IMPROVING INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH:

DEVELOPMENT OF A DECA COMPETITION PREPARATION PROGRAM

by

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(Under the Direction of Elaine Adams)

ABSTRACT

Career and technical education provides hands-on learning opportunities for students around the world. In addition to learning trades inside of the classroom, career and technical student organizations (CTSOs) remove barriers by allowing students to compete in real-world situations. DECA, the CTSO for the marketing cluster, allows students to compete in marketing-related events. Specifically, the role-play events challenge student knowledge through a standardized test and a role-play performance. The DECA advisor and marketing teacher is responsible for helping students prepare for these events by teaching them the marketing content. This action research study helped the advisor improve instruction and drive student performance through the development of a DECA competitive events preparation program. A conceptual contextual teaching and learning framework was used and tested through three action research cycles. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected to measure the effects of the DECA competition preparation program. Participant narrative data was collected after each action research cycle, and the advisor reflected to make changes and drive improvement. Findings from the research suggest that the implementation of the preparation program had a positive effect on competitors' performance on the standardized test and role-play event. Additionally, the teacher-researcher learned new strategies and methods of instruction that can be transferred and applied in the classroom setting.

INDEX WORDS: Technical Education, Career and Technical Student Organization, DECA, Action Research, Contextual Teaching and Learning, Problem-based Learning

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family who supported me during this eight-year journey. You have sacrificed tremendously to help me achieve my goals. This accomplishment is yours as much as it is mine. Erick, I am looking forward to happily ever after now. Infinity Jones.

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I would like to thank my husband Erick, mother Geraldine, and children Kennedi, Erick Jr., and Ethan, for always showing me a tremendous amount of grace during this process. Mom, you have given up your life at home to come here and support my dreams. I am forever in your debt. Erick, you are the best man and father that I have ever met in my life. I could not imagine loving you more, and I look forward to being better for you now. Children, always remember that the sky is the limit. Never give up. Work hard and persevere.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Career and technical education (CTE) courses offer students opportunities to blend their academic studies with real-life, hands-on, work-based educational experiences that help prepare them for future careers (Jacobson, 2013; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). CTE's ultimate goal is to train the future workforce to be successful in education and careers, which will produce a more diverse and competitive stance for the United States in the international workforce (Gordon, 2014). In 2015, The Future of CTE Summit hosted the most important stakeholders and outlined a shared vision for CTE. One significant goal identified was that students would "encounter no barriers between academic and technical instruction, secondary and postsecondary education, and the workplace" ("Career Tech," 2015, p.10). If met, this goal will have a massive impact on the workforce as CTE offers over seventy-nine pathways through sixteen career clusters (Advance CTE, 2018). See Appendix A for a list of career clusters and pathways.

Tied to the origins of apprenticeship and vocational training, CTE naturally employs contextual teaching and learning, allowing students to receive information in a way that they can understand. Through contextual teaching and learning, the workplace becomes an extension of the classroom, and students are better equipped to enter the workforce (Kosloski & Ritz, 2014). Because of this relationship, students' technical skills improve through CTE and career and technical student organizations (Ullrich, Pavelock, Fazarro, & Shaw 2007).

Career and technical student organizations (CTSOs) are co-curricular organizations that seamlessly imbue contextual teaching and learning through service, applied learning, real-world application, personal development, leadership, career awareness, and competitive events that reinforce the CTE program standards (Gordon, 2014). CTSO's are nationally recognized by the United States Department of Education and are structured with national executive directors, state directors, and local chapters (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). By using CTSOs as an engagement strategy, students naturally produce academic gains and grow as leaders and team members (Kosloski, 2014). In addition to educational benefits, Peckham (2011) concludes that students' technical skills are improving from the application of CTSOs because participation is providing the necessary hands-on experience of the respective pathway. Also, students in CTSOs show a higher level of academic engagement and motivation and demonstrate more employability skills (Peckham, 2011). Reese (2011) indicated that CTSOs are making a positive impact by making learning relevant to students. CTSO's offer benefits that are not traditionally found in the regular education setting, such as career readiness, interactions with potential employees, communication skills, and leadership development (Alfeld et al., 2007). These co-curricular organizations also provide opportunities through conferences and staff development for teachers to train and stay current on industry practices. The nationally recognized CTSO's are National FFA, Business Leaders of America, Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, DECA, SkillsUSA, Business Profesionals of America, HOSA-Future Health Professionals, and the Technology Student Organization. See Appendix B for a chart of nationally recognized CTSO's with their year established and associated programs.

One instrumental part of CTSOs is competitive events. Competitive events present opportunities for students to apply their technical and employability skills in authentic career situations (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2011). Students can participate in competitive events such as role-play scenarios, presentations, demonstrations, and manual writing (Young, 2014).

For the marketing pathway in which I teach, the career and technical student organization is DECA. Since its official beginning in 1947, DECA has grown steadily and is currently a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with over 215,000 student members and 5,500 advisors. DECA has 3,500 high school chapters and 275 collegiate chapters. Today, "DECA prepares emerging leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality and management in high schools and colleges around the globe" (DECA, 2019, para. 1). Tying to national curriculum standards in the career clusters of marketing, business, finance, and hospitality, DECA is an ideal way to provide students with hands-on learning opportunities and authentic assessment. With more than 60 student competitive categories, DECA has created a way for all students to get involved. See Appendix C for a full list of DECA competitive events areas (DECA, 2019).

This action research study focused on the individual role-play category of DECA's competitive events due to extensive competition options. The individual role-play events operate at two levels: business administration events and individual series events. Both sections share standard guidelines and are driven by performance indicators. Performance indicators are similar to the state standards that drive instruction. They are used to define the comprehensive written career cluster exam parameters and determine desired learning outcomes for role-playing events. Performance indicators were created by the MBA Research and Curriculum center and DECA Incorporated. Individual performance indicators are based on a review of prior research and an extensive literature review from industry and educational fields. Expanding past the marketing field, performance indicators represent business management and administration, entrepreneurship, finance, hospitality and tourism, marketing, and personal financial literacy.

The role-play event consists of one participant. The participant has ten minutes to prepare and ten minutes to conduct the role-play with a judge. The participant must also take a 100-question exam, which is generally offered weeks before the competition for the region and state level. For both levels (principles and individual), DECA.org offers guidelines, performance indicators, sample exams, sample events, and sample video presentations to help students prepare for competition. To be successful on competition day, advisors must seek additional resources to prepare students for competition because the website role-plays only cover one instructional area such as customer relations and the actual role-play can be based on several instructional areas including but not limited to (a) business law, (b) communication skills, (c) customer relations, (d) economics, (e) emotional intelligence, (f) entrepreneurship, (g) financial analysis, (h) human resource management, (i) marketing, (j) information management, (k) operations, (l) professional development and (m) strategic management. In addition to measuring students' knowledge of performance indicators, students will show their understanding regarding 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, flexibility, and cross-cultural skills (DECA, 2019).

More specifically, the principles of business administration events focus on student's proficiency in standard academic and technical content in the marketing, finance, hospitality, and business management and administration areas. These events are offered to first-year DECA members taking introductory-level principles of marketing courses. Students can compete in principles of business management and administration, principles of finance, principles of hospitality and tourism, or principles of marketing events. See Appendix D for a full event overview (DECA, 2019).

For the individual series events, the competition builds upon the principles series events, and the focus is shifted to measure proficiency in workforce skills. The students are given a specific situation to respond to using their knowledge about a particular field. Students can compete in accounting applications, apparel and accessories marketing, automotive services marketing, business finance, business services marketing, entrepreneurship, food marketing, hotel and lodging management, human resources management, marketing communications, quick-serve restaurant management, restaurant and food service management, retail merchandising, sports and entertainment marketing or personal financial literacy. The four tiers in the competitive events framework align with the national curriculum standards. Tier one is the principles of business administration events. The guidelines and performance indicators are the same for each of the events, but competitors can still choose what career path they would like to explore later. Tier two is the team decision making events and business operations research events. This area focuses on concepts that embrace the overall career path of each cluster. The third tier is the individual series events and prepared presentation events. This area focuses on the most specialized information for specific careers. The fourth tier is business plans, chapter projects, and online events. This area focuses on using higher-level management and entrepreneurial skills in specific subjects (DECA, 2019).

Role-plays build on a set of knowledge that competitors acquire through studying and delivering performance indicators. For the principles of business and administration events, the role-plays and exams were created from the business administration core standardized test shown on tier 1. For the team decision-making role-play events, which is tier 2, the business core and career cluster contributed to the role-play and test. For tier 3, individual series, the test, and role-play were created from the business administration core, career cluster, and appropriate pathway.

The only individual event that is a little different is the personal financial literacy event. That material was pulled from the national standards in the K-12 personal finance education curriculum. For the fourth tier that contains the marketing representative events and professional selling and consulting events, the material was selected from the career cluster and business administration core (DECA, 2019).

Overview of the Research Design: Action Research

Due to the problem-solving nature of this study, the action research design was employed. Action Research is defined as a systematic inquiry that is conducted by teachers, counselors, administrators, and others that have an interest in gathering information about the process of teaching and learning (Johnson, 2008; Mills, 2011). Overall, action research strives to guide teacher-researchers with a platform for solving everyday problems in learning institutions (Gay et al., 2012). Action Research is aligned with teachers continuously problem solving and making adjustments as part of teaching and is a specific methodology and official systematic inquiry into one's practice (Johnson, 2008). Action research differs from traditional educational research methods because it promotes real-world, localized problem-solving in a setting. In a traditional setting, research is generally conducted by researchers who are somewhat removed from the environment that is being studied (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Additionally, traditional researchers are usually studying places, people, or programs in which they are outsiders and observers, whereas action research allows for a more personal approach through active problem-solving (Mertler, 2012).

Action research looks at the social reality that is taking place at that time, and through cycles, works through challenges (Reason & Bradbury, 2013). Solutions are created from the repetition of research approaches that combine the information and experiences of a researcher to solve concerns (Gay et al., 2012). I chose the action research model because it most closely aligned with my problem-solving research goal, which was to create a successful DECA competitive events program through reflection and improvement of my own instructional practices positively impacting students learning of performance indications as exhibited via prepared role-play scenarios and standardized testing.

Purpose

The purpose of this action research study was to improve my instructional practice and examine whether the competition preparation program for students participating in DECA's competitive role-play events would improve students' knowledge of performance indicators and local competition performances. A well-designed course and knowledgeable instructor are invaluable during the CTSO competitive event training process (Stanislawski & Haltinner, 2009). There is a lack of research regarding the instruction for DECA competitive events. A competitive preparation program was designed to facilitate and document the role-play event instructional practices for local competitions.

Research Questions

To better understand the effectiveness of the competitive preparation program, students' knowledge of performance indicators was assessed during three cycles of action research using the DECA exams and role-play events. Each of the three cycles reviewed my instructional methods and measured student growth at local competitions in hopes of improving performance. Increased success in performance should result in students' improved knowledge of the performance indicators. Following each cycle, instruction provided through the competitive preparation program changed based on the previous cycle, my reflection as a researcher, and student performance and feedback. The overarching question that was answered at the completion of the research was:

> In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?

To better gauge the specific component of the improvement of my practice and to ascertain a clearer understanding of the answer to my overarching question, the following set of questions was answered via the results of a variety of research methods (application of contextual teaching and learning, role-play evaluations, and standardized tests) at the end of each action research cycle.

1. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?
2. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role play?
3. How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program?

Conceptual Framework

Due to the nature of the study, which implemented a multifaceted DECA competitive preparation program, a conceptual framework, rather than a theoretical framework, provided the best fit. Combining concepts from the behaviorism and constructivism theories, contextual teaching and learning emerged (Berns & Erikson, 2001). At its core, contextual teaching and learning is a pedagogy that helps teachers make real-world connections to the subject matter (Sears, 2002) and allows students to construct new knowledge from analyzing what they learned during the process (Clemente & Vesta, 2008). Contextual learning embodies self-regulated learning, teaching and learning in multiple contexts, independent learning groups, authentic assessment, and problem-based learning, which contributed to the creation of the DECA competitive preparation program (Sears, 2002).

Self-Regulated Learning

Self-regulated learning includes actions that students perform to improve knowledge (Zimmerman, 1990). Complementary to the conceptual teaching and learning framework, self-regulation is a constructivist process through which students set goals and then work to control their goals in hopes of achieving the desired outcome (Pintrich, 2000). Three central characteristics fall under self-regulated learning in the conceptual teaching and learning framework. The first, awareness of thinking, supports that self-evaluation leads to a deeper understanding of learning. In this study, self-regulated learning was seen as students reflected upon their assessment and watched and critiqued their recorded role-play scenarios. The second concept, use of strategies, perpetuates the use of strategies. This leans on the idea that students are continually growing a repertoire of strategies for learning and studying. Students naturally explored various applications of strategies as we used a variety of self-driven methods to increase their knowledge of performance indicators. The third concept is sustained motivation because to learn new concepts, and students must be able to provide effort and make choices. Students must have the mindset to pursue success instead of avoiding failure (Zimmerman, 1990; Paris & Winograd, 2001).

Teaching and Learning in Multiple Contexts

Teaching and learning in multiple contexts naturally occurred when competing in DECA events. The preparation for those events mirrored this aspect of conceptual teaching and learning. Students gained experience through standardized tests, speaking in front of others, learning independently, and learning from the advisor. Differentiation was a large part of the preparation program, and students were taught in various ways to cater to the different learning styles. McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) found that students' success depended on what teachers were doing, and if teachers were providing the necessary educational environments to foster learning. That noted that teachers must be willing to teach in multiple contexts, give students an active role, and encourage cooperative learning.

Independent Learning Groups

Research shows that independent learning groups improve academic performance, increases motivation and confidence, creates greater student awareness, enables teachers to provide differentiated tasks, and foster social inclusion (Meyer, Haywood, Sachdey, & Faraday, 2008). Independent learning groups can also encourage active, self-directed learning allowing students to apply prior knowledge to their current learning goals (Van Hout-Wolters, Simons, & Volet, 2000). For the purpose of this study, students practiced their role-plays from the competition university checklist in independent learning groups. They also reviewed test content and learning videos in independent learning groups. Lastly, students watched, critiqued, and grew from each other's role-play performance.

Authentic Assessment

While traditional assessment and multiple-choice tests were administered during each cycle, authentic assessment allowed students to perform real-world tasks. Real-world tasks included the demonstration of meaningful role-play application that reflects the current workforce, such as solving a problem on the job and targeting specific skills such as creating a marketing plan (Wiggins, 1998). While authentic assessments share similarities with performance assessments, authentic assessments focus on the high fidelity of the task under realistic conditions. The various role-play scenarios that students were assessed with provided meaningful opportunities for student growth.

Problem-Based Learning

Problem-based learning (PBL) provides students with the opportunity to work through problems while learning the curriculum. It is also a way to engage and challenge students academically (Brush & Saye, 2017). For the purpose of this study, self-regulated learning, teaching and learning in multiple contexts, independent learning groups, and authentic assessment are used through the lens of problem-based learning. PBL creates a student-centered learning experience where students build their knowledge by overcoming cognitive challenges as they problem-solve (Albion, 2000). In addition to the benefit of learning and problem solving, students also improve their social skills through group work (Duch, Allen & White 2002). The DECA role-play scenarios that students practiced during the action research cycles presented the perfect opportunity for students to participate in problem-based learning. The role-play provided a problem, and students used their accumulating knowledge to solve the problem individually and in group settings.

Study Rationale

With over 215,000 members and 5,500 chapter advisors (DECA, 2019), DECA has an increasingly influential reach with tomorrow's workforce. Thus, having a successful DECA competitive events program could make a significant impact on the future workforce. To prepare students in and out of the classroom, advisors need to have the required knowledge to teach students through the implementation of co-curricular organizations such as DECA. There are standards to guide teachers through the classroom curriculum efficiently, but the same free resources do not exist within preparation for DECA competitive events. DECA advisors are often ill-equipped to prepare their students for competitive events (Huff, 2003). Based on my experiences in attempting to prepare students for the DECA competition, I have found this to be true. There is a deficit in information related to preparing DECA competitors through instruction. After experiencing this first hand, my goal was to improve my instruction and increase students' knowledge of performance indicators and performance.

In the fall of 2019, I transitioned into my fifth year of being a DECA advisor, and I was still in need of better instructional strategies that would help students learn the performance indicators that would improve their competitive event performances. Therefore, I conducted this study to improve my teaching through a competitive preparation program that prepared students for DECA role-play competitive events while increasing their learning of performance indicators. Throughout the cycles, the goal was to create a successful competitive preparation program that would improve student learning by making changes after each cycle based on feedback and assessment scores.

An additional benefit of this study was the opportunity for me to reflect, grow professionally, and apply the competitive events program in future years with the ultimate goal of increasing future learning knowledge. Due to my lack of knowledge with DECA, it felt impossible to keep up with the overall demands of DECA competition. At first, I feared that I was not a strong enough teacher for the position, and my feelings of doubt as an advisor were strongly echoed during the region, state, and international competitions. Having a competition preparation program in place to combat the lack of resources and structure that advisors face could be very beneficial for advisors and competitors.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study's purpose was to improve my instructional practice and examine whether the competition preparation program for students participating in DECA's competitive role-play events would improve students' knowledge of performance indicators and local competition performances. A well-designed course and knowledgeable instructor are invaluable during the CTSO competitive event training process (Stanislawski & Haltinner, 2009). There is a lack of research regarding the instruction for DECA competitive events. A competitive preparation program was designed to facilitate and document the role-play event instructional practices for local competitions. The overarching question answered at the completion of the research was:

> In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?

To better gauge the specific component of the improvement of my practice and to ascertain a clearer understanding of the answer to my overarching question, the following set of questions were answered via the results of a variety of research methods (application of contextual teaching and learning, role-play evaluations, and standardized tests) at the end of each action research cycle.

1. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?
2. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role-play?
3. How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program?

For years, there has been a lack of training offered to DECA advisors, and without that knowledge, competition preparation can provide challenges. A knowledgeable instructor is invaluable during the preparation for competitive events (Stanislawski & Haltinner, 2009). It is not only essential to have a professional knowledge of the material, but the advisor must also have a plan for teaching and delivering that material. To provide a solution to this problem, this study aimed to improve my instructional practice (teaching) through the development of a competition preparation program that increased competitors' knowledge of performance indicators and role-play performance. To learn the importance of DECA competitive events, we must first better understand career and technical student organizations.

Career and technical student organizations (CTSOs) are co-curricular organizations that integrate conceptual teaching and learning through service, applied learning, real-world application, personal development, leadership, career awareness, and competitive events that support CTE curriculum (Gordon, 2014). Research suggests that participation in career and technical student organizations naturally produces academic gains and grow students as leaders and team members (Kosloski, 2014). In addition to academic growth, Peckham (2011) concludes that students' technical skills are improving because of the hands-on experience that CTSOs provide. Reese (2011) believes that CTSOs are making learning relevant to students by offering benefits that are not traditionally found in the classroom. Students can grow in areas such as career readiness, competitive edge, communication skills, and leadership development (Alfeld et al., 2007). Chapter 2 presents a review and synthesis of research literature regarding the following concepts: (a) career and technical education (b) career and technical student organizations including benefits of implementation (c) DECA including competitive events breakdown (d) theories (e) conceptual framework and (f) preparing students for competitive success.

Career and Technical Education

Career and technical education (CTE) courses provide students with opportunities to merge their academic studies with real-life, hands-on, work-based educational experiences that help prepare them for the future (Jacobson, 2013; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). CTE has transformed through many stages since the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 was instated promoting vocational education (Gentry, Peters, & Mann, 2007). An evolved version of vocational education, CTE is eliminating low-level training and single electives and implementing sequenced courses or pathways. These pathways offer more rigor and hands-on opportunities through programs such as work-based learning and career and technical student organizations, which go far beyond teaching students' necessary skills (Brand, Valent, & Browning, 2013; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski 2008).

The negative connotation that CTE was for students that were not college-bound is diminishing daily. We now know that CTE teachers guide students through math, science, literacy, communication, and problem-solving in real-world contexts, which prepares them for college or the workforce (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). The study *Understanding Participation in Secondary Career and Technical Education in the 21st Century* revealed positive outcomes from participation in CTE courses and high levels of participation among parents with higher levels of education. Out of the weighted 2,698,609 student participants, only 8% of students had not taken any CTE courses. This sample size represents the vast majority of students across the United States taking CTE courses (Aliaga, Kotamraju, Stone, 2014). In addition to serving students in advanced and regular courses, CTE also provides benefits for students with learning disabilities. The study *The Benefits of High School Career and Technical Education for Youth with Learning Disabilities* reported that students with learning disabilities that participated in CTE course were more likely to become employed full-time. The study included 11,000 participants, and in addition to a more stable career, CTE course takers also graduated with more employable skills and earned more. In practice, it was suggested that more students take CTE courses to better prepare for the workforce (Wagner, Newman, & Javitz, 2016).

The 2015 Future of CTE summit hosted the most important stakeholders and outlined a shared vision for CTE. One of the critical goals identified is that students would not encounter barriers between academic and technical instruction, secondary and postsecondary education, and the workplace (ACT, 2018). If met, this goal will significantly impact the workforce as CTE offers over 79 pathways through 16 Career Clusters, including:

- Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources
- Architecture & Construction
- Arts, A/V Technology & Communication
- Business Management & Administration
- Education & Training
- Finance
- Government & Public Administration
- Health Science
- Hospitality & Tourism
- Human Services

- Information Technology
- Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security
- Manufacturing
- Marketing
- Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)
- Transportation, Distribution & Logistics

The goal of CTE is to prepare the future workforce for careers in our global society (Gordon, 2014). There is substantial evidence to support that CTE, contributes to keeping students in school due to a high engagement factor and hands-on training (Alfeld et al., 2007). Career and Technical Education subtly incorporate academic skills while avoiding the fear of academic subjects by training students in specialized areas, informing students about career options, connecting them with employers, establishing relationships, and providing work experience (Gordon 2014; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski 2008). The *study Career & Technical Education and School-to-Work at the End of the 20th Century* reported that students that participate in CTE courses have significantly greater odds of graduating from High School (Stone & Aliaga, 2005). Magnuson (2013) believes that CTE programs develop future leaders through co-curricular methods and hands-on leadership experiences in workplace contexts. Career clusters provide those experiences through CTSOs, which present more intense exposure to a particular field such as marketing, business, or culinary arts (Alfeld et al., 2007; Magnuson, 2013).

DECA, an association of marketing students, is a rapidly growing Career and Technical Student Organization that lacks guidance for advisors when it comes to preparing for competition. DECA stems from a rich history of established areas, which include career and technical education (CTE), career and technical student organizations (CTSOs), and marketing education. The purpose of this action research study was to examine whether my competition preparation program for students participating in DECA's competitive role-play events would improve students' knowledge of performance indicators and local competition performances. Before creating a plan to improve my instruction, it was necessary to understand Career and Technical Student Organizations, foundations of DECA, the conceptual framework, and to understand how DECA role-play competitive events work.

Career and Technical Student Organizations

Preparing students for careers requires an intensive combination of academic, workforce, and technical skills (Peckham, 2011). Co-curricular career and technical student organizations serve the purpose of improving student achievement and creating well-rounded students to meet the challenges presented in our global workforce. The differentiating factor between co-curricular and extracurricular organizations is that co-curricular organizations are connected to the curriculum, and extracurricular organizations may not serve an educational purpose (Morkes, 2001). Career and technical student organizations are connected to career and technical education because organizational activities are embedded in the national curriculum through co-curricular methods.

The National Coordinating Council for Career and Technical Student Organizations (2018) defines the mission and purpose of CTE in the following quote.

> Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSO) enhance student learning through contextual instruction, leadership, and personal development, applied learning, and real-world application. CTSOs work as an integral component of the classroom curriculum

> and instruction, building upon employability and career skills and concepts through the application and engagement of students in hands-on demonstrations and real-life and work experiences through a career and technical education (CTE) program. CTSO's help guide students in developing a career path, a program of study and provide opportunities in gaining the skills and abilities needed to be successful in those careers through CTSO activities, programs, and competitive events. Also, students have opportunities to hold leadership positions at the local, state, and national levels and attend leadership development conferences to network with other students as well as business and industry partners (para. 2).

By using CTSOs to engage students through real-world applications, students naturally produce academic gains and grow as leaders and team members (Kosloski, 2014). In addition to educational benefits, Peckham (2011) concludes that students' technical skills are improving from the application of CTSOs because participation is providing the necessary hands-on experience of the pathway. For example, leadership is one of the most desired skills demanded in today's workforce. CTSOs help to address the lack of leadership skills by teaching students how to lead and, by simulating workplace contexts where students can learn through leadership roles (Jacobson, 2013; Peckham, 2011). In addition to serving in leadership positions, CTSO members can also participate in conferences, competitions, workshops, and school-based enterprises where they can show their skills (Magnuson, 2013). Overall, students in CTSOs show a higher level of academic engagement, educational aspirations, higher GPA's, leadership skills, and have more employability skills (Peckham, 2011).

History of CTSOs

The concept of CTSOs has been embraced much longer than the evolution of career and technical education. In the 18th and 19th centuries, trade guilds and apprenticeship societies existed to support students that were learning a trade. The vocational student organization, later known as career and technical student organizations, can be traced through several federal laws that have grown to support and fund CTSOs since 1917 (SkillsUSA, 2012). The most significant legislation that has influenced and supported CTSOs are the Smith-Hughes Act, The George Acts, Public Law 81-740, Vocational Educational Act of 1963, and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act.

The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 (Public Law 64-347) established federal, state, and local guidelines for career and technical education (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). Promoting segregation, the Smith-Hughes Act created segments that are similar to today's career pathways. While the act did not specifically discuss student organizations (SkillsUSA, 2012), the impact of the vocational segregation reflects the development of separate pathways and student organizations that exist today (Gordon, 2014). The Smith-Hughes Act also funded teachers that held responsibilities, including supervising a student organization (Hale, 1990). From 1917 to 1997, when the act was repealed, the Smith-Hughes Act laid a foundation for CTE and CTSOs (Gordon, 2014).

The George-Reed Act of 1929 (Public Law 70-702), George Ellzey Act of 1934 (Public Law 73-245), George-Deen Act of 1936 (Public Law 74-673), George-Barden Act of 1946 (Public Law 79-586) and the George-Barden Amendments of 1956 (Public Law 84-911) supplemented and continued the work of the Smith-Hughes Act (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008; Gordon, 2014). Relatively, the most important of the "George Acts" is the George-Barden

Act of 1946, which is also known as the Vocational Act of 1946. This act first mentioned a vocational student organization by name and clarified that funds could be used for a student organization (Hale, 1990).

Paving the way for CTSOs to stand on their own, Public Law 81-740 is the only act to federally charter a vocational student organization (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). Public Law 81-740 passed in 1950, and it grants the FFA a Federal Charter allowing a Department of Education staff member to serve as the national advisor. Though this law only chartered the vocational agriculture student organization, it created a sense of importance, showing that vocational student organizations are integral parts of vocational instruction. This act is also the reason why CTSOs are seen as essential parts of career and technical education programs (Gordon, 2014). Similarly, the Vocational Educational Act of 1963, also known as the Perkins-Morse Bill (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008), supported vocational student organizations and financially endorsed initiatives (Gordon, 2014).

Financially, The Perkins Act of 1984 federally funds CTSOs and provides a required use of funds for professional development, improvement of technical skills, and support for the development of partnerships. The Carl D. Perkins act was reauthorized in 1998, 2006, and 2018 to continue supporting Career and Technical Education and Career and Technical Student Organizations. Funds are also used for career guidance, chapter travel for chapter advisors and students, and instructional materials (Gordon, 2014). This act funds CTSO endeavors at the state and local levels (SkillsUSA, 2018) to meet two of its primary goals, which are to improve the skills of the labor force and prepare students for job opportunities (Gordon, 2014). Perkins V also supports CTSOs financially primarily when it comes to increasing participation of students who are members of special populations such as disadvantaged individuals, handicapped individuals, and students in need of training and retraining (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act, 2018).

As of the fall of 2019, there were eight active nationally recognized CTSOs that were being supported by Perkins funding and serving their respective fields. Active CTSOs that are funded may vary from year to year. Each CTSO has various responsibilities at the state and local levels that must be met to meet the guidelines. Many of the day to day operations are overseen by a state advisor, such as providing activities that are integral for the program, establishing a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation, providing governance, auditing, publishing necessary materials, offering leadership development, and cooperating with other CTSOs to move in a mutually beneficial direction (SkillsUSA, 2008).

Benefits of Implementing CTSOs

Career and technical education (CTE) benefits the world by continually breaking down barriers in areas that need improvements, such as workforce development, student success, economic vitality, and global competitiveness. One way that supports the improvements is through career and technical student organizations. CTSOs are blended with a nationally accredited CTE curriculum, and they naturally connect classrooms to real-world experiences (National Coordinating Council for Career and Technical Student Organizations, 2015). CTSOs transform the ways that students learn and allow students to explore careers outside of the classroom through programs, competitions, and partnerships at the school, regional, national, and international levels (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). Additionally, CTSOs facilitate the development of students academically and socially and prepares students with employability and technical skills by providing students with contextualized academic instruction. Although

CTSOs differ in content, they share one common mission, which is to create learning that works (National Coordinating Council for Career and Technical Student Organizations, 2015).

In the study *Looking Inside the Black Box* (Alfeld et al., 2007), four organizational elements were identified that contribute to the success of CTSOs: leadership, professional development, competitions, and community service. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the benefits of participation in CTSOs. The study concluded that CTSO members had higher academic motivation, engagement, GPAs, leadership skills, college aspirations, and employability skills. Using CTSOs as an engagement tool has created very favorable outcomes that have been tested over time. Ninety-five percent of teachers believe CTSOs are an effective engagement tool, and eighty-one percent of students that dropped out of school believe that more engaging opportunities would have kept them in school (Ullrich, et al., 2007).

CTSOs also offer benefits that are not traditionally found in the regular education setting, such as career readiness, competitive edge, interactions with potential employees, communication skills, and leadership development (Alfeld et al., 2007). Reese (2011) believes that CTSOs are making a positive impact by making learning relevant to students. Nationwide, CTSO students are developing leadership skills, life skills, and skills to be good citizens of the world. CTSOs bring students together based on their career interests and provide them with activities to support their growth. Students can participate in the region, state, and international competitive events, implement community service projects and serve as student mentors (Gordon, 2014). CTSOs provide multiple opportunities through conferences and staff development for teachers to train and stay current on industry practices. CTSOs are powerful, and they focus on the total development of students to prepare them for the global workforce (Reese, 2011).

The National Research Center for Career and Technical Education reported five significant benefits of CTSO participation. Those benefits include the development of student leadership skills, maturity, and self-confidence, instruction that blends academic and CTE skills with experiential learning acquisition of workplace skills, opportunities to explore and prepare for potential careers, scholarships, awards, and student/school recognition (Alfeld et al., 2007). Kitchel (2015) found that CTSOs are incredibly effective at developing student leaders. Participating members were found to be just as effective as other leadership groups such as student government or athletics. Also, CTSOs provided the advantage of being available to all students and not just a select group (Kitchel 2015; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). In addition to developing leaders, CTSOs enhance learning in technical and academic subjects, which strengthens the overall student, helps teachers prepare meaningful lessons, benefits the school with higher achievement levels, benefits the communities that receive the students, and prepares students for college and careers (Kitchel, 2015).

Student benefits. CTSOs can motivate students to take academics more seriously by providing relevance and by providing contextual learning opportunities that are grounded in real-world jobs. Additionally, students are better prepared to be college and career ready due to their leadership development, 21st-century skills, problem-solving and teamwork abilities, and goal setting strategies (National Coordinating Council for Career and Technical Student Organizations, 2015). CTSOs also help prepare students for the workforce by teaching them necessary literacy and computation skills, effective communication, creative thinking, problem-solving, personnel management, group effectiveness, and leadership skills (SkillsUSA, 2012). CTSOs provide the opportunity for individualization, independent study, and differentiation with no ceiling. Due to a vast array of opportunities offered in CTSOs, most students can find a place where they feel confident as participating in CTSOs allows for student-centered meaningful choices (Gentry, Hu, Peters, & Rizza, 2008).

Teacher benefits. The key to a successful CTSO chapter is a dedicated, student-centered CTE teacher serving as a chapter advisor (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). CTE teachers must be more prepared than ever to develop students for the workforce. This role includes wearing many hats. CTE teachers must lesson plan, instruct, advise CTSOs, operate school-based enterprises, implement work-based learning programs, participate in professional development, and sometimes much more (Miller & Clark, 2017). With so many demands, CTSOs benefit teachers because they provide teachers with meaningful content to deliver, increase the relevance of learning, and provide training for the workforce (SkillsUSA, 2012). The teacher gets to act as a developer of talent with the opportunity to differentiate instruction and nurture students to be their best selves (Gentry et al., 2008).

School and community benefits. Hundreds of workplaces are engaging with students through CTSOs, which is a win-win for schools and communities when it comes to youth development as it provides hands-on training. CTSOs imbue partnership, leadership, motivation, and recognition, allowing members to work closely with employers and learn through the application (Saed & Scates-Winston, 2017). Through the partnerships, advisory roles, and mentorships, CTSOs help employers find skilled workers for their companies and provide a massive opportunity for business and civic engagement (Miller & Clark, 2017). In addition to community partners and businesses judging at competitive events, local businesses are offering industry days and participating in local school advisory boards to help ensure that the learning that is taking place and that CTE's co-curricular environments are preparing students to transition into the workforce (Gilley, 2017).

Impact of CTSOs on College and Career Readiness and Professional Development

In interviews conducted by Young (2014), Tavares expressed that CTSOs prepare students for college and careers with quantifiable and quality experiences that can strengthen the economy as a whole. For example, CTSOs do not focus on developing students for entry-level positions. CTSOs provide students in high schools, community colleges, and technical schools with rigorous content designed to prepare them for the workforce. Rigor is applied through career exploration and advanced technical training (ACT, 2018). It is also seen through chapter involvement, such as running for office, officer training, competitions, and service-learning. Additionally, CTSOs provide students with individual and cooperative activities designed to expand leadership and job-related skills in their field (Alfeld et al., 2007; Gordon, 2014). In a broader sense, CTSOs strive to develop critical skills necessary for success in adult life and the workforce (McNally & Harvey, 2001).

When it comes to professional development, CTSO's are an influence as they model how to transform teaching and learning best. Around the country, CTSOs are benefiting from funding that is used to upgrade equipment, improve learning environments, and to make learning more engaging for students (Gilley, 2017). They also are giving students a desired and beneficial work-set through the implementation of job training. Having a work-set is a considerable benefit to the future workforce as CTE helps curb the dropout rate and creates a natural transition opportunity into postsecondary education (Saed & Scates-Winston, 2017).

CTSO Competitive Events

Skills deficits are putting the nation at a competitive disadvantage (Association of Career and Technical Education, 2010). CTSOs help address that issue by offering competitive events, which are like the Olympics for CTSOs. Competitive events are one of the most well-known components of co-curricular organizations. Each organization has a program with events in leadership and occupational areas. Additionally, each CTSO also has a national website that provides extensive information about competitive event offerings. Competitive events provide students with the opportunity to compete and demonstrate the leadership and occupational skills they have acquired in their CTE programs (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). They also provide an opportunity for students to apply their technical and employability skills in authentic career situations (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2011).

Competitive events serve to test both technical and non-technical job-related competencies. Many of these events integrate academic knowledge into industry-developed problem scenarios. Preparation for competitive events provides hands-on experience in a variety of trade, technical, and leadership fields. Additionally, competitive events operate with help from industry professionals, and competitors are tested based on the competencies that are set and judged by industry professionals (Alfeld et al., 2007).

Students generally have job-related challenges, testing opportunities, or speaking opportunities to choose from when they compete. By offering a variety of options, students are more likely to find an area of engagement (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). Ultimately, each student wants to win and receive recognition from parents, peers, and their respective organizations. Competitors win medals, ribbons, trophies, plaques, and sometimes cash awards and scholarships. Due to the co-curricular nature of CTSO's, every student that competes is a winner whether they receive a top award or not (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2011) because participation in competitive events has a positive effect on grades, academic engagement, career skills and self-efficacy (Alfeld et al., 2007).

DECA

The focus of this study was DECA (formerly Distributive Education Clubs of America). The career and technical student organization, DECA, is an association of high school and collegiate marketing students that "prepares emerging leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality and management in high schools and colleges around the globe" (DECA, 2019, para. 1). DECA helps students build leadership skills, self-esteem and practice community service to help students become well-rounded citizens of the world (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). Some of the ways that DECA reaches these goals are through chapter campaigns, competitive events, school-based enterprises, community service, emerging leader series, chapter meetings, and leadership development. Through the years, DECA has impacted more than ten million students, and today, DECA proudly influences over 215,000 of its members (DECA, 2019). DECA sponsors several competitive events throughout the year, such as region competition, state competition, and international competition, also known as ICDC. ICDC is a significant culminating event that showcases the leadership skills and development of the best and brightest DECA competitors in the world. In addition to competitive events, the conference offers leadership building opportunities (DECA, 2019).

DECA's History

Before its official inception, DECA has transformed through many names, including Future Retailers, Future Merchants, and Future Distributors. The first national conference was held in Memphis, Tennessee, in April of 1947, and at that time, the Distributors Clubs of America was born. At the conference, delegates from 12 states voted to form the organization and DECA accepted 17 charter member states, including Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington (Georgia DECA, 2019). In 1950, Distributors Clubs of America was changed to Distributive Education Clubs of America. In 1991, the full name was dropped (Gordon, 2014), and DECA was retained as the official title. In 1961, a postsecondary division, Delta Epsilon Chi, was created to address the needs of students that continued studies past high school. Today the high school division goes by DECA, and the college division goes by Collegiate DECA (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). Both divisions are overseen by the national headquarters, which were established in 1953 in Reston, Virginia (Gordon, 2014). In addition to the evolution of the name, DECAs brand has also evolved (shown in Figure 1). In 73 years, the logos have changed five times. Now, the symbol is a simple, easily recognizable logo (DECA, 2019).

Figure 1. Evolution of DECA logos. Adapted from "DECA," by DECA Website 2019. Reprinted with permission.

DECA Competitive Events

DECA sponsors three major competitive events throughout the year, region/district competition, state competition, and international competition. These events may vary slightly from state to state. ICDC is a culminating event that showcases the leadership skills and development of the best and brightest DECA competitors across the nation. More specifically, within DECA competitions, students can compete in role-play scenarios, presentations, demonstrations, and manual writing (Young, 2014). As an essential part of the classroom curriculum, DECA's competitive events directly prepare students for college and careers by fostering the growth of necessary 21st-century skills, connecting with businesses, and promoting competition. Students can compete in event categories such as principles of business administration, team decision making, individual series, personal financial literacy, business operations, chapter team, entrepreneurship, marketing representative, professional selling and consulting, and online events (DECA, 2019). Additionally, states may offer competitions that are not offered internationally. For example, the state of Georgia offers a job-interview and business speech competitive events (Georgia DECA, 2019). As a whole, international DECA offers nearly 60 areas that students can compete in (DECA, 2019).

DECA role-play competition. Due to extensive competition options, this action research study focused on the individual role-play category of DECA's competitive events. The individual role-play events operate at two levels, which are principles of business administration events and individual series events. Both of the sections share standard guidelines. The role-play event allows one participant, has a 100-question exam, ten minutes to prepare, and ten minutes to conduct the role-play with a judge. For both levels of events (principles and individual), DECA.org offers guidelines, performance indicators, sample exams, sample events, and sample video presentations to help students prepare for competition (DECA, 2019). To be successful on competition day, advisors must also seek additional resources because the website role-plays only cover one instructional area, and the actual role-play can be based on any of the performance indicators. In addition to measuring students' knowledge or core marketing standards, students will show their understanding regarding 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, flexibility, and cross-cultural skills (DECA, 2019). Dressing professionally is also part of the score for role play events. At the ICDC level, students must wear the official DECA blazer. The blazer is also encouraged for other competitions as well. See Appendix E for the DECA dress code.

To help students decide what competitive events are best for them, DECA provides the instructional model shown below in Figure 2. The model shows the four primary areas of DECA, which are marketing, hospitality, business, and finance. It further breaks down the career pathways and instructional areas. In each corner, the competitive events that fit within that area are listed. Students can look at this and choose the most appropriate competitive event for their pathway and future career (DECA, 2019).

Figure 2. DECA instructional model Adapted from “DECA,” by DECA Website 2019. Reprinted with permission.

More specifically, the business administration core events focus on student's proficiency in common academic and technical content in the marketing, finance, hospitality, and business management and administration areas. These events are only offered to first-year DECA members taking introductory-level principles of marketing/business courses. Students can compete in

- principles of business management and administration
- principles of finance
- principles of hospitality and tourism
- principles of marketing.

