

ADMINISTRATOR SATISFACTION WITH FIRST-YEAR AGRICULTURE TEACHERS

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Abstract

Many believe that society is caught up in an epidemic of quality. Businesses are scrambling to not only meet, but to exceed customer expectations. At the same time, education is being encouraged to act more like business. The purpose of this study was to assess the satisfaction of public school administrators (our customers) with first-year teachers (our product). Results indicate that administrators are generally pleased with the first-year teachers from our institution. The vast majority of the administrators indicated the overall performance of the teachers was good to excellent. Still, the results of this study raise some concerns. The researchers concluded that improvements need to be made in the areas of: 1) Clearly defining expected behavior of students; 2) adjusting instruction based on monitoring; 3) establishing closure; 4) having all students conduct meaningful SAEs, and 5) teachers taking part in school and community activities.

Introduction

For years, customer satisfaction has been a major concern of companies in America. Businesses ranging from Southwest Airlines to Xerox and from Chrysler to Coca-cola have invested millions of dollars in making sure their products and services meet their customers' needs. As of late, it has become even more important. Vavra, (1997) stated, "at the end of the 1990s most American businesses will accord the measurement of customer satisfaction a high priority" (p. 3). Hanan and Karp, (1989) reinforced the value of customer satisfaction saying, "The satisfied customer is always the bottom line" (p. xi).

John Dewey (1938) and countless other educational reformers have concluded that educational institutions need to operate more like successful businesses. Public schools as well as higher education institutions have been urged to emulate the way major corporations structure their administration, develop their products, and evaluate their clients or customers. If such advice is followed, working toward customer satisfaction should also be a priority for educational programs. As Vavra (1997) stated, customer satisfaction is critical because it has a long reaching impact on the current and future viability of any organization.

With that thought in mind, who are the "customers" of teacher education programs in agricultural education? Initially, you might say that the client group is composed of the students who take our classes, participate in our departmental clubs, and eventually, are conferred degrees from our programs. However, we would argue that our students are our "products." Young people come into teacher education programs as a raw good and are then processed, through coursework, extracurricular activities, student teaching, and other learning experiences into a useful product – so we hope. Therefore, the true clients of teacher education programs in agricultural education are school administrators who hire our graduates.

In order to satisfy customers, two things must be true about product quality: 1) it must meet the customer's specifications; and, 2) it must meet the customer's expectations consistently (Hanan & Karp, 1989). One of the basics of the Total Quality Management movement is product worthiness. Deming's quality improvement process is based upon consumer information and feedback (Vavra, 1997). It is critical, then, for teacher education programs in agricultural education to gather information about their graduates from those who employ them – public school administrators.

First-year teachers do not always teach as they were taught to teach. For example, McKee and Warmbrod (1992), and Cano and Garton (1996) found that student teachers and first-year teachers failed to use the problem solving approach to teaching to the level it was emphasized during their preparation program. In fact, Cano and Garton (1996) concluded that the student teachers in their study spent less than one-fifth of their instructional time using the problem solving approach. Because of this and other possible differences between preparation and practice, it is important to gather input from the school administrators who work with new teachers.

The first year in the profession is a challenging, even trying time for most teachers. It is a continuation of the new teacher's education. Wong (1998) stated that the first-year can make or break a young teacher. Roth (1994) reinforced this idea when he said, "The preparation of teachers is not isolated from the condition of schools. Schools serve as a fertile ground for testing theory in practice" (p. 264).

For this reason, researchers and other authors suggest the relationship between teacher education programs and schools should be closer than that of businesses and their clients. Goodlad (1991) stated that they should be "jointed together" in a mission to prepare teachers. Driscoll and Levneh (1994) supported this idea by saying "There must be a connection between the content and process of teacher education and the needs and concerns of schools" (p. 59). Following the model of successful businesses, this connection should include the evaluation of teachers by administrators for the benefit of teacher education programs.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research was to determine school administrators' satisfaction with first-year teachers who graduated from the agricultural education program at Oklahoma State University.

The following objectives were formulated to accomplish this purpose:

Determine the extent to which school administrators are satisfied with the ability of their first-year teachers to meet the minimum competencies for agriculture teachers.

Determine the extent to which school administrators are satisfied with their first-year teacher's performance related to supervised agricultural experience programs, student organizations, and school and community relations.

