

Attitudes of Superintendents of Ohio Comprehensive High
Schools Toward Adult Programs

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More than 20,000 adult students in Ohio were served in 1981-82 through adult programs in vocational agriculture. Fifty-seven of the 88 Ohio counties had Farm Business Planning and Analysis (FBPA) programs available to agriculturalists, with more than 2400 enrolled. The remaining students were enrolled in supplemental adult programs (Starling, 1983). These numbers represent only a small proportion of the audience that could be served through adult programs. Many more adults need education, but programs are no longer growing. A commonly heard explanation for the lack of growth is that school superintendents do not support the program.

Parks (1983) noted that adult vocational agricultural educational must continue to improve and grow if agriculturalists are to continue to improve. Numerous studies in other states (Viterna, 1973; Cepica, 1977; and McGhee, 1974) have produced inconclusive results regarding administrators' attitudes toward adult programs.

If attitudes could be determined, certain demographic characteristics might help explain any variability among the superintendents. Such knowledge would enable strategies to be developed which would permit the expansion of adult vocational agricultural education. Using practical experience to form a normative theory, certain characteristics were selected as specified in Objective 2.

Purposes and Objectives

The problem was that knowledge of the attitudes of superintendents of Ohio comprehensive high schools toward adult vocational agricultural education was not known. To address this problem, objectives of the study were stated in the form of research questions. The questions addressed were:

1. What are the current attitudes held by superintendents toward adult vocational agricultural education?
2. What is that relationship between the attitudes of superintendents and the selected demographic characteristics of:

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- a) existence of an adult vocational agriculture program in the school?
- b) years of experience as a superintendent?
- c) years of experience in public education?
- d) years of experience with adult vocational education?
- e) having previously been a teacher of vocational agriculture?
- f) having previously been a teacher of vocational education?
- g) having previously been a teacher of adult education?
- h) coursework taken in vocational education?
- i) coursework taken in adult education?

Procedures

This was a descriptive study of the survey type. *The 1982-83 Ohio Education Directory* was used to provide an up-to-date list of superintendents (N=294) and eliminate any frame or selection errors. A random 15% sample, stratified by geographic areas of the state, produced a sample size of 45, to provide a 95% confidence in the results. Therefore, sampling errors were controlled.

The questionnaire was developed from the literature to gather the demographic data and measure the attitudes, using Likert-type scaling, of the superintendents toward adult vocational agricultural education. A panel of five experts of teacher educators and supervisors from the Department of Agricultural Education at The Ohio State University established content validity for the instrument, and a pilot test utilizing the Cronbach's alpha procedure established the internal consistency reliability to be .78.

Data were collected through a mailed questionnaire. Second mailings and telephone calls were made, and produced 41 usable responses from the 42 received. The 93% response rate led the researchers to place high confidence in the representativeness of the results and non-respondents were not studied. Data were analyzed with appropriate measures of central tendency, dispersion, and correlation for the scale of measurement.

Findings and Conclusions

A summary of the demographic data revealed that 63% of the superintendents administered programs of adult vocational agricul-

ture. They had been a superintendent for an average of over eight years, with an average of 21 years in education, and an average of eight years experience with adult vocational agriculture. Less than five percent had been an instructor of vocational agriculture, or an instructor of vocational education. Nearly 44% had been an adult instructor. Twenty-nine percent had taken coursework in vocational education and 42% had taken coursework in adult education.

To facilitate discussion, the items on the questionnaire have been grouped in Table 1. The clustering has been done under the headings of Need for the Program, Funding of Programs, Operation of Programs, Benefits of Programs, and Leadership Organization. These clusters were not grouped as domains for analysis purposes but for ease of interpretation.

Examination of the results from the items on the questionnaire help describe their attitudes (Table 1). For example, superintendents agreed that a) agriculture was important in their districts, b) schools should offer instruction in agriculture to anyone who wishes to attend, c) local programs should not necessarily be free to participants, d) vocational agriculture instructors should serve as the teachers, e) school facilities should be available, f) advisory committees should be utilized, g) the state department is supportive of adult vocational agriculture, and h) such programs benefit the teacher, community, school, and students. Each item can be considered independently.

One open-ended item on the questionnaire requested the superintendents to indicate their perception of the ideal funding for adult agricultural education programs. Their mean response was 47% should come from state and federal sources, 47% from student fees, and six percent from local funds. Therefore, while their attitudes seem positive, they were reluctant to support the program with local monies. The question remains that if attitudes are predispositions to behavior (Summers, 1970), will superintendents behave in a manner conducive to encouraging the support of adult agricultural education programs with local dollars?

Perusing Table 1 and utilizing 2.5 as the midpoint between agreeing and disagreeing, one can conclude that superintendents were in agreement with a majority of the items. One can further conclude their attitudes were positive overall.

Concepts with which they disagreed include retaining the unemployed, free education for adults, adequacy of state and national funding, utilizing local tax dollars for support, utilizing school facilities during regular school hours, and adult instruction being conducted by someone other than the vocational agriculture instructor.

High mean ratings were prevalent in the clusters of Need for Programs, Benefits of Programs, and the Leadership Organization. One can conclude that the attitudes of Ohio superintendents are positive in regard to the adult program being needed, the benefits derived, and in the efficacy of the Young Farmers Association.