For the individual series events, the competition builds upon the principles events, and the focus is shifted to measure proficiency in workforce skills. The students are given a specific situation that they must respond to using their knowledge about a particular field. Students can compete in:

- accounting applications
- apparel and accessories marketing
- automotive services marketing
- business finance
- business services marketing
- entrepreneurship
- food marketing
- hotel and lodging management
- human resources management

- marketing communications
- quick-serve restaurant management
- restaurant and foodservice management
- retail merchandising
- sports and entertainment marketing
- personal financial literacy

Figure 3 shows the four tiers in the competitive events framework that align with the national curriculum standards. Tier one is the principles of business administration events, which, as mentioned, are for first-year students. The guidelines and performance indicators are the same for each of the events, but competitors can still choose what career path they would like to explore later. Tier two is the team decision making events and business operations research events. This area focuses on concepts that embrace the overall career path of each cluster. The third tier is the individual series events and prepared presentation events. This area focuses on the most specialized information for specific careers. The fourth tier is business plans, chapter projects, and online events. This area focuses on the use of higher-level management and entrepreneurial skills in specific subjects (DECA, 2019).

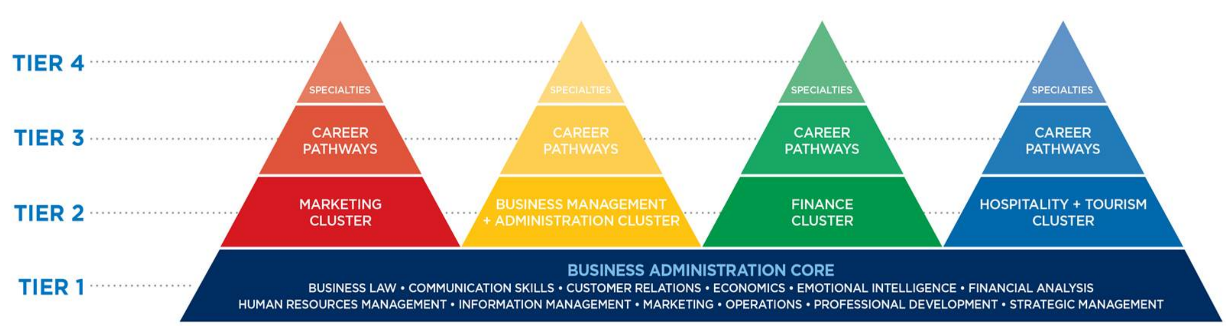


Figure 3. DECAs competitive event tiers Adapted from "DECA," by DECA Website 2019. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 4 offers a different view to aid in the understanding of the performance indicators as individual role-plays build on a set of knowledge. For the principles of business and administration events, the role-plays and exams will be created from the business administration core shown on tier 1. For the team decision making role-play events, which is tier 2, the business core and career cluster will contribute to the role play and test. For tier 3, individual series, the test, and role-play are created from the business administration core, career cluster, and appropriate pathway. The only individual event that is different is the personal financial literacy event. That material is pulled from the national standards in the K-12 personal finance education curriculum. For the 4th tier that contains the marketing representative events and professional selling and consulting events, the material is selected from the career cluster and business administration core (DECA, 2019).

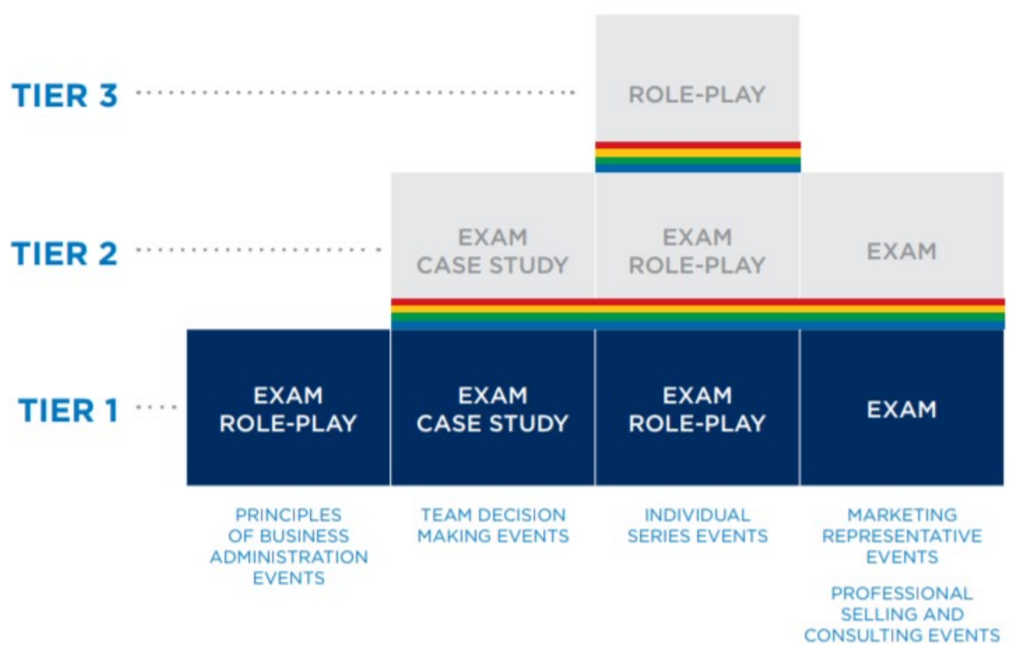


Figure 4. DECA's competitive events levels. Adapted from "DECA," by DECA Website 2019. Reprinted with permission.

Performance indicators. DECA uses performance indicators to measure and evaluate a student's understanding of a specific skill. In the classroom setting, we may also view performance indicators as state standards. For the role-play competitive events, each event may have five to seven performance indicators that the judge uses to evaluate the competitor. For individual series events, there will be five performance indicators, and at least three of them will come from the same instructional area. At least one of them will come from the pathway performance indicators (DECA, 2019). Examples of performance indicators are 'handle difficult customers,' 'identify the company's brand promise,' and 'discuss the nature of customer relationship management. Understanding performance indicators is essential for success. Overall, there are hundreds of performance indicators. See Appendix F for a sample of performance indicators.

Theories

Understanding the role of DECA in modern education is impossible without a thorough examination of theoretical frameworks and the investigation of the relationship between DECA participation and learning outcomes. This section examines theoretical frameworks, which provide a context for examining the relationship between involvement in DECA's competitive events program and potential learning outcomes of the students who participate in these programs. The first set of frameworks that will be explored are the study and practice approach, which is attributed to the theory of experiential learning and the mentoring psychological capital model which is connected to the service-dominant logic (S-D) of marketing (Geddes, Lee, Wilson, Harris & Cannon, 2016). While these frameworks are not a formal part of the conceptual framework, they contributed to the conceptual framework by supporting the interaction between students, mentors, and advisors involved in DECA. The second set of frameworks is behaviorism and constructivism. These two theories are the foundation of the conceptual teaching and learning framework (Sears, 2002). The investigation and evaluation of these theoretical approaches will increase understanding of the Conceptual Teaching and Learning Framework that will guide this research.

Study and Practice Approach – Experiential Learning Theory

The "study-and-practice" (SAP) approach to learning was first described within the work of Huff (2003). The researcher identified the study and practice approach as the process of coaching students with practice exercises, critique, and more practice. This approach occupied a significant place in the pedagogical strategy of DECA and was used as the theoretical background of DECA in the twentieth century (Geddes et al., 2016). The basic ideas of the study and practice approach were described in the works of Cannon, Friesen, Lawrence, and Feinstein (2009), who presented the philosophical theory of experiential learning, which is based on the investigation of simulations. The authors described the so-called "simplicity paradox," which presumes that students who try to manage in the business simulation environment accumulate the number of variables they have to consider into strategic patterns. According to the simplicity paradox, finding a simple solution to a particular situation is complicated, which requires unique skills and experience (Cannon et al., 2009). DECA education teaches students to master the skills that are required to cope with complicated decisions at work.

Cannon, Feinstein, and Friesen (2010) further extend the explanation of the study and practice approach to learning through the introduction of the "conscious competence" model. This model shows that when students are faced with complex problems, they initially do not have a solution. However, when they look through the materials they studied, the solution is found. The repetition of such situations forms the conscious mechanical competence of the students. This compares the application of the studied models to the solution of different problems and the formation of the so-called unconscious competence. The results of this study were further grounded within the works of Kolb (2014), who showed that students who learn by experiencing the particular problem are experimenting, and as a result, find the different solutions to this problem. The students can improve their first solution through the ongoing process of experiential learning.

The following information presented focuses on past DECA activities and assessment of these activities by the teachers and researchers. DECA incorporated the theoretical framework of the study and practice approach in its modern educational objectives. In particular, the DECA teams used the projects and cases from past DECA competitions as core assignments throughout the marketing curriculum (Geddes et al., 2016). DECA advisors collaborated with core teachers to choose the projects and cases, which would best fit the learning outcomes of the program. Moreover, DECA educators organized their classes to provide students with opportunities to collaborate and learn from businesses in the community. The students focused on mastering specific skills that were required to achieve success on their career paths, and they learned the steps of problem-solving in order to find practical solutions to business problems (Geddes et al., 2016). The students also learned to present their solutions and to defend them in public. These practices proved to be useful for the achievement of practical problem-solving skills required for future career paths.

DECA programs provide a unique educational environment for future business professionals and the most up to date educational strategies to prepare students for careers. The in-depth understanding of the study and practice approach to education is also essential for the investigation of the relationship between DECA participation and learning outcomes. It forms the theoretical basis of the innovative methods applied in DECA programs and shows the areas for the future improvement of marketing educational programs. This also supports the current research study because these results and findings demonstrate that while this study focused on the effectiveness of DECA, the current study focuses on improving my instructional practices and increasing students' knowledge of performance indicators, which in theory supports the effectiveness of DECA.

Mentoring Psychological Capital Model

Compared to the study and practice approach, the mentoring psychological capital (MPC) model represents a more modern theoretical framework of the DECA approach to education. It is also more difficult to apply; however, its implications could be beneficial to the learning outcomes of DECA programs (Geddes et al., 2016). This approach presumes the particular form of interaction between the teacher and the student, which is based on the service-dominant logic (S-D) of marketing (Mele, Colurcio & Spena, 2011). Geddes, Cannon, Cannon, and Feinstein (2015) describe this theoretical framework in education as an application of service-dominant logic (S-D logic) from marketing, where educators are marketers and students are their customers. According to (S-D logic), marketers do not supply products and services but instead supply appropriate resources. The outcome is the cooperation of the marketer and customer, which results in the achievement of customer satisfaction. By practicing this hands-on approach, DECA can influence outstanding learning outcomes for the students.

The advantages of the MPC approach through education are reflected through the provision of structured exercises and feedback from the teachers (Geddes et al., 2016). Such an approach to education is successfully implemented within DECA programs and lead to significant learning outcomes for students who are involved. The mentoring of students throughout their studies is essential for the implementation of the MPC approach. The students are psychologically supported and provided with practical advice and additional guidance in their studies. This approach also gives a sense of self-confidence and resilience, which are essential for their future in the workforce (Luthans, Avey, Avolio & Peterson, 2010). Feedback from DECA students, obtained in the form of evaluations, showed that teachers in the program follow the principles of the MPC approach in the educational process. As a result, the students gain the unique skills and experiences required for the achievement of future career success and have tools to overcome potential problems at work (Geddes et al., 2016).

DECA offers a unique approach to the learning process as students that participate in DECA programs are expected to master skills, which will help them to become experienced, professional, future business leaders. MPC is the most innovative approach to the educational process and can aid in the development of leadership, potential, and unique professional skills in students that participate in DECA. The combination of the SAP and MPC approaches to the educational process applied in DECA programs could ensure promising learning outcomes. Lastly, the understanding of the interrelationship between these theories provides a unique theoretical background for the investigation of the relationship between DECA participation and learning outcomes.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism is a learning theory that supports the idea that behavior can be controlled or changed based on the antecedents and consequences of a behavior. Instructional methods require a significant amount of practice and assessment of learned content until students have mastered new concepts (Algahtani, 2017). The behaviorist theory views the mind as a black box believing that a response to a stimulus can be viewed quantitatively. The theory also dismisses the effect of thought processes going on in the mind. Overall, behaviorism looks at behaviors that can be observed and measured as indicators of learning (Anderson, 2008). The attributes of behaviorism can be seen in many businesses, CTE courses, and CTSOs. By learning small pieces of information related to a particular skill and reinforcing the behavior through rewards, students are participating in behaviorism (Peter, 1993). In DECA, one way that behaviorism is applied is through competition. Students learn information to compete, and they are rewarded during the competition for their growth. During the competition, students earn trophies, rankings, and positive feedback from advisors and peers at the regional, national, and international levels (DECA, 2019). More specifically, in the role-play competitions, students practice and are assessed. Then, their new behavior is observed and measured.

Behaviorist attributes contribute to CTSO's and DECA because they create the opportunity for students to get the structure that they need. Behaviorist learners do better in structured, behaviorally oriented environments (Algahtani, 2017). With its variety of offerings, DECA has competitions for high achieving students, low achieving students, and caters to students of various learning types such as kinesthetic, auditory, and visual learners (Peter, 1993). Even among the variety of options, each option provides the students with structure, practice, assessment, and observation. Learners should begin with the end in mind and be informed of desired outcomes so they can set expectations and judge themselves on their achievement or lack of (Algahtani, 2017). Overall, when applied to DECA, students benefit from behaviorism applications because they can practice, be assessed, and measured (Eggan & Kauchak, 2001).

Constructivism Theory

Constructivism argues that students respond to the regularity and structure of the world through experience (Piaget, 1972). Similarly, DECA supports the marketing education curriculum as an instructional strategy in which real-world applications take place through projects, work-based learning, school-based enterprises, and competitive events (Kosloski & Ritz, 2014). Constructivism is a view that prioritizes the progressive role of learners in creating comprehension and making sense of information. Its roots are Piagetian; however, there are other early constructivists such as Dewey, Bruner, and Vygotsky (Woolfolk, 2001). The philosophical view aims to explain how we come to understand or know something. Three primary contributing thoughts regarding constructivism are:

1. Understanding is obtained from our interactions with the surrounding environment. We can not address what is learned separately from how we learn it.
2. Cognitive conflict stimulates learning and directs the organization and nature of what is learned. The learner's goal remains central in considering what is learned.
3. Knowledge is enhanced through social negotiation and the review of individual understanding. Using others to test our own understanding helps to expand our knowledge.

Instructionally, this can transcribe by (a) Attaching learning activities to a more significant task or problem. (b) Supporting the learner in developing ownership of the problem or task. (c) The instruction of designing an authentic task. (d) Have the learning environment reflect the complexity of the environment that the learner should be able to function in post-learning. (e) Allow the learner to maintain ownership of the process to develop a solution. (f) Design the learning environment to support and challenge the thought process of the learner. (g) Encourage the learner to test concepts and ideas against alternative views. (h) Create opportunities for support and reflection (Savery & Duffy, 1995).

A prevalent and influential philosophy in the field of education (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008; Woolfolk, 2001), constructivism believes that the teacher should act as a facilitator. The CTE profession and DECA support this view. Through the DECA lens, the advisor is the facilitator and plays a significant role in student success. The advisor is responsible for facilitating and assisting students in preparations for events, competition, and everyday learning. Additionally, constructivism supports the idea that there is not just one answer yet; there are many ways to solve a problem (Joldersma, 2011). This holds true in DECAs solution based role-play scenarios.

The constructivist classroom strongly aligns with the activities in DECA. In addition to DECA being built into the textbooks and curriculum, the constructivist classroom supports student participation and adaptation according to the needs of students. Constructivism seeks to understand individual development, social transformation, and cultural-historical transformation (Phillips, 2000). The teacher's job is to differentiate the curriculum based on individual strengths to facilitate the student's learning experiences. Students' expectations continuously evolve in response to environmental changes (Phillips, 2000). For example, with the use of the internet, educators have a new tool that students' can use to drive their framework for learning (Kosloski & Ritz, 2014). Students can use several hands-on learning tools and compete in events that add a real-world application to the marketing education curriculum. DECA naturally provides complex learning situations that are related to real life. The program also emphasizes collaborative work and requires ownership of learning as students are constructing knowledge (Eggan & Kauchak, 2001).

The investigation of the relationship between DECA participation and learning outcomes requires the use and application of the constructivism theory. This theory prioritizes the progressive role of learners in the comprehension of information within the educational process (Bodner, 1986). Knowledge is an environmentally negotiated product, and "knowledge exists in a social context and is initially shared with others instead of being represented solely in the mind of an individual" (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001, p. 293). Constructivism provides a platform for knowledge to grow within the DECA.

Conceptual Framework

Due to the nature of the study, which implemented a multifaceted DECA competitive preparation program, a conceptual framework provided the best fit. Combining concepts from the behaviorism and constructivism theories, contextual teaching and learning (CTL) emerged.

> Contextual teaching and learning is a system of instruction based on the philosophy that students learn when they see meaning in academic material, and they see meaning in schoolwork when they can connect new information with prior knowledge and their own experience. (Johnson, 2002, pp. vii)

Created through a national project, CTL obtained funding through the U.S Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education and the National School to Work Office (Berns & Erikson, 2001). At its core, CTL is a pedagogy that helps teachers make real-world connections to the subject matter (Sears, 2002) and helps students construct new knowledge from analyzing what they learned during the process (Clemente & Vesta, 2008). Characteristics of CTL include problem-solving, self-directed learning, peer-to-peer learning, real-world learning, and authentic assessments. Overall, CTL strives to connect to learner's experiences, engage learners, encourage self-regulated learning, and provide authentic assessments.

Contextual Teaching and Learning

There are several reasons that contextual teaching and learning (CTL) works for this action research study. First, CTL honors human beings' innate longing for meaning. Second, it allows the brain to connect new information with prior knowledge. It also helps shape the physical structure in response to the environment. Third, CTL aligns with the way that the universe works. Physicists and biologists note three principles that imbue everything in the universe. These three principles, reflected in CTL, are interdependence, differentiation, and self-organization. Since CTL aligns with universal principles permeating nature, by learning contextually, students are naturally working towards reaching their full potential (Johnson, 2002). As shown in Figure 5, contextual learning embodies self-regulated learning, teaching and learning in multiple contexts, independent learning groups, authentic assessment, and problem-based learning (PBL), which all contributed to the creation of the DECA competitive preparation program.

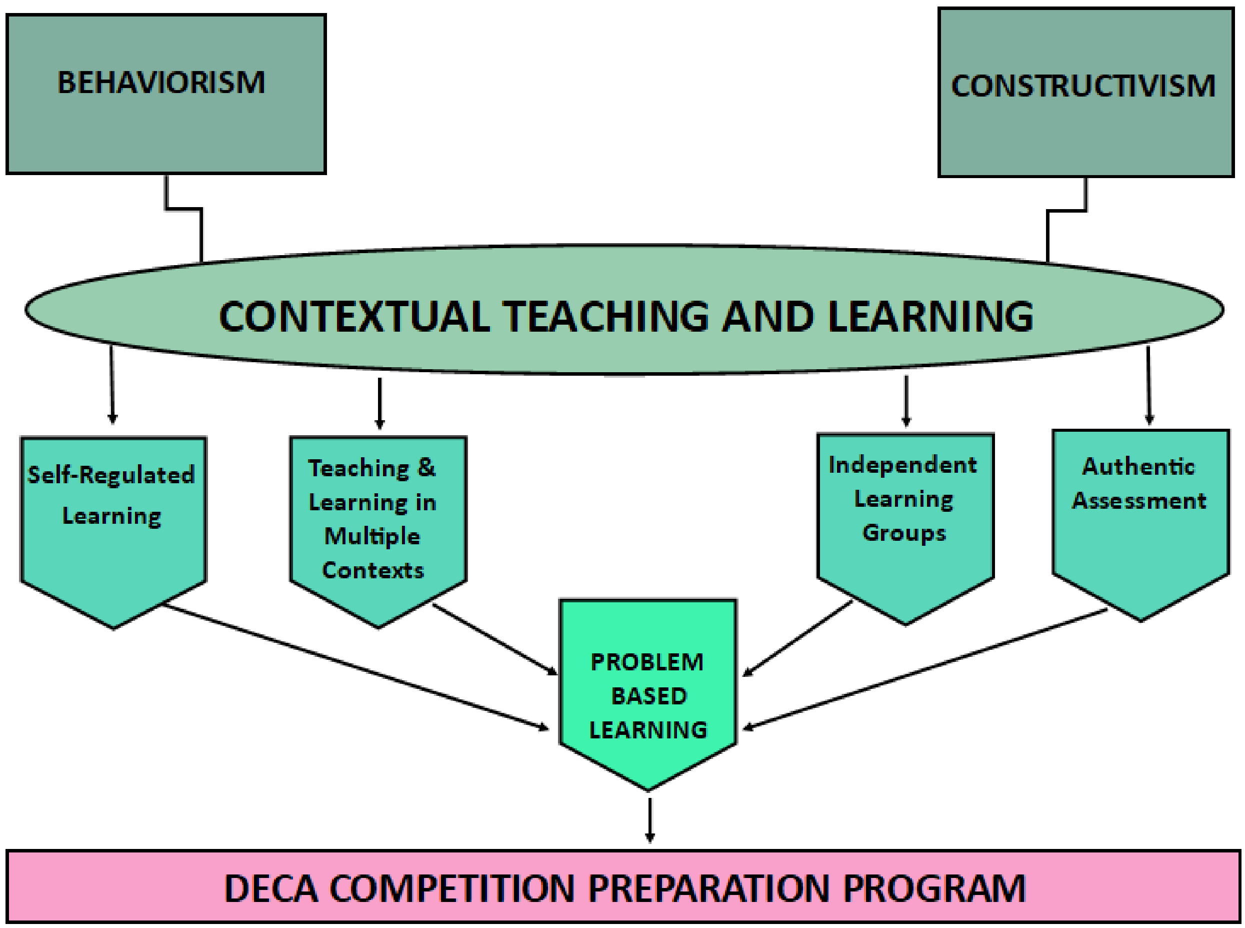


Figure 5. Contextual teaching and learning frames the DECA competitive preparation program

Behaviorism and Constructivism. Behaviorism and constructivism provide the basis for contextual teaching and learning. Though very different theories, they work together and contribute to this model. Where behaviorism includes knowledge as resulting from a finding process (Anderson, 2008), constructivism includes knowledge as the natural consequence of a constructive process (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). This can be applied by looking at the relationship between performing the role-play (behaviorism) and taking the DECA exam to show content knowledge (constructivism). Coupled, both seek to demonstrate competence related to performance indicators.

Constructivism is a prevalent and influential philosophical concept in the field of education (Woolfolk, 2001), which sustains that education, like the DECA competitive events program, is a process of building meaning to make sense of experiences. Constructivist teachers take the emphasis off lecturing and promote the process of active engagement so that students can establish and engage in their learning objectives (Noddings, 2015). Constructivism also seeks to understand individual development and social transformation (Phillips, 2000), making it applicable to the role-playing portion of the DECA competition. With various ways that students could respond to a role-play, this is an excellent match as teachers must prepare students to practice for their reality, which consists of developing their stance for the role-play alone on the day of competition. Behaviorism regards learning as a finding process. This model pairs better with the standardized testing portion of the role-play competition as students must also take the DECA written exam.

Self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning helps students to build knowledge and skills that they could not develop in a question and answer learning environment through independent inquiry. It allows students to absorb information in a way that links academics and real-life; therefore, showing students how academics fit into their daily lives (Johnson, 2002). Bembenutty (2011) regards self-regulated learning as the hallmark of students' ability to stay goal-oriented. This requires students to be proactive in directing their learning experiences, guide their behavior, ask help from the right sources, stay motivated, and delay gratification (Bembenutty, 2011). Students must have the mindset to pursue success vs. avoid failure (Paris & Winograd, 2001).

Self-regulated learning requires that students have specific knowledge and skills and that they use them logically to grow (Bembenutty, 2011; Sears, 2002). Some of the specific skills that are required are taking action, asking questions, making choices, developing self-awareness, and collaborating (Johnson, 2002). Many of these skills are naturally seen during the competition process; however, communicating and reinforcing these skills for students is emphasized. According to Johnson (2002), in practice, the self-regulated learning process includes (a) choosing a goal, (b) making a plan, (c) following the plan and continuously assessing progress, (d) producing the final result, and (e) showing proficiency through authentic assessment.

Teaching and learning in multiple contexts. The goal of teaching and learning in multiple contexts is to help students make sense of new information by relating it to past social, cultural, and physical experiences (Sears, 2002). It supports the premise that learning can occur inside and outside of school walls through methods such as classrooms, work-based learning, career pathways, school-based work, project-based learning, and service-learning (Johnson, 2002; Sears, 2002). Teaching and learning in multiple contexts naturally occur when competing in DECA events. Students gain experience through standardized tests growth, speaking in front of others, learning independently, learning within a community of peers and mentors, and learning from the advisor.

Independent learning groups. Learning is a social process that can be enhanced when students are given chances to collaborate regarding instructional activities (Sears, 2002). Additionally, independent learning groups improve academic performance, increase motivation and confidence, create student awareness, enables teachers to provide differentiated tasks, and foster social inclusion (Meyer et al., 2008). For this study, students practiced their role-plays from the competition university checklist in independent learning groups. They also reviewed test content and learning videos in independent learning groups. Lastly, students had the opportunity to watch, critique, and grow from each other's role-play performances.

Authentic assessment. While a traditional assessment (test) was also administered, the authentic assessment allows students to perform real-world tasks, demonstrate meaningful applications, specific skills, and face significant problems (Wiggins, 1998). More specifically, authentic assessment features collaboration, feedback, and reflection, directing students towards producing products, using rubrics and checklists, and drawing from multiple sources of information (Sears, 2002). The various role-play scenarios that students were assessed with provided meaningful opportunities for student growth.

Problem-based Learning

Problem-based learning is the lens that provides the focus for this action research study, which designed and implemented a DECA competition preparation program. Stemming from constructivism, problem-based learning (PBL) is an instructional method based on resolving real-world problems. PBL is what occurs when theoretical principles, instructional design, and the practice of teaching are in action. It is also is a way to engage and challenge students academically (Brush & Saye, 2017; Savery & Duffy, 1995). Problem-based learning encompasses engagement, inquiry and investigation, performance, and reflection. Instructors using this strategy should raise questions, issues, challenges, and present situations in need of a solution. Students use critical thinking skills, draw from multiple content areas, acquire new skills and knowledge and apply, analyze, synthesize, transfer and evaluate old skills and knowledge in new ways (Sears, 2002). The DECA role-play scenarios that students practiced during the cycles presented the perfect opportunity for students to participate in problem-based learning. The role-play provided a problem, and students used their accumulating knowledge to solve the problem.

Problem-based learning was created for use in medical education in the mid-1950s. It has developed tremendously over the years and is practiced in many fields, such as business education, architecture, law, engineering, and social work (Savery & Duffy, 1995). In the article *Why Problem-based Learning Works: Theoretical Foundations*, Marra, Jonassen, Palmer & Luft (2014) reported that PBL environments are created to focus entirely around solving an authentic problem often presented as a case. Contrastingly, from traditional educational environments, the learner does not learn the basic or foundational context first. Instead, they learn through the implementation of PBL and their efforts to solve an authentic problem. Chen Lee and Blanchard (2019) conducted a quantitative study that examined factors contributing to middle and high school teachers' decisions to use or not use PBL. The findings highlight that teachers with PBL experience are aware that teaching with PBL requires more time. However, the benefits strongly outweigh the cost regarding student outcomes, so they were willing to invest their time (Chen Lee & Blanchard, 2019). In addition to teachers understanding the value in PBL, Virtue and Hinnant-Crawford (2019) reported that students find their PBL work meaningful as well. In subjects' math, science, humanities, social science, and across other disciplines, students felt as though they were engaged in hard work and doing something that mattered. They believed that their learning outcomes contributed to their personal growth and that they gained skills that would be used in real-life. One drawback that students and teachers shared was falling behind. They felt as though the work was essential and wanted their work to be thorough, genuine, and correct. In the end, both students and teachers were satisfied with the outcomes (Virtue & Hinnant-Crawford, 2019).

In the study *Problem-Based Learning Approach Enhances the Problem-Solving Skills in Chemistry of High School Students*, Valdez and Bungihan (2019) found that students in a PBL group showed more significant learning outcomes than students that were not in a PBL group. The study used a standardized test to evaluate students' knowledge and understanding of problem-solving skills. Both the PBL and non-PBL groups took the same pre and post-test to evaluate their knowledge. The non-PBL group used traditional methods of instruction, and the PBL group participated in a PBL project. The results from the post-test showed significant growth from the students that participated in the PBL group. The PBL group grew by 11%, while the non-PBL group only grew by 4%. In the discussion, it was noted that this growth is a reflection of one project. Looking forward to future to projects occurring over the course of the year, gains could be tremendous (Valdez & Bungihan, 2019). In a related study, Siagan, Saragih, and Sinaga, (2019) found that students that participated in PBL projects showed improved mathematical problem solving and metacognition ability. In round one of the study, the growth was not desirable as the learning materials developed did not display the components of an effective PBL project. Once the appropriate changes were made for round two, the study revealed growth of 97.56% among student participants. Overall, the use of PBL methods improved students' understanding and capabilities of applying and solving mathematical problems in everyday life (Siagan, Saragih, & Sinaga, 2019).

Representing an area in CTE, Munawaroh, (2017) reported that in comparison to traditional classroom methods such as bookwork, the implementation of PBL facilitated by the teacher had positive effects on Entrepreneurship students. Student's practicing authentic problem-based learning showed significantly better attitudes towards learning. The study suggested that in practice, Entrepreneurship should be taught by a professional teacher who knowledge of the field and field practice in order to effectively implement PBL to increase student achievement. Out of the measured variables, teacher influence and instructional ability had the greatest impact (Munawaroh, 2017). Kusumatuty, Baedhowi, and Murwaningsih (2018) researched two groups of students in a vocational school; one group using PBL methods and another that did not. The study found that students that accessed and implemented PBL methods improved student learning outcomes. Students showed a gain of 13.23% on their assessment if they used PBL methods. Suggestions for future research included expanding the subject matter past Career and Technical Education and to expand the participating schools (Kusumatuty, Baedhowi & Murwaningsih, 2018). Overall, the studies above have proved the effectiveness and success of students participating in Project-Based Learning, which is the foundation of this research study.

Preparing Students for Competitive Success

To be successful in DECAs role-play category, various skills must be mastered. Competitors need to perform well on the 100 question standardized cluster exam, understand how to address key targets for role play, and be able to convey their thoughts in front of judges. Teachers play an instrumental role in preparing students by providing strategies to perform their best in each of these areas. Overall, the knowledge that students attain will contribute to their knowledge of the performance indicators.

Role-Play Scenarios

The phrase role-play is exactly what it suggests. Role-play is a simulation of activities related to particular topics and allows students to actively participate in the learning process while gaining a more thorough understanding of course content (Chad, 2010; Shelton, 2016). For decades, role-play has been used as a tool for developing communication skills. More recently, role-play has become an active component used as an effective method to teach in the classroom and influence business negotiation skills. Using role-play in the classroom can be an effective and engaging way to increase communication, knowledge, and skills, which are beneficial in the workplace (Widmier, Loe, & Selden, 2007). Concerning DECA, role-play is a simulation of certain conditions of careers. Due to DECA's co-curricular methods, role-play scenarios are incorporated for use during classroom time and outside of the classroom in the competitive arena.

According to Raymond (2010), role-playing simulations are often claimed to be an effective instructional tool that allows students to participate in active knowledge. Students participating in role-plays can experience educational processes in ways that reading textbooks and participating in lectures may not allow. In his 2010 study *Do Role-Playing Simulations Generate Measurable and Meaningful Outcomes? A Simulations Effect on Exam Scores and Teaching Evaluations*, Raymond discovered that participating in role-play simulations increased student test scores. The study had 90 students that participated in the role-play simulations and 83 students that did not participate. On the first recorded exam, role-play participants score an average of 77.2%, and the non-simulation participants scored an average of 72%. Students participating in the role-play simulations scored an average of 5.2% higher than non-role-play participants. On the second recorded exam, students participating in the role-play simulations scored an average of 77.8%, while non-participants scored an average of 72.5%. Overall on the second exam, role-play participants scored 5.3% higher as a result of the role-play simulations. Raymond also reported that he believed a before and after standardized test would have shown even greater results in favor of the role-play scenarios (Raymond, 2010).

Dingus and Milovic (2015) conducted a study which explored an in-class student role-play assignment where students were placed in buyer-seller pairs and assigned roles. The salesperson was responsible for closing the deal using as many high-pressure tactics as possible, and the buyer's role was to show a lack of interest in the product. The classroom was divided into half, each representing the role of the buyer or seller, respectively. Students provided positive feedback regarding their role-play experience, and 87% of the students recommended the exercise for future semesters. One concern that students expressed was that time only permitted them to play one half the selling relationship (either the buyer or seller). Students pointed out that it would have been nice to play the other role and explore role-play through various scenarios (Dingus & Milovic, 2015).

McDonald (2006) conducted a study in which he videotaped role-play exercises in large sales management classes and discovered that these were beneficial. The practice provided the instructor with the opportunity to review student performance without using class time or practice time. The study showed that using this method reduced student anxiety, stage fright, and boredom, which are problems that commonly associated with role-playing in class. Even though the role-plays were not performed in front of the class, students did well with following instructions and completing the assignment. The teacher viewed the videos outside of class time and provided feedback about content, style, language, gestures, dress, script quality, energy level, realism, creativity, and effort. McDonald reported that role-play is a popular teaching tool because of the vicarious learning that naturally occurs. Due to large group sizes, it is often difficult to practice these things during class time. By using technology, students not only participated in the role-play, but they could go back to review their work multiple times and improve along the way through the use of evaluation. The only major problem that was incurred was a lack of video recorders (McDonald, 2006). The benefits of recorded role-play also include being able to self-assess, have the performance judged, and review it for growth later on (Widmier et al., 2007).

In addition to classroom benefits, role-playing is used in other teaching contexts such as medical school and in the medical practice, which also supports professionalization similar to this study. Baile and Blatner (2014) reported the importance of role-play in the medical field. They noted that role-play significantly contributes to the interpersonal and communication skills needed to interact with patients, families, and colleges. The skills gained through role-play are becoming increasingly important in medical education as the need for teamwork and professionalism increase. Role-play has now become required for medical trainees to provide them with the necessary soft skills. In teaching this emotional domain, three goals of role-play were identified. First, placing emphasis on attitudes and feelings attributed to human behavior and communication role-plays foster sensitivity to what is not spoken as much to what is overtly stated. This helps professionals improve communication by helping learners address what is implied and spoken. Second, many workers in the medical field often miss the opportunity to show empathy when communicating with patients. Role-plays help professionals recognize emotions and learn how to respond compassionately. Third, role-plays improve professionalism by helping learners understand and become more aware of their own communication. By practicing tough situations, professionals are able to evaluate their performance and work to improve their delivery to patients (Baile & Blatner, 2014).

Standardized Testing

Standardized type testing often presents challenges for students. Fear and testing anxiety are factors that can harm student's test scores. The type of teacher and the teacher's relationship with students may reduce or increase student test anxiety (Von Der Embse, Schultz, & Draughn, 2015). Therefore, it is essential that teachers create a classroom climate that encourages a positive approach toward assessment as a part of the learning process (Johannessen & Kahn, 2001). Lagares and Connor (2009) reported that students feel an increased pressure to demonstrate high levels of academic performance consistently. Due to the constant pressure that students face, Lagares and Connor (2009) also provided tips that teachers can implement to help high school students reduce anxiety, stress, and fear of testing. These tips are proven to build self-confidence, engagement, and autonomy. They reported that teachers should celebrate students with public praise, chart practice test scores, communication with parents, meaningful homework (vs. busywork), and carefully planned engaging lessons. Additionally, Lagares and Connor (2009) recommended that teachers encourage students to create and use flashcards consistently, connect class notes to visual images, use reading symbols, and dramatize with props. Two of their reported most beneficial tips were to provide opportunities for after-school help as well as provide a countdown study guide that students can fill in to plan how they will use their time preparing for the test (Lagares & Connor, 2009).

Hollingworth (2007) provided five ways to prepare for standardized testing without sacrificing best practices. The first recommendation includes using content standards to guide studying. Second, Hollingsworth believes that giving students formative assessments and providing feedback contributes to best practices as well. In the third recommendation, the author states that connecting to real-world content is important, which was also reported by Lagares and Connor (2009). Fourth, the author also recommends that teachers is to set the tone with planning and motivation. Lastly, the fifth recommendation includes not compromising what one knows as a teacher to be best practices (Hollingworth, 2007).

Shanahan (2014) provides teachers with specific ways to prepare students for specific tests. While he did not conduct a study, his recommendations and assertions are backed by cited research. To properly prepare students for testing, knowing what not to do can also be beneficial (Shanahan, 2014). A huge mistake that teachers make is teaching to the test or practicing test questions as a method for success. Shanahan also reported that you could not merely practice test questions and expect genuine growth. Instead, teachers should have students read extensively because tests often test reading skills, make sure tests are challenging, have students review their answers, and provide text evidence supporting their claims and engage students to write about material vs. just answering multiple-choice questions (Shanahan, 2014).

Student Evaluation and Feedback

According to Spiller and Marold (2015), to be successful, we must consider not only how to deliver content but also how to present it and assess it. They conducted a study in which they disseminated a survey to business professionals who served as judges in a college-level marketing competition. They concluded that best practices in grading include providing students with assignment objectives, detailed expectations, and providing timely and instructive feedback. They also found that, though time-consuming, providing feedback to students on assessments and projects is essential to their success. Additionally, the authors also concluded that rubrics are also helpful in establishing clear expectations and enabling differentiated instruction (Spiller & Marold, 2015).

Lizzio and Wilson (2008) conducted two studies in relation to feedback on assessment. In the first study, 57 students reflected on the feedback they got on a variety of assessment tasks and described what was helpful and what was not. In the second study, a questionnaire was used by 277 students to reflect upon aspects of student's evaluation of assessment and feedback. The purpose of the first study was to evaluate the quality of written feedback. Students reported that socioemotional aspects of feedback were important. Three primary forms of feedback were described as supportive: acknowledging achievements, recognizing effort regardless of the grade given and tone when making crucial comments. Students also noted that effective feedback had signs of genuine engagement, showing that the evaluator had given clear thought, effort, and care to what was being graded. The purpose of the second study was to understand the underlying structure of students' perceptions of assessment feedback. The first measured criteria were encouragement, including recognizing effort, acknowledging achievements, thoughtful criticism, and giving hope. The second measure criteria were in-depth feedback. The third measure criteria were the developmental focus, which included transferability, identifying goals, suggesting strategies, and engaging content. The fourth and last measured criteria were justice, which included justification of mark, transparency, the opportunity for voice, and clarity. The findings revealed that (a) students are easily able to describe the factors of assessment feedback that they do and do not value. (b) Students' perceptions of assessment feedback can be understood by looking at developmental, encouraging, and fair feedback factors. (c) A variety of personal, academic, or affective variables did not significantly influence students' perceptions of assessment feedback. (d) Though all feedback factors were positively correlated with ratings of effectiveness, developmental feedback held the most significant association with students' evaluations of effective assessment feedback. Implications for practice concluded that while students particularly valued developmental feedback, there is a need to balance this with socio-emotional support (Lizzio & Wilson, 2008).

In addition to the responsibilities of the evaluator in the feedback process, Sadler (2010) reported that students need to be able to apply feedback, and to do so, they need to understand the meaning of the feedback statements. They also need to be able to identify with certainty the parts of their work that are needing attention. For these things to occur, students must understand their assignments and have background knowledge. Three major concepts were identified as important parts of the feedback process: task compliance, quality and criteria, and a cache of relevant tacit knowledge. Overall, students needed to have a great understanding of their assignment to be able to accept and apply feedback constructively (Sadler, 2010).

Conclusion

The review of the literature provided critical information for this action research study. The literature review contains a vast body of research regarding behaviorism, constructivism, and contextual teaching and learning with an emphasis on Project Based Learning, which provides a lens for this study. In terms of specific topics and sub-topics, this chapter focused on the following: (a) career and technical education (b) career and technical student organizations including benefits of implementation (c) DECA including competitive events breakdown (d) theories (e) conceptual framework and (f) preparing students for competitive success through role-play scenarios, standardized testing and student evaluation and feedback. It summarized numerous studies sharing the strengths of the conceptual framework employed for this action research study.