Methods

During the 1998-99 academic year, 21 graduates of Oklahoma State University began their teaching career in agricultural education. Seventeen of these new teachers were hired to teach in Oklahoma, two in Kansas, one in California and one in Colorado. The population for this study was composed of the administrator who was responsible for supervision of each of these first-year teachers. In most cases the administrator was a principal.

The instrument used was a combination of the Oklahoma Minimum Criteria for Effective Teaching Performance developed by the Oklahoma State Department of Education, (1992) and items developed by the researchers. The state criteria were composed of two areas, Practice and Products. Within the Practice area, there were two sections, Teacher Management Indicators (four items) and Teacher Instructional Indicators (twelve items). Three items were included in the Products area. These 19 criteria have been adopted as the basis for evaluation of teachers in the state of Oklahoma.

Three additional sets of subject specific criteria were developed by the researchers to be included in the instrument. Criteria were developed for Supervised Agricultural Experience Projects (3 items), FFA (4 items), and School and Community (3 items).

A four-point Likert-type scale was provided for response to each of the 29 criteria items. The scale was: 4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = fair; 1 = poor. The real limits of the scale were used to categorize the mean responses.

Four other items were included on the questionnaire to gather information about the respondents. Data were gathered about the administrators' gender, administrative experience and teaching expertise.

The mailed questionnaire was assessed for validity by a panel of teacher educators and graduate students – several of whom were former agriculture teachers on the secondary level. Useable instruments were returned from 16 of the 21 administrators resulting in a response rate of 76%.

Data were analyzed with the Data Analysis pack for Microsoft Excel 97. A grand mean was calculated for each of the six minimum criteria areas and for all of the criteria items combined.

Results

Each of the 16 respondents was a male. The years of experience as an administrator ranged from 1 to 23 years with a mean of 13 years. The mean for experience at the current school was 7 years. Seven (43.75%) of the administrators reported to have teaching expertise in social studies. Two (12.50%) indicated their expertise was in a vocational education area.

The administrators rated each of the items composing the Management Indicators of the criteria at the "good" level. The most highly rated indicator was related to the teacher establishing a positive learning environment with a mean of 3.13. The lowest rated indicator was related to the teacher's ability to maintain discipline in the classroom (2.94). However, this item had the highest standard deviation (1.06) of this group of items and the second highest of all of the 29 items included in the study. These data are displayed in Table 1.

Table 2 shows how the administrators rated the teachers on Teacher Instructional Indicators. The administrators indicated that the teachers were "good" at all 12 of the items in this section of the criteria. The most highly rated item was "Models: the teacher demonstrates the desired skills" with a mean rating of 3.31. The teachers were also rated high for requiring students to practice newly learned skills (3.19), communicating instructional objectives (3.13), supervising practice of newly learned skills (3.13), and involving all learners (3.13). The lowest rated items was related to the teacher's ability to adjust their teaching based on feedback from monitoring and their providing for guided and independent practice of newly learned skills (2.88).

Table 1.
Administrator Satisfaction With First-Year Teachers Related to Teacher Management

Indicators	Mean*	SD
Learning Environment: the teacher establishes rapport with students and provides a pleasant, safe, and orderly climate conducive to learning	3.13	0.89
Preparation: the teacher plans for delivery of the lesson relative to short-term and long-term objectives	3.00	0.82
Routine: the teacher uses minimum class time for non-instructional routines thus maximizing the time on task	3.00	0.82
Discipline: the teacher clearly defines expected behavior (encourages positive behavior and controls negative behavior)	2.94	1.06

* Scale: 4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = fair; 1 = poor.

Table 2.
Administrator Satisfaction with First-Year Teachers Related to Teacher Instruction

Indicators	Mean*	SD
Models: the teacher demonstrates the desired skills.	3.31	0.79
Provides for Independent Practice: the teacher requires students to practice newly learned skills while under the direct supervision of the teacher.	3.19	0.66
Establishes Objectives: the teacher communicates the instructional objectives to students.	3.13	0.72
Guides Practice: the teacher requires all students to practice newly learned skills while under the direct supervision of the teacher.	3.13	0.72
Involves All Learners: the teacher uses signaled responses, questioning techniques, and/or guided practices to involve all students.	3.13	0.81
Explains Directions: the teacher gives directions that are clearly stated and related to the learning objectives.	3.06	0.68
Stresses Sequence: the teacher shows how the present topic is related to those topics that have been taught or that will be taught.	3.06	0.68
Relates Objectives: the teacher relates subject topics to existing student experiences.	3.06	0.68
Monitors: the teacher checks to determine if students are progressing toward stated objectives.	3.06	0.77
Explains Content: the teacher teaches the objectives through a variety of methods.	3.06	0.93
Establishes Closure: the teacher summarizes and fits into context what has been taught.	2.94	0.68
Adjusts Based On Monitoring: the teacher changes instruction based on the results of monitoring.	2.88	0.81

* Scale: 4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = fair; 1 = poor.

