed and organization-specific "development of life skills necessary to perform leadership functions in real life." Boyd, Herring, and Briers (1992) found level of 4-H participation was a significant predictor of leadership life skills development scores among 4-H youth in Texas. They also observed higher leadership life skills development for 4-H members than nonmembers. Seevers and Dormody (1994) found participation in leadership activities to be a significant predictor of youth leadership life skills development among senior 4-H members in three states.

Previous research on predicting youth leadership life skills development in agricultural education has focused on 4-H members. This study will provide data from an ethnically diverse area of the country to further strengthen the theoretical base for a relationship between participation in FFA leadership activities and leadership life skills development. Research is also needed to determine FFA members' levels of participation in specific leadership development activities; the activities that are the most effective in developing leadership life skills; and FFA members' participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating these activities.
Such knowledge could assist practitioners in developing more effective FFA leadership development programs.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to determine predictors of youth leadership life skills development among 1992-93 FFA members in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. Specific objectives of the study were:

1. To describe FFA members by their youth leadership life skills development, participation in FFA leadership activities, achievement expectancy, self esteem, years in FFA, age, ethnicity, gender, and place of residence.

2. To determine the predictors of leadership life skills development from among participation in FFA leadership activities, achievement expectancy, self esteem, years in FFA, age, ethnicity, gender, and place of residence.

3. To describe FFA members by their perceptions of which FFA leadership development activities have made the greatest contribution to their leadership life skills development.

4. To describe FFA members by their participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating FFA leadership development activities perceived to have made the greatest contribution to leadership life skills development.

5. To determine if there are differences between the frequencies that FFA members participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of FFA leadership development activities perceived to have made the greatest contribution to leadership life skills development.

PROCEDURES

FFA membership rosters for 1992-1993 were obtained from State Departments of Education in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. From the rosters, the population of FFA members in the three states was calculated to be 9,549. At a 95% confidence level, a sample size of 370 was needed to represent the population (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). This number was rounded to 400. A random sample of FFA members, stratified proportionally by state to ensure representation, was generated.

The design of the study was descriptive-correlational-predictive. For the prediction portion of the study the dependent variable was youth leadership life skills development; the main independent variable was participation in FFA leadership activities. Other variables that have also been shown to have a relationship with youth leadership life skills development in agricultural education were included as control variables: achievement expectancy (Seevers & Dormody, 1994) self esteem (Blackwell, 1990; Mueller, 1989), years in the youth organization (Orr & Gobeli, 1986; Waguesback, 1983), age (Boyd et al., 1992), ethnicity (Blackwell, 1990; Seevers & Dormody, 1994), gender (Luft, 1986; Orr & Gobeli, 1986; Seevers & Dormody, 1994), and place of residence (Heinsohn & Cantrell, 1986).

All parts of the mail questionnaire and a parallel instrument for 4-H were assessed for content and face validity by a panel of experts consisting of two faculty members in vocational education, two state Cooperative Extension Service administrators, a faculty member in educational administration, and two faculty members in research methods and statistics. The 30-indicator, unidimensional Youth Leadership Life Skills Development Scale (YLLSDS) was used to measure the dependent variable (Dormody, Seevers, & Clason, 1993). During its development, the YLLSDS had been assessed for construct validity, reliability, and dimensionality following a pilot test with 262 FFA and senior 4-H members in New Mexico (Seevers & Dormody, 1992). Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the scale was .98. Scores on the YLLSDS can range from 0 to 90.

Participation in FFA leadership activities was measured by a 25-indicator index adapted from Mueller (1989) utilizing the Official FFA Manual (National FFA Organization, 1993), three state supervisors of agricultural education, and an agricultural education teacher to identify FFA leadership development activities. The index listed FFA leadership activities by various levels of participation ranging from no participation through local, district, state, regional, and national participation, depending on the activity. Scores on the participation index can range from 0 to 62. A two-week test-retest procedure with 19 youth who were not part of the sample yielded a reliability coefficient of .97 for the index. Participants were also asked to choose and rank three leadership activities from the participation index they perceived to have helped them the most in developing leadership skills. For each of the three activities identified, they were to indicate whether or not they helped plan, implement, or evaluate the activity.