Due to little research discovered specific to preparing students for DECAs competitive events, we know that there is a need for growth in this area. Having reviewed career and technical student organizations, DECA, DECA competitive events, role-plays, standardized testing, and feedback, this chapter has provided the foundation needed to develop a program for competitors. We learned that the studies about role-play all supported the use of role-playing to increase the knowledge, soft-skills, and professionalism of the participant (McDonald, 2006; Raymond, 2010; Baile & Blatner, 2014; Dingus & Milovic, 2015). We also learned that attitudes, climates, relationships study materials, and preparation all play essential roles in the performance of standardized testing (Johannessen & Kahn, 2001; Hollingworth, 2007; Lagares & Connor, 2009; Von Der Embse, Schultz, & Draughn, 2015). Lastly, we learned that effective evaluation and feedback must be timely, supportive, and developmental (Lizzio & Wilson, 2008; Sadler, 2010; Spiller & Marold, 2015).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Career and technical education courses offer students the opportunity to participate in hands-on, work-based development activities that help prepare them for the workforce (Jacobson, 2013). Career and technical education (CTE) commonly employ contextual learning by using strategies such as the cooperative approach to learning. Essentially, by using the cooperative approach to learning, the workplace becomes an extension of the classroom, and students are better equipped to enter the workforce (Kosloski & Ritz, 2014). Student's technical skills also are improved through the application of career and technical student organizations (CTSOs), which support CTE through co-curricular methods (Ullrich, Pavelock, Fazarro & Shaw, 2007). CTSOs are essential to CTE because co-curricular organizations seamlessly imbue contextual learning through community service, leadership, career awareness, and competitive events. These CTSO activities reinforce the CTE program area standards and performance indicators. By using CTSOs, students grow as leaders and team members (Kosloski, 2014). Peckham (2011) concluded that student's technical skills are improving from the application of CTSOs. Also, students in CTSOs show a higher level of academic engagement, motivation and have improved employability skills. Reese (2011) stated that CTSOs are making a positive impact by making learning relevant to students. CTSO's offer benefits that are not traditionally found in the regular education setting, such as career readiness, competitive edge, interactions with potential employees, communication skills, and leadership development (Alfeld et al., 2007).

One instrumental part of CTSOs is competition. Students can participate in competitive events such as role-play events, standardized testing, presentations, and manual writing. The opportunity for students to apply their technical and employability skills in authentic career situations is invaluable (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2011). Each CTE program includes a student organization that is targeted towards their field (Alfeld et al., 2007). For the marketing field in which I teach, the career and technical organization is DECA, formally known as the Distributive Education Clubs of America (Young, 2014). DECA stems from a rich history of established areas, which includes Career and Technical Education (CTE), Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs), and marketing education. Despite our knowledge surrounding CTSO's, there is still a gap in DECA when it comes to preparing advisors to guide their students through the competition process. DECA is a rapidly growing organization that lacks instruction for sponsors regarding preparation for competition.

Purpose

The purpose of this action research study was to improve my instructional practice and examine whether the competition preparation program for students participating in DECA's competitive role-play events would improve students' knowledge of performance indicators and local competition performances. A well-designed course and knowledgeable instructor are invaluable during the CTSO competitive event training process (Stanislawski & Haltinner, 2009). There is a lack of research regarding the instruction for DECA competitive events. A competitive preparation program was designed to facilitate and document the role-play event instructional practices for local competitions.

Research Questions

To better understand the effectiveness of the competitive preparation program, students' knowledge of performance indicators was assessed during three cycles of action research using the DECA exams and role-play events. Each of the three cycles reviewed my instructional methods and measured student growth at local competitions in hopes of improving performance. Increased success in performance should result in students' improved knowledge of the performance indicators. Following each cycle, instruction provided through the competitive preparation program changed based on the previous cycle, my reflection as a researcher, and student performance and feedback. The overarching question that was answered at the completion of the research was:

> In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?

To better gauge the specific component of the improvement of my practice and to ascertain a clearer understanding of the answer to my overarching question, the following set of questions was answered via the results of a variety of research methods (application of contextual teaching and learning, role-play evaluations, and standardized tests) at the end of each action research cycle.

1. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?
2. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role play?
3. How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program?

Rationale

There were several reasons why conducting this study was important. Overall, the goal was for me to improve my instructional practices in effort to positively impact student performance. To date, there is no official road-map showing advisors step-by-step directions to prepare students for competitive event success. With over 215,000 members and 5,500 chapter advisors (DECA, 2019), DECA has an increasingly influential reach on tomorrow's workforce. Thus, having a successful DECA competitive events program could make a significant impact on the future workforce. To prepare students, advisors would benefit from having the required knowledge to teach students through the implementation of co-curricular organizations such as DECA. There are standards to guide teachers through the curriculum efficiently, but the same free resources do not exist within DECA competitive events. DECA advisors are often ill-equipped to prepare their students for competitive events (Huff, 2003). There is a deficit in information related to preparing DECA competitors through instruction. After experiencing this firsthand, my goal was to gather and analyze data that could improve my instruction and increase students' knowledge of performance indicators.

In the fall of 2019, I transitioned into my fifth year of being a DECA advisor. I was still in need of better instructional strategies that would help students learn the performance indicators that would improve their competitive event performances. Throughout the action research cycles, the goal was to create a successful competitive preparation program that would improve student learning by making changes after each cycle based on feedback and assessment scores.

An additional benefit of this study is the opportunity for me to reflect, grow professionally, and apply the competitive events program in future years. When I began my work with DECA, it felt impossible to keep up with the overall demands of DECA competition. At first, I feared that I was not a strong enough teacher for the position, and I felt feelings of doubt as an advisor more acutely during the region, state, and international competitions.

Having a competition preparation program in place to combat the lack of resources and structure that advisors face could be very beneficial for advisors and competitors.

Research Design

This study used the action research design, which focuses on the researcher as the primary interest. One advantage of action research is having access to your participants, or in this case, students (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012; Metler, 2012). Being able to perform a study in one's classroom alleviates many of the issues that traditional researchers face, such as a lack of responses and participation. Another benefit of action research is being able to reflect and make changes to promote learning during the study. Action research is an excellent method to use to solve problems in the local setting (Gay et al., 2012).

While action research can contain components of other research methods such as qualitative and quantitative, action research is unique compared to traditional research methods because it promotes localized problem-solving in a setting. In a traditional setting, research is generally conducted by researchers who are somewhat removed from the environment that is being studied but it is not uncommon for the action research to be an active participant in the study (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Additionally, traditional researchers are often studying programs, people, and locations, and action research allows for a more intimate approach through active problem-solving (Metler, 2012).

Action research works through challenges by looking at the social reality and making research-backed changes (Reason & Bradbury, 2013). Solutions to problems are created from the repetition of research approaches that combine the information and experiences of a researcher to solve concerns (Gay et al., 2012). The action research model was chosen because it most closely aligned with my problem-solving research goal, which was to create a successful

DECA competitive events program through reflection and improvement of my own instructional practices.

Action Research Defined

Action Research is defined as a systematic inquiry that is conducted by teachers, counselors, administrators, and others that have an interest in gathering information about the process of teaching and learning (Johnson, 2008; Mills, 2011). Overall, everyday problems are solved by teacher researchers through the use of action research (Gay et al., 2012). Though action research appears to be a new concept, it is not new, nor is it a fad. Teachers have always worked to solve problems. Action Research is a specific methodological approach and an official systematic inquiry into one's practice (Johnson, 2008).

Importance of Action Research

Action research is vital because it helps us reach the ultimate goal of education, which is student growth (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Similarly, action research can improve the lives of teachers by equipping them with the necessary tools to best accomplish their goals and feel successful in the classroom. In a continually evolving educational system, professional growth and development are essential for the success of teachers and students (Mertler, 2012). Through action research, teachers gain the technical skills and specialized knowledge that is necessary to cultivate positive change within the classroom (Hine, 2013). Action research helps teachers learn new information directly connected to their classroom, encourages reflective instruction, broadens teachers' professional knowledge, allows teachers to own their craft, and reinforces the bridge between instruction and student success (Barone, Berliner, Blanchard, Casanova & McGown, 1996). Though action research is great for teacher research, it does have drawbacks which include a lack of repeatability and subjectivity. Because action research depends on reflection based changes, the results from the study will vary based on the teacher, students and changes that are implemented. Also, because the teacher is also participating in the research, subjectivity must be monitored to ensure that any changes are research-driven.

Overview of Action Research Process

Throughout this study, three cycles of action research were conducted. Reil's action research progressive problem-solving model (2010) was used. To help solve a problem, each action research cycle in this model consists of four stages. Each stage serves an important purpose that contributes to the overall study. The first stage is identifying an area of focus or planning. The planning stage includes identifying and limiting the topic, gathering information, reviewing related literature, and developing a research plan. Once the foundational steps have occurred, the second stage, which is the acting stage, can take place. During the acting stage, data is collected and analyzed. After the researcher has planned and taken action, the third stage occurs, which is the collection and analyzing stage. During this time, the researcher actively works with participants to test the effectiveness of the action stage. During the reflecting stage, the researcher shares and communicates results and reflects on the overall process (Mertler, 2012). Although the process appears to be linear, it is more of a cyclical process, which is repeated multiple times. The action research cycle is shown below in Figure 6.

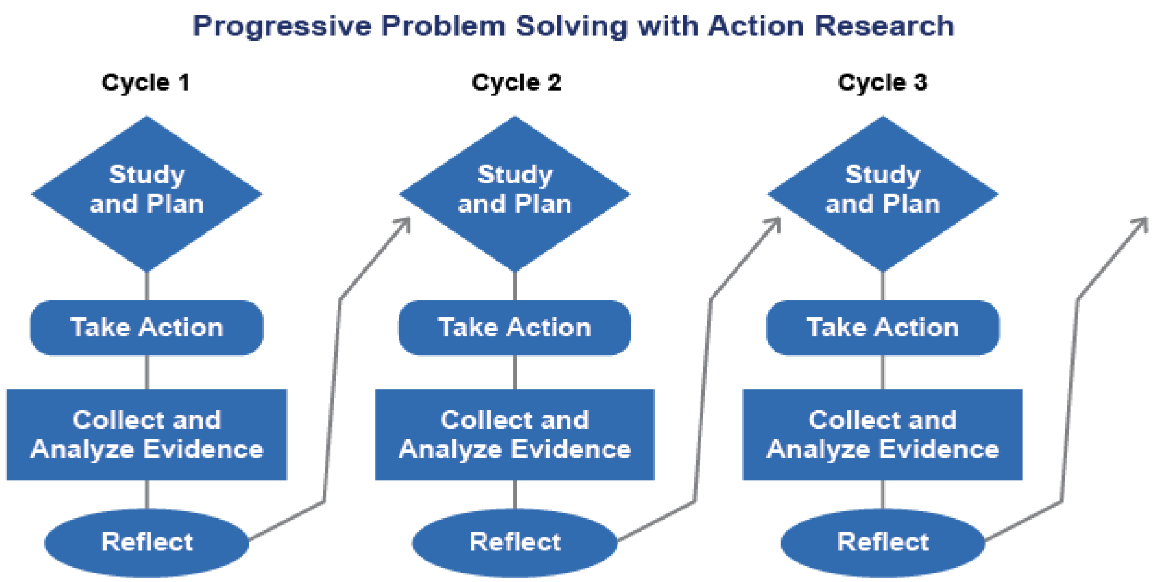


Figure 6. Riel's Action Research Model (Riel, 2010)

Contextual Teaching and Learning Guiding Action Research

Contextual teaching and learning CTL is a method of instruction based on the understanding that students learn best when they see meaning in their academic studies. Students also value academic material when they are able to connect new information with prior knowledge and their own life experience (Johnson, 2002). Born from the collaboration between the behaviorism and constructivism theories, contextual teaching and learning satisfy the brain's need to attach new knowledge with prior knowledge and to shape its physical structure in response to the environment (Berns & Erickson, 2001). At its core, CTL is a pedagogy that encourages teachers to make a real-life connection to academic material (Sears, 2002) and helps students create new knowledge from analyzing what they learned during their experience (Clemente, 2008). Components of CTL include self-regulated learning, teaching, and learning in multiple contexts, independent learning groups, and problem-based learning. Overall, CTL aims to engage students and guides them to grow through hands-on experiences. This study will guide students through the use of contextual teaching and learning through the lens of project-based learning, which embodies all of the components of CTL.

Contextual Teaching and Learning

Created by talented educators, CTL seeks an alternative to the one-size-fits-all mold in education (Johnson, 2002). Contextual teaching and learning provided the best fit for this study because it frames the competitive events structure well. By practicing through the implementation of self-regulated learning, teaching, and learning in multiple contexts, independent learning groups, authentic assessment, and problem-based learning, students were able to build on prior knowledge and try new methods while adding to their knowledge. Contextual teaching and learning frames the DECA competitive events preparation program. Before reviewing the action research cycles, it is essential to understand how each area of contextual teaching and learning drove instruction.

The overall role of behaviorism. This study depended on the contextual teaching and learning framework for guidance. Part of that was looking to behaviorism, which is one of the major theories from which contextual teaching and learning stemmed. To improve the use of behaviorism, first, we practiced and assessed multiple times. This was accomplished by reviewing the role-play evaluation form with the student in advance. Second, learners were tested to show if they have met their learning goals. The role-play and standardized test offers two methods of evaluation. Third, learning materials were organized and sequenced to promote learning. Competition University, along with my checklist, gave students the necessary information in small chunks. As time passed, students checked items from their list and were rewarded with a sense of accomplishment. Fourth, learners were given feedback so they can take corrective action if necessary (Peter, 1993). In addition to getting on the spot feedback from judges, the role-play events were recorded, and students played back their performance, critiqued themselves, and combined the newfound knowledge with the judge's feedback. Students also got their test scores immediately. Overall, when applied to my study, students benefited from a competition preparation program because the behaviorist learner reacts to conditions in their environment vs. taking an active role in discovering their environment (Eggan & Kauchak, 2001).

The overall role of constructivism. Constructivist teachers take the emphasis off of lecturing and promote the process of active engagement so that students can establish and engage in their learning (Noddings, 2015). Constructivism also seeks to understand individual development and social transformation (Phillips, 2000), making it applicable to the role-playing portion of the DECA competition. Additionally, constructivism includes knowledge as the natural consequence of a constructive process (Ertmer & Newby, 2013), which can be seen through peer interactions. As competitors communicated with each other, shared their understandings, knowledge, and experiences, they created new knowledge, which are all characteristics of constructivism. Further, the teacher became the facilitator and learners were encouraged to interact and exchange views to construct meaning and enhance knowledge. Another larger part of constructivism, as demonstrated in this action research study, is the use of problem-based learning, a constructivist instructional method that will be further explored later.

Self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning helps students learn through independent inquiry. To be a successful learner, self-regulated learners seek and apply information. Johnson (2002) describes self-regulated learning in more detail in the following quote.

> Self-regulated learning is a learning process that engages students in independent action, sometimes involving one person, usually a group. This independent action is designed to connect academic knowledge with the content of students' daily lives in ways that achieve a meaningful purpose. This purpose may yield a tangible or intangible result. (Johnson, 2002, p. 81)

Self-regulated learning engages grade school students as well as students in higher education. Students have the freedom to engage prior knowledge, relate to their interests and talents, explore, question, and experiment (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). To take action and use self-regulated learning, table 1 shows the steps that were incorporated into the study.

Table 1

Self-regulated Learning Steps Incorporated into the Study

	Self-Regulated Learning Step	How It Was Applied
1	Self-Regulated Learners Choose a Goal	After an initial practice role-play and test, students chose their improvement goal.
2	Self- Regulated Learners Make a Plan	With the learning plan, students made additional notes and decided how and when they would accomplish the goals.
3	Self- Regulated Learners Follow the Plan and Continuously Assess Their Progress	Student reevaluated the plans frequently and charted progress through assessment weekly. Students also did independent lessons.
4	Self-Regulated Learners Produce the Final Result	Round 3 ended with a final test and role play that showed their progress over time.
5	Self-Regulated Learners Show Proficiency Through Authentic Assessment	Students used data (role-play evaluation) and test scores to reflect on overall growth and develop plans for improvement.

Teaching and learning in multiple contexts. Teaching and learning in multiple contexts focuses on drawing upon prior knowledge and making connections to find meaning. To make those connections, CTL encourages combining school and work, service learning, integrated courses, and participation in CTSOs. To implement teaching and learning into multiple contexts into this study, we (a) used role-plays with real-world scenarios, (b) connected material with the student's interests, (c) worked on growing 21st-century skills, and (d) combined school with work simulations. By using those methods to bring academic content to life, students were engaged and able to incorporate their personal experiences into their work.

Independent learning groups. Independent learning groups encourage independent thinking. Through the use of independent learning groups, learning is transferred to students. When students are learning from each other and teach themselves, they better understand concepts (Sears, 2002). During the preparation process, students practiced with and evaluated each other's performance. By practicing with each other, students participated in a social process and collaborated for an enhanced learning experience. They also reviewed test content and learning videos in independent learning groups. Lastly, students had the opportunity to watch, critique, and grow from each other's role-play performances.

Authentic assessment. Authentic assessment features collaboration, feedback, and reflection, directing students towards producing products, using rubrics and checklists, and drawing from multiple sources of information (Sears, 2002). Throughout the study, participants practiced with several standard role-plays, not including their role plays from Competition University. This encouraged students as they accomplished small milestones. They were happy to watch their scores increase on the role plays and were happy with their increased knowledge of the performance indicators. We also reflected on our growth regularly, always comparing information from where they started.

Problem-based learning PBL. Problem-based learning played a significant role in this research study. Students were allowed to work through problems while learning the curriculum. The role-play scenarios provided performance indicators, and students had to use those indicators to solve problems. There were many components of PBL incorporated in this study, such as engagement, inquiry and investigation, performance, and reflection. Additionally, this strategy was used to raise questions, challenges, issues, and to present role-play situations that needed solutions. Students used critical thinking skills, prior knowledge, analyzed, synthesized, and acquired new skills. Another way that students learned to solve problems is through the evaluation of their recorded role-plays. Students evaluated their performance and identified areas of strength/weakness.

Summary of CTL Implementation. Overall, by combining the five areas highlighted in the contextual teaching and learning framework developed for this study, students were actively engaged in their learning process. While some students may have thrived in one area while their peers thrived in another, all students were able to benefit through the implementation of a variety of learning contexts. You will further see these methods exhibited in the research cycles.

Instruments and Tools

Before we review the action research cycles, the instruments and tools will be described, as it will help increase understanding while going through the cycles. We will also review how the instruments and tools were used in the preparation, how students used the instruments and tools, and how the data from the instruments were used in the reflective process. While several instruments and tools contributed to this action research study, there are two main areas that the instruments and tools fall into, which are the preparation packet, and the competitor's binder. The preparation packet provided a general overview of the study and helped students and parents understand their commitment to the study. The competitor's binder was a helpful learning aid that students used to guide them, which includes instructional materials such as the competitor's checklist and Competition University. Some other components that were included in the binder are the pre and post standardized tests and practice tests, DECA role-plays, the reflection and goal setting worksheet, and the DECA Performance indicator worksheets.

Preparation Packet

The preparation packet was created to provide an understanding of the research study. Parents and students were able to review the components, which included the consent form, time commitments, competition costs, cycle checklist, event guidelines, a sample role-play, exam blueprint, sample exam (standardized test), performance indicators, DECA performance indicator worksheet, dress code, competition university information, and DECA website information. Using this tool, the researcher was able to provide essential information in one place. Now, we will review each component of the preparation packet individually.

Consent forms. The consent form was a requirement from The University of Georgia and the Instructional review board (IRB). It is a parental permission form that provides an overview of the research. It includes the researcher's statement, principal investigator information, the purpose of the study, study procedures, risks, benefits, alternatives, incentives, what will be collected, participation information, a privacy statement, and contact information. Parents and the researcher signed and dated this form to ensure both parties understood. The judges also had a consent form, which reviewed the same things as it pertained to them.

Student time commitment. The student time commitment provides an estimate of how much time students would spend on the tasks occurring throughout the three-month study. It breaks the tasks down into weekly, monthly, and overall commitments. The time in which students complete the tasks may vary based on independent commitment and learning strategies. How many classes they have with the researcher might also influence this.

Fall competition costs. While participation in the study was free, all student participants had hopes of competing in the regional competition. The simple note let parents know that participation in the study was free and that the cost for region competition should their student decide to participate would be $25.

Competitor's checklist. The competitor's checklist is a valuable instrument that guided students through each stage of the cycle. The checklist covered lessons, quizzes, practice role-plays, sample exams, instructional areas, group exam reviews, self-evaluation, reflections, and goal setting. While most items are listed to be checked off, the self-evaluation and reflection included questions about their experiences, asked if they needed clarity, and asked them how they can improve their performance. Students were also able to reflect on their performance and set goals for the next cycle.

Event overview. The event overview is a document that outlines what the role-play events are for. It explains that the events were created to measure student's proficiency in the knowledge and skills areas determined by academic and technical content. Their skills will be assessed in the fields of marketing, finance, hospitality, and business management and administration. Only first-year competitors may participate in these events at the region, state, and international levels. Students with prior competition experience in role-playing must compete in the individual series events or the team decision-making events if they plan to still participate in role-playing. The document also provides an event overview, judging information and knowledge and skills developed during the role-play. Those knowledge and skills include 21st-century skills, along with common core standards for math, English, language arts, and literacy.

Role-play. Prospectively, the most important instrument is the role-play. The role-play counts for 2/3 of the overall score for competitors. A variety of role-plays were used throughout the study. Competitors practiced at least four role-plays each cycle in addition to the pre/post role-play and Competition University role-plays. A role-play contains participant instructions, specific performance indicators, a case study, the judge's instructions, and a judge's evaluation form. The purpose of the role-play is to provide students with a real-world situation and a problem to solve. For example, a student might play a marketing consultant that needs to provide solutions and advice to a failing business. There are hundreds of role-play scenarios that are based on the national curriculum and performance indicators. For each cycle, the researcher sat down with competitors to practice a role-play. Students also practiced their role-plays with peers and judges. At that time, judges and peers provided feedback about role-play performance, and students worked to make improvements based on that feedback. See Appendix G for Sample Role-Play.

Performance indicators. Performance indicators are used to evaluate a student's knowledge of a skill. Performance indicators are similar to state and national standards and were created by MBA research and curriculum center, and DECA Incorporated. Each indicator was written based on research-based needs and a review of literature in industry and education. There are three levels of performance indicators, which are PQ (prerequisite level performance indicator), CS (Career Sustaining level performance indicator), and SP (Specialist level performance indicator). Prerequisite level performance indicators develop employability and job-survival skills and concepts, which include work ethics, appearance, and overall business behavior. Career Sustaining level performance indicators develop skills that are necessary to remain employed or study business based on applying academics and business skills. Specialist level performance indicators provide very detailed skill development in all business functions (DECA, 2019). While there are thousands of indicators, here are examples of each:

1. Describe the nature of emotional intelligence (PQ)
2. Recognize and respond to ethical dilemmas (CS)
3. Leverage personality types in business situations (SP)

As you can see, the level of difficulty increased at each level. Understanding the importance of performance indicators is important at every level as they guide all of the role-play influence and test questions. Students can use performance indicators to help study and prepare for role-plays. While they may not know the exact situation of the role-play, if they understand the performance indicators, they will be better equipped to handle any situation. The DECA advisor can use the performance indicators to teach general and specific skills throughout the year in the classroom. For the region competition, the DECA advisor can also choose to focus on the particular performance indicators that students are expected to know for the first competition. For the first competition, the instructional area that guides each competitive event is revealed to everyone. After that, moving onto state, students must have a general understanding of all performance indicators. Judges will use the performance indicators to evaluate how well a student knows them when they present their role-plays at the competition. Their score will be based on their knowledge of five to seven performance indicators.

Instructional Area: Marketing-Information Management (IM)

Standard: Understands the concepts, systems, and tools needed to gather, access, synthesize, evaluate, and disseminate information for use in making business decisions

Performance Element: Acquire foundational knowledge of marketing-information management to understand its nature and scope.
Performance Indicators:
Describe the need for marketing data (IM:012) (CS)
Identify data monitored for marketing decision making (IM:184) (SP)
Explain the nature and scope of the marketing-information management function (IM:001) (SP)
Explain the role of ethics in marketing-information management (IM:025) (SP)
Describe the use of technology in the marketing-information management function (IM:183) (SP)
Describe the regulation of marketing-information management (IM:419) (SP)

Performance Element: Understand marketing-research activities to show command of their nature and scope.
Performance Indicators:
Explain the nature of marketing research (IM:010) (SP)
Discuss the nature of marketing research problems/issues (IM:282) (SP)

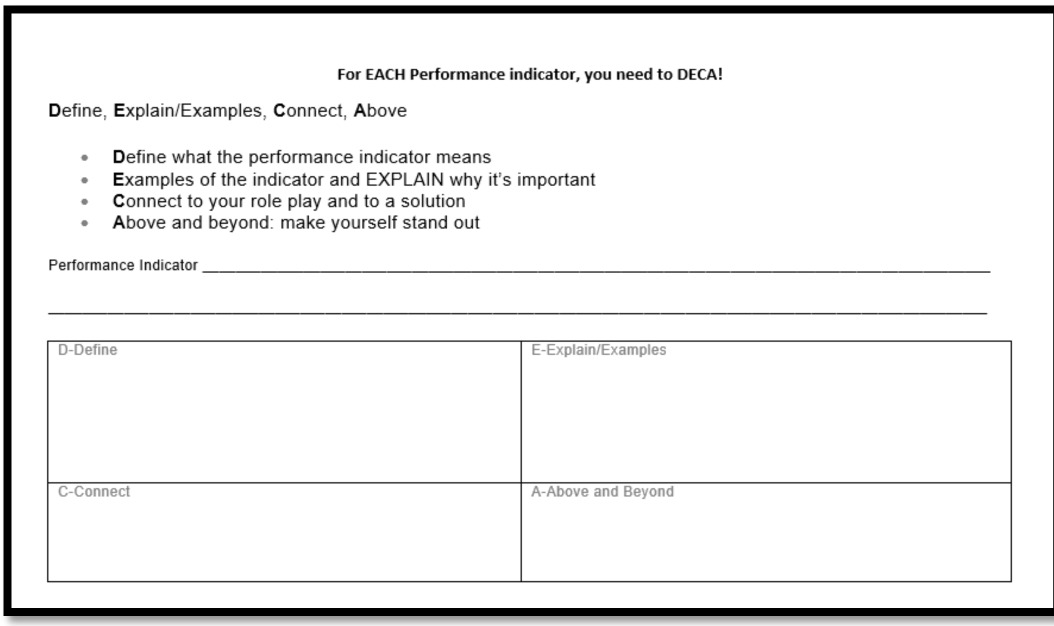
Performance Element: Understand marketing-research design considerations to evaluate their appropriateness for the research problem/issue.
Performance Indicators:
Describe methods used to design marketing research studies (i.e., descriptive, exploratory, and causal) (IM:284) (SP)
Describe options businesses use to obtain marketing research data (i.e., primary and secondary research) (IM:281) (SP)
Discuss the nature of sampling plans (i.e., who, how many, how chosen) (IM:285) (SP)

Figure 7. Performance Indicators Examples. Adapted from "DECA," by DECA Website 2019. Reprinted with permission.

As shown in Figure 7, performance indicators can be very detailed and represent different levels of learning. Overall, there are over seventy pages of performance indicators.

DECA performance indicator worksheet. A great instrument to help students, regardless of their role-play topic, is the DECA performance indicator worksheet that the researcher created based on DECA's performance indicators. This document prepared students by having them practice with each performance indicator that they might have been exposed to for the regional competition. While the region competition was not included in this study, the researcher still used this method as it was better for tracking data with students. It was much easier to evaluate their learning for 10-40 performance indicators than to evaluate hundreds of indicators for them. During the region competition, students knew in advance which instructional areas they would focus on. Using this worksheet, students were able to practice each performance indicator in their instructional area. On the worksheet, students must:

1. **D**-Define what the performance indicator means
2. **E**- Provide examples of the indicator and explain why it's important
3. **C**- Connect to your role play and to a solution
4. **A**- Above and beyond: make yourself stand out



For EACH Performance indicator, you need to DECA!

Define, **E**xplain/Examples, **C**onnect, **A**bove

- **D**efine what the performance indicator means
- **E**xamples of the indicator and EXPLAIN why it's important
- **C**onnect to your role play and to a solution
- **A**bove and beyond: make yourself stand out

Performance Indicator ____

____

D-Define	E-Explain/Examples
C-Connect	A-Above and Beyond

Figure 8. Sample of the performance indicator worksheet

Exam Blueprint. The DECA exam blueprint is a great tool to help students and advisors work smarter. The blueprint shows how many questions from each instructional area will be on the test at the district (or region), association (state), and ICDC (national) levels.

MARKETING	DISTRICT	ASSOCIATION	ICDC
Business Law	2	2	2
Channel Management	4	5	6
Communications	7	5	4
Customer Relations	2	2	2
Economics	7	6	5
Emotional Intelligence	11	9	8
Entrepreneurship	1	1	0
Financial Analysis	7	6	5
Human Resources Management	1	1	0
Information Management	7	5	4
Market Planning	3	4	4
Marketing	1	1	1
Marketing-Information Management	9	11	14
Operations	8	6	5
Pricing	2	3	3
Product/Service Management	9	11	13
Professional Development	6	6	5
Promotion	7	9	11
Selling	5	6	8
Strategic Management	1	1	0

Figure 9. Exam blueprint for the marketing exam. Adapted from "DECA," by DECA Website 2019. Reprinted with permission.

As you can see, looking at Figure 9, some items are weighted much more heavily than others. For example, we would want to spend a great deal of time studying emotional intelligence for the district exam and not a great deal of time on strategic management. Students used this guide to choose which instructional areas to study first. Once they prioritized the areas, they filled them in on their competitor's checklist and studied the sections based on their instructional need for the exam.

Sample Exam (standardized test). To look at the growth of each competitor throughout the overall study, a pretest and posttest were administered. There were three sources that their tests came from, including the DECA website, Competition University, and the DECA site for practice exams. The exam is a one-hundred question multiple-choice test like the DECA exam that students take during DECA competitive events (see Appendix H for example). The exam analyzed student performance in each standard, which allowed for accurate reflection and strategic studying moving forward. To practice, we also used exams from competition university, old DECA exams, and state practice exams, which are very similar to the exam. Old exams can also be found online or purchased from DECA. Students took at least one exam a week. DECA also provides the exam blueprint (see Appendix I), which allowed competitors to know how many questions in each category would be on the exam. This is broken down for every exam at the region/district, state, and international level.

Dress Code. Another tool that was discussed was the DECA dress code. Their appearance is judged as a part of the role-play performance. Male students are encouraged to wear the DECA blazer, a button-up collared shirt, tie, dress slacks, and dress shoes. Female students are encouraged to wear the DECA blazer, a button-up or blouse, ascot scarf, knee-length or below skirt, and dress shoes. Females are also encouraged to wear the DECA blazer with a business dress.

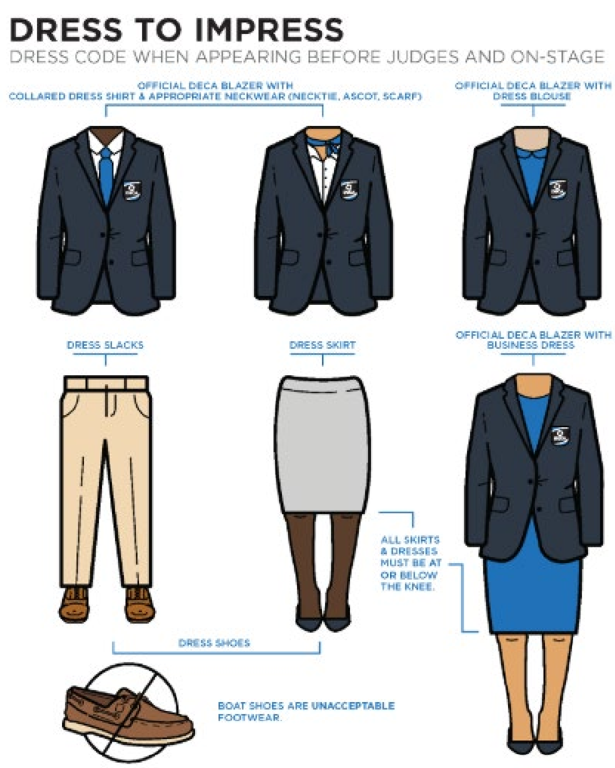
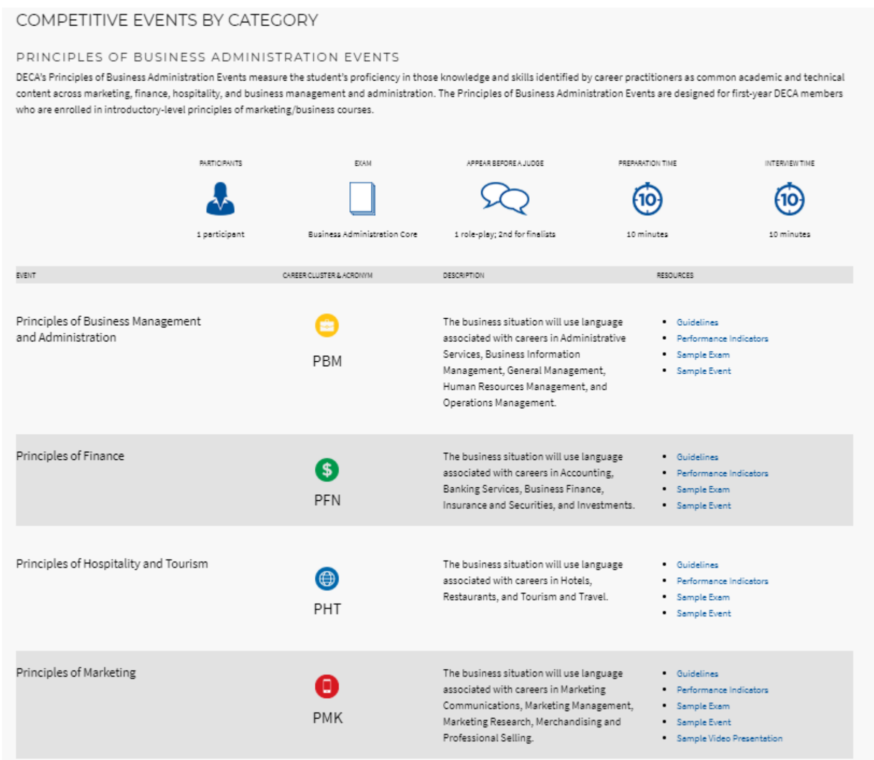


Figure 10. Images of suggested DECA apparel for competitive events

DECA website information. The DECA website was an instrumental tool that provided students with a place to see all of DECA's competitive events in one place. Some of the resources provided under competitive events are the DECA guide, competition advice, videos of sample role-play presentations, competitive events updates, competitive events poster, career cluster poster, exam blueprint, and penalty points information. The website also provides an overview of the event, describes what exam will be used, how much preparation time students have, and how long their interview will last. Other resources specific to each event include guidelines, performance indicators, sample exams, sample events, descriptions, career clusters, and the title of the event.


COMPETITIVE EVENTS BY CATEGORY

PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION EVENTS

DECA's Principles of Business Administration Events measure the student's proficiency in those knowledge and skills identified by career practitioners as common academic and technical content across marketing, finance, hospitality, and business management and administration. The Principles of Business Administration Events are designed for first-year DECA members who are enrolled in introductory-level principles of marketing/business courses.

PARTICIPANTS	EXAM	APPEAR BEFORE A JUDGE	PREPARATION TIME	INTERVIEW TIME
1 participant	Business Administration Core	1 role-play; 2nd for finalists	10 minutes	10 minutes

EVENT	CAREER CLUSTER & ACRONYM	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCES
Principles of Business Management and Administration	PBM	The business situation will use language associated with careers in Administrative Services, Business Information Management, General Management, Human Resources Management, and Operations Management.	• Guidelines • Performance Indicators • Sample Exam • Sample Event
Principles of Finance	PFN	The business situation will use language associated with careers in Accounting, Banking Services, Business Finance, Insurance and Securities, and Investments.	• Guidelines • Performance Indicators • Sample Exam • Sample Event
Principles of Hospitality and Tourism	PHT	The business situation will use language associated with careers in Hotels, Restaurants, and Tourism and Travel.	• Guidelines • Performance Indicators • Sample Exam • Sample Event
Principles of Marketing	PMK	The business situation will use language associated with careers in Marketing Communications, Marketing Management, Marketing Research, Merchandising and Professional Selling.	• Guidelines • Performance Indicators • Sample Exam • Sample Event • Sample Video Presentation

Figure 11. Principles of business administration events. Adapted from "DECA," by DECA Website 2019. Reprinted with permission.

The DECA website provides this detailed information for the 58+ areas of competition.

Competition University. Competition University is an instrument that allowed students to prepare for the individual series role-play and the principles role-play events. The website Competition University was created to help students preparing for DECA competitions. The website was created after the start of this research study and has been a phenomenal resource when preparing for competitive events. Tara Richardson, the creator of Competition University, is a former marketing and business teacher. Since 1997, she has been a judge at various regional/district, state, and national conferences. She started the business Custom Resources (the business that developed Competition University) in 1997 to provide innovative and time-saving resources to advisors. Competition University also employs several researchers and former DECA competitors (Competition University, 2019).

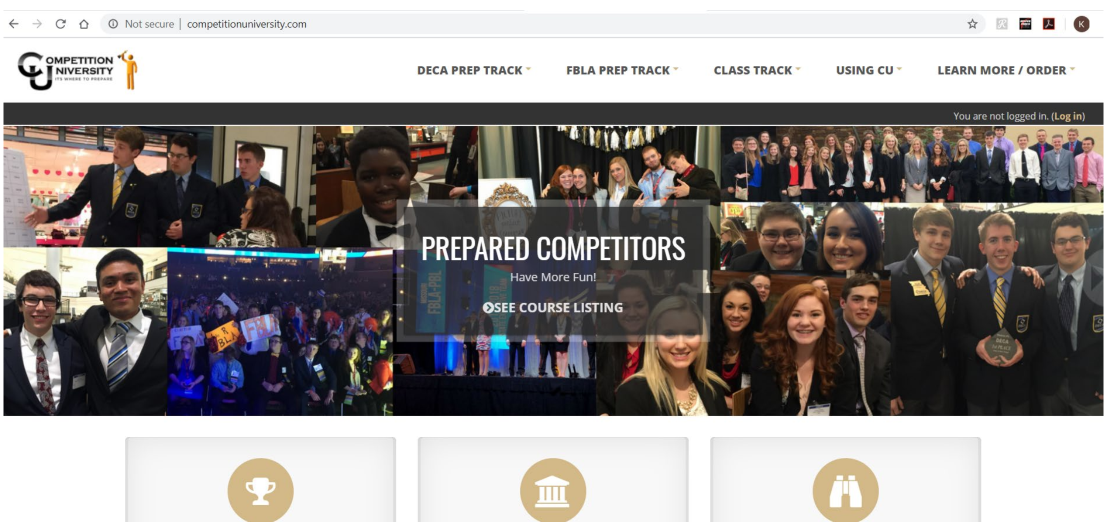


Figure 12. Competition University's home page Adapted from "Competition University," by Competition University Website 2019. Reprinted with permission.

Students used competition university to practice within instructional areas, take practice quizzes, review hot topics in a particular field, practice role-plays, take tests in weak areas, play games, and more. Competition University allowed students to focus on areas that they needed more practice in. The practice tests were also broken down into smaller test for faster practices. A few weeks leading up to the role-play competition, DECA released the focus area for the first competition. This allowed students to focus on one area for that time, such as customer relations or marketing. By focusing on one area, students were better able to prepare for the role-play event. The advisor was able to track scores, assess strengths and weaknesses, and assign particular areas for growth.

Competitor's Binder

The competitor's binder contained all information from the packet along with the other materials listed above. Ultimately, it was a place where they could store everything that they were collecting as their studies progressed. It contained the event overview for their specific event and all of the pages of performance indicators for their specific instructional area. Students added role-plays to their binders as we practiced them. They started out with one role-play each and ended up with a dozen or more. Students also accumulated several performance indicator worksheets in their binders. As they filled them out, they added them to their binder for reference as they prepared for future role-play events. This is also where their checklist and exam blueprint was housed, which helped them stay organized and on task. In addition to the sample exam, the binder is where students kept notes from other practice exams so that they could review and understand questions that were answered incorrectly. The inside of the binder cover is where they stored their login information to Competition University and to the practice test website for easy access. Lastly, students were able to keep their own notes in the binder for reflection. The students left their binders in the classroom unless they wanted to take it home for the weekend. This allowed the advisor to check in on their progress, leave notes for improvement, and to make changes to cycles based on need.

Action Research Cycles

In preparation for the cycles, I hosted a virtual competitive events orientation for all competitors and parents. During this time, students reviewed consent forms; time commitments, competition costs, checklist, event guidelines, and messaged me to ask any questions that they may have had. Each student was given a preparation packet that included (a) the consent form and a copy of the consent form, (b) time commitments, (c) fall competition costs, (d) competitor's checklists, (e) event overview, (f) sample role-play, (g) performance indicators, (h) DECA performance indicator worksheet, (i) exam blueprint, (j) sample exam, (k) dress code, (l) DECA website information and competition university login. Judges were also provided with an explanation of what was in their folder, which contained a welcome letter consent form, events overview, sample role-play, and sample role-play video. Figure 13 shows images of both of the YouTube videos that were recorded to inform participants about the study.

