

Participation in FFA and Self-perceptions  
of Personal Development

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The 12 purposes of the Future Farmers of America (FFA) place emphasis on the development and improvement of members' agricultural skills and personal competencies. Are these purposes being realized by students who participate in the organization in the 1980s? Previous studies have explored various relationships between FFA participation and members' personal characteristics (Ebbers, 1968; Spooner, 1974; Welton & Bender, 1971). Townsend (1981) studied the relationship between FFA participation and personal development as perceived by Iowa vocational agriculture seniors. Based upon her research, a relationship was established between participation in certain types of activities and senior FFA members' self-perception of their personal development.

Purpose of the Study

This study replicated Townsend's work in an attempt to substantiate the results and to provide insight into how the FFA is accomplishing its stated purposes. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between students' participation in FFA activities and their self-perceived personal development. The specific objectives were:

1. To determine the relationships between levels of participation and total personal development of senior FFA members and in the following subscales: leadership, self-confidence, orientation to agricultural occupations, citizenship, cooperation, scholarship, and health and recreation.
2. To determine if a difference exists in personal development scores between individuals with high levels of participation compared to individuals with low levels of participation in FFA activities.
3. To establish self-perceived bench mark scores for the scales of the Personal Development Inventory (PDI) for senior FFA members in Iowa.

## Methodology

The replicated study (Townsend, 1981) used an ex post facto correlational design. The population for the study consisted of a clustered sample of senior FFA members enrolled for the 1981-82 school year at the same schools that were used in the Townsend study. The original study population consisted of 54 schools with 426 students. Since that time, one of the original schools was divided into two separate departments. Also, two of the schools did not return the questionnaires. The sample for this study contained 428 seniors from 53 schools. The Personal Development Inventory (PDI) and the FFA Activity Participation Inventory were completed by each senior FFA member in the sample.

The Personal Development Inventory was created as a part of an Iowa Experiment Station Project. Indicators of personal development were devised based upon the aims and purposes of the FFA. The inventory consisted of seven scales: leadership, self-confidence, orientation to agricultural occupations, citizenship, cooperation, scholarship, and health and recreation. Six of the seven scales had reliability coefficients of .728 or higher and the total instrument reliability was .942. A reliability coefficient of .617 was obtained for the health and recreation scale. For each item, students indicated their level of agreement or disagreement on a seven point Likert-type scale. The mean for each scale's items yielded a score for the related personal development ability. The total mean for all items was the individual's total personal development score.

FFA activity participation scores were calculated using jury weighted values for 37 FFA activities. The weighted score recognized that participation in certain activities indicated a higher level of involvement than others. Means for each PDI scale, the total PDI, and the FFA participation score were calculated for each individual. The PDI scores were correlated with FFA participation scores using Pearson Correlation. The study sample was then divided into thirds based upon FFA activity participation scores to form high, medium, and low level participation groups. The PDI scores of individuals in the the low participation group using *t*-tests. Also PDI scale scores from this study were compared with the scores obtained in Townsend's study to determine differences and similarities of scores from the two studies.

## Findings and Discussion

Scores for the seven PDI scales and the total PDI score were correlated with each FFA participation score as shown in Table 1. Positive relationships were found between FFA participation and personal development scores across all scales at the .05 level. Cause and effect cannot be assumed due to design of the study. The leadership scale had the strongest correlation coefficient (0.35) which indicates a moderate relationship with FFA participation scores.

The sample was divided into groups based upon their FFA participation scores to form high (n=138), medium (n=137), and low (n=138) level participation groups. The high and low level groups were compared to determine if there were significant differences in their PDI scale scores or in total PDI scores as shown in Table 2. A comparison of PDI scale scores between the low and high level groups

Table 1

*Correlation Coefficients Between Total FFA Participation Scores and PDI Scales*

PDI scale	N	Coefficient	Probability
Leadership	417	0.3503	0.000
Self-confidence	417	0.1095	0.025
Ag orientation	415	0.1325	0.007
Citizenship	414	0.1643	0.001
Cooperation	417	0.1213	0.013
Scholarship	417	0.1118	0.022
Health & recreation	417	0.1037	0.036
Total PDI	417	0.1956	0.000

