

Assessment of the Morale of Beginning Vocational
Agriculture Teachers in Illinois

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The morale of vocational agriculture teachers has been a concern of the agricultural education profession during recent years. Miller (1978) found that the morale of beginning vocational agriculture teachers in Virginia was higher than the morale level of experienced teachers. However, Debertin and Priebe (1984) reported that experienced teachers scored higher on the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire, an instrument designated to measure teacher morale, than did beginning vocational agriculture teachers. Grady (1985) found that vocational agriculture teachers expressed moderate levels of satisfaction with their jobs, and that more experienced teachers reported higher levels of job satisfaction than beginning teachers.

Many vocational agriculture teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Craig, 1983; Knight, 1978), indicating a dissatisfaction with some aspect of teaching. In an effort to assist beginning vocational agriculture teachers with specific problems and concerns which may affect teacher morale, many states provide beginning teacher programs through their agricultural education programs at their state universities. Little is known concerning the effect of beginning teacher programs on the morale of those who participate in those programs.

Purposes and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to assess the level of morale of beginning vocational agriculture teachers in Illinois, and to compare the morale levels of teachers who enrolled in an organized course for beginning teachers with the morale of those who did not enroll in the beginning teacher course. A secondary purpose of this study was to examine relationships between selected program and teacher characteristics related to teacher morale. The specific objectives of this study were stated as research questions:

1. What was the overall morale level of Illinois beginning vocational agriculture teachers as measured by the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire?
2. How did the morale levels of beginning vocational agriculture teachers in Illinois compare with national norms for secondary school teachers who had completed the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire?
3. Were there differences in the morale levels of beginning vocational agriculture teachers who enrolled in the beginning teacher course, when compared to those who did not enroll in the beginning teacher course?
4. What were the relationships between morale levels of beginning vocational agriculture teachers in Illinois and the following program

and teacher variables: (a) school size, (b) vocational agriculture enrollment, (c) percentage of students with SOE, (d) use of an advisory committee, (e) highest degree earned, and (f) length of teaching contract.

Procedures

The research design utilized by this study was descriptive survey. The population consisted of all beginning vocational agriculture teachers in Illinois during the 1983-84 and 1984-85 academic years ($N = 76$). For the purpose of this study, beginning teacher refers to teachers with less than two years of teaching experience. During this two-year period, there were 49 beginning vocational agriculture teachers who enrolled in the beginning teacher course and 27 new teachers who did not enroll in the course. Questionnaires were sent to all 76 beginning teachers.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used to collect data for this study. The Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (PTO) was used to measure teacher morale, and a second instrument was developed by the researchers to collect demographic data. The instrument used to collect demographic data was reviewed by members of the agricultural education faculty at the University of Illinois for clarity. The PTO instrument consists of 100 items, and it comprises 10 factors associated with teacher morale. The Kuder-Richardson coefficient of internal consistency reported for the instrument was .96, and test-retest correlations ranging from .69 to .93 were reported for the 10 subscales on the instrument.

Data Collection

Data were collected near the end of the 1984-85 school year. Questionnaires were mailed to the 76 beginning vocational agriculture teachers in April. Teachers who had not responded by the end of April received a follow-up mailing and a telephone call urging them to complete the questionnaire. Responses were received from 42 of the teachers who had enrolled in the course (86%) and 20 who did not enroll in the course (74%), for an overall response rate of 82%. According to Miller and Smith (1983), late respondents have been found to be very similar to nonrespondents. Based upon this finding, data from late respondents (those who responded to the second mailing) were statistically compared to data from early respondents. Since *t*-tests indicated no significant differences between early and late respondents, the data were combined for analysis.

Data Analysis

The PTO instruments were scored by the Center for Instructional Services at Purdue University, and an index for the 10 factors associated with teacher morale was calculated. Data were further analyzed by means of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, measures of central tendency, measures of variance, and measures of association were used to summarize the data.

Results

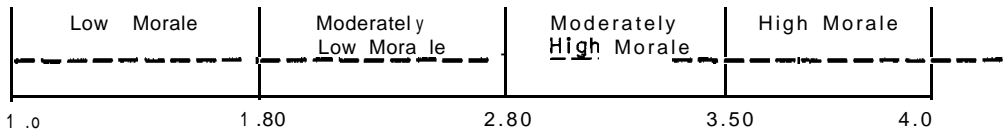
Demographic Program and Teacher Variables

Beginning vocational agriculture teachers in Illinois were teaching in schools with enrollments that ranged from 48 to 1700 students ($\bar{X} = 355$). Enrollments in vocational agriculture programs ranged from 15 students to 120 students per teacher ($\bar{X} = 53.2$). The teachers reported

that, on the average, almost three-fourths of their students had supervised occupational experience programs. The length of teaching contract ranged from 9 to 12 months, but the greatest number of beginning teachers held 10-month contracts. Eight beginning teachers had earned a master's degree; 53 of the teachers possessed a bachelor's degree; one teacher held an associate's degree.