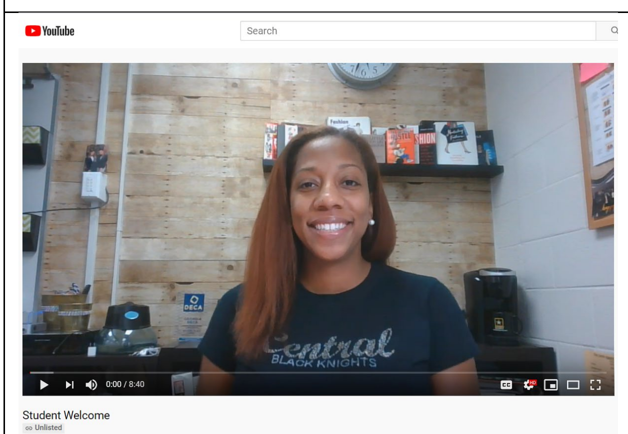
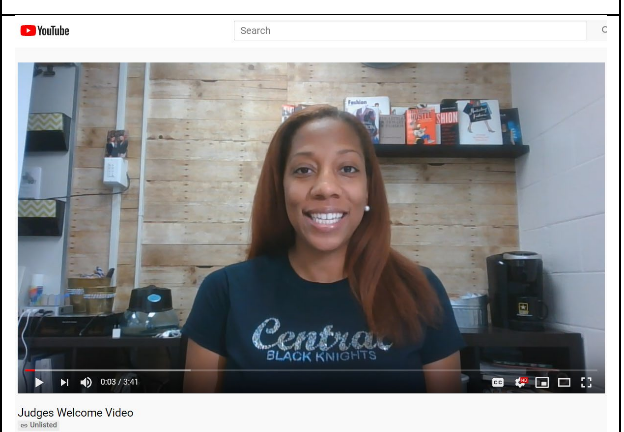
Student Welcome Video	**Judges Welcome Video**
	

Figure 13. The virtual competitive events videos that were made for student competitors and judges participating in the study

Once students and parents signed the consent form and returned it, we were able to get started with cycle 1, which began on October 14th, 2019. Judges signed their forms later at the judges' orientation prior to competition. Table 2 shows the research timeline for each research cycle. A description of the action research cycles follows the table.

Table 2

Research Timeline

Cycle	Start Date	End Date
1	October 14th , 2019	November 19th , 2019
2	November 20th , 2019	December 26th, 2019
3	January 6th, 2020	February 23rd, 2020

Cycle One

Each cycle included multiple components including (a) Pre-test (cycle one-week one only), (b) pre-test role play (cycle one-week one only), (c) advisory meeting (monthly), (d) instructional area lessons, independent learning, and quizzes, (e) practice role-play self-evaluation, (f) practice role-play with recorded group feedback, (g) group exam review, (h) sample exam, (i) group exam reflection, (j) practice role-play with advisor, (k) DECA performance indicator worksheet, and (l) reflection and goal setting for the next week. Each component was completed three times each cycle except for the pre-tests.

The first thing that happened during cycle one was testing. The competitors took an untimed one hundred-question practice standardized test that was created by MBA research and

DECA. The test includes multiple-choice questions and a detailed explanation for each correct answer at the end. There is also a reference for the source that each question came from. Following the test, students did a practice role-play. This allowed us to review the competitors' current knowledge and identify areas of need during the second step. The role-play was based on performance indicators. Students had to read the instructions and scenario, prepare, and perform the role-play with a judge. The practice test was also based on performance indicators. Depending on the topic, the number of questions from each instructional area varied.

The second step was sitting down with competitors for an advisory meeting. During that time, we reviewed rules, performance indicators, and the contents of the folders. Additionally, we reviewed how the competition works and went over preparation strategies, including being creative, enthusiastic, and professional. I was also available to answer any questions that students had. Additionally, I made a note of the questions so that I could address them with all of the competitors. Third, students worked to complete the checklist. Figure 14 shows a snip of the checklist; the full checklist can be seen in Appendix J.

Cycle 1 Checklist

Stage 1

✓	Goal	Goal Date/Date Completed
	Pre-test (cycle one week one only)	______/______
	Pre-test role play (cycle one week one only)	______/______
	Advisory Meeting (monthly)	______/______
	Complete Performance Indicator Worksheet	______/______
	Instructional Area #1 Lessons (independent learning) & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #2 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #3 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #4 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Practice Role Play Self-Evaluation	______/______
	Practice Role Play with recorded group feedback	______/______
	Record Role Play with improvements along with self-evaluation	______/______
	Group Exam Review	______/______
	Sample Exam #1	______/______
	Group Exam Reflection	______/______
	Practice Role Play with Advisor	______/______
	Reflection & Goal Setting For next week	______/______

Figure 14. A portion of the competitor's checklist

The checklist includes lessons, quizzes, role-plays and self-evaluations, recorded role-plays, group exam review sample exams group exam reflections, and a practice role-play with the advisor (also the researcher). The role-play strategies and industry lessons were provided on Competition University. The breakdown of role-plays came from Competition University and DECA. Competition University offered a role-play for each instructional area, and we practiced with sample role-plays from DECA. After we got through their competition preparation checklist, the students competed in a local competition.

During the local competition, competitors performed a role-play with a judge in a situation modeling region competition. Six judges that were able to commit to all three local judging cycles were obtained on a voluntary basis. Judges were given an orientation upon arrival, at which time we watched the welcome video that provided an overview of what they would be doing. In the role-play packet, the judge's instructions are included and can be viewed in the role-play description. During the competition, judges used the scoring rubric to score student performance. They were also asked to add notes to their scoring, and this was a point of emphasis for our judges. We asked them to provide real-time feedback to students after completion of their role-play and to leave written commentary so that we could use their critique to assist students in growth and improvement in specific areas. After the role-plays, competitors reflected on their experiences, mainly the grows (areas of growth that are identified) and glows (areas that they can improve on). Students reviewed all of these components with the advisor during the next advisory meeting.

Cycle Two

This cycle relied on the things learned during the first cycle. We made changes based on what we learned and applied it to this cycle. Students were encouraged and guided to use the feedback from the first round. During the second cycle, their performance was assessed again. One goal was to increase the reality of the competitive environment by starting to time students while they prepared and timing their test practices. Results from the changes occurring during the action research cycle are reported in chapter 4.

Cycle Three

In addition to the changes that were made during the reflection process, I moved even closer to simulating actual role-play and testing conditions. I also incorporated more videos and retaught testing concepts not mastered. Another resource that was available during this time (not available before) is the sample exams from our DECA state association. This resource was not available until mid-November. The tests mimic the test that students took for the region, state, and international competitions.

Research Site

The Research site for this study is Metro Atlanta High School in Lawrenceville, Georgia, which is a part of the Gwinnett County Public School system. Metro Atlanta High School was opened in 1957, and during the 2017-2018 school year, educated over 2,100 students (Orr & Smith, 2019). Metro Atlanta High school is a Title I school, which means that it receives government assistance because the school hosts a high number of students from low-income families. The funding from Title I goes towards making sure that all children meet the challenging academic standards set by the state of Georgia. Currently, the school does not have a strong presence with CTSO's. The school has a small DECA, HOSA (Health Occupations Student Association), and TSA (Technology Student Association) chapters.

DECA at Metro Atlanta High School lacked a competitive presence for years. The marketing program was revived a few years ago, and each year, there has been a transition with Marketing teachers. For the 2019-2020 school year, there was one teacher returning to CGHS for her second year (researcher), as well as a new first-year Marketing Teacher. The researcher, as a participant and observer in the research process, also served as a DECA advisor and teacher. The researcher worked full-time at the school teaching Marketing courses, work-based learning, sponsoring school store, and advising DECA. Access to marketing students in the secondary marketing class was easily granted due to the nature of the working relationship. Both teachers taught in a computer lab, had an online marketing textbook, and a plethora of sample role-plays that the researcher saved over the years. The classrooms were the primary location for the study. Competitors also studied at home, and the media center was used to host the local competitions. The data was collected as a part of DECA competition preparation and was approved by the school system. The data was then de-identified to protect student information and turned over to the University of Georgia for analysis.

Participants

Student Participants

Participants in this study were Metro Atlanta High School volunteer DECA members. While all members had access to the checklist and materials, ten students were included in the study. That number was chosen based on the average number of competitors the researcher had over the past four years of sponsoring DECA. The goal was also to keep a realistic number of students so that all students could be motivated appropriately and would complete the study. Participants in this study represent a diverse population (shown below), which is reflective of Metro Atlanta High School.

Student Data (2015–16 to 2017–18)

	School Year		
	15–16	16–17	17–18
Enrollment	2254	2186	2167
+American Indian/Alaskan Native*	1%	1%	0%
+Asian*	7%	7%	8%
+Black/African American*	47%	48%	46%
+Hispanic or Latino, *any race*	32%	31%	33%
+Multiracial, *two or more races**	3%	3%	3%
+Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander*	0%	0%	0%
+White*	11%	10%	10%
Special Education	14%	14%	13%
ESOL	6%	6%	9%
Free/Reduced Lunch	76%	77%	76%
Average Attendance	95%	94%	94%

**Not Hispanic or Latino*

Figure 15: Student Data 2015-2016 to 2017-2018 (Orr & Smith, 2019)

Many of the students that live in this Title I cluster are economically disadvantaged. In 2017, 77% of students received free or reduced lunch, meaning that their family lives at or below the federal poverty guidelines (Orr & Smith, 2018). In addition to their economic struggles, students have traditionally struggled academically as well. Students matriculating at Metro Atlanta High School perform lower than the county and state averages on standardized test such as the ACT, SAT, AP Exams, and End of Course Assessments. Despite North's test scores averaging at a lower level than the county and state averages, the school managed to increase the graduation rate each year with the exception of the 2018 school year.

Graduation Rate (2015 to 2018)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Metro Atlanta	80%	80%	82%	79%
GCPS	78%	80%	81%	82%
State	79%	79%	81%	82%

Figure 16. Metro Atlanta High School Graduation Rate (Orr & Smith, 2019)

Another beneficial thing to know about the students is that they are participating in a career academy model. Within this model, students are grouped and take classes together with career and technical education teachers and core academic teachers for at least three years based on a particular career and technical education pathway within the sixteen career clusters. An example of a pathway is the marketing management pathway, which consists of three classes: marketing principles, marketing and entrepreneurship, and marketing management (Advance

CTE, 2018). Pathways inside of career academies are comparable to having a college major. Like DECA, the goal of the academy model is to give students hands-on experience in a trade.

Judge Participants

The judges included in the study are current educators with former industry experience and current industry workers that were formerly educators. By having real-world experience and classroom experience, judges were better trained to offer students guidance and feedback. Judges are also all teachers or former teachers of CTE subject areas, which increased their familiarity with the career and technical student organization DECA. The judge's years of experience teaching range from 5 years to 46 years of experience. We also had a guest judge who is involved on the international level of DECA. This judge was able to provide overall insight to the researcher and suggestions for improvement.

Data Collection Procedures

This action research study employed a mixed-methods approach, which joins the use of quantitative and qualitative data. Mixed-methods approaches are viewed as appropriate for studies implementing theoretical frameworks. Creswell (2014) stated that mixed-methods is "an approach to inquiry using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks" (p. 32). Additionally, combining the use of qualitative and quantitative data provides more strength than either method provides alone (Creswell, 2014). Multiple data tools needed to be considered in this action research study due to the nature of DECA's role-play events. The following data tools were used to answer the proposed research questions: standardized tests, Competition University, role-plays, independent studies, group exam reflection, DECA performance indicator worksheet, self-reflections, and goal setting.

The role-play competitions consisted of a role-play and testing event, so both methods of data collection are reflected through triangulation, which uses multiple data points to understand more about the data. According to Maxwell (2013), triangulation

> involves using different methods as a check on one another, seeing of methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion. This strategy reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the biases of a specific method and allows you to gain a more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating (Maxwell, 2013, p.102).

Table 3 shows which data collection methods were qualitative and which were quantitative through the triangulation of research methods.

Table 3

Triangulation of Research Methods: Qualitative & Quantitative Study

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Processing	Data Analysis Approach
Overarching: **In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?**	**Qualitative** Judges & Competitor Reflections	Reflection Form Transcribing Input data into Excel codebook	Inductive Coding Deductive Coding Thematic Analysis
	Quantitative Overall Test Scores Overall Role-play Scores	Input numerical data into excel spreadsheet	Descriptive Statistics
Research Question #1 **How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?**	**Qualitative** DECA Practice Exams	Reflection Form Transcribing Input data into Excel codebook	Deductive Coding Thematic Analysis
	Quantitative Pre-Test Quizzes Practice Tests	Input numerical data into excel spreadsheet	Descriptive Statistics
Research Question #2	**Qualitative**		

How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role-play?	Judges' Reflections Competitors Reflections	Recorded Transcribed Input narrative data into Excel codebook	Inductive Coding Deductive Coding Thematic Analysis
	Quantitative Role-Play Scores	Input numerical data into excel spreadsheet	Descriptive Statistics
Research Question # 3 **How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program?**	**Qualitative** Competitor Reflections	Input narrative data into excel codebook	Thematic Analysis
	Quantitative N/A	**N/A**	N/A
Inform Instructional Practice	Teacher Researcher Reflections Role-Play Scores Exam Scores Checklists Reflections	Input numerical and narrative data into Excel codebook	Triangulated the results from thematic analysis and descriptive statistics from all data collected

Quantitative

Summative assessment is typically used by teachers to gain an overall picture of student learning throughout the session (Mertler, 2014). The pre-test, quizzes, and practice tests were all quantitative in nature because they all had definite answers. They were traditional standardized tests that included questions that were tested and approved by MBA research and DECA. Though they varied in the number of questions asked, all were measurable based on the correct answers. Each of these tests were multiple choice, and scores were generated based on the number of correct answers.

Qualitative

To complement the quantitative data collection, I used qualitative data to gain more specific information from competitors to more fully elaborate on overall results. According to Creswell (2014) qualitative research allows the researcher to uncover facts from the perspectives of the study participants. The data collected can be used to show themes and support growth or lack thereof. The advisory meeting, lessons, group exam review, reflection, and goal setting were qualitative measures that were recorded through journaling and through the reflection form on the competitors' checklist. During the advisory meeting, students expressed how they felt, asked questioned, synthesized, and planned. The qualitative lessons were interactive and gave students the opportunity to learn more about the specific topic while the quizzes for the lessons judged student growth quantitatively. The group exam review was more of a discussion about strengths, weaknesses, and identified areas for improvement. During the practice role-plays, judges recorded written notes at the bottom of the competitor's written score sheets. During the reflection stage, students answered several questions and set goals for the next cycle. The instruments used in this DECA study were developed by national agencies and myself. The standardized tests were derived from MBA research, the role-plays were created by DECA Incorporated, many of the study materials are on competition university, and the feedback/reflection tool was created by me. Each platform has its own way of scoring and reporting data to be analyzed. To collect test scores, Competition University automatically grades the scores on the site. Or, I had to manually grade tests using an answer key. Competition University uses tests that are developed by MBA research. For the paper tests, each correct answer is worth one point. All tests are 100 questions each. MBA research created the paper tests, as well. To analyze the data, the researcher had to take the scores and plug them in on the spreadsheet.

The instrument used to collect role-play data is the rubric that comes with the role-play. See *figure 17* for an example of the rubric. The role-play was designed by DECA incorporated. The rubric lists performance indicators from a particular area along with 21st-century skills. The role play evaluates students on a scale of 0-18 for performance indicators and a scale of 0-7 for

21st-century skills. To analyze this information over the course of the study, total scores were added to the spreadsheet. Students were able to see their growth from week to week after their practice role-plays with the advisor, and the advisor was able to look at all student growth in a central place. Over the course of the study, students were able to compare scores for ten weeks, which represents their pre-test role play and weekly role-plays during the course of the study.

Did the participant:		Little/No Value	Below Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations	Judged Score
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS						
1.	Explain the nature of positive customer relations?	0-1-2-3-4-5	6-7-8-9-10	11-12-13-14	15-16-17-18	
2.	Demonstrate a customer-service mindset?	0-1-2-3-4-5	6-7-8-9-10	11-12-13-14	15-16-17-18	
3.	Develop a rapport with customers?	0-1-2-3-4-5	6-7-8-9-10	11-12-13-14	15-16-17-18	
4.	Determine ways of reinforcing the company's image through employee performance?	0-1-2-3-4-5	6-7-8-9-10	11-12-13-14	15-16-17-18	
21st CENTURY SKILLS						
5.	Reason effectively and use systems thinking?	0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	
6.	Communicate clearly?	0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	
7.	Show evidence of creativity?	0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	
8.	Overall impression and responses to the judge's questions	0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	
					TOTAL SCORE	

Figure 17. Sample role-play rubric

The culminating point of each cycle is teacher reflection. Mertler (2012) expressed that action research is about one's willingness to critically reflect upon practice on a regular basis as a means for improvement. The reflection portion focused on specific questions to students and reviewing advisor and judge feedback. This information was qualitative and was recorded and later transcribed and reported in writing form. The questions were answered on the reflection worksheet and reviewed during our one-on-one meeting. Competitors also had written feedback at the bottom of their role-play form from the judges. That is standard DECA practice, and it served as a reflection tool for students. Throughout the study, I wrote all of my reflections in a journal. I shared my reflections as appropriate with students.

Data Analysis

As with any cyclical action research study, data analysis occurred throughout the cycles as the data analysis was an integral component of the action research process. During the study and plan phase, the researcher analyzed the overall growth or lack thereof and made a plan to yield improvement. During the take action phase, the researcher implemented the competition preparation program and analyzed data simultaneously, which led into the collect and analyze phase. Herr and Anderson (2015) suggested that journaling is imperative for the action researcher as it allows the documentation of ongoing thinking, decisions, and actions. Because the researcher chose to transcribe the interviews, journaling, and role-play feedback personally to help with further reflection, this task was completed each cycle during the reflection stage, so that the data did not become overwhelming. Qualitative data such as the advisory meetings, role-play feedback, reflection and goal setting, and the group exam review were audio-recorded to eliminate loss of information and to make it easier to transcribe later. Data reduction was also used while transcribing the data. Metler (2014) described data reduction as the process of analyzing a large volume of data, searching for patterns and meaning, and narrowing the data down to focus on those recurring themes. The analysis of summative assessments and the role-play scores involved the use of a spreadsheet that calculated the growth percentage based on each area. This was done through the use of descriptive statistics, as recommended by Mertler (2014). Mertler explained that by using descriptive statistics, the researcher could summarize numerical data. For teachers, this could be done on a class-wide scale. In the case of the DECA competitive events preparation program, the data helped report the results for all competitive members. This allowed the researcher to see how the various areas of the competition preparation program were affected by the changes made after each cycle. The use of means showed the average of the competitor's performance in role-play or summative test scores, while the standard deviation helped identify outliers in the data, which could skew results (Mertler, 2014). The researcher also used a spreadsheet tool that calculated the summative test and role-play growth for each cycle and for the overall study. During the reflection stage, the researcher was able to look at results from each area to better understand the results of the research. Findings were reported in a variety of ways, including graphs, charts, and tables, as needed in chapters 5 and 6. The quantitative data was concise in calculation while the qualitative narrative data required coding and additional analysis. All responses were explored, and student experiences were equally represented.

Validity and Reliability

Mertler (2012) wrote that trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability were all important factors of valid research data. In this action research study using qualitative and quantitative methods, the question then arises; how can we ensure the quality of the research? First, the instruments used in DECA competitive events were created by nationally accredited sources. MBA research designed the exams. MBA Research is the Marketing and Business Administration Research and Curriculum Center. Its mission is to support educators in the preparation of students for careers. They provide exams, lesson modules, programs of study, end of pathway testing, certification, professional development, and more. They are always releasing new, researched methods and refining exams. The role plays were created by DECA based on national educational standards in DECA related clusters (DECA, 2019). It is important to note that the researcher did not create the defining instruments, yet created a program with nationally recognized instruments to help students succeed. If students were able to grow their test scores in the program, it is also likely that their performance would improve for their final exams, certification tests, and end of pathway assessments as that is what the instruments were designed to support. Herr and Anderson (2015) found that reliability in action research has a broadened bandwidth. Some indicators of validity noted are (a) meaning and purpose, (b) participatory evolutionary reality, (c) practical being and acting, (d) extended epistemology, (e) knowledge in action, (f) human flourishing, (g) practical issues, and (h) questions outcome and practice. This action research study embodies each of those indicators and, the study can be repeated to test the reliability.

Methodological Limitations

A limitation of this study is students' lack of experience in the competition realm. For example, first-year students sometimes chose an individual event to compete in. Those students will have to learn the business core content (tier 1) and the individual series content (tier 3). This does not provide a huge limitation at the local setting, but it might serve as a setback at future competitions.

I decided to use local competitions because the majority of the students are first-time competitors, and they needed to practice before competing against other schools. An alternative option was to use a regional competition, state competition, and international competition. Due to the lack of competitive experience, I chose to create more opportunities for preparation as many students from other schools have competed for several years, some as early as middle school. Additionally, using local competitions helped prevent attrition throughout the cycles, as students were not eliminated from cycle to cycle, which supported the validity and reliability of the study.

Another factor when considering limitations was who would be included in the study. I've gotten feedback from the Texas DECA state advisor, Georgia State advisor, Metro Atlanta High School Principal, DECA test and role-play creators, and Tara Richardson, the creator of Competition University. The Texas state advisor shared that he offered online testing for all competitors to practice. I shared this information with my state advisor. The state of Georgia now offers online practice exams to all Georgia DECA members. I also learned from my state advisor the importance of saving old role-plays so that students have as many as possible to practice with during preparation time. My principal reminded me that while DECA is co-curricular, I could not force students to participate in competitive events. In addition, after speaking to local administration, I learned that my research was supported, but I could not have the local competition during school hours as it conflicted with instructional time in other courses. Tara Richardson, the creator of Competition University, taught me that it is important to be organized, intentional, and structured when it comes to preparing students for competitions. She encouraged me to use the testing blueprints and to try to focus on student's weak areas vs. every area when preparing them.

Lastly, all participants were students in the DECA classes; however, they were not required to participate in the competitions. The group of participating students were self-selected in that they chose to participate in the study. This may form a limitation to the study in that it is not generalizable to all students involved in this career pathway at the school.

Ethical Considerations

Some ethical considerations for this study included student and parental consent, as the participants were all high school students. This was secured through the consent forms. Students and parents agreed to participate under the terms outlined in the consent form. Consent forms for students and judges are included in Appendix K. All student identities remained confidential, and student and judges' names were replaced with pseudonyms. Only the researcher had access to the list of students' real names and their pseudonyms. This was on a password-protected laptop computer. Participation in this study was 100% voluntary. No student was punished or rewarded for participation, and if a student decided not to compete anymore, it had no bearing on their grade in the class. Data was reported without any details that could identify a student participant, and the researcher ensured that students remained comfortable throughout the competition.

Researcher Subjectivities and/or Assumptions

I remained very aware of researcher bias and my own subjectivity as both the teacher and researcher. Overall, I did not want to taint my study because the overall goals were to improve my instructional practice to improve student learning. The data would have been accepted regardless of the results. While I am the only researcher for this study, the data was calculated through reliable and validated instruments for both the scoring rubrics and the qualitative data collection through validated and tested instruments. For the qualitative measures, honest thoughts, feelings, and scores were being recorded into the documents.

To avoid bias with the qualitative data, I depended on the questions to drive the advisement sessions. To ensure equality and fairness in the role-play, I stuck to the rubric and followed the judge's instructions exactly. If I learned of ways to improve, I held those improvements to be applied equally in a new week or cycle to ensure all students received the same preparation opportunities.

Research Timeline and Time Commitment

The timeline for this action research study began in the Fall of 2019. Before the cycles began, the researcher designed the study, completed the prospectus, and gained approval from the University of Georgia IRB, Gwinnett County Public Schools, and Metro Atlanta High School. After the completion of those activities, the researcher was able to conduct the cycles in the action research study. Students were able to complete three cycles of the program (see table 4). The time commitment from students can also be seen in Appendix L.

Table 4

Research Timeline 2

Cycle	Start Date	End Date
1	October 14th , 2019	November 19th , 2019
2	November 20th , 2019	December 26th, 2019
3	January 6th, 2020	February 23rd, 2020

Data analysis to provide details of my experiences using action research, as well as the experiences of participants, began in February of 2020. Chapter 4, which is participant experiences and action research cycles, was completed in July. Chapter 5, data collection and chapter 6 discussion & conclusions were completed in September.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES AND ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES

The action research process has contributed significantly to my instructional practice. Through the use of contextual teaching and learning and improving my instruction based on reflections, I have become a better instructor and advisor. Each cycle, I was able to study and plan, take action, collect and analyze data, and reflect. Those reflections helped me grow by allowing me to see what was going wrong and being able to fix it. At the conclusion of cycle one, I learned that students needed more time, were not grasping the role-play, and did not understand instructional areas. As an advisor, I struggled to find role-plays for students to practice with. After cycle two, I learned that students still wanted more time for the checklist, needed help organizing the flow of the role-play and I still had problems finding role-plays. At the conclusion of cycle three, I learned that students still needed more time and practice. I also learned that I needed to be more active during the cycles to help students grow which is revealed in chapter five. Knowing how to adapt to drive competitor instruction also helped me to become a better teacher in the classroom. An underlying theme in the results is the need for more practice. As a teacher, I now understand the importance of repetition, multiple ways of teaching and learning, reflection, and how to drive instruction. This knowledge was acquired by reflecting upon the experiences that occurred during this study.

This chapter discusses the experiences of the participants, judges, and the researcher in the DECA competitive preparation program. This includes the description of the three action research cycles along with changes implemented at the conclusion of each cycle. Three participant reflection surveys were used to provide a representation of each participant's experience, which were later used to implement changes after each of the three action research cycles. The narratives in Chapter 4, reflection and goal setting results and the competitor's checklist results were used to answer the following research questions. Detailed findings are presented in Chapter 5 and thoroughly discussed in Chapter 6.

The overarching question that was answered at the completion of the research was:

> In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?

To better gauge the specific component of the improvement of my practice and to ascertain a clearer understanding of the answer to my overarching question, the following set of questions were answered via the results of a variety of research methods (application of contextual teaching and learning, role-play evaluations, and standardized tests) at the end of each action research cycle.

1. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?
2. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role-play?
3. How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program?

Narratives used participants' (competitors, judges, and teacher) own words to describe their perceptions about study participation. Competitors' background data was obtained using school files. Mentor background data was constructed based on information that was provided by the mentor. Reil's (2010) action research model guided this study, and at the end of each cycle, the participants provided a reflection. The researcher reflected in the form of writing. The judges reflected orally, and the students reflected electronically. For cohesiveness throughout this study, all reflections were transcribed before reporting. Reflecting on what happened during the cycles provided the opportunity for participants to discuss their experiences, evaluate strengths and weaknesses, and offer suggestions for growth. It also allowed participants to reflect on what was and was not working.

This action research study employed a mixed-methods approach, which joins the use of quantitative and qualitative data. To analyze the data that employed a mixed-methods approach, the following data tools were used to answer the proposed research questions: standardized tests, Competition University, role-plays, independent studies, group exam reflection, DECA performance indicator worksheet, self-reflections, and goal setting. Table 5 shows which data collection methods were qualitative and which were quantitative through the triangulation of research methods and the data analysis approach.

Table 5

Triangulation of Research Methods: Qualitative & Quantitative Study 2

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Processing	Data Analysis Approach
Overarching: **In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?**	**Qualitative** Judges & Competitor Reflections	Reflection Form Transcribing Input data into Excel codebook	Inductive Coding Deductive Coding Thematic Analysis
	Quantitative Overall Test Scores Overall Role-play Scores	Input numerical data into excel spreadsheet	Descriptive Statistics
Research Question #1 **How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?**	**Qualitative** DECA Practice Exams	Reflection Form Transcribing Input data into Excel codebook	Deductive Coding Thematic Analysis
	Quantitative Pre-Test Quizzes Practice Tests	Input numerical data into excel spreadsheet	Descriptive Statistics
Research Question #2	**Qualitative**		

How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role-play?	Judges' Reflections Competitors Reflections	Recorded Transcribed Input narrative data into Excel codebook	Inductive Coding Deductive Coding Thematic Analysis
	Quantitative Role-Play Scores	Input numerical data into excel spreadsheet	Descriptive Statistics
Research Question # 3 **How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program?**	**Qualitative** Competitor Reflections	Input narrative data into excel codebook	Thematic Analysis
	Quantitative N/A	**N/A**	N/A
Inform Instructional Practice	Teacher Researcher Reflections Role-Play Scores Exam Scores Checklists Reflections	Input numerical and narrative data into Excel codebook	Triangulated the results from thematic analysis and descriptive statistics from all data collected

I chose the triangulation of research methods for several reasons. First, they align with and support the practices of the contextual teaching and learning framework for this study. Second, they are excellent tools for a teacher-researcher to use in an action research study. Third, they align with the processes of the DECA competitive events preparation program as the results of the program will lead this action research study and guide the changes. Overall, it provides the opportunity to review the data from multiple angles, which will strengthen the answers to the questions that guide this study.

Tables 6 and 7 provide information on the ten competitors and five judges that participated in the research study. To protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms replaced names, and the fictional names were used to represent participants throughout the study. Abbreviations for student programs were also used. Students that receive free lunch due to low income show the code FL under the programs column. Students that are or were a part of the English language learners program show EL. Students that are currently participating in reading recovery show RR. Students that are in an early intervention program due to failing grades show EIP.

Table 6

Descriptive Data for Competitors in the DECA Competitive Preparation Program

Participant	Age	Grade	Gender	Race	GA Milestones Average	Years in DECA	GPA	HS Credits Earned	Attendance	Programs
Alexis	17	12	F	Bosnian	81%	2	3.0	27.5	104/107	FL
Chris	17	12	M	African American	83%	1	3.4	28.5	103/107	EL, FL
Eric	17	12	M	Hispanic	70%	2	2.1	27	81/107	EL, FL, RR, EIP
Jade	17	12	F	African American	93%	2	3.9	31	107/107	Gifted
Karisa	17	12	F	African American	78%	1	3.1	29.5	62/107	FL
Kathia	16	11	F	Hispanic	92%	1	3.8	25	82/107	FL, Gifted
Kristin	17	12	F	African American	92%	1	3.9	31.5	107/107	EL, FL
Melody	17	12	F	African American/ Caucasian	82%	1	3.2	29	94/107	FL
Ming	16	11	F	Asian	92%	1	3.8	22.5	95/107	EL, FL
Paula	17	12	F	Indian	83%	1	3.0	27	88/107	EL, EIP, FL

Table 7

Descriptive Data for Judges in the DECA Competitive Preparation Program

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Profession
Sherry	42	Female	Caucasian	Computer Science Teacher & TSA Instructor. Former NSA employee.
Geraldine	38	Female	African American	Marketing Teacher & DECA Advisor. Former Business Experience.
Carlos	46	Male	Hispanic	Academy Administrator
Cynthia	31	Female	Asian	Healthcare Science Teacher, HOSA Advisor & Former Hospital Administrator
Kevin	74	Male	Caucasian	Financial Consultant & Former DECA Board Member

Action Research Cycles

This action research study was conducted during the fall semester of 2019 using the contextual teaching and learning framework and the DECA competitive preparation program. Three action research cycles led the study using Reil's Action Research Model (2010) as a guide. Each cycle hosted four phases, which included: (a) study and plan, (b) take action, (c) collect and analyze evidence, and (d) reflect. The decision to use action research for this study was made because the action research model was most closely aligned with the problem-solving research goal. Action research allows teacher-researchers to reflect and improve their instructional practices throughout the study.

Cycle 1 started after IRB approval was obtained on October 14th, 2019. See Appendix M for IRB approval letter. The cycle took place from October 14th, 2019, through November 19th, 2019. Week 1 of the study correlates with Week 1 on the competitor's checklist. Participants worked on various activities including (a) standardized pre-test, (b) role-play pre-test, (c) lessons and quizzes for instructional areas, (d) practice role-play and self-evaluation, (e) practice role-play with group feedback, (f) recorded role-play with improvements along with self-evaluation, (g) group exam review, (h) sample exam 1, (i) group exam reflection, (j) practice role-play with an advisor, and (k) reflection and goal setting for next week. Figure 18 shows the checklist that students used for cycle 1, week 1.

Cycle 1 Checklist

Week 1

√	Goal	Goal Date/Date Completed
	Pre-test (cycle one week one only)	______/______
	Pre-test role play (cycle one week one only)	______/______
	Advisory Meeting (monthly)	______/______
	Instructional Area #1 Lessons (independent learning) & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #2 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #3 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #4 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Practice Role Play Self-Evaluation	______/______
	Practice Role Play with recorded group feedback	______/______
	Record Role Play with improvements along with self-evaluation	______/______
	Group Exam Review	______/______
	Sample Exam #1	______/______
	Group Exam Reflection	______/______
	Practice Role Play with Advisor	______/______
	Reflection & Goal Setting For next week	______/______

Figure 18. Cycle 1 Week 1 of Action Research Study

During weeks 2 and 3, participants completed a similar process that excluded the pre-tests, which only happen once. The remaining time in the cycle was dedicated to collecting and analyzing evidence and researcher reflection to identify what changes needed to occur for improvement. Changes were communicated with participants prior to the start of cycle 2. Cycle 2 was five weeks in length, and cycle 3 was seven weeks due to extra reflection time. Like cycle 1, changes were implemented after each cycle and communicated with participants. Table 8 illustrates the application of the action research process for this study.

Table 8

Application of Action Research

Cycle 1
10/14/19
11/19/20

Study/Plan
10/14/19-*Preparation, orientation, consent forms, pre-tests*
Action Phase
10/16/19-*Checklist procedures begin*
Collection and Analysis of Data
11/4/19- *reflections, judges feedback, research notes & synthesis of information*
Reflection
11/11/19-*what is working/not working, plan and communicate changes*

Cycle 2
11/20/19
12/26/20

Study/Plan
11/20/19-*Implemented Cycle 1 changes*
Action Phase
11/21/19-*Checklist procedures continued*
Collection and Analysis of Data
12/11/19- *reflections, judges feedback, research notes & synthesis of information*
Reflection
12/16/19-*what is working/not working, plan and communicate changes*

Cycle 3
1/6/20
2/23/20

Study/Plan
1/6/20-*Implemented Cycle 2 changes*
Action Phase
1/7/20-*Checklist procedures continued*
Collection and Analysis of Data
1/27/20- *reflections, judges feedback, research notes & synthesis of information*
Reflection
2/7/20-*what worked/did not work*

Data was collected through advisory meetings, role-play feedback, tests, judge's feedback, and checklist information. Those things, along with researcher reflections, guided the changes at the end of each action research cycle. The following narrative offers details of my experiences as an action researcher.

Cycle 1

Prior to the start of Cycle 1, I held a DECA meeting. During this time, students that were interested in competing were able to sign up. Later, I hosted a virtual competitive events orientation for all competitors. All students that were on our competition team were given the opportunity to participate in the study. During the orientation, I reviewed their preparation packets and addressed any questions. Students that chose to participate returned their consent forms to me. Judges also received a virtual orientation, and they returned their consent forms prior to the first competition.

The action research portion of the study began on October 16th, 2019. During this first week of cycle 1, student competitors began to work on their checklists independently during class time and as other time permitted. Each student had a binder with their competition checklist, practice role-plays, all information from their preparation folder, and they had me as a resource in the classroom. Students completed work for their competition checklist in the place of their classroom grade. However, they were fully aware that they could drop out of competition at any time, and it would not negatively affect their grade if they chose to resume the regular class track. Initially, twenty-six students turned in the consent form. After that, three students chose not to compete. Ultimately, ten students that I had in class were included in the study, but all students had access to the same materials. I did not, however, regularly follow up with the thirteen non-participants to ensure that they were completing everything on the checklist. I had to provide equal opportunity for participation due to my principal's wishes but tracking all of their growth would not have been realistic at that time.

During the second week of the action phase, some students needed to be caught up with their instructional area lessons, as they were not able to complete them during week 1. Students also continued to practice different role-plays and took their second exam. To end this week, students had a practice role-play with me and set goals for the following week.

During the third week of the action phase, many students found themselves behind and needed more time to be caught up. They continued to work in their instructional areas, lessons, and quizzes in Competition University. They also were able to complete a practice role-play in a group setting and receive feedback from their peers. We were not able to get through everyone due to class time restrictions. Students were able to stay on track with their third exam and role-play. This week ended with their first local competition in which students were able to meet the judges and receive feedback after their role-play. The local competition was held in our media center. All student competitors had the opportunity to participate; however, only study participants were granted extra time to get immediate feedback from the judges.

After the action phase, the collection and analysis of the data phase begun on November 1st, 2019. During this time, I was able to start collecting each participant's test scores for each week, role-play scores, and work completed in Competition University. I was also able to review the feedback from the judges as well as their practice role-plays with me. Lastly, I was able to review their reflections. The data served several purposes, including (a) allowing the researcher to know what was taking place in the study, (b) identifying trends amongst participants, (c) seeing what was and was not working, and (d) having the necessary information to make improvements. For example, week two and week three of the action phase revealed that students did not have enough time to complete all of the things on the checklist. By looking at each student and seeing what was completed overall, I had the necessary information to improve the checklist for the following cycle. I was also able to review student concerns and communicate with them regarding my plans for change. Lastly, I was able to create a group where students could communicate virtually at any time and serve as a resource to each other beyond the school day.

The last stage in Cycle 1 was the reflection stage that began on November 11th, 2019. During the course of the action research study, a reflection journal was maintained, which described my observations. This was a place that I could jot down my thoughts as things occurred. I was able to make notes on what was and was not working, what we could implement to change that, and any other information that presented itself. The following is a summary of the reflection journal during Cycle 1.

It is amazing to see my research finally taking place. I am overwhelmed by the number of students that attended the DECA meeting and showed an interest in the competition. I found that it was very important to thoroughly review what competition entailed. I need to make sure that students were not just there to earn cords. I also want to make sure that I could handle the load of students that choose to participate. At the meeting, we reviewed all areas of competition, but I expressed that for the fall semester, we would only focus on individual role-play. I also emphasized that students did not need to have perfect grades to compete. I shared success stories of students that had low GPA's but still crushed competition. After all, DECA is all about nurturing real-world skills. The virtual orientation flowed seamlessly. I only had to ask a few students to bring back their consent form as they forgot. This is so exciting! I cannot believe that I never thought of some of these things in previous years like creating videos.

Starting the first week, the students seem to be taking great pride in their work. They have a fire under them and want to do well in the competition. So far, I have lost three competitors. One student has withdrawn to attend the online campus, as she only needs two more classes to graduate. Another student does not think that she can manage the workload with her increased hours at Publix, and the last student is her friend and is dropping out for that reason. Fortunately, the ten students that are in my classes and being included in the study have not changed. I find myself to be very mindful of my interactions with them. I try to remain encouraging, provide snacks, and make this a great experience for them. It is a lot of work, and I hope that I can keep this pace while still managing all of my classes, school store, and lead teacher responsibilities. We did not have time for a second exam this week. The pre-test will have to suffice. We also did not have time for some other things, though; it varies by student what we were able to accomplish. I can honestly say that it was not due to a lack of trying. They are doing a great job! Some students have me two times a week, and some students have me three times a week depending on the week. Also, some students may have me for one class while others may have me for two or three classes. If I try this again in the future, I would likely change the 'week' to something else…possibly a quarter to ensure that all students have the same amount of time each 'quarter'. I also need to adjust the workload for students that have me for more than one class. I may only want to allow them to work on competition stuff during one class period and do the regular classwork for the other course.

We are now in the second week, and I am already able to identify some issues. Looking at student checklists and listening to their feedback, they are not able to keep up with the workload. I see them working hard, and I know that they are using pretty much all of their class time on this. Students that have more than one period with me are able to get more work done. However, *if I am being honest, they also seem completely drained. Alexis and Melody have me from 7:10AM-8:43AM and then again from 8:50AM-10:22AM. They are wonderful students, but I can tell that doing the same work for such a long period is draining them. I want to help them organize their time so that they can come to the big table and start having more peer interactions while practicing for role-plays. I do not like that we are only in week two and students are already getting discouraged. As organized as I was entering this thing, I could not have possibly imagined how many obstacles we would face.*

It is week three, and I am struggling. The students are behind on their checklists, and I'm having a hard time finding role-play resources for their specific performance indicators without spending all of my free time doing so. This is not something that I could have prepared for in advance as they are just now releasing the instructional areas of focus for each competitive area. I also can't seem to get them to grasp the concept of their instructional area vs. their role-play area. The struggle is real. Another problem that we are having is their lack of structure during the role-play. I will give them feedback, and they will improve with one or two parts, but start to finish, there are still too many issues. I am just going to keep on my smiley face, and after we survive the first local competition (which they are freaking out about), I can take the time to reflect and make some changes for the next cycle.