Achievement expectancy was assessed with a two-indicator summated scale adapted from Canfield (1976). One indicator asked members to indicate the level of evaluation they expect to get on their FFA activities and projects, ranging from outstanding to poor. The other indicator asked them to indicate the level of performance they expected from themselves during FFA activities and projects, also ranging from outstanding to poor. Scores on the scale can range from 0 to 8. The two-week test-retest reliability coefficient for the scale was .67.

Self esteem was measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), a 10-item, unidimensional Guttman scale (Wylie, 1974). Split-half reliability assessment of the RSE during the pilot testing of the YLLSDS yielded a coefficient of .68 (Seevers & Dormody, 1992).

Data were collected from March through June 1993 following the Dillman (1978) procedure for mail questionnaire administration. Incentives were sent with the three mailings to increase response rate. A response rate of 67% (n=266) was obtained. Complete data for the regression analysis was submitted by 256 (64%) of the members. To check for nonresponse bias, 10 nonrespondents were contacted by telephone. Nonrespondents were compared statistically to respondents by youth leadership life skills development, years in FFA, age, gender, ethnicity, place of residence and state. The two groups differed significantly only by ethnicity, with respondents having a higher percentage of minority members than nonrespondents. Therefore, findings related to ethnicity will not be generalized to the target population.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Objective 1 was analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e., means, medians, modes, standard deviations, ranges, frequencies, and percentages). Objective 2 was analyzed using stepwise multiple regression. Due to the exploratory nature of the regression analysis, a Type II error was judged potentially as serious as a Type I error. Therefore, a significance level of 0.15 was set a priori for the regression analysis. Because a large number of independent variables was used in the regression analysis, multicollinearity indices were also analyzed. No serious collinearity problems between the independent variables were observed. Objectives 3 and 4 were analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies and percentages). Objective 5 was analyzed using McNemar tests for significance of change. A significance level of 0.05 was set a priori for these tests.

RESULTS

Objective 1

FFA members' Youth Leadership Life Skills Development Scale (YLLSDS) scores ranged from 0 to 89 with a mode of 66 (n=15), median of 67.5, and mean of 64.2 (sd=17.7). Their scores on the achievement expectancy scale ranged from 0 to 8 with a mode of 6 (n=76), median of 6, and a mean of 6.1 (sd=1.3). FFA members' scores on the RSE scale ranged from 2 to 6 with a

mode of 6 (n=134), median of 6, and mean of 5.3 (sd=0.9). FFA members' years in FFA ranged from 1 to 8 with a mode of 1 (n=86), median of 2, and mean of 2.3 (sd=1.3). Their ages ranged from 13 to 22 years with a mode of 17 (n=69), median of 16, and mean of 16.3 (sd=1.5). Because of the low percentage of minority FFA members in the sample (19.1% or n=49), minority categories were combined for analysis. Half the FFA members (n=128) were from a farm or ranch. Another 30% (n=76) were either rural non-farm/ranch residents or from a town under 10,000 in population. The FFA members were 41% (n=105) female.

The FFA members' scores on the participation in FFA leadership activities index ranged from 0 to 44 with a mode of 12 (n=37), median of 12, and mean of 12.6 (sd=7.5). Over half the FFA members participated in 8 of the 25 leadership development activities listed in the index. Chapter meetings had the highest frequency of participants (n=210), followed by participation in fundraising activities (n=191), chapter banquet (n=184), judging contests (n=178), committees (n=141), parliamentary procedure (n=133), public relations (n=125), and SAEP (n=119) (Table 2). Other activities with relatively high participation were Achievement Award Program (n=108), public speaking (n=106), state convention (n=103), and holding office (n=101). Only 23% (n=51) of the FFA members had participated in Program of Activities (POA) planning. For activities offered at and above the chapter level, participants did not advance beyond the chapter level 66% of the time.