The administrators evaluated three "product" indicators. Again, the administrators reported that the new teachers' performance was good for each of the items in this section. As shown in Table 3, the lowest rated item of the three was the teachers' use of daily lesson plans (2.94). A mean rating of 3.06 was given for indicators related to the teachers' maintaining a written record of student progress and their use of fair grading practices.

Table 3.
Administrator Satisfaction with First-Year Teachers Related to Products of Teaching

Indicators	Mean*	SD
Student Files: the teacher maintains a written record of student progress.	3.06	0.44
Grading Patterns: the teacher utilizes grading patterns that are fairly administered and based on identified criteria.	3.06	0.57
Lesson Plans: the teacher writes daily lesson plans designed to achieve the identified objectives.	2.94	0.77

* Scale: 4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = fair; 1 = poor.

Three indicators were included to assess the administrators' satisfaction with first-year teachers' work related to Supervised Agricultural Experience programs. The item "All students conduct meaningful Supervised Agricultural Education Programs (projects)" was rated lowest of the group with a mean of 2.88. The highest rated item was related to the teacher providing adequate supervision of the SAEs (3.13). These data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Administrator Satisfaction with First-Year Teachers Related to Supervised Agricultural Experience Programs

Indicators	Mean*	SD
Teacher provides adequate supervision to student's projects.	3.13	0.81
Teacher requires students to maintain project record books.	3.00	0.73
All students conduct meaningful Supervised Agricultural Education Programs (projects).	2.88	0.81

* Scale: 4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = fair; 1 = poor.

All four of the items related to the teachers' work with the student organization, FFA, had a mean above the mid-point of the "good" classification. The most highly rated item with a mean of 3.38, was "FFA activities are of sound educational value to students." This item tied for the most highly rated of all of the 29 items in the study. The teacher's involving all students in the FFA was also rated highly with a mean of 3.25. The lowest rated item from the group was "FFA activities are communicated to faculty, administration, and the community" (3.06).

Table 5
Administrator Satisfaction with First-Year Teachers Related the Student Organization

Indicators	Mean*	SD
FFA activities are of sound educational value to students.	3.38	0.62
Teacher involves all students in activities of the FFA.	3.25	0.66
FFA activities are well planned.	3.19	0.66
FFA activities are communicated to faculty, administration, and the community.	3.06	0.77

* Scale: 4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = fair; 1 = poor.

The administrators rated two of the items listed among the school and community involvement indicators below the mid-point of the "good" classification. The teacher's involvement in community activities rated the lowest of all of the 29 items in the study with a mean of 2.81. This item also had the highest standard deviation (1.11) of all of the items in the study. A mean rating of 2.88 was calculated for the teacher's involvement in school activities other than those related to agricultural education. In contrast, a mean rating of 3.38, tied for the highest rating for any items in the study, was found for the teacher maintaining positive relations with other school employees. These data are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6
Administrator Satisfaction with First Year Teacher's School and Community Involvement

Indicators	Mean*	SD
Teacher maintains positive relations with other school employees.	3.38	0.62
Teacher is involved in non-aged related school activities.	2.88	0.89
Teacher is involved in community activities.	2.81	0.62

*Scale: 4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = fair; 1 = poor.

A rating for each of the six groupings of the criteria items was calculated. In comparing the means for these items, the administrators reported being most satisfied with the first-year teachers' performance as the advisor of the FFA chapter (3.22). While all of the means were at or above the mid-point of the good classification of the scale (see Figure 1), the lowest rated area was related to the teachers' performance with SAE programs (3.00).