The first local competition went well. Students enjoyed getting feedback, and I think that it helped hearing feedback from someone besides me! Judges enjoyed their experience judging and are looking forward to the next competition. I enjoyed all of it…providing snacks, walking them to their tables, giving pep talks, listening to feedback, and every other piece. All participants in the study showed up. Double impressive! Ugh! I love this part.

The Action phase has commenced, and I am looking forward to addressing the major changes in the following cycle. I know for sure that I need to restructure the checklist. I need to redistribute some of the tasks, which may be hard. I want to go based on class time, but it will never truly be an even playing field, as some students will practice at home. I guess I cannot control that part, and maybe once I make the checklist better, I might encourage it. If they cannot complete their work during class time, maybe it would not hurt to finish it at home. I want to reorder it to prioritize the face-to-face interactions, but I cannot because they need the lessons and independent activities to grow prior to practicing their role-plays. Though it is going well, we could certainly use more time. Moving forward, I know that I need to address time; students not grasping the flow of the role-play, and better explain performance indicators. I also need to figure out how to find all of the role-plays they need in their specific instructional area that we will be focusing on.

As Cycle 1 concluded, a thorough analysis of data obtained from reflections, checklist progress, test scores, role-play performance, and judge's feedback were reviewed. The researcher's journal was also updated. Table 9 shows the details of changes implemented for Cycle 2 and the methodology used to justify their implementation.

Table 9

Action Research Cycle 1 Analysis and Changes Implemented

Issue Identified	Justification for Action	Instrument(s) used	Action(s) Implemented for Cycle 2
Not enough time to complete things on checklist.	0% of competitors completed their checklist for cycle 1.	Cycle Checklist	Modify the checklist so that competitors can complete it and introduce alternative communication methods (skype, zoom, FaceTime for role-play practice.
Not grasping the flow of the role-play	During the 1-1 practices, students continuously lacked flow and understanding.	DECA role-play judges score sheet.	Create an outline for students to follow when conducting their role-play.
Not understanding instructional areas	Competitors do not understand what the instructional areas are or how to study them.	Performance indicator worksheet, role-play, DECA's performance indicator guide	Include a lesson reviewing the difference between instructional areas, where to find them, and how to use them to prepare with the performance indicator worksheets. Add more indicators to one worksheet to avoid confusion with the overall topic and provide an example.
Problem finding role-plays for some areas.	At a competition, competitors might see any of the performance indicators that support their area.	DECA Role-Play	Continue to search and build a collection, seek advice from other advisors, DECA Inc. and State Leaders

As shown in Table 9, there are four major issues identified in cycle 1. The primary concern was not having enough time to complete the checklist. Competitors did not work on the checklist in the same order, but overall, no one was able to complete the workload. To combat this, the checklist was updated for cycle 2. I chose to try to remove the elements that were repetitive so that students would still have exposure to all aspects. I also had to keep in mind that the next two cycles would include holidays, reducing face-to-face time. Figure 19 shows the updated Competitor's Checklist for Cycle 2.

Competitors Name: ____________________ Competitors Event: _________________________

Cycle 2 Checklist

Week 1: Nov 20th-Nov 27th

✓	Goal	Goal Date/Date Completed
	Instructional Area #7 Lessons (independent learning) & quizzes	_______/_______
	Instructional Area #8 Lessons & quizzes	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play Self-evaluation	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play with group feedback	_______/_______
	Sample Exam #4	_______/_______
	Group Exam Reflection	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play with Advisor	_______/_______
	Begin Performance Indicator Worksheet for instructional area of focus	_______/_______
	Reflection & Goal Setting For next week	_______/_______

Week 2: Nov 27th-Dec 4th

✓	Goal	Goal Date/Date Completed
	Complete Performance Indicator Worksheet for instructional area of focus	_______/_______
	Instructional Area #9 Lessons (independent learning) & quizzes	_______/_______
	Instructional Area #10 Lessons & quizzes	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play Self-Evaluation	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play with group feedback	_______/_______
	Group Exam Review	_______/_______
	Sample Exam #5	_______/_______
	Local Role Play Competition	_______/_______
	Reflection & Goal Setting For next week	_______/_______

Week 3: Dec 4th-Dec 11th

✓	Goal	Goal Date/Date Completed
	Instructional Area #11 Lessons (independent learning) & quizzes	_______/_______
	Instructional Area #12 Lessons & quizzes	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play Self-Evaluation	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play with group feedback	_______/_______
	Sample Exam #6	_______/_______
	Group Exam Reflection	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play with Advisor	_______/_______
	Reflection & Goal Setting for next cycle	_______/_______

Figure 19. Cycle 2 Competitor's Checklist

Another issue that was identified is that competitors were not grasping the flow of the role-play. Some competitors would jump right into giving a breakdown of performance indicators. Other competitors would not address the performance indicators at all but would respond to the scenario. This was cause for alarm, and something needed to be put in place for them to flow through their role-play consistently. Using DECA resources and the things that I have learned, I updated a role-play outline and tips guide. It will help competitors provide an introduction, roadmap, performance indicators, solution, summary, and outro. Figure 20 shows the role-play outline and tips guide.

CENTRAL GWINNETT HIGH SCHOOL
DECA

Role Play outline and tips

1. **Introduction (.5 minutes)**
    - Firm handshake, eye contact, smile
    - Introduce your name, position, and purpose of your presentation
    - Sit up straight, keep your hands on the desk (never on your lap)
    - Thank the judge for their time
2. **Roadmap (1 minutes)**
    - Tell the judge what you will be talking about (this prepares them for the content of your presentation)
    - List out all 5 or 7 performance indicators in order, and how they relate to the case study at hand
    - Tell them that at the end of the presentation, after you've talked about the PI's, you will give your thoughts on what should be done to solve the case study
3. **Performance Indicators (2.0 minutes)**
    - go in the order that is presented to you on the case study sheet

For EACH Performance indicator, you need to DECA!

Define, Explain/Examples, Connect, Above

- Define what the performance indicator means
- Examples of the indicator and EXPLAIN why it's important
- Connect to your role play and to a solution
- Above and beyond: make yourself stand out

Performance Indicator ______________________________

D-Define	E-Explain/Examples
C-Connect	A-Above and Beyond

4. **Solution (2.0 minutes)**
5. **Summary (1.5 minute)**
    - Briefly sum up the performance indicators
    - Summarize the highlights of your proposed solution
6. **Outro (1.5 minutes)**
    - Thank your judge for their time
    - Formalities: "I hope my proposed solution will help elevate your (our) company; I would love to be considered for this project long-term…)
    - Politely ask the judge if they have any questions (they will always have questions)
    - When answering questions, think WHILE you talk – do not pause for too long to think of an answer
    - Final handshake, and remember to push in your chair

Figure 20. Role-play Outline and Tips

To combat competitors not understanding instructional areas, I prepared a lesson on instructional areas, performance indicators, and how to use them. I also included how to best use the performance indicator worksheet. After students better understood these components, we looked at the role-play outline and tips, and competitors began to prepare for their next role-play using the guide. The last issue that was addressed in this cycle was problems finding role-plays in some of the instructional areas. To address this, I spoke to other advisors to see what they did. This seems to be a top-secret thing as no one wants to share. However, they did say that you build your collection over time. I also spoke to Randi Bibliano, the Competitive Events Specialist for DECA. She sent me a few old role-plays and told me that we could talk soon about understanding role-play. Lastly, I reached out to my state advisor Shannon Aaron for role-plays. She was able to guide me to a few as well.

Cycle 2

Cycle 2 began on November 20th, 2019. To implement changes, I communicated with students in person or through a YouTube video delivered through the remind app. I did not think about the fact that we would not be in school until this cycle began. I had to make a plan to avoid a week without any work being done. Students were challenged to continue working on their checklist. We also planned to role-play on FaceTime and Zoom applications, which allowed us to see each other. The updated cycle checklist was reviewed as well as plans for the following week since we would be out for Thanksgiving break from November 25th until December 2nd.

The Action phase began on November 21st. Students took another practice test on the 21st or 22nd and continued working on their checklists. In addition to competition prep, we had a Friendsgiving celebration on November 21st after school. This presented the opportunity for competitors that are not in the same class to socialize. It was great to build morale and foster friendly competitiveness. During our Friendsgiving, I talked to competitors about the easiest method to video chat with them. Most students had an iPhone and could FaceTime. All students had the capability to use zoom. During the week of fall break, competitors worked on their checklist and practiced with each other or me. Some competitors practiced multiple times while others only practiced once. Once we returned to school on December 2nd, competitors that were behind worked to get caught up. The local competition was held earlier in the cycle on December 4th because we had our region competition on December 5th and needed the practice. Following the region competition, we resumed working on the checklist until the action phase ended on December 11th. The collection of data and analysis of data started on December 12th and ended on December 16th. After that, the reflection period took place from December 16th until January 5th. The following is a summary of the reflection journal during cycle 1.

I am excited to see if the changes made for this cycle will be effective. Today, (day 1 of the action stage), I sent the competitors smarties candies, and encouraging notes to their classes. I am proud of the work that they are putting in. I am learning that strategy is important but overall, hard work is necessary. Practice is necessary. Watching them struggle several times before grasping a concept is hard for me to watch as a teacher. I wonder how often they experience this in the normal classroom setting, but we move on so quickly that they rely on notes, friends, and memorization to do well on assessments. It might seem unrelated, but it is related. I am learning that as an educator, I need to frequently assess student progress and reteach when necessary. It is cute to me that they were "bored" when we were not focusing on competition prep. Though this process would not be normal if it were not a study, I am glad that they are engaged and proud of their growth. I believe that teaching in multiple contexts and using hands-on learning is contributing to that. Anyway, let's go cycle 2!

It is the end of the first week, and it has been very interesting. The week started with another test and working on the checklist. On Monday, I practiced on FaceTime with Paula, Jade, Kristin and Ming. They did really well, and it was nice to have time to reflect with them while not watching my class or the clock. Chris and Eric said that they FaceTimed on their own.

Throughout the week, they told me that they practiced with each other several times, and each competitor practiced virtually at least once. Occasionally, I also sent them YouTube videos that were on the DECA website to remind them to watch practice role-plays. I did this because we are STILL struggling with the flow of the role-play. None of them are hitting all of the points. I think next cycle I am going to stop each time they forget to do something and make them start over from scratch. Dramatic…but possibly needed. On the bright side, they do better understand what their instructional areas are. However, they still need to become better versed in talking about it.

Week 2 began at the end of our fall break. In our group chat they shared that they were a little behind with the checklist due to family travel, Thanksgiving day, and black Friday. They also said that it had nothing to do with motivation because they needed to get ready for the upcoming region competition. I did not talk to students outside of our group chat until we returned to school on December 2nd. By this time, everyone was panicking because the region competition was on Thursday, and they felt unprepared. I stayed at work on Monday until 9pm printing out role-plays to practice. We were able to get caught up from week one and complete week two's work prior to Thursday. Wednesday was also a long day as we had the local competition. The judges were much more confident and excited to be there. They enjoyed the student growth but did agree that they need to continue to work on hitting all of those areas because they are being judged on all of the areas.

Week 3 felt like a cleanup period. It allowed time to complete unfinished parts of the checklist. Students are still on cloud nine from their region performance. I am still pushing them and trying to get them to understand that the work is not done yet! I do like the confident side of them though. If they could keep their confidence, improve their performance, and test *scores, wow…it would be amazing. I guess another thing to consider is that week 3 falls on finals week for semester 1. I am happy that students care enough to make time for DECA amidst their finals.*

Looking back on cycle 2, I wish that I had implemented a formal schedule and committed to each student having two practices with me during the fall break. It would have been the perfect time to get this done. It is also a great way to cater to students that I do not have in class. I am glad that these methods are on my radar, but I am sad that we missed a great opportunity to use them. I am also nervous about cycle 3 because I will not have many of these students in my class second semester. Now that region is over; I fear that many of them have lost motivation and are overconfident after their strong region performance. It is hard to find a balance between building them up to strengthen their confidence and keeping them humble because this is just the beginning. However, I guess I really should not judge them based on past years. We will see how it goes! I am honestly a little disappointed in their growth. I thought that they would all be much further along. It is simple things like…why are they still not saying SOMETHING about each performance indicator. Just make something up if you need to! We are in the middle of the study, and Judges should not be scoring them so low in any area of their role-play, especially if it is because they didn't even try to address a performance indicator. However, they are not doing it. I know that it is my fault as an instructor. I also think that in some ways I have unrealistic expectations from them. They might be growing just fine. I am looking forward to seeing them grow more and hopefully finding a way to expedite that growth.

As Cycle 2 concluded, a thorough analysis of data obtained from changes, reflections, test scores, role-play performance, and judge's feedback were reviewed. The researcher journal was updated to include all reflections from cycle 2. Table 10 shows the details of changes implements for Cycle 3 and the methodology used to justify their implementation.

Table 10

Action Research Cycle 2 Analysis and Changes Implemented

Issue Identified	Justification for Action	Instrument(s) used	Action(s) Implemented for Cycle 3
Not enough time to complete things on the checklist. (This time, we believe due to vacation)	40% of competitors completed their checklist for cycle 2.	Cycle Checklist	Work on time management and the incorporation of virtual platforms to get things done.
Not addressing all points from the Role-play Outline and Tips	Competitors still forget major parts such as their introduction, all performance indicators, and summaries.	DECA role-play judges score sheet and the Role-play outline and tips sheet.	Provide another lesson on the judge's score sheet and role-play outline and tips form.
Problem finding role-plays for some areas.	Students should focus on one major instructional area right for role-plays now to better track growth.	DECA Role-Play	Use role-plays from various instructional areas but add performance indicators from their area of focus.

Table 10 shows the three major issues identified in cycle 2. The issues were identified through the researcher's reflection, the judge's feedback, and student feedback. The primary concern from the students was that they still did not have enough time to complete the checklist. The students that did complete it have me for multiple periods, and they said that they worked on it at home as well. While I did remove some things from the checklist last time, this cycle also conflicted with final exams, region competition, and winter break. I revised the checklist again for cycle 3. We are really at a crossroads because most students are saying that they need more preparation, but they are not able to get through the checklist. Figure 21 shows the updated checklist for cycle 3.

Competitors Name: ______________________ Competitors Event: ___________________________

Cycle 3 Checklist

Week 1: Jan 7th-Jan 13th

✓	Goal	Goal Date/Date Completed
	Instructional Area #13 Lessons & quizzes	_______/_______
	Instructional Area #14 Lessons & quizzes (or review big area)	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play Self-evaluation	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play with group feedback	_______/_______
	Sample Exam #7	_______/_______
	Group Exam Reflection	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play with Advisor	_______/_______
	Reflection & Goal Setting For next week	_______/_______

Week 2: Jan 14th- Jan 20th

✓	Goal	Goal Date/Date Completed
	Instructional Area #15 Lessons & quizzes (or review big area)	_______/_______
	Instructional Area #16 Lessons & quizzes (or review big area)	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play Self-Evaluation	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play with group feedback	_______/_______
	Group Exam Review	_______/_______
	Sample Exam #8	_______/_______
	Reflection & Goal Setting For next week	_______/_______

Week 3: Jan 21st- Jan 27th

✓	Goal	Goal Date/Date Completed
	Instructional Area #17 Lessons & quizzes (or review big area)	_______/_______
	Instructional Area #18 Lessons & quizzes (or review big area)	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play Self-Evaluation	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play with group feedback	_______/_______
	Sample Exam #9/Post-test	_______/_______
	Group Exam Reflection	_______/_______
	Practice Role Play with Advisor	_______/_______
	Local Role Play Competition	

Figure 21. Cycle 3 Competitor's Checklist

The second issue identified for cycle two was competitors not addressing all points from the role-play outline and tips. Students were still forgetting to introduce themselves, explaining each performance indicator, and summaries. They also were not putting their role-play into context. To combat this, I provided another lesson on the judge's score sheet and the role-play tips and tricks form. During the lesson, I had competitors score each other so that they could see how important it was to address all points.

The third issue that we had was finding role-play events for students to practice within their instructional area. Student growth could be easier seen if we focused on an instructional area vs. fully preparing for various instruction areas for the role-play event. To combat this issue, I used role-play events from all instructional areas and added performance indicators from their instructional area of focus. This allowed students to still gain exposure in all areas while still constantly seeing performance indicators in their instructional area. It also saved a significant amount of time, as it was difficult to find additional role-plays outside of the 300+ that I had saved.

Cycle 3

Cycle 3, the final cycle in this study, began on January 6th, 2020, when we returned from winter break. We were in a new semester, so I did not have some of the students in class anymore. Because of this, we heavily relied on technology to communicate. On the 6th, I sent out a happy new year video to the DECA competitors. In that video, I reviewed all of the changes that were implemented after Cycle 2. I also reminded them of the methods that they have to communicate. Lastly, I told them that I would have a treat for them every Friday so that I could still see them at least once a week.

The action phase began on the 7th. If students had not already picked their binders back up from me, I had them delivered to their classes. Students started working on their checklists and practicing their role-play events in class if they had me and after school or virtually if they did not have me. I made it a point to do their week one practice role-play with them as soon as possible so that I could also offer words of encouragement and answer any questions that they may have about the changes that were made. The last local competition ended the third cycle. The following is a summary of the reflection journal during cycle 3.

I am currently preparing for Cycle 3, and I am filled with nerves. This study is very important to me as I want to help students grow. This entire experience has been amazing, and I have never had a year where we felt more like an actual team. I think that having this structure, increased communication and practices contribute to that. I am nervous about this cycle because it is a new year and I do not have everyone in class anymore. I think the saving grace that will keep students motivated is the upcoming state competition at the end of January. They are still working to prepare for that even if they are not competing in a role-play event. We will see how it goes!

It is the end of week one and so far we are on track. Competitors are taking things more seriously than I thought they would. I was able to do the practice role-play with every competitor this week. Using a virtual platform for some of them helped significantly. It was nice to be able to focus on some of them without the pressure of squeezing them in during lunch or keeping them after school when their brains are already tired from a day of work.

It is the end of week two and students are doing much better with hitting the points on their role-play guide. I do have to stop them a lot, but they are learning quickly not to skip stuff. When I stop them, I start making a bunch of silly faces at them. I do not want to yell or embarrass them in front of their peers. They laugh a little, but I can tell that it is frustrating. Yesterday, I had hot Cheetos delivered to all of their classes with a note that says, you are on a *hot streak don't give up. They laughed about it in our group chat. Seems lame but it was another way to build morale.*

I am impressed with the improvement competitors are making. I was certain that they would be checked out by now but they are sticking with me. Some of them are not keeping up with their online prep and it shows. Overall, I'm happy that they are at least keeping up with their practice tests and role-play practices. I think that teaching a lesson on instructional areas and providing examples was effective because now they know. I think it was even more effective to stop them when they missed something and kindly corrected them. One more week to go! This is insane.

It is the end of the 3rd week and we are just wrapping up with the last local competition. The judges were very proud and impressed with student growth. The competitors were all dressed professionally from head to toe with their DECA pins and our chosen DECA uniforms. I have spoken to the competitors and their common theme is wishing that they had more time to prepare. I can say that everything was condensed in this period. I would definitely start early in the year if I decided to do this again. To be honest, I would start with my Sophomores and Juniors right after ICDC if we were going that year. I can't express enough that while structure has clearly helped, there is no secret ingredient. It takes a significant amount of hard work. There are a lot of moving parts working together to help students succeed.

As Cycle 3 concluded, a thorough analysis of data obtained from changes, reflections, test scores, role-play performance and judge's feedback were reviewed. The researcher journal was updated to include all reflections from cycle 3. Table 11 shows the details of changes suggested for future research and methodology used to justify their implementation.

Table 11

Action Research Cycle 3 and Suggestions for Future Research

Issue Identified	**Justification for Action**	**Instrument(s) used to identify issue**	**Suggestions for future research**
Not enough time to complete things on checklist.	60% of competitors completed their checklist for cycle 3.	Cycle Checklist	Start earlier with the checklist. This was too much information and work in a short time period. Start in the spring or as soon as school begins. Anticipate work not being done during holiday seasons and plan accordingly.
Low test scores	Low test scores	Practice tests, region test and state test scores	Put more emphasis on test scores and start preparing for them sooner. More prep is needed to close the achievement gap. Possibly incorporate a Q&A segment into role-play practice time.
Loss of student engagement	20% less students completed their checklist this cycle despite it being easier	Cycle Checklist, 1-1 meetings, Student Reflections	Build this around the actual competition schedule. Students lost motivation to achieve, as things were not aligned with hopes of being rewarded. I did provide medals but that could not compete with DECA trips.
Not addressing all points from the Role-play Outline and Tips	Competitors are still forgetting major parts such as their introduction, all performance indicators and summaries.	DECA role-play judges score sheet and the Role-play outline and tips sheet.	Test students on the format in your very first week and continue to test them until they master it. You can also record samples and provide local samples of what their performance should look like.
Problem finding role-plays for some areas.	Students should focus on one major instructional area right for role-plays now to better track growth.	DECA Role-Play	Create this for yourself. Find what you can and create your own for the rest. Add performance indicators from specific role-play practices. This way, students are still learning about other areas while mastering one. Also as you build your collection, keep it organized.

Overall, the issues were consistent amongst the cycles. Emerging themes provided the opportunity for improvement. Reflecting on the three cycles, we see that time management, timing during the year, test preparation, and role-play flow must work in harmony for the program to improve more.

Ten Competitor's Experiences

The following information provides a description of each competitor using information obtained from the orientation, student profile, researcher journal, and goal setting and reflection worksheet. After the competitor introduction, the results of the goal-setting and reflection worksheet will be shared to provide competitor's experiences from participating in the study. Editing of the original data was limited to typographical errors, flow, and cohesiveness. Edits to the narrative data are underlined. The questions that are asked are (a) What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?, (b) How was your overall growth this cycle, (c) What things can you do to improve your role-play performance? (d)What things can you do to improve your test performance? (e) How can your advisor help you improve? Students answered the questions electronically through secured google forms at the end of each cycle. The data from the google forms is displayed in a chart for an easy comparison of competitor's answers through each cycle.

Alexis

Alexis is a 17-year-old, low income, Bosnian female. She is a senior with a 3.0 GPA and has earned 27.5 of 28.5 attempted credits. She is a second-year DECA member and has an 81% Georgia Milestones testing average. Last year, Alexis enjoyed the competition experience but did not place. This year, she is excited to participate in the study and is determined to improve her skills so that she can place at the competition. General observations noted about Alexis during the course of the study are that she is crafty with words, confident, sometimes distracted, and requires motivation and redirection. She is a leader but often seems overwhelmed with life and her many obligations. Alexis's experience is described in her own words from the goal setting and reflection electronic google form in Table 12.

Table 12

Alexis's Reflection Questionnaire

Alexis	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Q1: What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?	I learned more of the body language I should use when doing a role-play. Such as eye contact, keeping a comfortable atmosphere, allowing room for conversation, etc.	to be detailed and to be talkative	How to incorporate data and charts into my role-plays to ensure a higher score.
Q2: How was your overall growth this cycle?	I feel as if iâ€™ve evolved a little in the sense that iâ€™m more comfortable in conversation and getting into role-playing when doing a role-play.	I think it was very good in the sense that i learned a lot more about role-play like body language and tactics to use such as graphs and statistics	I think during this cycle I majorly learned how to present a role-play in certain ways to place 1-3
Q3: What things can you do to improve your role-play performance?	Learn more of the content and vocabulary to expand my choices in role-plays.	be more informative and use more information about marketing	Improve my speech pattern and have more confidence in my words.
Q4: What things can you do to improve your test performance?	Take more tests and get used to testing such long questions in short amounts of time.	get used to taking such a long test in such a short amount of time, such as taking more tests more frequently	Practice more online testing to get used to the amount of questions in a short amount of time.
Q5: How can your advisor help you improve?	Practice more role-plays with us.	practicing with us more	Practice with students one on one more to help them get the full experience and face the challenge head-on.

Melody

Melody is a 17-year-old, low income, African American, and Caucasian female. She is a senior with a 3.2 GPA and has earned 29 of 29 attempted credits. She is a first-year DECA member and has an 82% Georgia Milestones testing average. Melody took two marketing courses back to back in the fall and spring semesters. General observations noted about Melody during the course of the study were she is a hard worker, she wants to be successful, she has self-motivation, and she does not give up even when she is not growing. She is also influenced by her peers easily. While she struggled with assessment growth, she was great at taking role-play feedback and improving. Melody's experience is described in her own words from the goal setting and reflection worksheet in Table 13.

Table 13

Melody's Reflection Questionnaire

Melody	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Q1: What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?	How to organize my thought to perform a role-play and how to talk to a stranger about a pretend situation	so far i have learned how to properly introduce myself and pick up on the key indicators but i need to work on explaining how to relate indicators to my situations and coming up with solutions	I learned how to connect my indicators to any scenario and situation
Q2: How was your overall growth this cycle?	I think I grew a lot with the talking (role-play) part and grew a little in the marketing knowledge part	Ive been learning alot in a short period of tiem	I feel my growth was okay i could have done better with more effort
Q3: What things can you do to improve your role-play performance?	actually go through each option to do in a role-play..do brochures power points and how to organize it	Do a better job of finding solutions	watch more people do role-plays to get ideas
Q4: What things can you do to improve your test performance?	Study what I get wrong and why	study more and do more practice test	study more quiz let and things about my overall topic
Q5: How can your advisor help you improve?	just analyze the options and go through step by step and different scenarios	I need to work on more role-plays and scenarios	more communication with changes because we don't always pay attention

Eric

Eric is a 17-year-old, low income English Language Learner, and reading recovery male competitor. He is a senior with a 2.1 GPA and has earned 27 of 28 attempted credits. He is a second-year DECA member and has a 70% Georgia Milestones testing average. Eric took his second marketing class this year; however, he has also taken an entrepreneurship class. Eric technically placed in the competition last year but was disqualified because he did not know that he could not use his notes and had them in the prep room. This year, he is looking forward to going back and doing well in the competition. Researcher observations are that Eric is intelligent and speaks well. He struggles with writing and testing. He also had abysmal attendance, which made practicing very difficult. He attended school 81/107 days; however, he often missed his marketing class even on present days as he did not check in until after that class. Eric may have been one of the most confident competitors; however, he lacked the desire to fully prepare as he didn't find many of the components necessary. He was more like a "wing it" kind of student. Eric's experience is described in his own words from the goal setting and reflection worksheet in Table 14.

Table 14

Eric's Reflection Questionnaire

Eric	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Q1: What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?	I can't just wing it	Preparation is a key to success	How to market and be more responsible I learned a lot
Q2: How was your overall growth this cycle?	My overall growth was amazing, I met people from all different walks of life and made friends forever.	I feel like I would've placed a couple of times if I had another year	My growth was something I didn't expect cause I learned so much that I could use in the future
Q3: What things can you do to improve your role-play performance?	Prepare better and do more practice role-plays	If I had another year I would've took it more seriously and practiced more	Practice more often, be confident and learn as much as you can
Q4: What things can you do to improve your test performance?	Study more often	Better then first year my test scores were pretty good but I would have tried to learn more of the excelled terms that were used.	Study, don't be so ease, listen when the teacher more often
Q5: How can your advisor help you improve?	Give me more feedback	Give feedback, but you improve every year so just keep doing you	She did really good with trying to prepare us but we were lazy

Ming

Ming is a 16-year-old, low income, English Language Learner and an Asian female. She is a junior with a 3.8 GPA and has earned 22.5 of 22.5 attempted credits. She is a second-year DECA member and has a 92% Georgia Milestones testing average. Ming took her first marketing course this year. Last year, Ming did not place in the competition, and though her testing shows that she generally tests well, she did not initially test well for DECA. Researcher observations include that Ming is a hard-working overachieving student. She sometimes talks very fast, stutters, and gets flustered. She takes excellent notes when preparing, and she was always ahead of most of her peer competitors with the competition list. Ming often sought extra practice time with me, and she was great at motivating her peers to do better. Ming's experience is described in her own words from the goal setting and reflection worksheet in Table 15.

Table 15

Ming's Reflection Questionnaire

Ming	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Q1: What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?	I understand that market identification is finding your target market through their demographics, habits, psychographics, and lifestyle. I understand that by providing a customer centric culture at your store allows for better service and overall an increase in profit	How to introduce yourself when you already know the judge	How to communicate effectively and articulating my words. How to be engaging to my interviewer
Q2: How was your overall growth this cycle?	It was good	The most growth	It was great.
Q3: What things can you do to improve your role-play performance?	Be more creative and create more pictures and graphs	Slow down	Respond better to the interviewer
Q4: What things can you do to improve your test performance?	Do more practice exams and look at marketing quizlets in my category	Study more	Use quizlets
Q5: How can your advisor help you improve?	More role-plays	More role-play practice	Give me more feedback

Paula

Paula is a 17-year-old, low income, English Language Learner, and a Hispanic female. She is a senior with a 3.0 GPA and has earned 27 of 28.5 attempted credits. She is a first-year DECA member and has an 83% average Georgia Milestones testing average. Paula took her first marketing course this year, and she has completed the entrepreneurship pathway. Paula has grown significantly over the past year. She was doing poorly in all of her classes, but since joining DECA has maintained A's in all of her classes. Her transformation has been very impressive. Researcher notes include that Paula is a self-starter. She keeps a notebook full of work and even found her own role-plays to practice by herself at home. She is very patient, open, and easy to teach. She absorbs information quickly and is a great speaker. Paula struggles with the testing portion but put a great deal into improving her score. Paula's experience is described in her own words from the goal setting and reflection worksheet in Table 16.

Table 16

Paula's Reflection Questionnaire

Paula	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Q1: What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?	So far, preparing and studying the performance indicators. Learning the performance indicators has allowed me to have more creative control of my ideas for the role-plays.	Communication skills and presentation	Different ways to organize and sort my ideas and how to research information.
Q2: How was your overall growth this cycle?	I think I'm grasping the idea and set-up of a role-play and explaining myself properly and concisely.	I would say a lot better than when we first started, but I still need to develop how to properly express my ideas.	Since the beginning of the semester I've learned a lot to sort my ideas and communicate in the best way I can.
Q3: What things can you do to improve your role-play performance?	My attitude and presentation	Practice 2-on-2 conversations, enthusiasm and approach.	Practice smiling, making my voice heard, and learning to get comfortable with my topic and environment.
Q4: What things can you do to improve your test performance?	Focusing on the main indicators	Study certain terminology	Focus on the topics I'm unsure about and practice using them in a role-play.
Q5: How can your advisor help you improve?	Going over how to present all my ideas coherently, well-organized and with pep.	Examples like you did earlier today	By presenting examples and situations (like you did in state) they really helped my understand the format and flow of the role-play and topics.

Kathia

Kathia is a 16-year-old, low income, gifted, Hispanic female. She is a junior with a 3.8 GPA and has earned 25 of 25 attempted credits. She is a first-year DECA member and has a 92% average Georgia Milestones testing average. Kathia took her first marketing course this year. Researcher observations include Kathia's great work ethic, her effortless speech, and her overall mature presence when conducting role-play. She brings a great deal of life knowledge and does extensive research to master her role. Though younger than most of the other competitors in the study, Kathia is a positive influence and was great with group feedback.

Kathia's experience is described in her own words from the goal setting and reflection worksheet in Table 17.

Table 17

Kathia's Reflection Questionnaire

Kathia	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Q1: What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?	The most important things I learned was that presentation, speech, and confidence is very important in professional meetings.	I learned to clarify my transitions and speech to keep my discussions easier to follow.	I learned good communication and interpersonal skills
Q2: How was your overall growth this cycle?	I grew in my background knowledge on finances and the factors that influence many business decisions.	I began to learn professionalism along with learning to believe in myself at whatever it is I do.	I grew a lot in becoming more involved and out going
Q3: What things can you do to improve your role-play performance?	I can improve my performance by making my points clear and my information condensed and valuable.	I can gain better background information on even more performance indicators and better connect them with each situation.	I can better practice and prepare myself more
Q4: What things can you do to improve your test performance?	I can continue to expand my background knowledge and understand important concepts in my events.	I can, as previously mentioned, just gain better background information on PIs.	I can study more and continue to advance my background knowledge
Q5: How can your advisor help you improve?	Continue to give me good constructive criticism.	Practice role-plays and constructive criticism on what information is missing and what ideas I may add.	By continuing to give me tips and good practices

Jade

Jade is a 17-year-old, gifted, African American female. She is a senior with a 3.9 GPA and has earned 31 of 31 attempted credits. She is a second-year DECA member and has a 93% average Georgia Milestones testing average. Jade is a marketing management pathway completer. Last year, she placed at the region competition and was excited to work hard and hopefully do even better her senior year. Researcher observations include Jade's dedication to preparing for the future, seriousness about her studies, professionalism, and willingness to learn. She is quiet yet observant and a fast learner. Jade's experience is described in her own words from the goal setting and reflection worksheet in Table 18.

Table 18

Jade's Reflection Questionnaire

Jade	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Q1: What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?	Knowledge about marketing functions resurfaced, I discovered more about my timing and how to pace myself and expand my presentation.	I learned the importance of going above and beyond and providing more details of applying concepts to specific situations.	I learned how to think of more creative ideas to push a role-play above average.
Q2: How was your overall growth this cycle?	I significantly grew from the first times on body language and getting my ideas across and organized.	I learned significant, vital information for my role-play tactics.	I grew a little with helping my creativity and being more organized for role-plays.
Q3: What things can you do to improve your role-play performance?	I could slow down and think more about what I say rather than ramble, and pace myself to use the time completely.	I can expand more on my concepts with relating the broad picture to the specific scenario.	I can expand on concepts and play them in more specific ways to scenarios.
Q4: What things can you do to improve your test performance?	I can use more illustrations, relearn what I forgot in marketing principles and be more comfortable.	I can do exercises to jog my creativity when applying concepts to scenarios.	I can study more and utilize aids such as the Georgia deca practice tests and competition university.
Q5: How can your advisor help you improve?	My advisor can allow us to practice more with our peers to get more comfortable with presenting our ideas.	My advisor can provide exercises and sheets for/ with creative ways to respond to scenarios.	My advisor can practice with us more regularly, like once a week, in between the competitions/ conferences.

Chris

Chris is a 17-year-old, low income, English Language Learning, African male. He is a senior with a 3.4 GPA and has earned 28.5 of 28.5 attempted credits. He is a first-year DECA member and has a 83% Georgia Milestone testing average. Chris has not taken any marketing courses, but he has taken an Entrepreneurship course. Researcher observations include Chris's desire to be successful; however, his work ethic does not seem to match that. Chris thinks that the competition is more about social skills than knowledge acquisition. He has a fake it until you make it philosophy, and it shows. His confidence level and role-play ability do not match. Chris's experience is described in his own words from the goal setting and reflection worksheet in Table 19.

Table 19

Chris's Reflection Questionnaire

Chris	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Q1: What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?	Learn more about team work	How to be better at my role-play performance by my body language and how to get my point across, effective communication in role-plays.	I never thought I would be bonding with the other people on our chapter because we are all different but the important thing is just about growing through DECA and learning more about business
Q2: How was your overall growth this cycle?	It was decent	I think I've done some growth in learning to understand things and following them effectively to better myself like being able to explain myself in role-play a little better.	I learned a lot from Mrs.Woodley and DECA by going to these events and seeing people with different views and different backgrounds than me and it gave me a drive that I never really had to become better
Q3: What things can you do to improve your role-play performance?	Not stumble over my words	I can be more confident with my role by trying not to pause for too long and trying to elaborate on my responses.	Stop Being nervous
Q4: What things can you do to improve your test performance?	Study more	I can study the information and try to really concentrate and take some time to think about my responses	Take as many practice test as possible
Q5: How can your advisor help you improve?	Practice with me more	By helping me see what else I could possibly improve on my role-play.	She has done a great job with teaching us so thats all I could say

Kristin

Kristin is a 17-year-old, African American female. She is a senior with a 3.9 GPA and has a 92% Georgia Milestone testing average. She has earned 31.5 of 31.5 attempted credits. She is a first-year DECA competitor and is excited about participating in the competition. Researcher observations include Kristin's workload. In addition to her classes on campus, she is also a dual enrollment student and spends most of each day on a college campus. She is also in several other organizations. She is putting effort into DECA but it is clear that she is struggling to balance it all. Kristin is very intelligent, but her people skills need work. That was our focus while preparing for the role-play. She is very calculated and soft-spoken. Kristin's experience is described in her own words from the goal setting and reflection worksheet in Table 20.

Table 20

Kristin's Reflection Questionnaire

Kristin	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Q1: What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?	If I speak with confidence it makes look like I know exactly what what I am talking about.	I learned more about business and marketing and how it's applicable in so many aspects of my everyday life.	I need to speak with confident and not be focused on being sure that all my answers are right. Judges don't always know the information as well and being stuck on say the correct definitions of key indicators will keep my focus from what will make my role-play great.
Q2: How was your overall growth this cycle?	Good- I found a system for organizing my thoughts that makes my ideas flow clearer	I think I grew but I definitely need to work on my speaking. I find that when I speak I take awkward pauses and lose my train of thought.	I think the fact that I actually placed is a good enough indicator that I improved so much this cycle. I went in the role-play and this DECA season feeling uneasy but eventually you do the task so many times it just feels normal.
Q3: What things can you do to improve your role-play performance?	Connect my ideas and be MORE creative	Thing of creative ways to make my ideas "pop". Then change and adapt these ideas based on my role-play.	I think that I can just continue to think of creative ways to solve problems. A big struggle and insecurity of mine is that i'm not "creative enough" but creativity is very subjective. If I have an idea I think will make my role-play stand out I need to be confident in it and run with it. Being passionate about my ideas that I create leaves a good impressions on my judges.
Q4: What things can you do to improve your test performance?	study more	Definitely study more	Analyze how what I learn can be seen in my daily life, and study more when I'm going through my test.
Q5: How can your advisor help you improve?	Practice with me more	I think by helping me make sure I organize my thoughts in an effective way when brainstorming my role-plays.	I think that my advisor has done her best but can help me improve by giving more role-plays.

Karisa

Karisa is a 17-year-old, African American female. She is a senior with a 3.1 GPA and has a 78% Georgia Milestone testing average. She earned 29.5 of 29.5 attempted credits. She is first-year DECA competitor that joined DECA due to a work-based learning requirement. Since joining, she has made friends and decided to compete. Researcher observations include that while Karisa performs average academically, she has great common sense and people skills. She is outgoing, assertive, and a great leader. She gravitates to the role-play and does not like the testing portion but practices anyway. Karisa's experience is described in her own words from the goal setting and reflection worksheet in Table 21.

Table 21

Karisa's Reflection Questionnaire

Karisa	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Q1: What are the most important things that you learned this cycle?	The most important things I learned this cycle were the lessons and activities to help me fully understand the content.	I learned how to properly prepare for a situation with a time limit.	You need to be prepared for all outcomes and situations regarding your role-play.
Q2: How was your overall growth this cycle?	My overall growth this cycle was consistent and increased as the lesson and practice exams went on.	It was good because I was able to train myself to think under pressure.	The growth was mostly consistent as long as you continued to look over materials.
Q3: What things can you do to improve your role-play performance?	To improve my role-play performance, I would be assertive and more confident in what I was speaking .	I can help myself using a time limit to draw out my thoughts.	Using your more experienced peers to help is always a good resource.
Q4: What things can you do to improve your test performance?	To improve my test performance, I would try to retain as much information as possible from the lessons and activities.	I can improve my test performance by properly having the time to look over materials.	Since the questions are worded differently, look for associated words and cues to recognize the concept.
Q5: How can your advisor help you improve?	My advisor can help me improve by proving more role-plays and one-on-one training.	My advisor can help me improve by helping me find more resources to use to develop my ideas.	By using more out of the box practice, we can help the next competitors be great and have better opportunities.

The Judges Experiences

Five judges participated in this action research study. Judges received training in a YouTube video prior to the first local competition. Judges also had an orientation with the researcher to address any questions and to review the role-play expectations. Judges were asked to leave written and oral feedback on the judging sheets for each competitor as they judged them so that the information could be shared for the purpose of the study. Judges were also asked to provide instant feedback to competitors after their role-play event. Lastly, judges were debriefed in a short meeting with me where they were asked to share information about each competitor and overall feedback. All information is transcribed in this section. The following introductions of the judges are based on information that the judges shared and researcher reflections. Following the introductions, feedback from judging experiences will be shared. Like with competitors, the judge's names were changed to protect identities.

Sherry

Sherry is a 42-year-old Caucasian female. She is a computer science teacher, TSA advisors, and former NSA employee. Sherry has extensive industry experience and holds several leadership roles in the county. As a curriculum writer and pathway builder, she is very creative. Researcher observations include her passion for students and developing advanced STEM pathways. Despite her busy schedule, she is always available to help students. The following notes provide Sherry's feedback to students. Sherry was responsible for judging Kristin and Chris.