Table 2

*Comparison of PDI Scale Means Between High and Low FFA Participation Groups*

PDI scale	Participation Group Means		t Value	Prob.
	Low (n=138)	High (n=138)		
Leadership	4.6988	5.2888	-6.22	0.000
Self-confidence	5.4833	5.6401	-1.79	0.074
Ag orientation	5.3482	5.5982	-2.66	0.008
Citizenship	5.3571	5.5581	-2.20	0.028
Cooperation	5.6901	5.8616	-2.02	0.045
Scholarship	5.5634	5.7108	-1.82	0.070
Health & recreation	5.6405	5.7944	-1.59	0.113
Total PDI	5.3343	5.5678	-3.35	0.001

indicated that the groups had significantly ( $p = .05$ ) different PDI scores on four of the seven scales as well as the total PDI scores. Individuals in the high group scored themselves higher in the areas of leadership, orientation to agricultural occupations, citizenship, and cooperation as well as the total PDI score than individuals in the lower participation group. Overall personal development is enhanced by active participation in FFA activities as shown by the significant difference in total PDI scores between the low and high level groups.

In an effort to begin establishing norms for the PDI scores, mean scores from the 1981 study were compared with those obtained in the 1982 study using a pooled  $t$ -test. The variance within each group was not significantly different. As shown in Table 3, the two sets of scores were not significantly different for any of the scales nor the total PDI score. Thus, these scores could be used as reference points for senior FFA members in Iowa completing the Personal Development Inventory Scales. More studies need to be completed before definite norms can be established.

Table 3

*Comparison of PDI Scores in 1981 and 1982 Studies*

PDI scale	1981		1982		$t$ VaTue*
	N	Mean	N	Mean	
Leadership	426	4.95	427	4.95	0.000
Self-confidence	425	5.56	427	5.54	0.403
Ag orientation	424	5.41	424	5.47	-1.136
Citizenship	426	5.48	424	5.43	0.998
Cooperation	426	5.72	428	5.74	-0.412
Scholarship	426	5.61	427	5.61	0.000
Health & recreation	421	5.69	420	5.69	0.000
Total PDI	426	5.42	428	5.42	0.000

\* Critical  $t$ -value ( $\alpha = .05$ ) = +1.96

### Conclusions and Implications

A significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ) was found between all seven PDI scale scores and the FFA participation scores. Members with high FFA participation scores tended to rate themselves higher on the PDI scale than members with low participation scores. The strong emphasis on leadership development in all FFA activities is reflected in the highest correlation coefficient obtained. However, based on the relatively weak coefficients of the other scales, the FFA organization at each level needs to evaluate the opportunities for members' personal development in all activities.

When individuals with high levels of participation were grouped together and compared with those of low levels of participation, significant differences were found in all areas except self-confidence, scholarship, and health and recreation. While the relationships found were not strong in the first analysis, there is indication that members who actively participated in FFA activities tend to have higher perceptions of their personal development. The lack of significant ( $p=.05$ ) differences between high and low level participation groups in the areas of self-confidence, scholarship, and health and recreation may be attributed to two plausible reasons. First, individuals who participate more in FFA activities have more contacts with others and as a result broaden their frame of reference for comparison of their own self-perceived personal development. Therefore, they tend to rate themselves lower on the scales. For example, Townsend (1981) found in analyzing specific FFA activities that students participating in the Washington Leadership Conference actually perceived their level of development significantly less than those who had not participated in the conference in three areas. A logical explanation would appear to be that participants change their reference points based on contacts with outstanding students nationwide rather than with individuals in their own chapters. Secondly, self-confidence, scholarship, and health and recreation may be affected by experiences that members have developed throughout their lives and are therefore less affected by FFA experiences. Regardless of the reason or reasons, more emphasis should be placed on FFA activities at the local, state, and national levels which centers on developing these areas.

The mean scores found in this study do not vary significantly from those found in the Townsend (1981) study. This allows senior FFA members to use the mean values as a reference point for comparison with their own PDI scores. Although the data from these two studies are not sufficient to establish norms, they serve as benchmark values that individuals could use for comparison in the future. Also, they provide a useful tool for advisors and students in planning future FFA activities for the chapter membership.

The FFA has been shown in this study to contribute to its members' personal development as outlined by the purposes of the organization. This contribution is stronger in certain areas such as leadership. While the FFA should not decrease the emphasis on leadership, stronger emphasis is needed in the other areas especially in self-confidence, scholarship, and health and recreation.

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