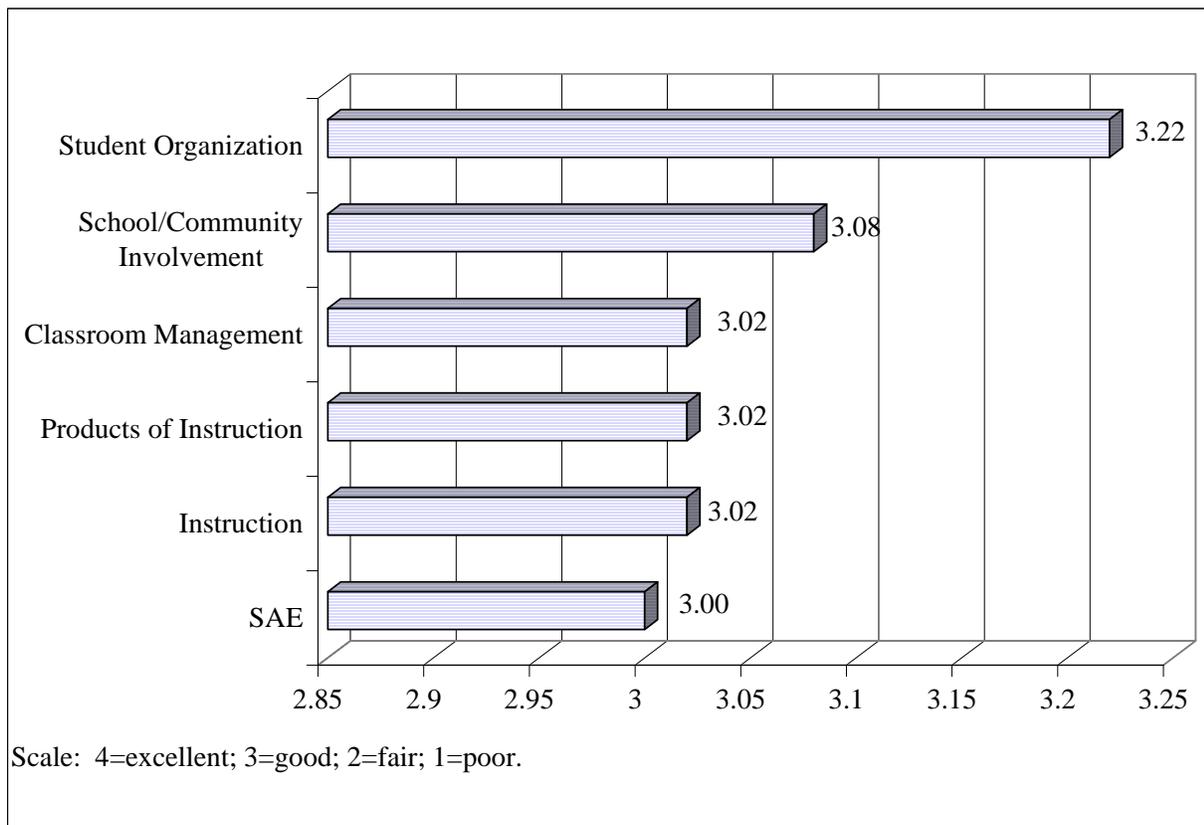


Figure 1. Administrator overall satisfaction with first-year teachers for each of the criteria groups.

The administrators' overall satisfaction with the first-year teachers in their employ was calculated by combining the rating from all 29 indicators. The means ranged from 4.00 to 1.50 with a mean of means at 3.07. The overall performance of five first-year teachers was rated as "excellent," nine were rated as "good" and two were rated as "fair."

Conclusions and Implications

Administrators are satisfied with the preparation of first-year agriculture teachers from Oklahoma State University. The mean for each of the 29 items included in the evaluation was in the "good" category. The vast majority of the administrators indicated the overall performance of the teachers was good to excellent. Still, the results of this study raise some concerns for our teacher education program.

In our program, we strive to produce "excellent" teachers. Through course offerings and structured experiences, our program addresses each of items on the criteria by which these teachers were evaluated. When the administrators' rate our graduates at less than excellent for any item, we know we have room for improvement. Of particular interest

are those criteria on which the mean rating was below 3.00. From the results of this study, our program needs to focus on the following areas to improve our product, first-year agricultural education teachers:

1. Clearly define expected behavior of students including encouraging positive behavior and controlling negative behaviors
2. Adjust instruction based on monitoring students
3. Establish closure to lessons
4. Have all students conduct meaningful supervised agricultural experiences
5. Take part in school and community activities other than those involving the agricultural education program.

While our graduates seem to be doing very well in their roll as advisor to the FFA, this research raises concerns about how our graduates value and use supervised agricultural experiences to enhance their teaching program.

This study serves as a positive first step toward evaluating the satisfaction of administrators and other stakeholders with graduates of our teacher education program. More work should be conducted using a variety of research techniques to assure the program is meeting the needs of our graduates and those with whom they work.

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