Reflection #1/Competition 1. *I'm happy that the students are almost just as lost as I am lol. DECA feels different than TSA, and I understand the need for them to be marketable. Kristin was all over the place. I had to bounce around the score sheet to figure out how to give her points based on her presentation. I don't think she hit each performance indicator. If that is how she will present, she needs to be prepared to be interrupted. She was not prepared lol. She is well-spoken but shy. It doesn't matter that much if she doesn't have good information. No one is buying what she is selling. She also didn't take the time to summarize.*

Chris was more lost then Kristin. It seems as though he is accustomed to getting his way with charm. But a nice smile and no knowledge won't get him far. He needs prepared information about the nature of positive customer relations. He overused "like you know". I liked the way he pointed out and addressed each performance indicator; although not fully grasped he touched on them. He had some trouble articulating certain words but he handled questions well. He just needs to practice delivery and go more in-depth on responses to show grasp of the materials.

Overall, feedback both need to prepare their responses, speak confidently, make eye contact, avoid looking around the room while speaking, and smile.

Reflection #2/Competition 2. *This time, Chris gave a great handshake and spoke well. He didn't present any charts or visual materials. He didn't present a chart of accounts and discuss what category they fall in. He needs to better understand accounting. He talked about spreadsheets but not in the context of accounting. He also needs to ask for the time to process questions if needed and elaborate on his answers.*

The first thing I noticed with Kristin is the need to provide an overview. Her performance indicators and fake PowerPoint were great. She had a great pace, and she was informative, knowledgeable, confident, and polite. She addressed problems systematically. Next time she needs to hit her main points a little harder and provide product examples for specific situations. More specifically, provide applicable examples and incorporate the functions of marketing too. Overall, she was knowledgeable, confident, and creative.

Reflection #3/Competition 3. *I guess they saved the best for last. Kristin did good. She was prepared and clearly spoken. She had a good handshake and manners and I like that she provided fake references. This time, she could elaborate on specific situation because she spoke* *in general terms and didn't connect to the role-play She needs to use statistics and information from the scenario.*

Chris had a great introduction and handshake. He really needs to focus on maintaining good eye contact and not reading from notes as much. He did a great job selling himself. He discussed the global economy, product awareness, aesthetics for all groups and marketing. He also covered the balance sheet and provided a visual example of it. Overall, there is a big difference from where they started until now. I love the organization this last time. Overall feedback, make good eye contact and provide detailed information.

Geraldine

Geraldine is a 38-year-old African American female. She is a new marketing teacher and DECA advisor. Prior to teaching marketing, Geraldine was a business teacher and has years of business industry experience. As a new marketing teacher, Geraldine was able to use the DECA guide and be very open and objective with her feedback. She learned a lot during the study and she had some great fresh perspectives. Researcher observations include her being overwhelmed with so much information related to DECA. Starting a new job in the fall and having so much to keep up with in the classroom and with DECA can be overwhelming. The following notes provide Geraldine's feedback to students and the researcher's dialogue with her. Geraldine judged Alexis and Melody.

Reflection #1/Competition 1. *It is interesting to see students in this element. They are so different when they are in class. This is such a great way to break them out of their shell. I need to start doing some of these activities in class. Alexis had a lack of understanding regarding the terms. This prevented her ability to elaborate on certain points. She needs to know key marketing terms such as the 4 P's of marketing which is the marketing mix. She relies* *on her notes too much which is strange because she didn't have good notes. It is clear that she knows much of this information but needs to improve her terminology and delivery.*

Melody needs to slow down. She has great ideas. She needs to take her time to explain herself thoroughly. I loved her energy. She, too, needs to improve her terms. She can't just say "stuff". She needs to use terms like global economy, branding, and customer behaviors. She also needs better transitions and not to say things like "something like that." She had a decent understanding of the 4 P's. There is a lot of work to be done here though. Overall, for a marketing competition, both girls need to work to present themselves better and articulate their thoughts in a better way with terminology. They also need to work on their flow and delivery of information.

Reflection #2/Competition 2. *Alexis needs to continue developing her vocabulary. She also needs to start with more confidence. She said "I feel like" and "like", "uh", and "um". She might benefit from a quick lesson in code switching. I do like that when she messes up, she pauses, smiles and continues. While she did hit each indicator, she needs to provide a little more background in the beginning of the role-play event. She also lacked visual creativity. She had great body language and eye contact. Not all points were used in the proper context but she is improving and providing effort.*

Melody did much better this time with her pacing. Her ideas were impressive again. She took her time explaining things. She still needs to work on using filler words. I can tell that she worked to improve her vocabulary, and she can continue to work on that. She did use the 4 P's and the functions of marketing, which was impressive. Overall, both girls can continue to work on their flow, building vocabulary and speaking professionally.

Reflection #3/Competition 3. *Alexis addressed every category thoroughly. My only suggestion this time would be to slow down a little and use "we" and us instead of "you and yours". She used the SWOT analysis which was a great introduction into presenting the performance indicators. Her growth is amazing. She was very professional, dressed well, and confident. My overall impression in response to the questions she answered exceeds expectations.*

Melody also took control this time. I barely counted any filler words and she have a wonderful overview. She can still use some practice making her transition between performance indicators clear but overall, it was good. She had a great PowerPoint for me to see and she did a good job using marketing terms. My overall advice for the girls would be to just keep practicing and building their confidence because they are getting better each time. Oh, and to list all indicators before starting.

Carlos

Carlos is a 46-year-old Hispanic male. He is an administrator with experience with CTE teachers. Carlos oversees the Marketing, Law, Business, and Public Service pathways at a high school. Carlos has strong people skills, and as a native Spanish speaker, he was able to help some of our English Language Learning students with their speaking skills. Researcher observations include Carlos's passion for helping students advance and participate in extracurricular activities. Carlos was the judge for Paula and Eric.

Reflection #1./Competition #1. *This is not related but I just gotta say it. I was happy to see these two sign up for DECA. They barely even come to school and you got them here. That's dope Woodley. I can't wait to help turn them into beasts! They are going to be a great representation of our culture. It's all about equity, and this move will most definitely help* *increase our value here. After today, I know that we have a lot of work ahead but we got it! The first participant (Paula) needs to focus on what the role-play requires her to do. She provided a great plan but struggled to align her plans with the role-play objective. She also needs to speak up a bit more. She is very soft-spoken and can't be afraid to show some energy! She definitely knows entrepreneurship and studied for this. She just has to learn how to deliver it.*

Eric had a good handshake. He is overconfiden though. He did not clearly explain marketing and its connection with the global economy. He only briefly talked about the performance indicators, but he needs to make clear connections with the various functions. He gave little to no support with examples. I can tell that he has the ability to articulate, but he seems to have a getting by, and that isn't going to work here. He has to get organized and have a plan. Compared to Paula he isn't nearly on the same level. He must be more specific. Overall they both need to focus on the weak spots that I talked to them about and get better.

Reflection #2/Competition 2. **Paula'***s plan for improvement was fire! She had great examples for the above and beyond. You can tell that she is really into this thing. She could actually cut back a little bit so she has more time for the grand finale. Her visuals were fire too. She just needs to keep practicing at this point. It was one indicator that she crushed. It was identify the company's unique selling proposition. You can tell that she knows this stuff because she gave a detailed answer on how the company stands apart.*

My man Jose was dressed for success this time! He was confident and made good eye contact. He mentioned an app and gave details on how it would be used as a marketing strategy which was awesome. He had an average opening, covered performance indicators by point with general comments. He needs to expand his ideas. He could also use more assertiveness. His closing was weak because he kind of just stopped with no summary or wow factor. Overall, they *need to take what I gave them and keep working on it, along with following your outline for them. Next time I will be more critical. Make them tough!*

Reflection #3/Competition 3. *Their growth with this whole thing is dope Woodley. Camila was fire. She nailed the performance indicators. She created a rewards program, and I want hire her lol. She has to make sure to treat me like the customer if that is what the role play is. She did great controlling the conversation. She needs to try and limit "ums" and "ands" when talking. She can take a deep breath in between thoughts too. Overall she did a great job.*

Jose has great potential. He was well organized but he jumped straight into the role-play without a good intro. He could use some more vocal expression and enthusiasm! He also needs more eye contact and to take on the role more. This definitely seems like the most he has prepared, but he still needs to practice to make it all come together. Maybe a firmer handshake too. If they improve this much for their real competition, they should be straight. Overall, they have something to be proud of!

Cynthia

Cynthia is a 31-year-old Asian female. She is a healthcare science teacher, HOSA advisor, and former hospital administrator. Cynthia has a strong sense of the hospitality field from her years working in the hospital setting. Researcher observations include her attention to detail when judging. She was very vigilant when it came to addressing each performance indicator for the role-play. She judged Ming and Kathia.

Reflection #1/Competition 1. *I really wanted to focus on the performance indicators and 21st-century skills on the rubric. Ming did a great job guiding me through the performance indicators. She is a little rushed and needs to slow down. She also needs to strengthen her introduction and conclusion. When it comes to marketing, she might want to think of* *promotional methods that don't cost so much. While her ideas were well developed in terms of thought, they were not all practical. Ming also overemphasized her notes which seems a little contradictory when I say it but, it was rudimentary knowledge after hearing it so many times. She identified with the role-play and inspired. She just needs to make it more organic from beginning to end.*

It is evident that Kathia is a good student. She presents well and has a strong, smart presence. She had thorough notes but she should not depend on them as much. She could also expand upon answers more related to the performance indicators. She could develop a rapport with customers and determine more ways of reinforcing the company's image through employee performance. She needs to show more creativity in her answers and consider the customers perspective in answering the questions. I want her to go back to that outline and really refine her processes.

Reflection #2/Competition 2. *Ming had above average presentation skills this time. She still needs to improve her closing, and she also needs to project her voice and show more enthusiasm. She might also improve from expanding her introduction to make it feel more real. She is extremely intelligent but a little robotic in speech. She needs to be more personable and take on the character, all while delivering the information.*

Kathia had a good opening. Her presentation skills are above average for sure. The biggest criticism that I can offer is that she needs to watch her hands when she is talking. During the presentation, she can also relate the comments to initial overview. A tighter wrap up at the end would be great too. Jade was very knowledgeable about the importance of communication and she provided social media usage statistics. Overall, she was really well prepared. Lastly, even though we are women, we still want a strong, confident handshake.

Reflection #3/Competition 3. *Ming had great visuals and an excellent greeting this time. She hit every performance indicator and even had a visual graph showing the product life cycle, marketing functions and SWOT. She addressed buying behaviors and provided examples and even addressed them based on demographics. She had a great solution for her role-play and great answers to the questions at the end. Her growth is phenomenal.*

Kathia spoke like an adult this time! She navigated through the introduction, overview and performance indicators like a boss! She took her time answering questions, made good eye contact and had a good handshake. I know that you should be the proud one lol but I'm proud of her growth. Overall, they just need to refine their practice and keep growing!

Kevin

Kevin is a 74-year-old Caucasian male. He is a former DECA board member and has extensive experience in the business and financial sectors. Kevin has judged countless DECA competitions at the local, state, and international levels. Researcher observations include his extensive knowledge of role-playing events and his ability to break down each area of strength and weaknesses to students. Kevin took the time to provide me with great advice and tips for the competitors. He emphasized the importance of standing out, having energy, and overall being enthusiastic. He said that students not only have to show a knowledge of the content, but they need to be entertaining and likable to the judges. I purposely paired the strongest and weakest competitor with him in hopes of understanding his feedback and applying it to all students.

Reflection #1/Competition 1. Jade had a great introduction. She addressed marketing in a global economy, economic growth, and specializations. She also addressed customer behavior and in addition to the performance indicators. Showing a wide knowledge of topics can never hurt. Her presence is strong and inviting, and she flows well through the role-play. She can work on her wow factor and enthusiasm.

Karisa was not very confident in her answers. She needed a reminder to address the performance indicators. She went straight into providing a weak solution to the problem. She needs to practice and become more comfortable with speaking in this setting. She also needs to make eye contact. I have seen worst but she has a long way to go. I advised her to watch a lot of performances on YouTube to get her more comfortable with the role-play. Hopefully, she can practice more with her peers as well.

Reflection #2/Competition 2. Jade had a thorough explanation of the performance indicators. In fact, her entire role-play was thorough from start to finish. In efforts to make her stronger, I guess I need to supply advice. She could share more ideas to market the product. She could also become more creative with her visual aid. Possibly provide a business card, fake resume, fake PowerPoint for show. She's got it. Practice until you can't get it wrong!

Karisa grew a little. She has to try not to read from the paper when talking to the client. She did do a great job thinking on her feet. Also, this time, she was much more confident and friendly. Her introduction was good, but she needs to focus more on the topic at hand and not so much on verbal or written communication. Overall she needs to improve at a much faster rate to be competition ready.

Reflection #3/Competition 3. Jade had a very clear, focused, and thoughtful presentation. It was well organized, and she followed performance indicators to perfection. She also related each to strategies and plans. She answered the questions well and also referred them back to the strategies. Overall, I told her to continue to build her knowledge bank, be enthusiastic and "see ya on stage".

Karisa provided a logical, creative, and confident presentation this time! She used "I believe" to show ownership and had a firm handshake. She can work on not being repetitive. I think she needs to learn between the introduction being short and performance indicator time being longer. She did have good guidance through the actual performance indicators. Overall, the most you can hope for as a teacher is growth. You need to continue to push her. You need to be able to push all of them.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 provided the experiences of competitors, judges and myself as the action researcher. This information was synthesized to provide the reader with insight into how the study was conducted and how it was received by all participants. Competitors and Judges analysis from the role-play study provides details of experiences as they progressed throughout the action research cycles. The information was an essential part in the implementation of changes at the end of each cycle. The information, along with the researcher's observations, provided guidance in answering the research questions as well as recommendations for future researchers and implications for DECA advisors. The next chapter will present the research questions and study findings for the DECA competitive events preparation program.

CHAPTER 5

COMPETITIVE PREPARATION PROGRAM: FINDINGS FROM THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of this action research study was to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators through the implementation of the DECA competition preparation program. Currently, there is a lack of research regarding the instruction for DECA competitive events. Therefore a competitive preparation program was designed to improve the role-play event instructional practices for local competitions. Through the competitive events preparation program, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed for this action research study. Chapter 5 will present the data and analysis for the study findings to answer the overarching research question as we as the sub-research questions that guided the study.

Overarching Research Question

In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?

Sub-research Questions

1. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?
2. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role-play?
3. How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program?

Discussion of the Findings

Inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning were utilized to answer the action research questions. Inductive reasoning is associated with qualitative studies when the data collected is saturated through a rigorous analytic process by the researcher. Inductive reasoning makes specific observations and then draws a general conclusion, while deductive reasoning shares a specific conclusion that follows a general theory. Using both methods is complementary in research because the methods are needed to illuminate qualitative findings (Metler, 2012). In addition, the approaches can be combined to fully understand the topic of study. Due to the nature of action research, the questions, instruments, implementation, and analysis are driven by the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework for this study was presented in Chapter 1.

Inductive reasoning correlates with everyday reasoning and, it is appropriate if an action researcher wants to use reasoning to display results. It can be studied by asking simple questions or providing complex information and asking the subject to judge. It is also used to categorize, estimate probability, and make decisions. The process of inductive reasoning starts with a set of empirical observations, looking for patterns within those observations, followed by creating theories about the patterns (Heit & Feenly, 2007).

The deductive reasoning process starts with a theory and develops into a hypothesis from the theory, followed by obtaining and analyzing information to test the hypotheses. This process is generally used to analyze quantitative data. The deductive reasoning process includes choosing a theory, narrowing the theory to a specific hypothesis, collecting data, analyzing data, and confirming or rejecting the hypothesis (Mertler, 2012). In addition to other methods of analyzing data that were outlined in my triangulation of research methods, descriptive statistics were used. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze pre and post-test scores and role-play scores as those tangible scores most greatly impacted my instruction for the DECA competition preparation program's effectiveness. In addition to showing us answers to the research questions, the data also provided insight about what worked and did not work in the study and allowed me to improve my instructional practices based on new knowledge, a core tenant of action research (Mertler, 2012).

I chose action research because it allowed me, the researcher, to gain a more thorough understanding of my instructional practices and measure the impact of the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program that imbued practices of contextual teaching and learning (Sears, 2002) with a focus on problem-based learning (Albion, 2000). Action research focuses on the social reality that is occurring, and through cycles, develops the solutions to problems (Reason & Bradbury, 2013). Through my three cycles of research, I was able to problem-solve while reflecting after each cycle. Through the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, I was able to improve my instructional practices. Subsequently, students' knowledge of performance indicators was improved, which can be witnessed through their standardized test scores, role-play scores, and my increasingly effective instruction methods.

Data Collection

Multiple instruments were utilized to collect qualitative and quantitative data during this action research study. The instruments that were included in the study were role-play practices, practice exams, and the narrative reflection responses from students and judges. The pre-tests, post-tests, and scores throughout each cycle allowed me to see how my instructional practices were affecting student knowledge. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze scores for the role-play and test scores to examine the overall growth of the competitors. The reflections were submitted by the competitors, judges, and researcher at the end of each cycle. In addition, the reflections provided analytic insight from a thematic analysis on how my instructional practices could be developed to improve my instructional practice.

The focus of action research is to improve teacher practice (Mertler, 2014); therefore, I chose the triangulation protocol to analyze multiple information points to enhance credibility. This study's triangulation protocol focuses on the areas that influence teacher practice improvement: Pre and post-test scores, pre and post-test role-play scores, and reflection reports. Figure 22 illustrates the instruments used for the triangulation of data.

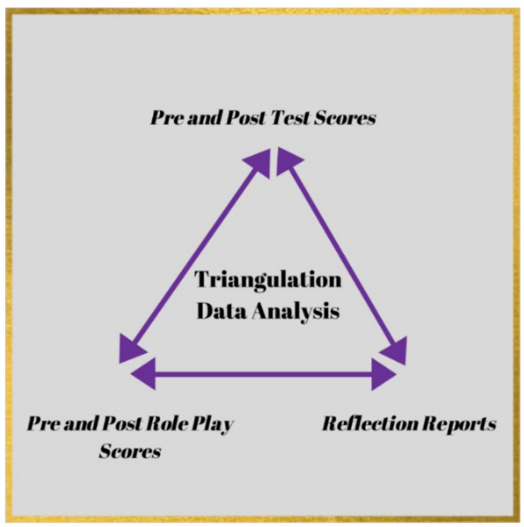


Figure 22: Triangulation of Data Methods

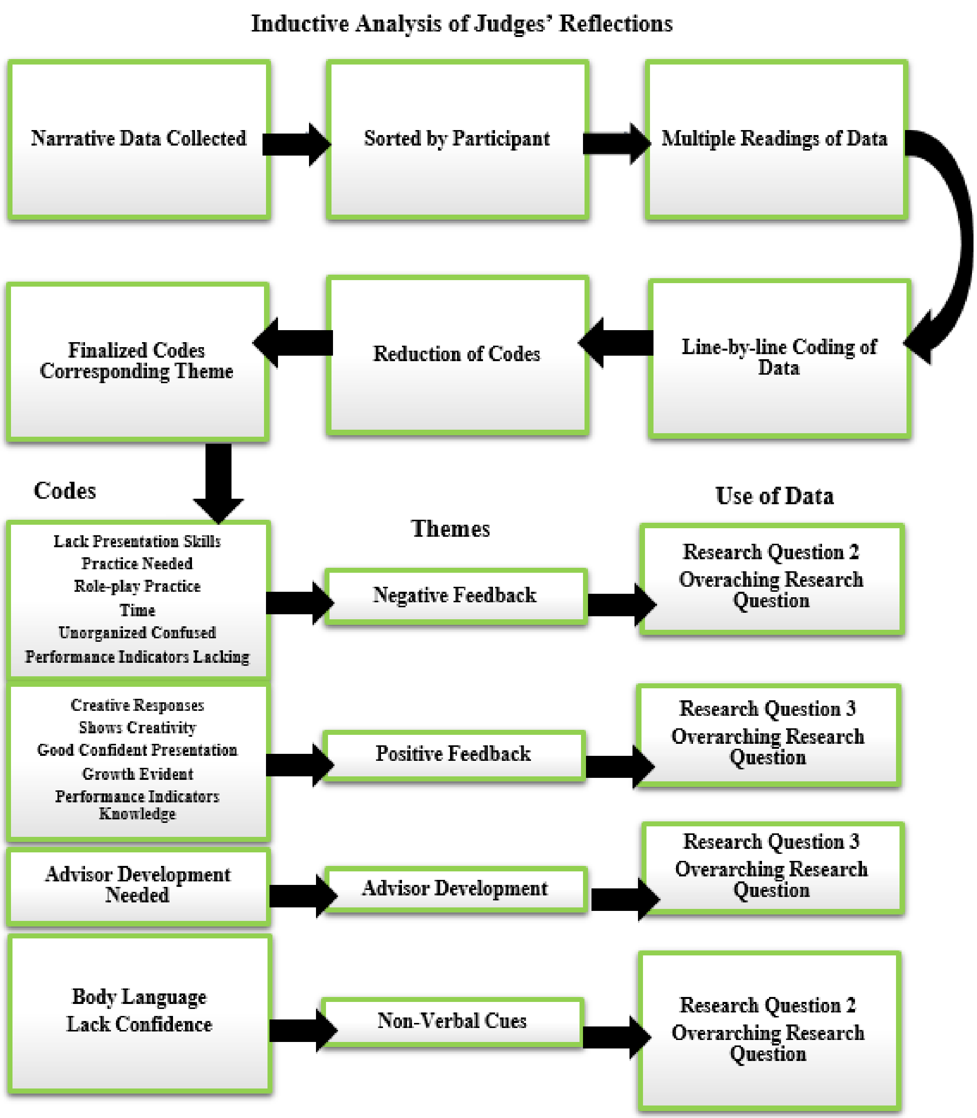
Data Analysis

The data collected for the action research study was quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data analyzed were the role-play and exam test scores. During the action research cycles, test scores and role-play scores were added to one Microsoft Excel spreadsheet which was used to process all of the quantitative data. Once the study concluded, the data was separated to represent the test and role-play scores individually. Descriptive statistics were analyzed, which included frequency, growth percentage, weekly growth, cycle growth, and growth by competitor charts.

The qualitative data was likewise processed and analyzed, utilizing Microsoft Excel. The thematic analysis incorporated two types of analytic applications, inductive and deductive coding. The justification for using two approaches for analyzing the qualitative data was based on the pre-established categorical themes differentiating between the competitors and judges. Judges were asked to provide feedback which was later transcribed and coded, whereas competitors had pre-existing themes based on the reflection questions.

The inductive process included collecting judges' narrative responses, sorting the participant's responses, and then reading the data multiple times. The process concluded with line-by-line coding of the data, reduction of the codes and the development of related themes, and data use. The initial codes for the Judges' feedback contained twenty-two various codes. In order to refine and streamline the codes, redundant codes were combined appropriately. The codes were then categorized under four major themes that emerged during the analysis of data: negative feedback, positive feedback, advisor development, and non-verbal cues. Analyzing this data contributed to answering the research questions pertaining to student role-play performance (2) and the impact of implementation question (3). The use of data also contributed to answering the overarching question and provided useful information for future researchers.

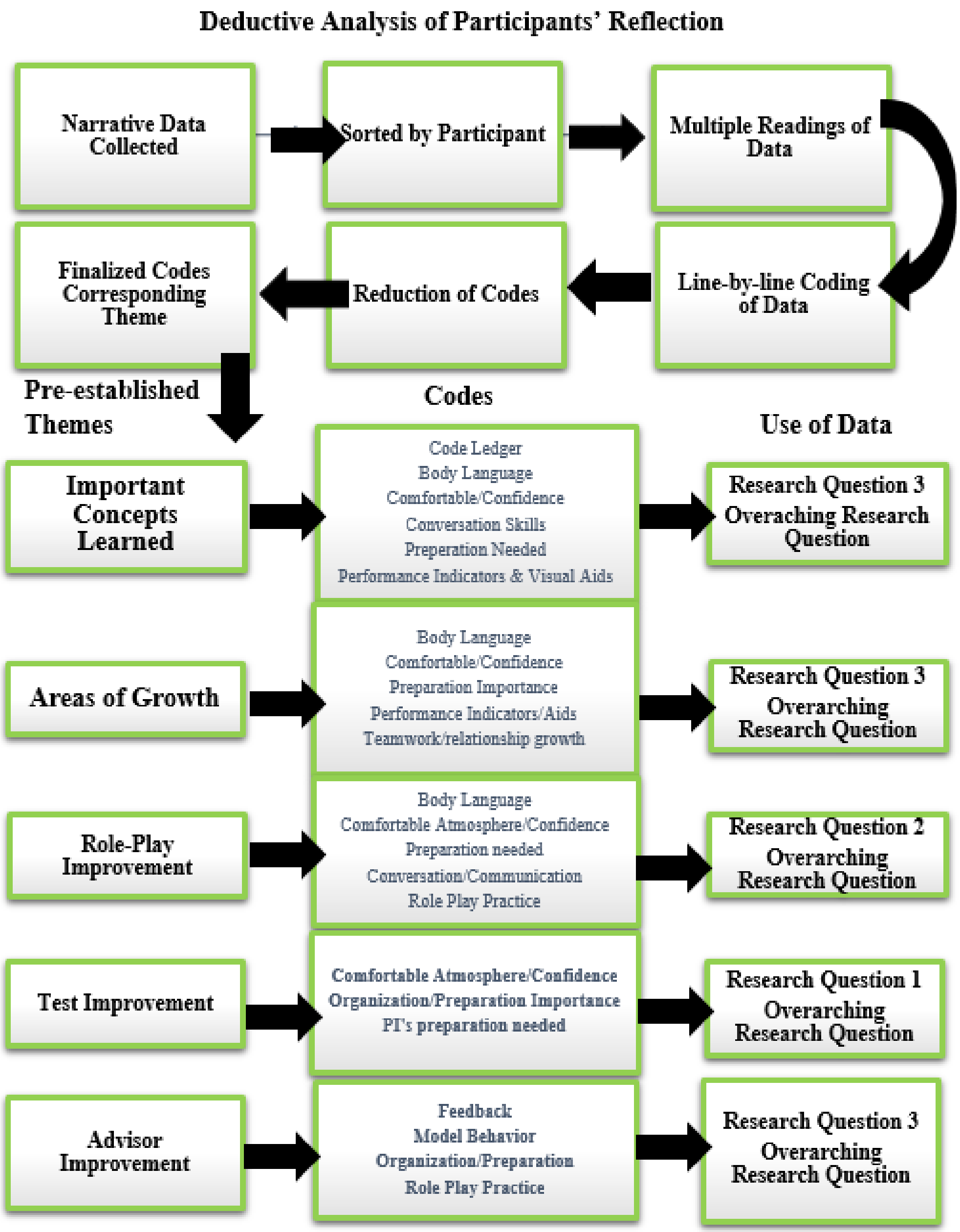
Once the narratives were coded line-by-line, it was read multiple times and assigned a category. A total of nine codes were created when the analysis was complete. The context of the narratives was taken into consideration prior to assigning it a theme. For example, a judge says, "the student needs to work on making eye-contact and shaking hands." The natural inclination would be to code this phrase as a *lack of presentation skills*, but further analysis reveals that it should be assigned under the *body language* level rather than a *lack of presentation skills*. *Body language* was cited as a code seventeen times, which presented an emerging theme. The following figure illustrates the coding process used to provide findings from the Judges' Reflections.



Note. Adapted from Cook (2015).

Figure 23. Inductive Analysis/Open Coding

The deductive process included collecting competitors' narrative responses, sorting participants' responses, and then reading the data multiple times. The process concluded with line-by-line coding of the data, reducing the codes, assigning codes to pre-established themes based on the competitors' reflection questions, and defining the use of data. The initial codes for the competitors' feedback across the five feedback questions contained thirty-five various codes. Like with the inductive process, to refine and streamline codes, redundant codes were combined appropriately. The codes were then assigned to pre-existing themes that matched the research questions: Important concepts learned, areas of growth, role-play improvement, test improvement, and advisor feedback. The following figure illustrates the coding process used to provide findings from the competitors' reflections.



Note. Adapted from Cook (2015).

Figure 24. Deductive analysis of participants' reflections

Overall, the quantitative statistical analysis and the thematic analysis of the qualitative data were used to provide answers to the action research study. We will explore each question individually.

Research Question 1- DECA Exam

How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?

Numerical data collected from role-play and test scores, as well as narrative data collected from reflections, provided answers to research question 1. The qualitative data for question one provided descriptive statistics that included average exam scores across cycles, weekly exam scores, competitors exam scores, and a growth chart.

Quantitative Data

The numerical analysis began with analyzing the competitors' average exam scores across the cycles of the action research data collection process. Analyzing the average exam scores across cycles benefited the findings by giving panoramic insights into how the competitors' performed within each cycle compared to the other cycles. There was incremental growth between the cycles. Between cycle one and cycle two, there was a 9% increase. However, between cycle two and cycle three, there was a 7% increase representing an overall increase of exam scores by 16%. This also reflected that the competitors' exam scores increased more between cycle one and cycle two than it did between cycle two and cycle three. Figure 25 shows the increasing average exam scores for cycle 1, cycle 2, and cycle 3.

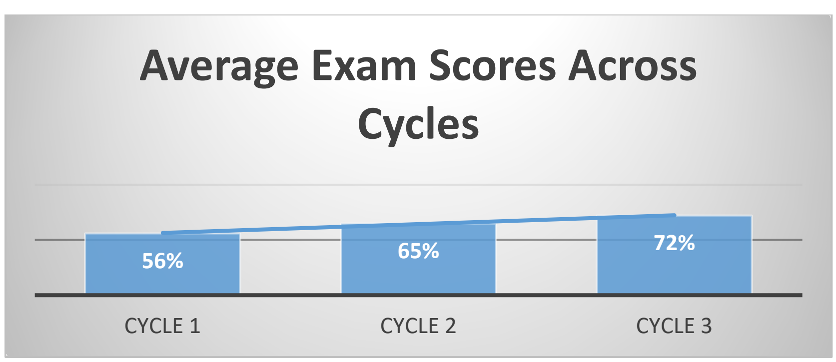
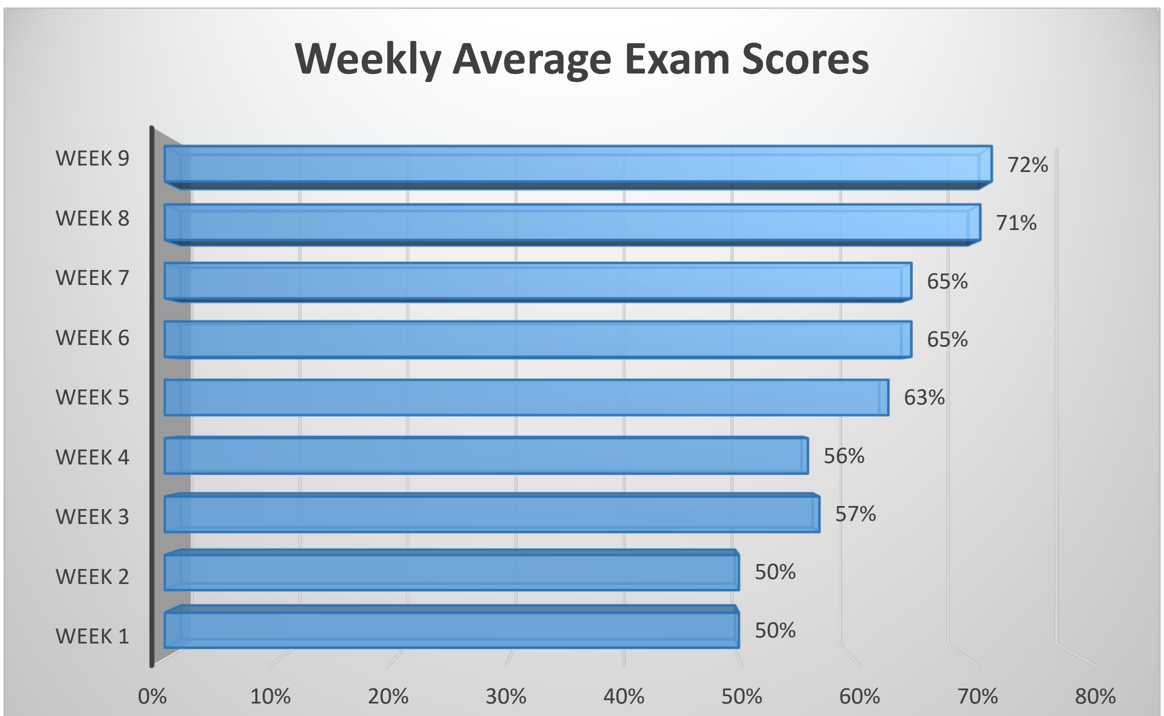


Figure 25. Average Exam Scores Across Three Cycles

Each exam score cycle comprised of three-weeks, comprising of nine individual weeks. It was important to analyze how the average exam scores fluctuated across the nine weeks. This examination found that the competitor exam scores consistently improved across all weeks except for the fourth week, which showed a 1% decrease. The largest growth percentage increase was between weeks two and three as well as four and five, showing a 7% increase respectively. Week seven and eight demonstrated a 6% increase. This resulted in a finding that on average the students' exam scores increased by 22% over the nine weeks. This is consistent with the analyzed finding across cycles. However, this provides a more in-depth perspective on which specific weeks the competitors demonstrated increased proficiency. Figure 26 reflects the weekly average exam scores for the competitors.



	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
Series1	50%	50%	57%	56%	63%	65%	65%	71%	72%

Figure 26. Weekly Average Exam Scores

The above figure demonstrates the average aggregated exam scores of the competitors. This assisted with being able to analyze the competitors as a whole. However, the group of competitors needed to be analyzed individually as well as better to measure the influence of the competitive preparation program. The following figure demonstrates the fluctuations of and between the individual competitors' exam scores for each week. Looking at each competitor's scores from week to week, there is a noticeable upward trend, which shows increased scores for most competitors.

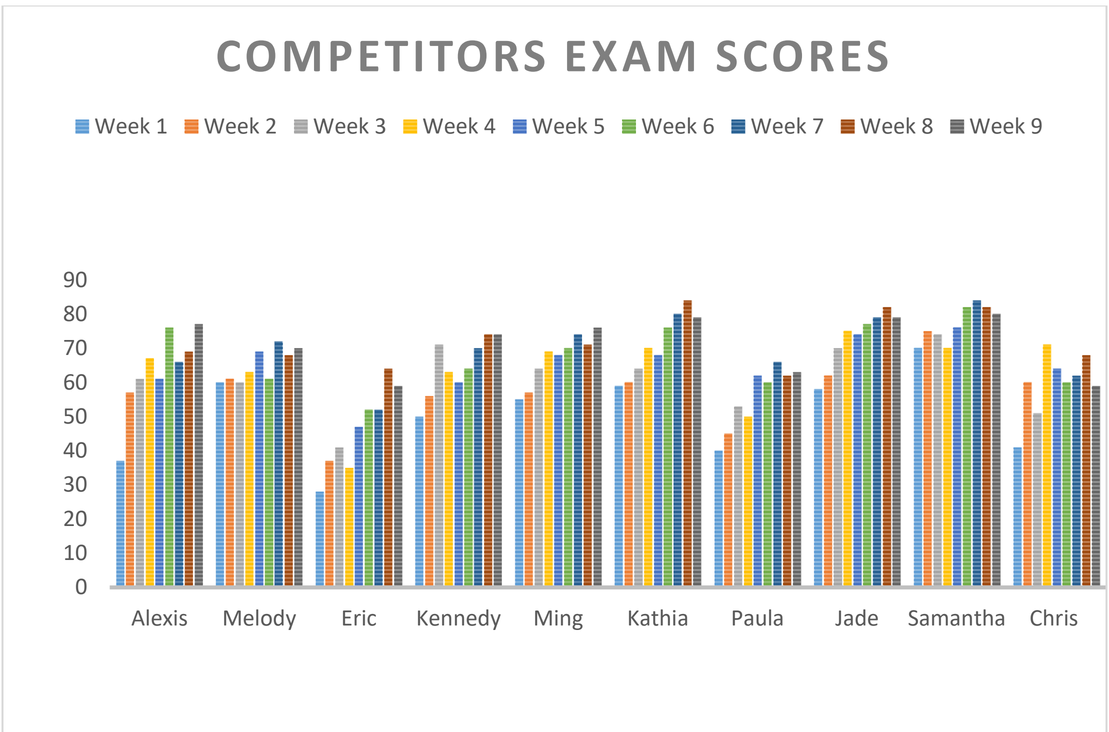


Figure 27. Competitors Exam Scores

Continuing with a micro-level analysis related to each individual competitor exam scores, an analysis of the competitor exam scores was examined and their percentage of growth compared to the other competitors within the group. Table 22 provides a breakdown of the competitor scores as well as the percentage of growth for each student. Looking at the growth, the data found that every competitor grew. The data also found that their base score in week one was higher than the average base score of 50% for the competitors that did not grow as much. For example, earning the lowest percentage growth, Samantha grew by 17%. However, her week one score was 70%, which was higher than the weekly average until week 8, as shown above in Figure 27.

Table 22

Competitors' Exam Scores and Percentage Growth

Competitor	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Growth %
Alexis	**0.37**	0.57	0.61	0.67	0.61	0.76	0.66	0.69	**0.77**	108%
Melody	**0.6**	0.61	0.6	0.63	0.69	0.61	**0.72**	0.68	0.7	20%
Eric	**0.25**	0.37	0.41	0.35	0.47	0.52	0.52	**0.64**	0.59	156%
Kennedy	**0.5**	0.56	0.71	0.63	0.6	0.64	0.7	0.74	**0.74**	48%
Ming	**0.55**	0.57	0.64	0.69	0.68	0.7	0.74	0.71	**0.76**	38%
Kathia	**0.59**	0.6	0.64	0.7	0.68	0.76	0.8	**0.84**	0.79	42%
Paula	**0.4**	0.45	0.53	0.5	0.62	0.6	**0.66**	0.62	0.63	65%
Jade	**0.58**	0.62	0.7	0.75	0.72	0.77	0.79	**0.82**	0.79	41%
Samantha	**0.7**	0.75	0.74	0.7	0.76	0.82	0.84	**0.82**	0.8	17%
Chris	**0.41**	0.6	0.51	0.71	0.64	0.6	0.62	**0.68**	0.59	66%

Qualitative

The qualitative narrative data for question one was processed through the deductive analytic approach. Inherent within the deductive analytic coding process is pre-established themes. The theme for question one was exam improvement. Therefore, the thematic analysis focused on exam improvement codes from the narrative data collected from the competitors. The following table provides the categorical theme, codes, and associated frequencies related to exam improvement. The performance indicators preparation needed represented 75% of the codes. This represents an important finding regarding the emphasis that the competitors placed on performance indicators preparation needed to successfully improve their exam scores.

Table 23

Exam Improvement Question Codes

Category	Code	Count	% of Total Codes
Exam Improvement	**Comfortable Atmosphere/Confidence**	3	6%
Exam Improvement	**Organization/Preparation Importance**	10	19%
Exam Improvement	**PI's preparation needed**	40	75%

As noted above, according to competitors' feedback, 75% cited that they needed to better prepare by studying performance indicators. Regarding Organization and preparation, 19% of students felt as though they needed to improve in that area. There were also students that lacked confidence and did not feel comfortable in the testing atmosphere representing 6% of coded responses. Figure 28 reflects the percentage of competitors' reflections related to exam score improvement codes.