Table 1

Attitudes of Superintendents Toward Adult Education

Items in cluster	\bar{X}_a	SD
Need for Programs		
Agriculture is of little importance within our school district. (reversed) ^b	3.90	0.30
Adults want additional information dealing with agriculturally related subjects.	3.24	0.49
Adult programs should be available to everyone within the school district.	3.22	0.62
A comprehensive high school's main responsibility is to students in grades nine to twelve.	3.17	0.67
Adult programs are the responsibility of the joint vocational school system; not the comprehensive high school. (reversed)	2.94	0.75
Adult programs should serve the agribusiness owners and employees.	2.86	0.49
Adult programs should be offered by every comprehensive high school offering vocational agriculture.	2.68	0.63
Adult programs in agriculture should try to serve the non-agriculture public.	2.61	0.69
When adults have educational needs, it is the school's responsibility to meet those needs with an educational program.	2.57	0.73
Adult programs should be the responsibility of the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service.	2.51	0.89
Adult programs should be geared toward retraining the unemployed for agricultural occupations.	2.33	0.63
Funding of Programs		
All consumable supplies that are used in the adult programs should be purchased by the adults.	3.27	0.64
Adult students should pay a fee to cover all costs of the educational program.	2.94	0.67
Our country has a free education system and that right extends to adults.	2.20	0.77
State and national funding for adult agricultural programs is adequate.	2.00	0.60
Adult programs should be self-supporting and use no local tax dollars. (reversed)	1.72	0.86

Table 1 (continued)

Items in cluster	\bar{X}_a	SD
Operation of Programs (continued)		
The use of school facilities for adult programs during hours that school is not in session is acceptable.	3.37	0.49
The Ohio State Department of Education personnel encourages the conduct of adult programs.	3.29	0.46
Adult programs should be operated with the assistance of a vocational agriculture advisory committee.	3.08	0.54
Current vocational agriculture instructors do not want to teach adult programs (reversed)	3.04	0.52
The administrative duties inherent with adult programs make them unrealistically burdensome to the comprehensive high school administrator. (reversed)	2.94	0.71
Vocational agriculture instructors do not have the time to teach adult programs. (reversed)	2.68	0.53
Adult programs should be intensive, in-depth educational programs if adults are to benefit from them.	2.57	0.65
The use of school facilities during regular school hours for adult programs is acceptable.	2.27	0.75
Adult programs should be conducted by someone other than the high school vocational agriculture instructor.	2.26	0.74
Benefits of Programs		
Having adult programs in the school improves the community attitude toward the school.	3.34	0.47
Adult programs provide excellent public relations for schools.	3.19	0.47
Adult programs can have an observable impact on local agricultural practices.	3.03	0.30
Adult programs produce no financial benefit for the students. (reversed)	3.03	0.55
In an election year, an adult class will have a positive effect on any school issue that is on the ballot.	3.00	0.64
Adults, who have participated in adult programs, become strong school supporters.	3.00	0.60
Vocational agriculture instructors become better teachers after they have taught adult programs.	2.91	0.46

Table 1 (continued)

Items in cluster	\bar{X}_a	SD
Leadership Organization		
Organizations like the Ohio Young Farmers Association are of great benefit to the adult student.	3.31	0.47
Organizations like the Ohio Young Farmers Association are of little benefit to the school system. (reversed)	3.22	0.48

Note. ^aSA - strongly agree (4), A - agree (3), D - disagree (2),
^bSD - strongly disagree (1),
^bScaling of negatively worded items was reversed for analyses and comparative purposes.

Addressing Question 2, the examination of the relationship between the attitudes of superintendents and the demographic characteristics produced low and negligible relationships (Table 2). These characteristics were not good predictors of the attitudes of the superintendents, and failed to help explain the variability within the group. The correlation of greatest magnitude was between attitudes and experience as a teacher of adult education. This correlation (.18) was positive but of low magnitude.

Table 2

Correlation of Superintendents' Attitude With Selected Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Pearson r
Existence of Adult Vocational Agriculture	.06
Years of Experience as Superintendent	- .002
Years of Experience in Public Education	- .05
Years of Experience with Adult Vocational Education	.08
Previous Teacher of Vocational Agriculture	.09
Previous Teacher of Vocational Education	.08
Previous Teacher of Adult Education	.18
Coursework taken in Vocational Education	- .12
Coursework taken in Adult Education	- .05

Recommendations

1. Superintendents of Ohio's comprehensive high schools are conceptually supportive of adult vocational agricultural education; therefore, this finding should be shared with the profession.
2. Funding for adult programs should be arranged from a variety of potential sources; therefore, a study should be conducted to determine the optimum mix of support.
3. Program planning for adult education should be guided by an advisory council.
4. Instruction should be planned and delivered by the teacher of vocational agriculture.
5. The characteristics examined were not good predictors of the attitudes of the superintendents; therefore, other predictors should be examined in future studies.
6. Superintendents believed that agribusiness persons should be served as well as production agriculturalists; therefore, future policies should facilitate such programs.
7. Similar studies should be conducted in other states and with other populations such as superintendents of Ohio joint vocational schools, teachers, advisory council members, other administrators, and current and prospective students.
8. Future studies should investigate the relationship between the attitudes of superintendents and the quality of the adult program in their system.
9. Ohio educators should utilize these results as input to expanding and improving adult education programs in agriculture through revised recommendations for policies and procedures in comprehensive high schools.

References

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