Selected Demographic and Personal Characteristics of Secondary Agricultural Education Teachers in Texas

Douglas D. LaVergne
Assistant Professor
West Virginia University
2044 Agricultural Science Building
Morgantown, WV 26506-6108
304-293-4832 ext. 4469
doug.lavergne@mail.wvu.edu

Alvin Larke, Jr.
Professor
Texas A&M University
105B Scoates Hall
College Station, TX 77843-2116
979-862-3008
a-larke@tamu.edu

Wash A. Jones
Assistant Professor
Prairie View A&M University
Post Office Box 519
Prairie View, Texas 77446-2002
936-261-2538
wajones@pvamu.edu

Chanda D. Elbert
Associate Professor
Texas A&M University
119B Scoates Hall MS 2116
College Station, TX 77843-2116
Phone: (979) 458-2699
E-mail: CElbert@tamu.edu

Selected Demographic and Personal Characteristics of Secondary Agricultural Education Teachers in Texas

Introduction

Changing demographics in public schools across the country has had a profound effect on the agricultural education profession, as national organizations like FFA, and The National Council for Agricultural Education realize that tomorrow's teachers of agricultural education will be from a wide range of individuals from different ethnic, racial, cultural, and societal backgrounds. Because of this impact, the field of agricultural education has been charged with meeting the needs of our society and, in turn, ensuring that the profession is more applicable to a wide range of people. Teachers of agricultural education must be prepared in terms of philosophy, pedagogy and curriculum to deal with the challenges of an increasingly diverse population and actively work on preparing this population to navigate the waters of agricultural education successfully. This study sought to describe selected demographic and personal characteristics of Texas secondary agricultural education teachers employed in public schools.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this research was based upon the concept of diversity inclusion. Diversity inclusion is an educational philosophy that welcomes all learners by actively engaging them in educational programs regardless of their race, ethnicity, or exceptionality. A diversity inclusive program is where the critical infusion of multicultural education, inclusion, and culturally responsive teaching takes place. Teachers and programs that exist within this area have positive perceptions about (a) the benefits of diversity inclusion; (b) understanding that, because of past perceptions, pre-existing barriers may be reason why students of color and students with disabilities are underrepresented in agricultural education, and (c) having an awareness of possible solutions to increase underrepresented group participation in agricultural education.

Methodology

This purpose of this study was to explore and analyze secondary agricultural education teachers' attitudes toward diversity inclusion in secondary agricultural education programs. The target population consisted of all Texas secondary agricultural education teachers as listed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) during the 2006-2007 school year (N = 1,732). A nonproportional stratified random sampling technique was employed to determine the levels of subgroups within the sample to be selected. The researchers decided that all 10 administrative areas as defined by the Texas FFA Association would be proportionally represented in the study. Within each administrative area, 32 teachers were selected randomly (n = 320). Sample size was determined using a sampling formula from Bartlett, Kotrlik and Higgins (2001).

The questionnaire used in this study was based on previous work by Warren and Alston (2007) concerning diversity and inclusion perceptions of North Carolina agricultural education teachers. Survey implementation and data collection methods followed Dillman's (2007) *Tailored Designed Method*. A panel of experts with expertise in diversity and inclusion established content and face validity. To address nonresponse error, the researchers compared respondents to nonrespondents by comparing participants who completed the questionnaire before the deadline (n = 195) to those that completed the questionnaire after the closing date (n =

37) (Lindner, Murphy, and Briers, 2001). The final response rate after controlling for response error was 72.5% (*n* = 232).

Findings

Approximately 79% of the respondents were male while females constituted 21% of the participants in the study. The average age of participants was 39 years old (*SD*=10.72). Nearly 61% of secondary agricultural education teachers had 15 or less years of teaching experience. Approximately 32% of secondary agricultural education teachers indicated that they received some form of diversity/multicultural training during their undergraduate matriculation. Conversely, 47% of participants indicated that they received some form of diversity/multicultural training outside of a college/university requirement. A large percentage (63%) of participants indicated that their school was located in a rural setting. The second largest percentage in the school setting was suburban (22%). Approximately 91% (*n* = 191) of the respondents indicated that they were White/European American while the second largest percentage (6%) of respondents identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino Americans (*n* = 13). Four (2%) participants identified themselves as Native Americans while less than 1% of the sample identified themselves as either African American (*n* = 2) or Asian American (*n* = 1).

Conclusions/Implications

Generally, a diverse demographic and personal characteristic difference exists between secondary agricultural education teachers within Texas. The gender representation of participants reflected a similar representation of gender as reported by the Texas Education Association (TEA, 2008a). Based on the findings in the study, the researchers suggest that preservice teacher education programs need to incorporate a greater focus on the aspects of the courses that will provide preservice teachers with diversity/multicultural training at the undergraduate level to ensure that agricultural educators are prepared to deal with the challenges of a diverse student population. Data of demographic trends in public schools imply that this type of training is warranted (TEA, 2008b). If agricultural educators are to stay abreast of the demographic shift occurring in public schools, diversity and multicultural education courses must be a vital part of the undergraduate curriculum.

Respondents in this survey were more than likely to have received diversity/multicultural training outside of a college or university requirement. One implication from this finding is that secondary schools are making conscious efforts to provide diversity/multicultural education to agricultural education teachers. Based on the implication, deliberate efforts should be made to examine the depth at which local schools implement diversity/multicultural training to secondary agricultural education teachers.

References

Bartlett, J. E. II, Kotrlik, J. W., & Higgins, C. C. (2001). Organizational research: Determining appropriate sample size in survey research. *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*, *19* (1), 43-50.

Lindner, J. R., Murphy, T. H., & Briers, G. (2001). Handling nonresponse in social science research. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 42*(4), 43-53.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: translating research into action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McLeskey, J., & Waldron, N. L. (2007). Making differences ordinary in inclusive classrooms. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *42*(3), 162-168.

Texas Education Agency (SEA) (2008a) [Demographics of teachers in agricultural science programs for the 2006-2007 school year]. Unpublished raw data.

Texas Education Agency (SEA) (2008b) [Demographics of students in agricultural science programs for the 2006-2007 school year]. Unpublished raw data.

Warren, C. K., & Alston, A. J. (2007). An analysis of diversity inclusion in North Carolina secondary agricultural education programs. *Journal of Agricultural Education*. *2*, (2) 66-78.