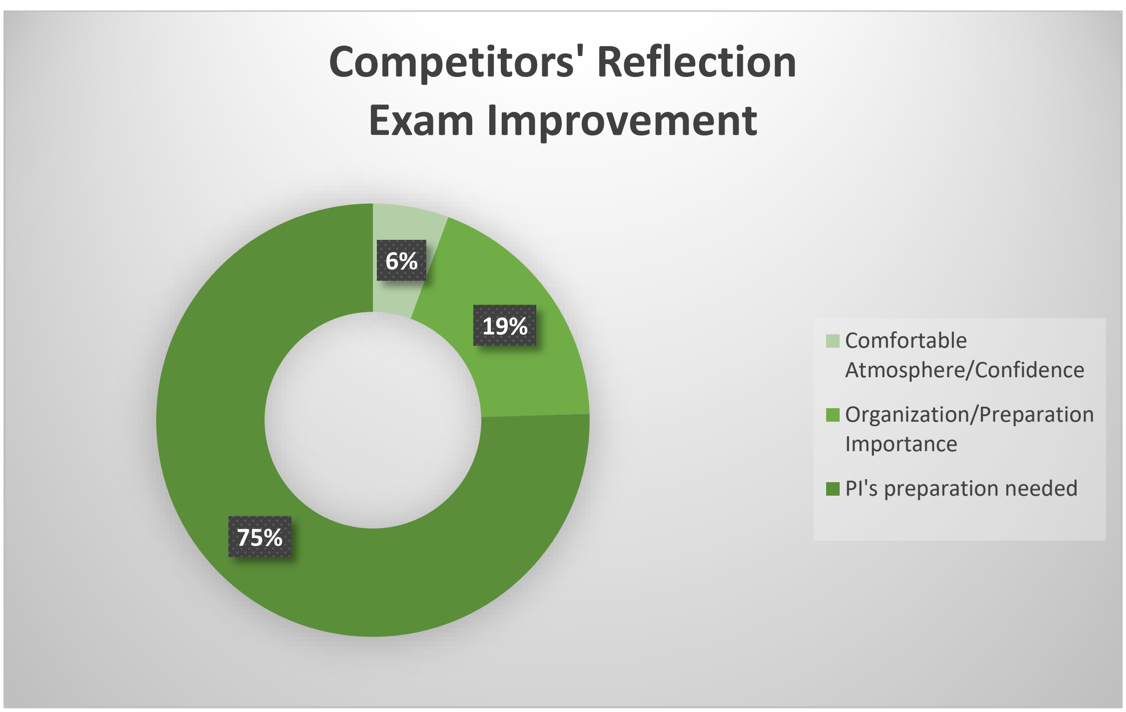


Figure 28. Competitors' reflection exam improvement

Conclusion

The numerical and narrative data for the DECA exam were analyzed to answer research question number 1: *How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?* The data reveals aggregated increased scores for most competitors over the nine weeks and participants' realization that they needed more preparation to improve their test scores. Some competitor scores peaked and then declined at the end of cycle two and start of cycle three. Later, in chapter 6, I will share how this data was used to improve my instructional practice.

Research Question 2- DECA Role-Play

How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role-play?

The following is the numerical and narrative data that was collected from DECA role-play scores and competitor reflections. The quantitative numerical data that will be discussed are the average role-play scores across cycles, weekly average role-play scores, and individual competitor role-play scores. The qualitative narrative data includes the thematic analysis of the competitors' and judges' categorical codes and frequencies, as well as their reflections.

Quantitative

The average role-play scores of the competitors across the cycles are presented below. Analyzing the average role-play scores across cycles provided the analytic insight into how the competitors' performed within each cycle and across cycles. Figure 29 shows the increasing average role-play scores for cycle 1, cycle 2, and cycle 3. Between cycle 1 and cycle two the competitors demonstrated an 18% increase in scores. Scores further increased by 11% between cycle 2 and cycle 3. This resulted in an overall increase of 29% between cycle 1 and cycle 3.

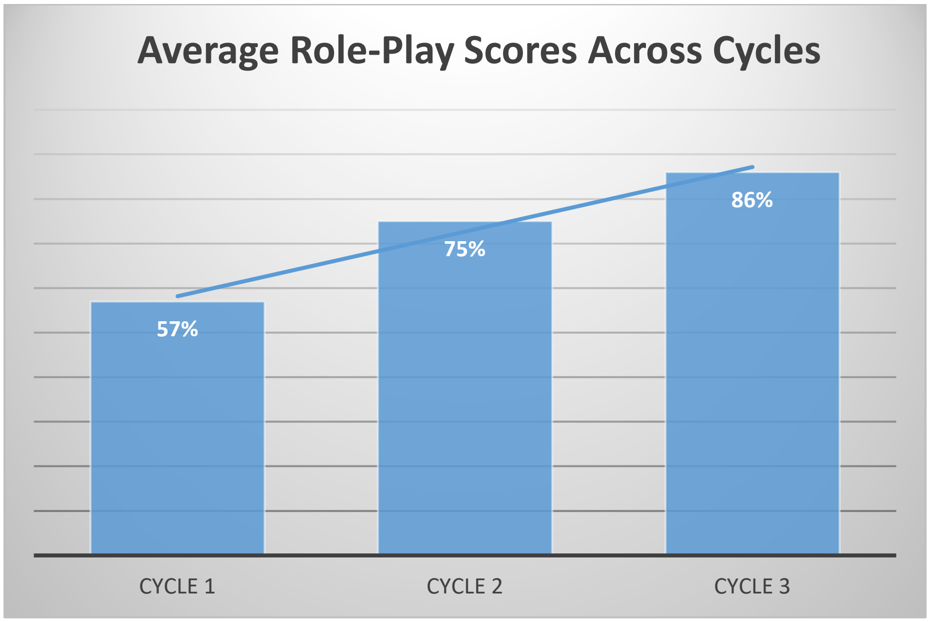


Figure 29. Average role-play scores across cycles

Figure 31 shows the increasing weekly average role-play scores for DECA competitors. The collected role-play score data demonstrated that, on average, the competitors' role-play scores increased by 22% over the course of the nine weeks. The data also found that there was a slight decrease after weeks three, six, and eight. This might be due to a limitation in the study and will be further discussed in chapter 6.

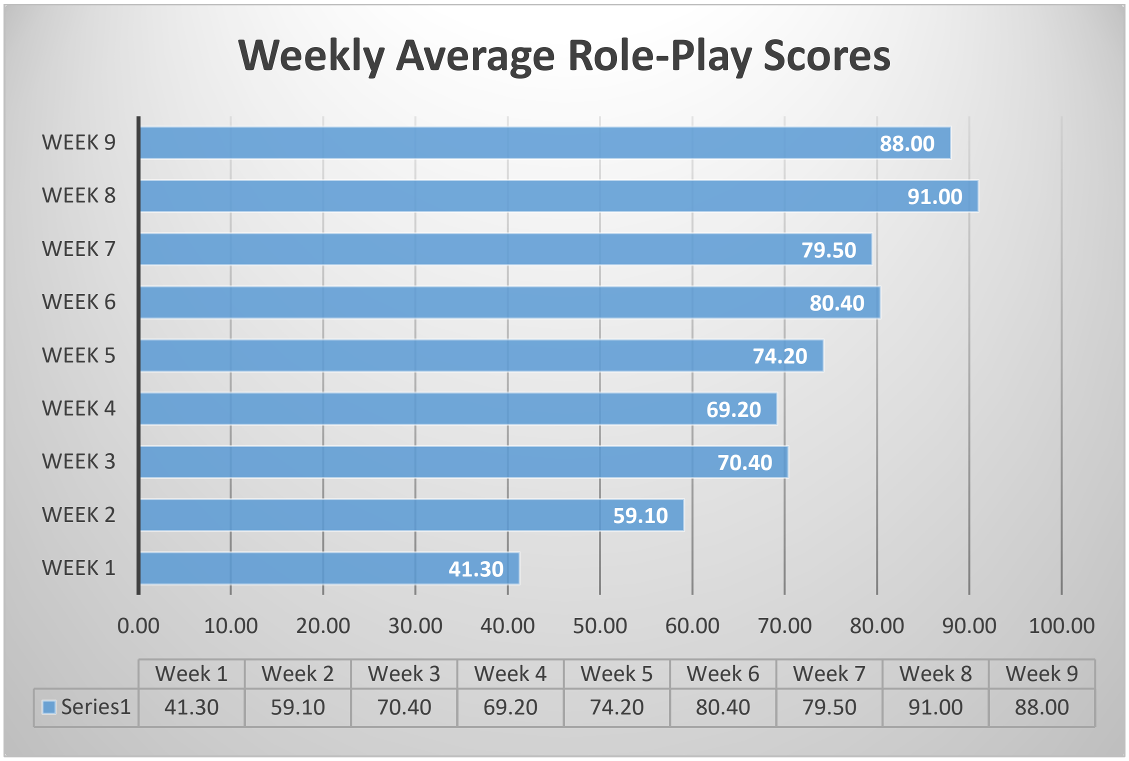


Figure 30. Weekly average role-play scores

In comparison to figure 30 above, which conceptualized the average aggregated role-play scores of the competitors, figure 31 demonstrates the individual competitors' role-play scores for each week. Looking at the data, once more, the scores reflect an upward trend. However, for every competitor within nine weeks, some had role-play score fluctuations. Yet, at the end of the program, all competitors showed role-play score improvement.

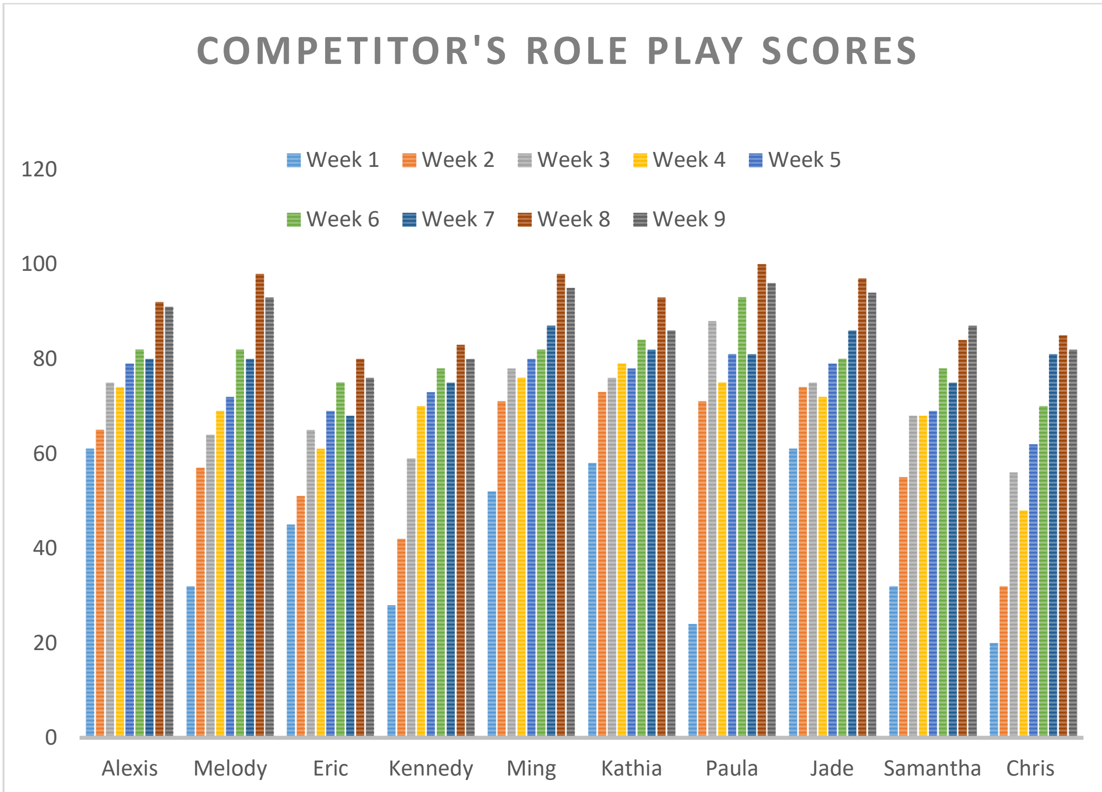


Figure 31. Competitor's Role Play Scores

An analysis of the individual competitor role-play scores were analyzed, and their percentage of growth compared to the other competitors within the group. Table 24 presents a breakdown of the role-play competitor scores as well as the percentage of growth for each student. Looking at the growth, the data shows that every competitor grew by at least 51%. For the competitors that did not grow as much, the data also shows that their base score in week one was higher than the average base score of 41%. For example, earning the lowest percentage growth, Alexis grew by 51%. However, her week one score was 61%, which was higher than the weekly average until week 3.

Table 24

Competitors' Role-play Scores and Percentage Growth

Competitor	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Growth %
Alexis	**61**	65	75	74	79	82	80	**92**	91	51%
Melody	**32**	57	64	69	72	82	80	**98**	93	206%
Eric	**45**	51	65	61	69	75	68	**80**	76	78%
Kennedy	**28**	42	59	70	73	78	75	**83**	80	196%
Ming	**52**	71	78	76	80	82	87	**98**	95	88%
Kathia	**58**	73	76	79	78	84	82	**93**	86	60%
Paula	**24**	71	88	75	81	93	81	**100**	96	317%
Jade	**61**	74	75	72	79	80	86	**97**	94	59%
Samantha	**32**	55	68	68	69	78	75	84	**87**	172%
Chris	**20**	32	56	48	62	70	81	**85**	82	325%

Qualitative

The qualitative narrative data for question two was processed through deductive analysis. The competitors' reflection questions provided the guide for coding with pre-established themes, which is inherent within the deductive analytic coding process. The theme for question two was role-play improvement. Accordingly, the role-play improvement codes were deducted from the narrative data collected from the competitors. The most important finding for role-play improvement was preparation needed representing 48% of the codes. The competitors' emphasis on the preparation needed to improve their role-play is a 29% increase over the next frequency code, which emphasized the importance of being confident and within a comfortable atmosphere. Table 25 provides the categorical theme, codes, and associated frequencies related to exam improvement.

Table 25

Role Play Improvement Categorical Codes and Frequencies

Category	Code	Count	% of Total Codes
Role-Play Improvement	Body Language	1	1%
Role-Play Improvement	Comfortable Atmosphere/Confidence	16	19%
Role-Play Improvement	Preparation needed	40	48%
Role-Play Improvement	Conversation/Communication	15	18%
Role-Play Improvement	Role Play Practice	12	14%

Competitors' feedback shows that 48% of competitors thought they needed more preparation to increase their role-play scores. Competitors also specifically mentioned the need to practice their role-play and conversation skills representing 18% and 15%, respectively. A comfortable atmosphere was desired by 19% of competitors, and 1% of the reflection represented the desire to improve body language. Figure 32 shows that competitors' strongly felt that they needed to practice to improve their skills.

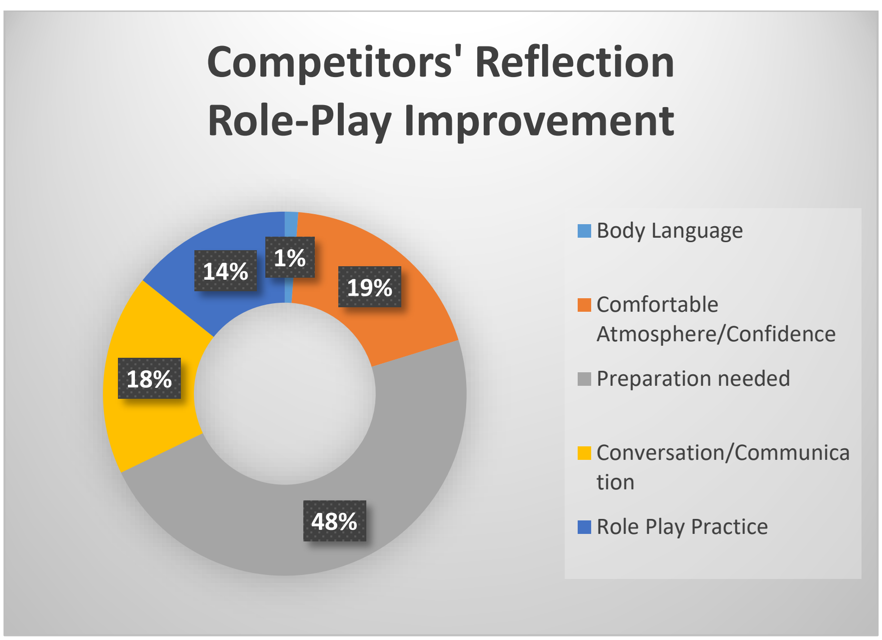


Figure 32. Competitors' reflection role-play improvement

The judges' experiences were processed using a deductive analytic approach where the codes generated the themes. The following discussion will focus on the themes that were generated from the coding of the judges' reflections. Below is the table that presents the themes, codes, and code frequencies.

Table 26

Judges' Experiences Deductive Categorical Themes, Codes, and Frequencies

Category	Themes	Code	Count	% of Total Codes
Judges' Experiences	**Advisor Development**	**Advisor Development**	**8**	5%
Judges' Experiences	**Non-Verbal Cues**	**Body Language**	**17**	10%
Judges' Experiences	**Positive Feedback**	**Creative Responses**	**11**	7%
Judges' Experiences	**Positive Feedback**	**Good/Confident Presentation**	**22**	13%
Judges' Experiences	**Positive Feedback**	**Growth Evident**	**14**	8%
Judges' Experiences	**Positive Feedback**	**Performance Indicators Knowledge**	**24**	14%
Judges' Experiences	**Negative Feedback**	**Lack Confidence**	**9**	5%
Judges' Experiences	**Negative Feedback**	**Practice Needed**	**55**	32%
Judges' Experiences	**Negative Feedback**	**Performance Indicators Lacking**	**11**	6%

Four major themes emerged from the deductive coding process. The themes were advisor development, non-verbal cues, positive feedback, and negative feedback. The code associated with advisor development was likewise identified as an advisor development theme. The non-verbal cues theme emerged from the body language code. The positive feedback theme consisted of codes related to creative responses, good/confident presentation, growth evident, and performance indicator knowledge. The negative feedback theme emerged from the lack confidence, practice needed and performance indicators lacking codes. Following is a chart that presents the percentages of the judges' reflection codes. According to the judges, 32% of what was associated with the negative feedback theme was related to competitors' need to practice. Following that is body language, which represents the second-largest code at 14%.

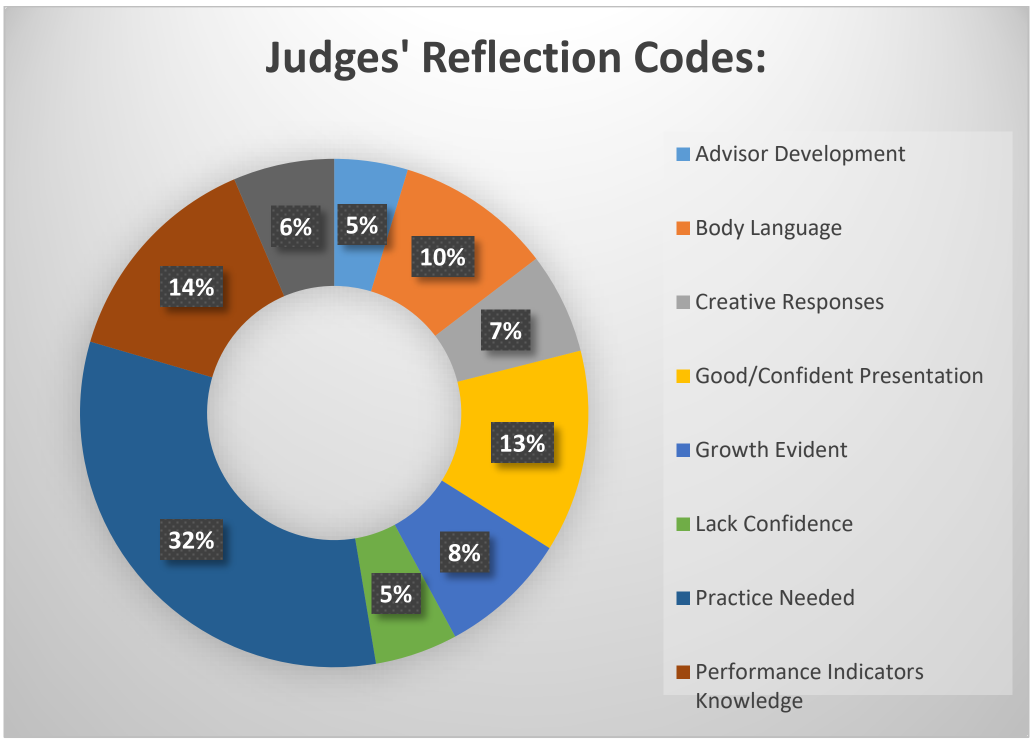


Figure 33. Judges' reflection

Conclusion

The numerical and narrative data for the role-play were analyzed to provide an answer to research question number 2: *How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role-play?* The data reveals aggregated increased scores for most competitors over the nine weeks and participants' realization that they needed more preparation to improve their role-play scores. Role-play scores increased by an average of 29%, revealing an upward trend. Weighing in at 48% of the codes, the competitors' reflections and deductive coding process revealed that competition preparation for the role-play was important. Contrary to the judges' emphasis on body language, only 1% of the data referenced body language for the role-play question from the competitor's reflection. Similar to the competitor's reflections, the judges cited 43% of codes related to negative feedback/improvement needed. Their second-highest ranked category was body language representing 14% of codes.

Research Question 3- Student Development

How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program?

The following is the narrative data that was collected from DECA competitor reflections. The primary thematic categories were related to important concepts learned and advisor feedback. The thematic analysis is presented from within a quantitative and qualitative approach.

Quantitative

The categorical themes for question three were important concepts learned and advisor feedback. Notably, within important concepts learned, four of the five codes associated with the theme showed little differentiation in regards to being mentioned within the students' reflections. However, it is interesting to note that once more, among the competitors, body language was not emphasized as an important concept learned and only being mentioned in reflections twice, representing only 3% of the frequency among the codes as shown in table 27.

Table 27

Important Concepts Learned Categorical Codes and Frequencies

Category/Theme	**Code**	**Count**	**% of Total Codes**
Important Concepts Learned	Body Language	2	3%
Important Concepts Learned	Comfortable/Confidence	10	16%
Important Concepts Learned	Conversation Skills	14	22%
Important Concepts Learned	Preparation Needed	22	35%
Important Concepts Learned	Performance Indicators & Aids	15	24%

Competitors' reflection showed three prominent themes related to important concepts learned. Specifically, 35% of competitors thought that they needed more preparation, 22% of competitors wanted to improve their conversation skills, and 24% of competitors reflected upon the importance of performance indicators and visual aids. *Figure 34* provides a view of the data that shows the more popular concepts reflected upon by competitors.

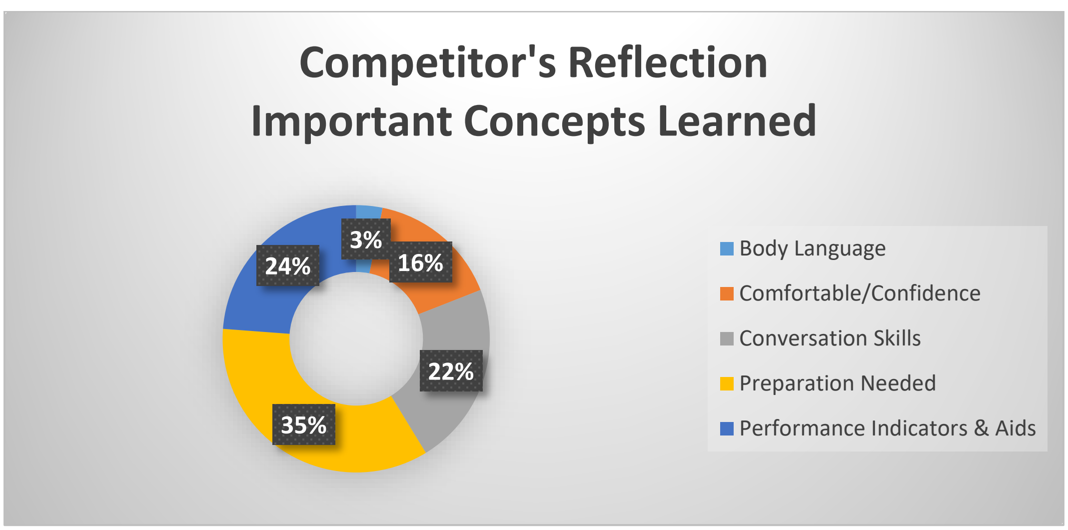


Figure 34. Competitors' reflection important learned concepts

The qualitative narrative data for the reflection question related to overall growth was analyzed for this section using the deductive analysis approach. The theme for this question is growth. Accordingly, the thematic analysis focused on codes related to growth from the narrative data collected from the competitors. Table 28 provides the categorical theme, codes, and associated frequencies related to competitor growth. It is important to note that the question relates to how students were growing and not what they needed to do to grow.

Table 28

Competitor Growth Categorical Codes and Frequencies

Category/Theme	**Code**	**Count**	**% of Total Codes**
Growth	Body Language	2	30%
Growth	Comfortable/Confidence	21	32%
Growth	Preparation Importance	27	41%
Growth	Performance Indicators/Aids	12	18%
Growth	Teamwork/relationship growth	4	6%

Competitors' reflection of growth concepts showed that 41% of competitors cited the importance of preparation importance. This seems to be a reoccurring theme through reflective questions. Competitors also shared that they understood the importance of and were becoming more comfortable and confident. Performance indicators and visual aids represented 18% of competitor reflections. Teamwork/relationship growth and body language were represented by 6% and 3%, respectively.

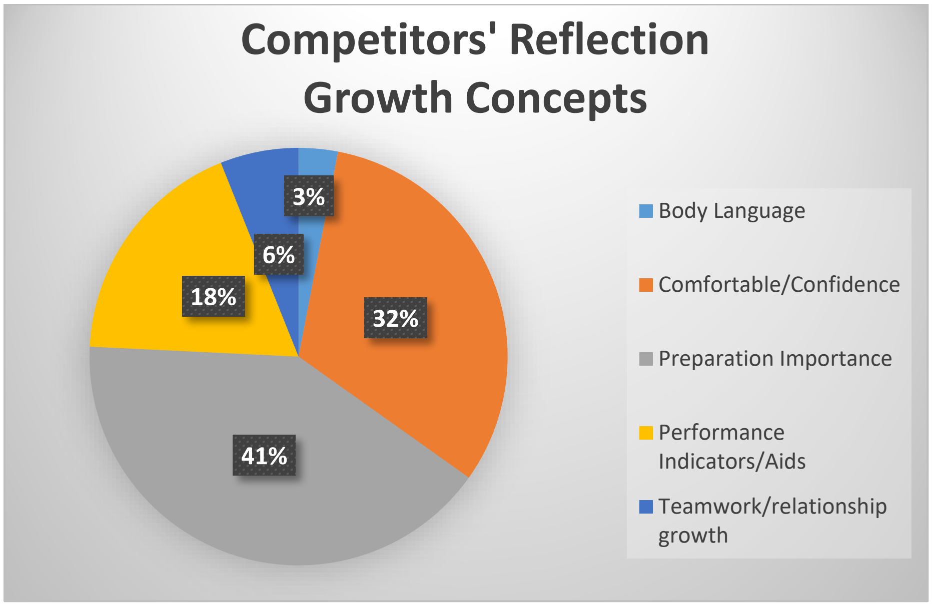


Figure 35. Competitors' reflection role-play improvement

Research Overarching Question

In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?

Quantitative and qualitative data from each question contribute to the finding related to the overarching question that specifically address the findings that would improve my instructional practice. Research question one, two, and three findings were analyzed through a triangulation convergence approach to better inform the findings related to the overarching question and the purpose of this study. As a result, the sub-research question findings provided insight into instructional considerations needed to improve performance across specific metrics. This section introduces a culminating theme specifically related to advisor improvement that was collected through narrative reflections. The thematic analysis of the narratives from each cycle are summarized in table 29.

Table 29

Narrative Findings From the Study

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?	My instructional practice improved by learning that sometimes too much can be a bad thing. I had to scale back and focus on fewer items to drive competitor performance. Competitor scores for the exam and role-play improved throughout the cycle. Students can benefit from more organization and practice.	This cycle, my practice greatly improved by incorporating an outline and performance indicator worksheet. This was huge for me because I learned that sometimes students need a better understanding when you want something done a certain way. Their scores are still increasing.	This cycle, I expected more. But I learned that the program works if they are working on the program. Students did not study as much as they should, and my major takeaway was that more time was needed, so I should start earlier and avoid holidays when possible. Students' scores continued to increase but were slowest in this cycle.
How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?	Competitors need to take more practice exams. They are not taking the exam seriously as they do not understand how big of a difference it can make. We might also benefit from reviewing the wrong answers as a group. Scores are increasing. Instructionally, I need to become more organized and provide more guidance.	This cycle, the program broke down the instructional areas and focused more on what competitors needed. For example, a competitor may have studied more customer service questions if that is the area that they were struggling in. We also did exam reviews as a group. Scores are continuing to increase.	This cycle, we just focused on practicing more. Students are not very motivated because they no longer have my class. However, scores are still improving. Students are admitting that they can spend more time on my study plan, and they know that more studying is needed to improve their scores. Being that many of them will never compete again (seniors), motivation is not really there.
How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role-play?	Just starting the program, students have made great leaps with their role-plays. The score increases from their first to third practice are awesome. While the competitors' checklist is helping, more work must be done. Competitors need more time, better organization, and I need to find more role-play scenarios.	This cycle, the checklist was shorter, and competitors were able to get more of it done. Also, my outline and performance indicator worksheets helped students to improve as well. Also, practicing made a big difference. Competitors have had 6 practices at this point. They have shared that me modeling the role play is a huge help.	This cycle we worked on time management, using a variety of role-plays from various instructional areas, and learned more about the score sheet. Students continue to improve as they learned the art and science of the role-play event. With a better understanding of the judges' rubric, they were able to follow my outline better for the most part. Scores continued to increase; however, they still need practice.
How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA	Student development (or a lack thereof), made me adjust the program by reducing the checklist obligations, creating an outline, adding a few lessons, and building up my role-play practice.	This cycle, student development made me change the time frame; some of our study methods, add some lessons, and practice role-plays. Though students continued to show	This cycle, we got more creative with how we practiced. Due to student development, we needed to provide more practice options and during the cycle we also emphasized the importance of practicing for the

competitive preparation program?	Competitors began to build a sense of rigor and the desire to improve also.	improvement, the program also needed improvement to best serve students.	exam. This made me understand that smaller quizzes might be needed.

Table 30 shows the codes that emerged from the question related to advisor improvement. Four codes were identified based on student feedback: feedback, modeling behavior, organization/preparation assistance, and participating in more role-play practices.

Table 30

Advisor Improvement Categorical Codes and Frequencies

Category/Theme	**Code**	**Count**	**% of Total Codes**
Advisor Improvement	Feedback	5	10%
Advisor Improvement	Model Behavior	7	14%
Advisor Improvement	Organization/Preparation	15	31%
Advisor Improvement	Role Play Practice	22	45%

Competitors' strongly felt that I needed to practice more frequently with them (45%) and help them become better organized/prepared (31%). Competitors also noted the value of me modeling behavior for the role play (14%) and the importance of providing feedback (10%). Figure 37 shows a breakdown that provides a visual emphasis on student reflection.

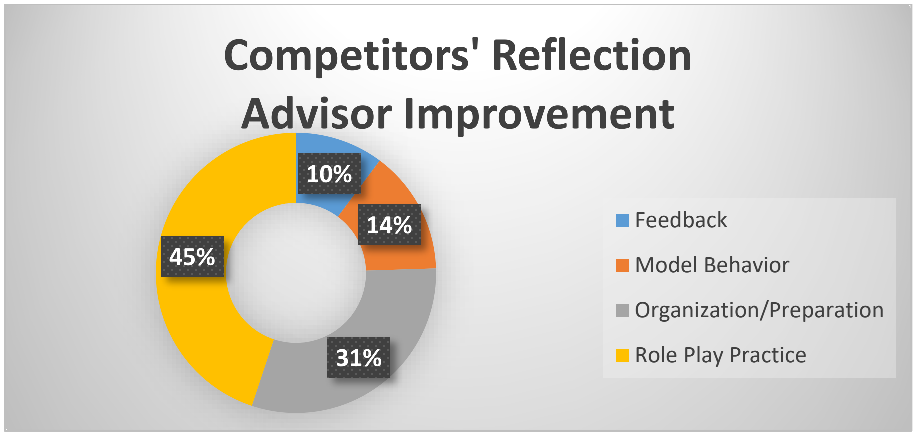


Figure 36. Competitors' reflection advisor improvement

Conclusion of Findings

Chapter 5 presented the study's findings by providing quantitative and qualitative data to provide answers to the research questions. There were a total of three research questions asked regarding how to improve my instructional practice through the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program. Questions one and two were answered using exam and role-play scores, respectively, and questions one through four incorporated reflections from participants that were coded and analyzed.

Overall, the findings suggest that by continually refining my instructional practice through the implementation of the DECA competition preparation program, students' exam scores and role-play scores increased during the course of the action research study. More specifically, every competitor that participated in the study showed growth in both the exam and role-play areas. Competitors' exam scores improved on average by 22% and role-play scores improved on average by 50%. The majority of competitors noted that they still needed to practice more to improve their performance.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter will provide a triangulated discussion of the findings, limitations, implications, recommendations, and a conclusion based on the study findings related to a DECA competition preparation program. Previous research studies have reported numerous benefits for teachers (Gentry et al., 2008; Miller & Clark, 2017; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008), CTSO members (Alfeld et al., 2007; Kitchel 2015; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008; Ullrich, et al., 2007), and more specifically, role-play participants (Baile & Blatner, 2014; Chad, 2010; Dingus & Milovic, 2015; Raymond, 2010; McDonald, 2006; Shelton, 2016; Widmier, Loe, & Selden, 2007). This action research study supported prior studies and sought to improve instructional practices through the implementation of a DECA competition preparation program. Teaching CTE course for nine years, I understand the benefit of the college and career-ready courses that help students prepare for their next step in life. However, at the start of this study, my experience teaching marketing and advising DECA was extremely limited. Action research was chosen to improve my instructional practice (Mertler, 2017) because I wanted to embrace the challenge of creating a program that would help students succeed and realize that they could be great competitors. I also wanted to equip myself with research-backed strategies that I could incorporate into my instruction for years to come. Action research provided answers to the research questions posed; it provided the opportunity to actively participate in the research process and provided an abundance of information. This included gaining greater insight into contextual teaching and learning, problem-based learning, and other research back strategies. It also provided a deeper understanding of the importance of preparation and reflections by allowing me to see how competitors and judges may view things differently. By slowly closing that gap, my instruction improved, and subsequently, students' knowledge did too.

Summary of the Study

This action research study was conducted to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators through the implementation of a DECA competition preparation program. Due to the problem-solving nature of this study, Reil's (2010) Progressive Problem Solving with Action Research Model was used. Action Research is defined as a systematic inquiry that is conducted by teachers, counselors, administrators, and others that have an interest in gathering information about the process of teaching and learning (Johnson, 2008; Mills, 2011). Overall, action research strives to guide teacher-researchers with a platform for solving everyday problems in learning institutions (Gay et al., 2012).

A conceptual framework, rather than a theoretical framework, provided the best fit for this action research study. Contextual teaching and learning emerged through the combination of the behaviorism and constructivism concepts (Berns & Erikson, 2001). The framework was comprised of self-regulated learning (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman, 1990), teaching and learning in multiple contexts (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993), independent learning groups (Meyer, Haywood, Sachdey, & Faraday, 2008; Van Hout-Wolters, Simons, & Volet, 2000), authentic assessment (Wiggins, 1998), and problem-based learning (Brush & Saye, 2017; (Duch, Allen & White 2002). To apply those concepts, a competitive preparation program was created.

To better understand the competitive preparation program's effectiveness, students' knowledge of performance indicators was assessed during three cycles of action research using the DECA exams and role-play events. Each of the three cycles reviewed my instructional methods and measured student growth at local competitions. Following each cycle, the competitive preparation program's instruction changed based on the previous cycle, my reflection as a researcher, and student performance and feedback. The overarching question that was answered at the completion of the research was:

> In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?

The following set of questions were answered via the results of a variety of research methods (application of contextual teaching and learning, role-play evaluations, and standardized tests) at the end of each action research cycle.

1. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?
2. How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role-play?
3. How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program?

Triangulated Discussion of Findings

The following is the discussion of the triangulated findings by converging the quantitative and qualitative findings related to each research question. Research questions one and two had both quantitative and qualitative findings. Research question three only had qualitative findings. However, all of the findings across research questions were triangulated to address the overarching research question of the action research study. The triangulation convergence model was utilized to analyze and discuss the findings (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

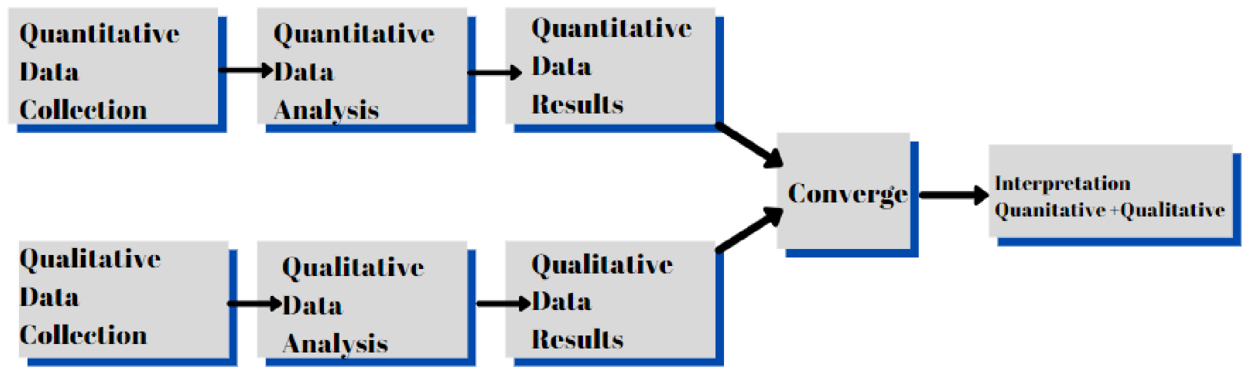


Figure 37. Triangulation Convergence Model (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Research Question 1

How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA region exam?

The quantitative findings related to the DECA competition preparation program's implementation demonstrated that the program positively influenced student performance on their DECA region practice exams. All of the competitors improved their practice region exam scores by at least 17%. However, 70% of competitors increased their scores by at least 40% or more. This increase is reflective of the benefits that students achieved from my instructional practices that were based on self-regulated learning (Bembenutty, 2011; Sears, 2002), teaching and learning in multiple contexts (Johnson, 2002; Sears, 2002), and independent learning groups (Meyer, Haywood, Sachdey, & Faraday, 2008). The findings relate to self-regulated learning because the competitors improved their awareness of thinking through a deeper understanding of performance indicators. This was accomplished by evaluating and understanding the exam blueprint and the exam practice methods, as exhibited on the competitors' checklist. Teaching and learning in multiple contexts also proved beneficial to competitors because they took practice exams, learned independently, and consulted with the advisor.

Additionally, by learning in multiple contexts such as text, video, and audio instruction, multiple learning types were catered to, and all competitors grew. Independent study groups for the practice exam were also incorporated and represent independent learning groups from the contextual teaching and learning model. Competitors compared answers and apply prior knowledge to their current learning goals (Van Hout-Wolters, Simons, & Volet, 2000). The thematic analysis also supports that students understood the importance of preparation and organization. Each cycle scores improved as students better learned the performance indicators and how to navigate through the standardized DECA practice region exams. Instructionally, I learned how to effectively implement these components of the conceptual framework to drive improved performance; thus, improving my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators for the DECA exam.

Research Question 2

How will the implementation of a DECA competitive preparation program influence students' performance on their DECA role play?

The quantitative findings related to the DECA competition preparation program's implementation showed that the program positively influenced student performance on their DECA role-play performance. All of the competitors improved their role-play scores by at least 51%. The competitors mostly represent a significant growth as 70% of the competitors increased their role-play performance by 78% or more. This increase is a reflection of the benefits that students gained from my instructional practices that were based on authentic assessment (Wiggins, 1998), self-regulated learning (Johnson, 2002), teaching and learning in multiple contexts (Sears, 2002), independent learning groups (Meyer et al., 2008), and problem-based learning. Role-play naturally imbues the characteristics of authentic assessment, allowing students to demonstrate meaningful skills. Also incorporated were the features of collaboration, feedback, and reflection through the use of rubrics and checklists inspired from one source of information, the performance indicators. By gaining specific knowledge of the performance indicators to apply logically through the role-play, students were able to develop self-awareness and participate in self-regulated learning (Bembenutty, 2011; Sears, 2002). To implement teaching and learning into multiple contexts into this study, we (a) used role-plays with real-world scenarios, (b) connected material with the student's interests, (c) worked on growing 21st-century skills, and (d) combined school with work simulations. The role-play growth was not only a benefit for my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators; it also provided them with beneficial life skills. Each of these areas of contextual teaching and learning contributes to the participation in problem-based learning, which allowed students to work through problems while learning the curriculum through the use of engagement, inquiry, and investigation, performance, and reflection (Brush & Saye, 2017; Savery & Duffy, 1995). Additionally, this strategy was used to raise questions, challenges, and issues and present role-play situations that needed solutions. Students used critical thinking skills, prior knowledge, analyzed, synthesized, and acquired new skills. The thematic analysis also supports that students understood the importance of preparation, communication skills, body language, and being confident in their environment. Judges' reflections showed that judges saw significant growth from competitors representing the largest category, 32% of the reflection codes. The judges' feedback also shows that body language was the second largest code in the negative feedback theme representing 14%. This is a significant difference from the competitors' feedback, which shows body language only representing 1%. Instructionally, I learned how to continuously refine my process using research-backed methods to improve my instructional practice and student role-play performance. I also learned that gaps often exist based on student or adult perspectives, and having an understanding of perspectives to better instruct students can help students achieve.