Objective 2

Three variables- achievement expectancy, participation in FFA leadership activities, and gender- explained significant amounts of the variance in YLLSDS scores after controlling for self esteem, years in FFA, age, ethnicity, and place of residence (Table 1). Achievement expectancy explained approximately 13.6%, participation in FFA leadership activities 2.3%, and gender 0.9%. The three-variable solution explained 16.7% of the variance in YLLSDS scores.

Table 1
Stepwise Multiple Regression on Youth Leadership Life Skills Development (n=255)

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F	Prob.>F
Regression	13,295.0	3	4,431.7	16.9	0.0001
Error	66,146.5	252	262.5		
Total	79,441.5	255			

Variables in the equation

Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	T	Prob.>|T|	Partial R square
Intercept	33.5	4.7	7.3	0.0001	
Ach. expectancy	4.1	0.8	5.1	0.0001	0.136
Participation in FFA leadership act.	0.4	0.1	2.5	0.0110	0.023
Gender	3.3	2.1	1.6	0.1101	0.009

Objective 3

FFA members were asked to identify the three FFA leadership development activities they felt made the greatest contribution to their leadership life skills development. Judging contests (n=110), public speaking (n=67), chapter meetings (n=62), holding office (n=55), and parliamentary procedure (n=54) had the top five frequencies (Table 2). Only four members had

POA planning in their top three leadership development activities. To obtain a more standardized measure of the perceived leadership development value of the activities, the frequency each activity was identified in the top three was divided by the overall participation frequency in the activity. The five highest ratios obtained were for the Washington Conference Program (.67), public speaking (.63), judging contests (.62), holding office (.54), and National FFA Convention (.49).

Objective 4

FFA members were most likely to participate during the implementation phase (84.8%) and less likely to participate in the evaluation (67.1%) or planning (48.2%) phases of the three FFA leadership development activities they felt made the greatest contribution to their leadership life skills development (Table 2).

Table 2
FFA Members' Participation in Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Their Top Three Leadership Development Activities (n=220)

	Planning		Implement.		Evaluating		Total	Total	
Activity	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Top 3	Part.	Ratio
Judging contests	61	49	13	97	38	72	110	178	.62
Public speaking	27	40	3	64	20	47	67	106	.63
Chapter meetings	34	28	14	48	28	34	62	210	.30
Holding office	16	39	0	55	19	36	55	101	.54
Parliamentary proc.	28	26	7	47	12	42	54	133	.41
Fundraising	22	18	1	39	13	27	40	191	.20
State convention	26	7	15	18	9	24	33	103	.32
SAEP	4	25	0	29	2	27	29	119	.24
National Convention	23	5	14	14	8	20	28	57	.49
Committee member	10	17	4	23	12	15	27	141	.19
Officer training	19	5	5	19	8	16	24	93	.26
Chapter banquet	15	6	11	10	15	6	21	184	.11
Public relations	9	11	1	19	5	15	20	125	.16
Achievement in Volun.	10	5	1	14	4	11	15	76	.20
Proficiency Award Pro.	4	10	1	13	3	11	14	92	.15
Made for Excellence Pro.	8	3	2	9	1	10	11	34	.32
BOAC	4	5	1	8	3	6	9	64	.14
Food for America	3	5	1	7	2	6	8	84	.10
Summer leadership camp	7	1	2	6	2	6	8	21	.38
Agriscience Recog. Pro.	4	3	3	4	4	3	7	32	.22
Computers in Agric.	3	3	0	6	2	4	6	55	.11
Achievement Award Pro.	2	2	0	4	4	0	4	108	.04
POA planning	0	4	0	4	1	3	4	51	.08
Washington Conf. Pro.	2	0	0	2	1	1	2	3	.67
National Safety Aw. Pro.	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	46	.02
Totals	342	318	100	560	217	443			
% of 660 responses	51.8	48.2	15.2	84.8	32.9	67.1			

