

# Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Building Excellence Conference

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## Introduction

- Employers are seeking workers with soft skills including leadership skills (National Research Council, 2012).
- Students enrolled in secondary agriculture courses can become involved in a student led organization (known as FFA) developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success. Members can participate in activities to strengthen their leadership skills.
- A series of “Excellence” workshops are available for secondary agriculture students designed to strengthen their leadership skills. These “Excellence” workshops are “Made for Excellence” for sophomores, “Building Excellence” for juniors and “Executing with Excellence” for seniors.
- “Building Excellence” is the newest addition to this series of workshops. It has never been evaluated to determine its effectiveness.
- The workshop was conducted seven times in locations across the state.
- The objectives of the workshop were developed by the presenters and the workshop leaders. (All seven workshops had the same objectives and were presented the same way).

## Methods

- A one-group, pretest-posttest design
- The researchers created statements to gauge the students’ self-efficacy for each of the 16 objectives taught at the conference (one statement per objective)
- A questionnaire was developed which included a Likert-type scale for each statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Slightly Agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree).
- All 158 workshop participants took the pre-assessment just prior to the workshop starting and took the post-test at the conclusion of the workshop.
- Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Paired-samples t-tests were used to calculate means, standard deviations, and determine the significant differences between the students’ self-efficacy before and after the workshop ( $p < .05$ ).

## Results

There was a statistically significant difference in the pre-test and post-test self-efficacy means of all 16 objectives. The most significant difference was seen in “I can explain the steps to creating effective goals .”

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study show this workshop was effective in increasing students’ self-efficacy in all 16 objectives. Means from the pre-test to post-test were compared and each objective had a statistically significant difference. This implies that the curriculum for the workshop and the strategies used by the facilitators were effective in teaching the target objectives. This resulted in higher student self-efficacy and therefore should be continued in the future. This study did have several threats to internal validity so it cannot be assumed that all gains in self-efficacy were due to participation in the workshop alone, but it does show these participants did increase their self-efficacy in all 16 objectives and thus shows the workshop was effective. This research should be continued to further test the effectiveness of these workshops. Research could also test to see if there are some correlations between gender or workshop size and change in self-efficacy. Future research could test for a change in student’s self-efficacy pre-COVID-19 and now.

## Theoretical Framework

Bandura’s (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory was used for this study. Bandura states that one’s self-efficacy is their belief to accomplish a task or behavior. Self-efficacy influences a person’s actions and outcomes of their actions. Four strategies can be used to adjust Self-efficacy 1) performance accomplishments, 2) various learning and modeling, 3) verbal persuasion, and 4) emotional arousal. These techniques were all used as teaching strategies in these workshops and therefore ground this study in Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977.) Self-efficacy has been used in previous research in agricultural education to indicate an individual’s perceived ability to do a task.

Table 1.  
A Comparison of Pre-Test and Post Test Students Self-Efficacy (N = 158)

Variable	Pre-Test		Post-Test		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
I can explain how peer pressure can affect personal actions	4.84	0.739	5.72	0.542	-14.880	.000
I know how to identify positive traits in people around me	4.98	0.848	5.65	0.554	-10.403	.000
I can explain why goals are important and necessary to success.	5.11	0.722	5.88	0.363	-12.041	.000
I can explain how to build positive relationships.	4.53	0.915	5.73	0.522	-15.645	.000
I can explain the steps to creating effective goals.	4.33	0.961	5.70	0.561	-17.777	.000
I can describe how to confront bullying effectively.	4.32	1.072	5.58	0.698	-15.325	.000
I can identify the benefits of setting goals.	4.89	0.856	5.87	0.334	-15.083	.000
I know how to describe my personality.	4.66	1.126	5.60	0.638	-10.449	.000
I can show someone how to identify personal barriers to attaining their goals.	4.11	1.106	5.56	0.653	-15.863	.000
I can show someone ways to overcome peer pressure.	4.27	1.018	5.61	0.636	-16.587	.000
I know what self-image is and can define it.	4.27	1.207	5.59	0.588	-13.323	.000
I can describe the steps to be taken to change the way I view my personal self-image	4.04	1.254	5.70	0.561	-17.161	.000
I can differentiate between dreams and goals.	4.65	1.083	5.82	0.383	-13.485	.000
I am able to describe how I perceive myself.	4.49	1.051	5.65	0.639	-13.558	.000
I know what a strong and healthy relationship looks like.	4.89	1.003	5.77	0.531	-12.611	.000
I can identify the characteristics of effective goals.	4.65	0.964	5.74	0.494	-14.555	.000

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Slightly Agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree;