Levels of Beginning Teacher Morale

Teachers were asked to respond to the 100-item Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire by selecting one response from a four-point Likert-type scale, with four representing high morale and one representing low morale associated with each item. In order to allow for a slight deviation for each category of response, the resulting means were interpreted according to the following scale:



The overall morale scores, as calculated from the PTO, indicated that the beginning teachers had moderately high levels of morale ($M = 2.81$). For the 10 factors associated with teacher morale measured by the instrument, the mean scores ranged from 2.38 to 3.28 (see Table 1). Lower morale scores were reported by the beginning teachers for Teacher Salary ($M = 2.38$) and Teacher Load ($M = 2.57$) than for the other eight factors. Although high levels of morale were not found for any of the 10 morale factors, the highest morale scores for the ten factors were reported for Satisfaction with Teaching ($M = 3.28$), Rapport Among Teachers ($M = 3.04$), and Community Pressure ($M = 2.95$).

When compared to national norms for junior and senior high school teachers who completed the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire, scores reported by beginning vocational agriculture teachers in Illinois ranked below the 50th percentile for 7 of the 10 factors (Bentley & Remple, 1980). Morale factors for which Illinois beginning teachers compared least favorably with national norms were Teacher Load (below the 5th percentile), Community Pressure (approximately the 10th percentile), and Rapport with Principal (approximately the 26th percentile). Illinois beginning vocational agriculture teachers scored at approximately the 50th percentile for Satisfaction with School Facilities and Services and Satisfaction with Teaching.

Differences in Morale Factors Between Beginning Teacher Groups

Examination of the data presented in Table 1 indicated that differences in morale between teachers enrolled in the beginning teacher course and those who did not enroll in the course were slight. The greatest differences between the groups were found for the morale factors Teacher Status, School Facilities, and Teacher Load. Vocational agriculture teachers who had participated in the beginning teacher course had slightly higher morale scores for the Teacher Status factor and for the adequacy of school facilities factor than teachers who were not enrolled in the course. However, the opposite was found for teachers' perceptions of their teaching load, with the teachers enrolled in the beginning teacher course indicating lower levels of morale for this factor than teachers who did not participate in the course.

Table 1

Mean Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire Scores for Beginning Teachers by Morale Factors

Morale Factor	Teachers in Program (N = 42)		Teachers not in Program (N = 20)		Combined Groups (N = 62)	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Satisfaction with teaching	3.27	0.49	3.29	0.66	3.28	0.55
Rapport among teachers	3.05	0.58	3.03	0.67	3.04	0.61
Community pressure	2.89	0.55	3.08	0.87	2.95	0.67
Community support	2.91	0.67	2.87	1.01	2.90	0.79
Curriculum issues	2.81	0.67	2.83	0.76	2.81	0.70
School facilities	2.86	0.78	2.66	0.77	2.80	0.77
Rapport with principal	2.78	0.85	2.69	1.01	2.75	0.89
Teacher status	2.69	0.66	2.43	0.64	2.60	0.66
Teacher load	2.51	0.71	2.71	0.68	2.57	0.70
Teacher salary	2.44	0.77	2.26	0.75	2.38	0.76
Total PTO Score	2.82	0.43	2.78	0.47	2.81	0.44

Note. Means based upon a 4-point **Likert** type scale with a mean of 1 indicating low morale and a mean of 4 indicating high morale.

Relationships Between Morale and Demographic Variables

The relationships between teacher morale and five of the six demographic variables examined in this study were slight (Table 2). Teachers who reported higher percentages of students with supervised occupational experience programs tended to have higher overall morale scores ($\rho = .43$). This relationship was considered moderate in strength. Teacher morale was only slightly related to length of contract and the

Table 2

Correlation of Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire Scores by Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables	rho
School size	-.16
Vocational agriculture enrollment	.15
Percentage of students with SOE	.43
Use of advisory committee	.23
Highest degree earned	.08
Length of teaching contract	.20

frequency of use of advisory committees. Although the relationship was very slight, beginning vocational agriculture teachers from smaller schools tended to indicate higher levels of morale.

Conclusions

Beginning vocational agriculture teachers in Illinois indicated they were moderately satisfied with their jobs. The major factors associated with lower levels of morale were Salaries Received and Teacher Load.

Participation in a beginning vocational agriculture teachers course did not affect the morale of beginning vocational agriculture teachers. Since beginning teacher programs have many other benefits, the finding that these programs did not significantly affect morale of the participants did not imply that the programs are not meeting many of the needs of beginning vocational agriculture teachers.

Most program and teacher demographic variables were only slightly related to teacher morale. Of the variables examined, only student participation in SOE was associated with higher levels of teacher morale. There was no practical relationship between the degrees held by the teachers and level of morale.

Recommendations

Since high levels of teacher morale were not reported for any of the 10 morale factors, school administrators, state consultants, vocational directors and teacher educators should focus attention upon improving the morale of beginning vocational agriculture teachers. While financial constraints may limit what can be done in these areas, special emphasis should be placed upon improving teacher morale in the two areas associated with the lowest morale scores, salaries and teacher load.

Teacher educators working with beginning vocational agriculture teachers should incorporate **activities** into the programs to assist the teachers in dealing with those factors which contribute to low teacher morale.

Due to the relationship between overall teacher morale and the percentage of students with supervised occupational experience programs, continued emphasis in the preservice and inservice programs in agricultural education should be placed upon developing and implementing supervised occupational experience programs for vocational agriculture students.

Follow-up studies should be conducted with this population to determine whether levels of teacher morale change with additional years of teaching experience.

In order to determine if morale levels of beginning vocational agriculture teachers differ from beginning teachers in other educational areas, the morale of beginning vocational agriculture teachers should be compared to the morale levels of other beginning teachers to examine differences and similarities in morale across educational program areas.

Additional studies should be conducted to examine the effects of beginning teacher courses/programs on participants.

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