Objective 5

Significantly more ($p<.001$) FFA members implemented but did not plan the leadership activity perceived to have made the greatest contribution to leadership life skills development (n=90) than those who planned but did not implement the activity (n=3). Significantly more

($p<.001$) members implemented but did not evaluate their top leadership activity (n=58) than those who evaluated but did not implement the activity (n=15). Significantly more ($p<.001$) members evaluated but did not plan their top leadership activity (n=71) than those who planned but did not evaluate the activity (n=27).

CONCLUSIONS

1. Achievement expectancy had a positive relationship with youth leadership life skills development and explained close to 14% of the variance in YLLSDS scores. In a similar study of senior 4-H members, Seevers and Dormody (1994) found achievement expectancy explained about 2% of the variance in YLLSDS scores. A possible explanation for this difference could be a stronger focus on individual achievement in FFA.

2. The weak positive relationship between participation in FFA leadership activities and YLLSDS scores reflects the findings of Boyd, Herring, and Briers (1992) who found 4-H participation explained only 3.3% of the variance in leadership life skills development scores. However, Seevers and Dormody (1993) found participation in 4-H leadership activities explained 12.6% of the variance in YLLSDS scores among senior 4-H members. Some possible explanations for a weak FFA relationship are (a) attenuation of correlation due to uniformly low participation, (b) low participation beyond the chapter level, (c) low participation in planning and evaluating leadership activities, (d) low participation in the POA program, (e) low participation in activities that would truly contribute the most to leadership life skills development (in contrast to those indicated by the members in this study), and (f) the leadership life skills in the YLLSDS are not being thoroughly addressed by FFA leadership activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Agricultural educators in the three states should focus on satisfying FFA members' achievement motives when developing FFA leadership activities. Challenging activities that balance cooperative, competitive, and personal development goals should be developed.

2. Agricultural educators should encourage youth to join FFA and participate in leadership activities. Some possible ways to improve leadership life skills development through the FFA are to increase members' overall participation, participation above the chapter level, participation in planning and evaluating activities (which can be realized in part by adoption of a POA program), and participation in activities most highly associated with leadership life skills development (Townsend & Carter, 1983). In the opinion of the members, some effective activities are Washington Conference Program, public speaking, judging contests, holding office, and National FFA Convention.

3. The National FFA Association should determine whether FFA leadership activities are developing leadership life skills central to the conceptualization of leadership. In the opinion of the authors, the YLLSDS has indicators that match both the industrial construct and emerging paradigm of leadership (Barker, 1994). On which conceptualization are FFA activities based?

4. Agricultural educators in the three states should revisit the POA as a vehicle for providing leadership development for all FFA members. By participating in the POA, members plan, implement, and evaluate part of the FFA program. They learn to solve problems, think critically, and learn from successes and failures. With the proper training (Dormody, 1991), they learn how to work collaboratively during committee activities. All of these skills will be necessary for adult leadership roles.

5. Further research should determine (a) other predictors of youth leadership life skills development, (b) why achievement expectancy scores appear to be a stronger predictor of youth

leadership life skills development among FFA members than among senior 4-H members (Seevers & Dormody, 1994), (c) why there is a weak relationship between participation in leadership activities and youth leadership life skills development, (d) why participation in leadership activities appears to be a stronger predictor of youth leadership life skills development among senior 4-H members (Seevers & Dormody, 1994) than among FFA members, (e) the effectiveness of each FFA activity in developing leadership life skills using a quantitative approach, (f) the level of POA adoption and if chapters using a POA are more effective in developing leadership skills, and (g) the perceptions of FFA advisors and members regarding member participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating leadership activities. Replication in other states is also encouraged.

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