Research Question 3

How does student development (positive or negative) impact the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program?

The qualitative findings related to student development show a positive impact from the implementation of the DECA competitive preparation program. Student experiences, positive and negative, influenced documented changes for each cycle. Making changes, each cycle further contributed to my knowledge as an advisor and researcher improving my instructional practice. The thematic analysis showed that 35% of competitors thought they needed more preparation, 22% of competitors wanted to improve their conversation skills, and 24% of competitors reflected upon the importance of performance indicators and visual aids. Competitors also reflected upon growth concepts, with 41% citing the importance of preparation, 32% citing the importance of being comfortable and confident, and 18% of competitors citing the importance of performance indicator knowledge and visual aids. Instructionally, I worked over the course of the three cycles to imbue those concepts into students' mindsets. In cycle one, the reflections showed that students thought that being a good speaker would be enough. Watching the qualitative narrative data unfold, we increasingly saw competitors grasping the importance of preparation. In this sense, my instructional practice has also improved because I have learned that if students understand the 'why,' they will perform better on the 'how'. Implementing practices from the constructivism theory (Woolfolk, 2001), we were able to go through the process of building meaning to make sense of experiences. I learned how to promote the process of active engagement so that students could establish and engage in their learning objectives (Noddings, 2015) and seek to understand their individual development through reflection (Phillips, 2000). Notably, Judges' reflections emphasized the need for preparation representing 32%, the importance of body language representing 10%, confident presentations representing 13%, and growth evident representing 8%. Out of all of the themes/categories, 43% of the codes represented negative feedback/improvement needed. This was significant to me in regard to improving my instructional practice because though growth was significant in each area; I learned that there is much more work that needs to be done. I have also learned the importance of collaboration (providing judges' perspective) and the importance of repetition (practicing multiple times).

Overarching Question

In what ways can a DECA competitive preparation program be used to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of performance indicators?

The amalgamation of all qualitative and quantitative data from this action research study represented in questions one through three contributed to the overarching question and the improvement of my instructional practice. In addition to the qualitative and quantitative discussion of the findings, students also reflected on how their advisor could help them improve. Student codes reflected a 45% need for role-play practice with me, 31% for organization and preparation assistance, 14% desire for modeled behavior, and 10% for more feedback. This study depended on the contextual teaching and learning framework for guidance, and through the implementation of the program, my instructional practice has improved significantly. Through the lens of behaviorism, I learned the importance of practicing and assessing growth multiple times (Peter, 1993). This was shown through multiple role-play and practice exam assessments.

In addition to positive qualitative results and thematic analysis, I have improved my instructional practices by learning how to implement practical tools to foster student achievement. The implementation of constructivism yielded knowledge as the natural process of the constructive process required a significant amount of communication (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). I improved my instructional practices through the development of tools and guiding students to methods to help them effectively communicate and convey their ideas. I learned how to become more of a student-centered facilitator of learning, which allowed students to participate in self-regulated learning and allowed me to better observe and make improvements after each cycle.

Limitations

While I responsibly implemented this research study, it did not come without limitations. First, the sample size was small, with only having ten participants. I would have preferred a larger sample size and a second advisor researcher. However, due to the study's demands and the time frame, ten was an appropriate number. Second, the study's timing made it difficult to know if the effects would have been more significant if the study aligned with DECA competition season. Cycle three took place during the second semester. By that time, I no longer had many of the students in class, and they were not as interested in DECA, knowing that they would not be participating in DECA competitions moving forward. Starting the program earlier in the school year and completing it before the first official DECA competition might be beneficial. The third limitation was the lack of technology. Some of our cycles were active during holiday breaks. Some of the students could not attend ZOOM practices and did not have the proper resources to record and submit their role-play performance. Investing in tablets for the chapter for students with inadequate resources might help solve this problem in the future. The fourth limitation is the sample profile as all students participating in the study attend a title one school and are first or second-year competitors. It would be interesting to see if more seasoned competitors from various socio-economic backgrounds also improved by participating in the study. The fifth limitation is the judges scoring inconsistency due to the role-plays being judged by myself and the judges. The judges provided scores for the local competitions. The remaining scores were from when I judged students. When I judged students, the role-play scores showed a drop if it occurred after a local competition. Naturally, as a DECA advisor, my expectations from competitors were higher. The scores might have shown a different pattern if the same person judged each time. However, because no competitor had the same judge except when practicing with me, the same could be said due to different judges scoring during the local competitions. A sixth limitation also pertains to the timeline as there was a disruption in the flow. Students were expected not to work on DECA prep during the reflection stages. The results might have been different if they were able to build their knowledge consecutively over the nine-week period.

Implications for Future Research

Additional research pertaining to the improvement of instructional practice related to co-curricular activities is needed to fill the literature gap. Few academic resources are available when it comes to CTSOs and competition preparation. Replication of this study across various CTSOs such as FBLA, HOSA, and TSA would provide additional information and aid advisors when preparing students for competitive events. This research indicates numerous positive benefits provided to DECA competitors, such as improved role-play performance and increased test scores. Knowing that the type of school (Title I vs. non-Title 1) a student attends influences their performance on standardized tests (Ross, C. 2016; Borman, G.D, & D'Agostino 1995); implementing an enhanced model for preparing Title I students for exams might also be beneficial across subjects. The final area suggested for further exploration by future researchers is early engagement. Participants in this study were upperclassmen, and 80% of competitors were graduating. To close the achievement gap compared to seasoned competitors that may have been competing since the 6^{th} grade, students need to start participating earlier.

Before and After the Research

Before conducting this study, I struggled to help students achieve success in their role-plays. I did not practice with them much at all; instead, I focused on delivering textbook-based instruction. Additionally, when students did not perform well, I assumed that they did not care and completely disregarded the notions of repetition, teaching and learning in multiple contexts and remediation. While I have always gone above and beyond in my delivery, I knew that I was not as effective as I could be. My competitors' success was mostly linked to their individual efforts and generally reflected the high performing students doing the best in the competitions. I scouted "good students" instead of inviting all students and molding them. Reading this reflection, it may seem like common sense to use multiple methods of instruction and problem-based learning. However, when managing over 200 students, school store, DECA and other duties, it is sometimes hard to find the time to dedicate to DECA competitions, and I had no idea how much work went into preparing for them. I often went with lessons provided by veteran teachers and did not really question the instructional methods.

Through the implementation of this program I learned that the low-performing students could also be high-performing students with guidance, preparation, and perseverance. While it may take longer for some students to perform better, it is certainly possible and their lack of performance is not always related to not caring. Before I started using these methods, the most that I had place at a competition was three students. This past year, all of the competitors in this study placed at the region competition along with some of the DECA students that were in my chapter and not participating in the study. Those students had access to and used all of the same materials. Not only did they place, we were able to make history at our school by having more 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place competitors than our school has ever had at a DECA competition. It was a monumental experience for the students at my school and a reminder for other Title I students that it can be done. Sometimes, I feel as though I tricked students into learning. With competition on their minds, they did not realize how these skills would also transfer into the classroom, making them better speakers, presenters that are more confident, and better at taking exams. They learned study strategies, how to deconstruct the standards (similar to performance indicators), and how to effectively communicate their thoughts. They also gained researching skills, interview skills, and real-world application skills.

Regarding specific instruction, I learned that repetition and reflection are important. Also, through the construction of my performance indicator worksheet, I learned the importance of activating higher levels of thinking. For example, prior to making changes, students would just define their indicators and try to explain them. Now students know to DECA (define, explain, connect, and go above and beyond). Essentially, this allowed students to activate higher levels of learning by applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. They now far surpass the basic level of remembering. In addition to this knowledge as an advisor, I also know how to better implement these strategies in my classroom to help students perform. My confidence as a teacher has greatly improved because my students perform better on projects, presentations, and exams. I have my research to thank for that, and I am motivated to continue developing strategies by picking up where I left off at the end of cycle three.

Conclusion

This action research study was conducted to improve my instructional practice and students' knowledge of marketing performance indicators through the implementation of a DECA competitive events preparation program. The research results suggest that DECA competitors' participating in the program can significantly improve their scores. Students showed growth in their role-play performance as well as the exam performance. Students also learned about the importance of preparation if they want to be successful. As the researcher and advisor, I learned how to create a competition preparation program based on research-backed strategies. I also learned how to make adjustments to help students learn and how to drive student performance.

There were also unintended outcomes that surfaced as a result of the research. First, student, advisor, and judge participants learned that there were gaps in student and adult perceptions, mainly related to the importance of body language. Once this was recognized, we were able to work towards students presenting themselves with the appropriate body language. A second unexpected outcome was that students still saw a significant need for improvement once the study concluded. Not only was this unexpected for students, but it was also unexpected for me as the researcher as well. We learned that while my instructional practices were having a positive effect, to put it simply, hard work was necessary. The implemented strategies proved to be beneficial; however, shortcuts do not exist. Time, effort, and preparation are all necessary to be successful as an advisor and competitor. The third unexpected outcome was that by implementing the competitive preparation program, not only were students able to make tremendous role-play performance gains amongst their group; they were able to compete and win among seasoned competitors. All of the competitors in this study placed at the region competition, nine out of ten competitors in the study won first through third place, breaking a record for our Title I school. By improving my instructional program and perhaps implementing the program in other schools as well, advisors and students around the country can benefit and grow.

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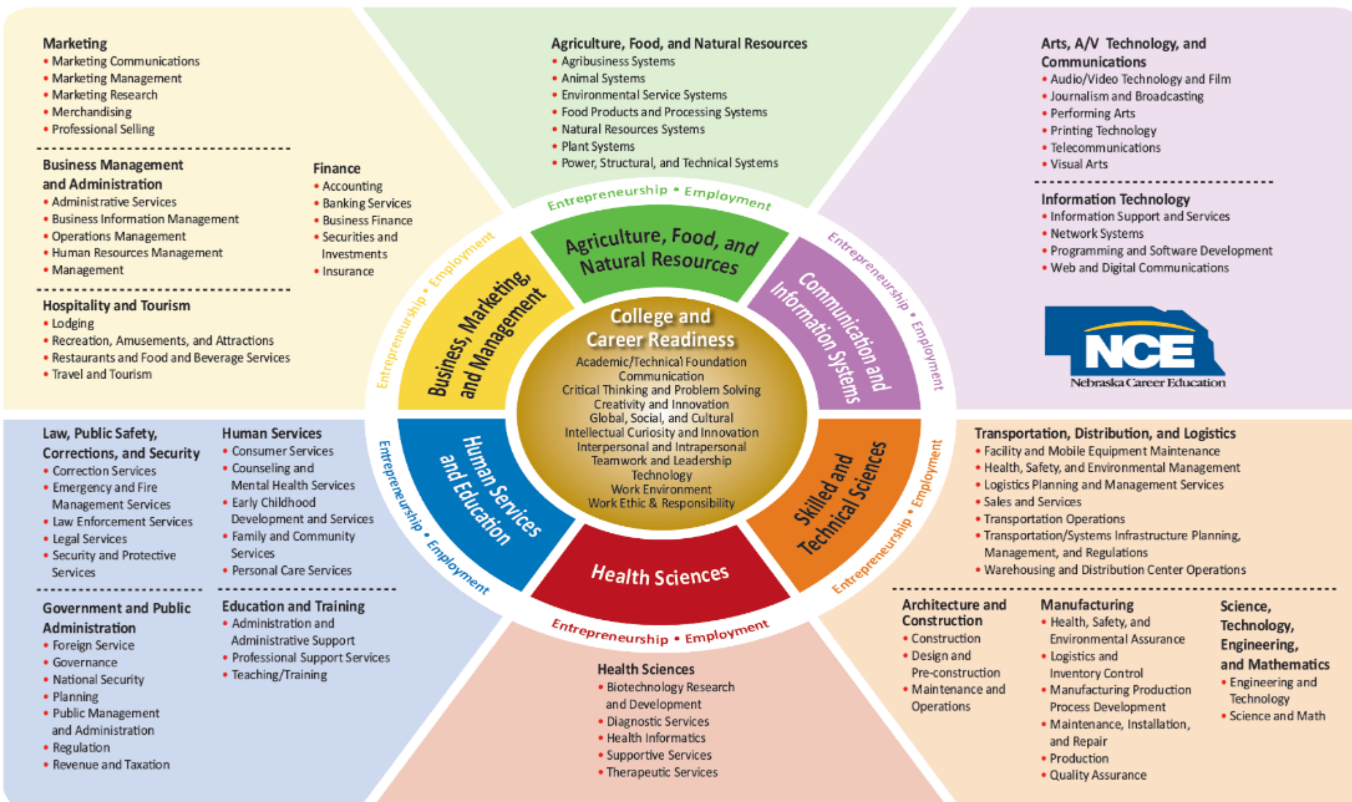
Appendix A

Career and Technical Education Clusters and Pathways



(Nebraska Career Education, 2009)

Appendix B

Nationally Recognized CTSOs

CTSO	Founded	Membership (listed as of July 2018)	Associated CTE Area
National FFA Organization	1928	653,300+	Agriculture
Future Business Leaders of America-Phi Beta Lambda	1943	248,000+	Business
Family, Career and Community Leaders of America	1945	161,000+	Family & Consumer Science Education
DECA	1946	234,000+	Marketing
SkillsUSA	1965	421,000+	Trades and Technical Fields
Business Professionals of America	1966	45,000+	Business
HOSA-Future Health Professionals	1976	200,000+	Health Occupations
Technology Student Organization	1978	250,000+	Technology Education

Appendix C

DECA Competitive Event Areas

PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION EVENTS

Principles of Business Management and Administration **PBM**
Principles of Finance **PFN**
Principles of Hospitality and Tourism **PHT**
Principles of Marketing **PMK**

TEAM DECISION MAKING EVENTS

Business Law and Ethics Team Decision Making **BLTDM**
Buying and Merchandising Team Decision Making **BTDM**
Entrepreneurship Team Decision Making **ETDM**
Financial Services Team Decision Making **FTDM**
Hospitality Services Team Decision Making **HTDM**
Marketing Management Team Decision Making **MTDM**
Sports and Entertainment Marketing Team Decision Making **STDM**
Travel and Tourism Team Decision Making **TTDM**

INDIVIDUAL SERIES EVENTS

Accounting Applications Series **ACT**
Apparel and Accessories Marketing Series **AAM**
Automotive Services Marketing Series **ASM**
Business Finance Series **BFS**
Business Services Marketing Series **BSM**
Entrepreneurship Series **ENT**
Food Marketing Series **FMS**
Hotel and Lodging Management Series **HLM**
Human Resources Management Series **HRM**
Marketing Communications Series **MCS**
Quick Serve Restaurant Management Series **QSRM**
Restaurant and Food Service Management Series **RFSM**
Retail Merchandising Series **RMS**
Sports and Entertainment Marketing Series **SEM**

PERSONAL FINANCIAL LITERACY EVENT

Personal Financial Literacy **PFL**

Not all chartered associations offer all events. Please check with your chartered association advisor for events offered in your chartered association.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS RESEARCH EVENTS

Business Services Operations Research **BOR**
Buying and Merchandising Operations Research **BMOR**
Finance Operations Research **FOR**
Hospitality and Tourism Operations Research **HTOR**
Sports and Entertainment Marketing Operations Research **SEOR**

CHAPTER TEAM EVENTS

Community Service Project **CSP**
Creative Marketing Project **CMP**
Entrepreneurship Promotion Project **EPP**
Financial Literacy Promotion Project **FLPP**
Learn and Earn Project **LEP**
Public Relations Project **PRP**

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EVENTS

Innovation Plan **EIP**
Start-Up Business Plan **ESB**
Independent Business Plan **EIB**
International Business Plan **IBP**
Business Growth Plan **EBG**
Franchise Business Plan **EFB**

MARKETING REPRESENTATIVE EVENTS

Advertising Campaign **ADC**
Fashion Merchandising Promotion Plan **FMP**
Sports and Entertainment Promotion Plan **SEPP**

PROFESSIONAL SELLING AND CONSULTING EVENTS

Financial Consulting **FCE**
Hospitality and Tourism Professional Selling **HTPS**
Professional Selling **PSE**

ONLINE EVENTS

Stock Market Game **SMG**
Virtual Business Challenge Accounting **VBCAC**
Virtual Business Challenge Fashion **VBCFA**
Virtual Business Challenge Hotel Management **VBCHM**
Virtual Business Challenge Personal Finance **VBCPF**
Virtual Business Challenge Restaurant **VBCRS**
Virtual Business Challenge Retail **VBCRT**
Virtual Business Challenge Sports **VBCSP**

(DECA, 2019)

Appendix D

Principles Role Play Event Overview

DECA

PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION EVENTS

PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION **PBM**
Sponsored by AT&T Aspire

PRINCIPLES OF FINANCE **PFN**

PRINCIPLES OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM **PHT**

PRINCIPLES OF MARKETING **PMK**
Sponsored by National Apartment Association Education Institute

DECA's **Principles of Business Administration Events** measure the student's proficiency in those knowledge and skills identified by career practitioners as common academic and technical content across marketing, finance, hospitality, and business management and administration.

The Principles of Business Administration Events are designed for **first-year DECA members** who are enrolled in introductory-level principles of marketing/business courses. Advanced students with multiple course credits in this area are better served in more advanced competitive events. **Students who were previously members of DECA are not eligible for these events.**

The guidelines for each of the Principles of Business Administration Events have been consolidated to facilitate coordination of participant activities in each career category. This means the guidelines are exactly the same for each career category. However, each career category's role-play will be career specific and will be different and distinct from the role-plays of the other career categories.

CAREER CLUSTERS + DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are used to determine the activities and careers that are included in each of the Principles of Business Administration Events.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT + ADMINISTRATION

Principles of Business Management and Administration: The role-plays will use concepts associated with careers in administrative services, business information management, general management, human resources management, and operations management.

$ FINANCE

Principles of Finance: The role-plays will use concepts associated with careers in accounting, banking services, business finance, insurance and securities, and investments.

HOSPITALITY + TOURISM

Principles of Hospitality and Tourism: The role-plays will use concepts associated with careers in hotels, restaurants, and tourism and travel.

MARKETING

Principles of Marketing: The role-plays will use concepts associated with careers in marketing communications, marketing management, marketing research, merchandising and professional selling.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DEVELOPED

Participants will demonstrate knowledge and skills described by selected business administration core performance indicators that are aligned with National Curriculum Standards and industry validated. Complete lists of performance indicators are available at deca.org. Participants in these competitive events are not informed in advance of the performance indicators to be evaluated.

Participants will also develop many 21st Century Skills, in the following categories, desired by today's employers:

- Communication and Collaboration
- Creativity and Innovation
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Information Literacy
- Initiative and Self-direction
- Leadership and Responsibility
- Productivity and Accountability
- Social and Cross-cultural Skills

Many Common Core Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts & Literacy are supported by participation in DECA's competitive events.

Crosswalks that show which 21st Century Skills are developed and which common core standards are supported by participating in each competitive event are available at deca.org.

EVENT OVERVIEW

- Principles of Business Administration Events consist of two major parts: a **business administration core exam** and a **role-play** with a business executive. A second role-play event will be given to finalists. The business administration core exam items and the role-play situations are selected from a list of performance indicators identified in the National Curriculum Standards for Business Administration developed by MBAResearch for the Career Clusters® Framework and validated by industry representatives.
- The participant will be given a 100-question, multiple-choice, **business administration core exam**.
- The participant will be given a business situation to review. In the **role-play**, the participant must respond to the business situation by translating what he/she has learned into effective, efficient and spontaneous action.
- A list of four performance indicators specific to the business situation is included in the participant's instructions. These are distinct tasks the participant must accomplish during the role-play. The judge will evaluate the participant's performance on these tasks, follow-up questions and 21st Century Skills.
- The participant will have **10 minutes** to review and to develop a professional approach to the business situation. Participants may use notes made during the preparation time during the role-play.
- Up to **10 minutes** are then allowed for the participant to interact with a judge and explain the designated concepts. The judge is a qualified business executive. Following the role-play, the judge evaluates the participant's responses and records the results on an evaluation form developed especially for each role-play event.
- The participant may not bring printed reference materials, visual aids, etc., to the competitive event. The participant may use a four-function calculator during the exam and preparation period. Scientific/graphing calculators, cell phones/smartphones, iPods/MP3 players and iPads/tablets may not be used.
- Materials appropriate for the situation may be handed to or left with the judge. Materials handed to the judge must be created using materials provided during the designated preparation period.
- If any of these rules are violated, the adult assistant must be notified by the judge.
- The maximum score for the evaluation is 100 points. The presentation will be weighed twice (2 times) the value of the exam score. The exam score carries forward into the final round of competition.

PRESENTATION JUDGING

The participant will be evaluated according to the Evaluation Form associated with the role-play.

The participant will have a 10-minute preparation period and may make notes to use during the role-play.

After introductions, the judge will begin the 10-minute role-play. Following the participant's response to the business situation, the judge will ask the questions related to the role-play that are provided in the event. These questions will cause the participant to think and respond beyond the performance indicators provided.

The judge will close the role-play by thanking the participant for his/her work. Then the judge will complete the Evaluation Form, making sure to record a score for all categories. The maximum score for the evaluation is 100 points.

1 PARTICIPANT

EXAM

BUSINESS ADMIN CORE EXAM

1 ROLE-PLAY

10

PREPARATION TIME

10

PRESENTATION TIME

(DECA, 2019)

Appendix E

DECA Dress Code

DRESS CODE

Professional appearance is an important aspect of the overall preparation of DECA members for the business world. To that end, DECA supports a dress code for its career-based functions that exemplifies the highest standards of professionalism while being non-discriminatory between genders.

DECA's board of directors has developed the following official dress standards for the International Career Development Conference. Students, advisors and chaperones must follow the dress code.

Competitors must wear an official DECA blazer during interaction with the judges. While official DECA blazers are not required during briefing and testing, professional business dress is required. Professional dress should also be worn to all conference sessions including workshops and special meal functions such as luncheons.

For a more polished, professional appearance, it is recommended that attendees wear appropriate hosiery/socks.

All skirts and dresses must be at or below the knee.

AN OFFICIAL DECA BLAZER IS REQUIRED TO RECEIVE RECOGNITION OR AN AWARD ON STAGE.

WHEN APPEARING BEFORE JUDGES AND ON-STAGE

- Official DECA blazer
- Dress slacks or dress skirt or business dress
- Collared dress shirt and appropriate neckwear (necktie, ascot, scarf) or Dress blouse
- Dress shoes

DECA GENERAL SESSIONS, MEAL FUNCTIONS, EVENT BRIEFING, MANUAL REGISTRATION AND TESTING

- Business suit or sport coat or blazer (blazer optional)
- Dress slacks, dress skirt or business dress
- Collared dress shirt, dress blouse or dress sweater
- Blazer optional
- Dress shoes
- Necktie/scarf (optional)

DECA BUSINESS CASUAL

- Casual slacks (e.g., Dockers), blouse or shirt, socks and casual shoes.
- Jeans, t-shirts and athletic shoes are not included in business casual attire.

UNACCEPTABLE DURING DECA ACTIVITIES

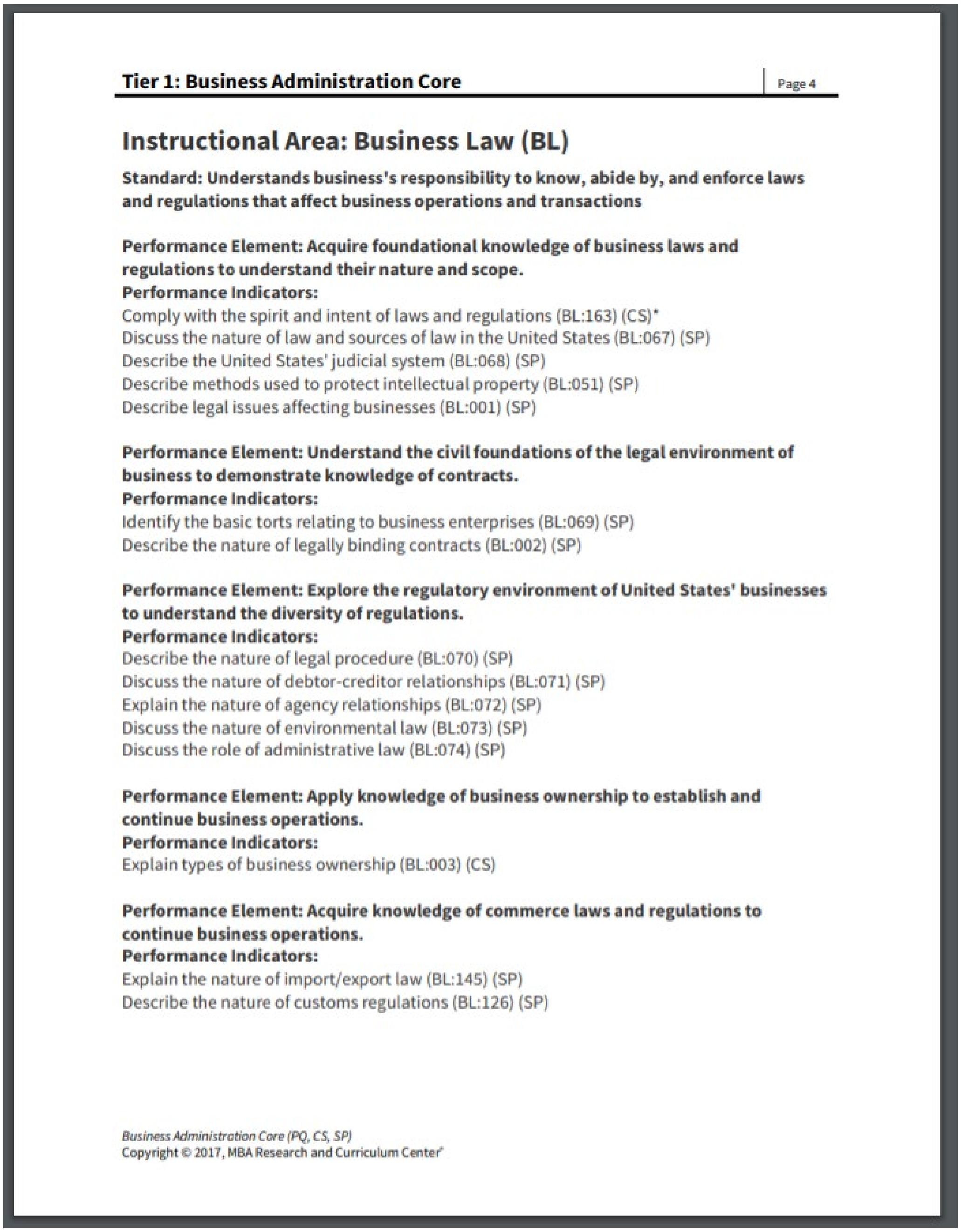
- Skin-tight or revealing clothing
- Midriff-baring clothing
- Swimwear
- Athletic clothing
- Leggings or graphic designed hosiery/tights
- Clothing with printing that is suggestive, obscene or promotes illegal substances
- Unacceptable types of dress shoes include boat shoes, canvas or fabric shoes, flip flops or casual sandals, athletic shoes, industrial work shoes and hiking boots.

When judging adherence to the dress code, DECA asks that advisors, teachers and chaperones use observation as the tool for assessing compliance. DECA does not support or condone the touching of students or their clothing as a means of determining whether or not a student is following the dress code guidelines.

(DECA, 2019)

Appendix F

Business Administration Core Performance Indicators



Instructional Area: Business Law (BL)

Standard: Understands business's responsibility to know, abide by, and enforce laws and regulations that affect business operations and transactions

Performance Element: Acquire foundational knowledge of business laws and regulations to understand their nature and scope.
Performance Indicators:
Comply with the spirit and intent of laws and regulations (BL:163) (CS)*
Discuss the nature of law and sources of law in the United States (BL:067) (SP)
Describe the United States' judicial system (BL:068) (SP)
Describe methods used to protect intellectual property (BL:051) (SP)
Describe legal issues affecting businesses (BL:001) (SP)

Performance Element: Understand the civil foundations of the legal environment of business to demonstrate knowledge of contracts.
Performance Indicators:
Identify the basic torts relating to business enterprises (BL:069) (SP)
Describe the nature of legally binding contracts (BL:002) (SP)

Performance Element: Explore the regulatory environment of United States' businesses to understand the diversity of regulations.
Performance Indicators:
Describe the nature of legal procedure (BL:070) (SP)
Discuss the nature of debtor-creditor relationships (BL:071) (SP)
Explain the nature of agency relationships (BL:072) (SP)
Discuss the nature of environmental law (BL:073) (SP)
Discuss the role of administrative law (BL:074) (SP)

Performance Element: Apply knowledge of business ownership to establish and continue business operations.
Performance Indicators:
Explain types of business ownership (BL:003) (CS)

Performance Element: Acquire knowledge of commerce laws and regulations to continue business operations.
Performance Indicators:
Explain the nature of import/export law (BL:145) (SP)
Describe the nature of customs regulations (BL:126) (SP)

Business Administration Core (PQ, CS, SP)

(DECA, 2019)

Appendix G

Sample Role-Play

CAREER CLUSTER Marketing

CAREER PATHWAY

Marketing Management

INSTRUCTIONAL AREA Market Planning

BUSINESS SERVICES MARKETING SERIES EVENT

PARTICIPANT INSTRUCTIONS

- The event will be presented to you through your reading of the 21st Century Skills, Performance Indicators and Event Situation. You will have up to 10 minutes to review this information and prepare your presentation. You may make notes to use during your presentation.
- You will have up to 10 minutes to make your presentation to the judge (you may have more than one judge.)
- You will be evaluated on how well you meet the performance indicators for this event.
- Turn in all of your notes and event materials when you have completed the event.

21st CENTURY SKILLS

- Critical Thinking – Reason effective and use systems thinking.
- Problem Solving – Make judgments and decisions, and solve problems.
- Communication – Communicate clearly.
- Creativity and Innovation – Show evidence of creativity.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

1. Explain the nature of marketing plans.

2. Explain the concept of marketing strategies.

3. Explain the concept of market and market identification.

4. Describe factors used by businesses to position corporate brands.

5. Identify a product's/service's competitive advantage.

EVENT SITUATION

You are to assume the role of director of marketing for PREMIERE, a struggling retail chain that specializes in office supplies and furniture. The senior vice president (judge) has asked you to design a marketing plan for the company's strategic move to focus on business to business delivery.

PREMIERE, at its prime, had over 3,000 locations nationwide. The retailer had large stores that sold a wide variety of office supplies, desktop and laptop computers, printers, fax machines, cash registers, office furniture and other accessories. Each PREMIERE also had in-house printing services, copy services and parcel shipping.

In the last five years, the company began closing physical store locations. In 2016, the store had less than 1,000 physical store locations. Last quarter showed same-store-sales declined by 7% and another 48 stores are scheduled to close. PREMIERE executives have decided to move the company's focus from selling office supplies to consumers to business-to-business delivery service.

PREMIERE will keep physical store locations in high performing areas, but the company is making a strategic move to focus on business-to-business delivery. PREMIERE will target businesses that are midmarket, 200 or fewer employees, and offer those clients a personal sales representative and online ordering with delivery service. The sales representative is able to meet with corporate clients in person or over the phone depending on client preferences. The sales representative then sets up initial purchases from PREMIERE. The corporate client can then choose to reorder supplies online or through the representative. PREMIERE then delivers all merchandise to the corporate client.

PREMIERE executives are excited to offer this new business-to-business delivery service. They feel this new strategic focus is a better fit for the company and the market. The senior vice president (judge) has asked you to develop the marketing plan that will unveil PREMIERE's new endeavor. Consumers recognize PREMIERE as an office supply retailer, not as a business-to business delivery service. The senior vice president (judge) wants the marketing plan to help shift consumer focus.

The senior vice president (judge) would like your marketing plan to include marketing strategies that will target the appropriate target market, methods to position PREMIERE as a business to business delivery service and promote its competitive advantage.

You will present the marketing plan to the senior vice president (judge) in a role-play to take place in the senior vice president's (judge's) office. The senior vice president (judge) will begin the role-play by greeting you and asking to hear your ideas. After you have presented the plan and have answered the senior vice president's (judge's) questions, the senior vice president (judge) will conclude the role-play by thanking you for your work.

JUDGE’S INSTRUCTIONS

DIRECTIONS, PROCEDURES AND JUDGE’S ROLE

In preparation for this event, you should review the following information with your event manager and other judges:

1. Procedures
2. 21st Century Skills and Performance Indicators
3. Event Situation
4. Judge Role-play Characterization
   Participants may conduct a slightly different type of meeting and/or discussion with you each time; however, it is important that the information you provide and the questions you ask be uniform for every participant.
5. Judge’s Evaluation Instructions
6. Judge’s Evaluation Form

Please use a critical and consistent eye in rating each participant.

JUDGE ROLE-PLAY CHARACTERIZATION

You are to assume the role of senior vice president for PREMIERE, a struggling retail chain that specializes in office supplies and furniture. You have asked the director of marketing (participant) to design a marketing plan for the company’s strategic move to focus on businessto-business delivery.

PREMIERE, at its prime, had over 3,000 locations nationwide. The retailer had large stores that sold a wide variety of office supplies, desktop and laptop computers, printers, fax machines, cash registers, office furniture and other accessories. Each PREMIERE also had in-house printing services, copy services and parcel shipping.

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PREMIERE will keep physical store locations in high performing areas, but the company is making a strategic move to focus on business to business delivery. PREMIERE will target businesses that are midmarket, 200 or fewer employees, and offer those clients a personal sales representative and online ordering with delivery service. The sales representative is able to meet with corporate clients in person or over the phone depending on client preferences. The sales representative then sets up initial purchases from PREMIERE. The corporate client can then choose to reorder supplies online or through the representative. PREMIERE then delivers all merchandise to the corporate client.

PREMIERE executives are excited to offer this new business to business delivery service. They feel this new strategic focus is a better fit for the company and the market. You have asked the director of marketing (participant) to develop the marketing plan that will unveil PREMIERE's new endeavor. Consumers recognize PREMIERE as an office supply retailer, not as a business-to-business delivery service. You want the marketing plan to help shift consumer focus.

You would like the marketing plan to include marketing strategies that will target the appropriate target market, methods to position PREMIERE as a business-to-business delivery service and promote its competitive advantage.

The participant will present the plan to you in a role-play to take place in your office. You will begin the role-play by greeting the participant and asking to hear about his/her ideas.

During the course of the role-play you are to ask the following questions of each participant:

1. Are we alienating any potential markets with this new strategy focus?

2. What communication channels provide the best method to reach our target audience?

Once the director of marketing (participant) has presented the plan and has answered your questions, you will conclude the role-play by thanking the director of marketing (participant) for the work.

You are not to make any comments after the event is over except to thank the participant.

JUDGE'S EVALUATION INSTRUCTIONS

Evaluation Form Information

The participants are to be evaluated on their ability to perform the specific performance indicators stated on the cover sheet of this event and restated on the Judge's Evaluation Form. Although you may see other performance indicators being demonstrated by the participants, those listed in the Performance Indicators section are the critical ones you are measuring for this particular event.

Evaluation Form Interpretation

The evaluation levels listed below and the evaluation rating procedures should be discussed thoroughly with your event chairperson and the other judges to ensure complete and common understanding for judging consistency.

Level of Evaluation	Interpretation Level
Exceeds Expectations	Participant demonstrated the performance indicator in an extremely professional manner; greatly exceeds business standards; would rank in the top 10% of business personnel performing this performance indicator.
Meets Expectations	Participant demonstrated the performance indicator in an acceptable and effective manner; meets at least minimal business standards; there would be no need for additional formalized training at this time; would rank in the 70-89th percentile of business personnel performing this performance indicator.
Below Expectations	Participant demonstrated the performance indicator with limited effectiveness; performance generally fell below minimal business standards; additional training would be required to improve knowledge, attitude and/or skills; would rank in the 50-69th percentile of business personnel performing this performance indicator.
Little/No Value	Participant demonstrated the performance indicator with little or no effectiveness; a great deal of formal training would be needed immediately; perhaps this person should seek other employment; would rank in the 0-49th percentile of business personnel performing this performance indicator.

BUSINESS SERVICES MARKETING SERIES, 2018 Participant: ____________________

I.D. Number: ____________________

JUDGE'S EVALUATION FORM

INSTRUCTIONAL AREA : Market Planning

Did the participant:		Little/No Value	Below Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations	Judged Score
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS						
1.	Explain the nature of marketing plans?	0-1-2-3-4	5-6-7-8	9-10-11	12-13-14	
2.	Explain the concept of marketing strategies?	0-1-2-3-4	5-6-7-8	9-10-11	12-13-14	
3.	Explain the concept of market and market identification?	0-1-2-3-4	5-6-7-8	9-10-11	12-13-14	
4.	Describe factors used by businesses to position corporate brands?	0-1-2-3-4	5-6-7-8	9-10-11	12-13-14	
5.	Identify a product's/service's competitive advantage?	0-1-2-3-4	5-6-7-8	9-10-11	12-13-14	
21st CENTURY SKILLS						
6.	Reason effectively and use systems thinking?	0-1	2-3	4	5-6	
7.	Make judgments and decisions, and solve problems?	0-1	2-3	4	5-6	
8.	Communicate clearly?	0-1	2-3	4	5-6	
9.	Show evidence of creativity?	0-1	2-3	4	5-6	
10.	Overall impression and responses to the judge's questions	0-1	2-3	4	5-6	
					TOTAL SCORE	

(DECA, 2019)

Appendix H

Sample Exam

DECA

SAMPLE EXAM

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION CORE

THE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION CORE EXAM IS USED IN THE FOLLOWING EVENTS:

PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION **PBM**

PRINCIPLES OF FINANCE **PFN**

PRINCIPLES OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM **PHT**

PRINCIPLES OF MARKETING **PMK**

These test questions were developed by the MBA Research Center. Items have been randomly selected from the MBA Research Center's Test-Item Bank and represent a variety of instructional areas. Performance indicators for these test questions are at the prerequisite, career-sustaining, and specialist levels. A descriptive test key, including question sources and answer rationale, has been provided.

Posted online March 2019 by DECA Inc.

1. After only her seventh month in business, Martha realized that her new business venture was paying off, and she would be taking home a $1,000 profit for the month. Finally, she could reap the financial rewards of being the boss. This is an advantage of what type of business ownership?
   A. Merger
   B. Partnership
   C. Corporation
   D. Sole proprietorship

2. For her new job, Tasha has been asked to write a report. She has found a website with information regarding her topic. Which of the following would help her identify whether the information on this site is accurate:
   A. A table of contents
   B. A bibliography
   C. A professional-looking website design
   D. A date of modification less than one year old

3. The office photocopier is jammed again! Fortunately, there is an instruction manual to guide you through the process of removing the jammed paper. What is the best way to use the manual to clear the photocopier?
   A. Perform the first step, and then verify that you have performed it correctly in the manual. Repeat this process in sequential order until all the steps are completed.
   B. Read the entire manual in sequential order and then perform all of the steps in reverse order to remove the jammed paper.
   C. Briefly skim the manual in reverse order and then follow the steps in sequential order to remove the jammed paper.
   D. Read step one and then perform step one. Repeat this process in sequential order until all of the steps are completed and you have removed the paper.

4. What is an effective way to support and encourage someone who is talking to you?
   A. Avoid making any noise while the speaker is talking
   B. Interrupt the speaker to debate what s/he has said
   C. Clap as the speaker makes each of her/his main points
   D. Make comments such as "yes" or "I see" occasionally

5. The employee didn't listen to the manager's explanation about how to perform a certain task because s/he had done a similar job before. Which of the following factors caused the employee <u>not</u> to listen effectively:
   A. Past experiences
   B. Attention span
   C. Age differences
   D. Language skills

6. Which of the following adds meaning to the words a speaker uses:
   A. Tone of voice
   B. Tempo
   C. Accuracy
   D. Economy of speech

7. If a message recipient is frowning and has clenched fists, the emotional response that s/he is most likely displaying is
   A. anger.
   B. sadness.
   C. joy.
   D. nervousness.

8. Ashley is helping Laia make soup. Ashley says, "Chop up your carrots. But first, find your cutting board. And before that, make sure you have all your ingredients." What mistake is Ashley making in giving directions?
    A. Giving directions that are too challenging
    B. Giving directions out of order
    C. Using too many big words
    D. Using too much negative language

9. What should employees be willing to accept when defending their ideas objectively?
    A. Nonverbal support
    B. Additional responsibility
    C. Critical feedback
    D. Personal attack

10. What should a business employee do immediately after taking a telephone message for a coworker?
    A. Contact a supervisor
    B. Write an inquiry
    C. Thank the caller
    D. File the information

11. Writing key points on notecards and then placing the cards in order of their importance is one way to
    A. revise facts.
    B. access files.
    C. organize information.
    D. verify accuracy.

12. You're giving a presentation about your company's budget, and you want to show how the budget is divided among departments. Which type of visual aid should you use?
    A. A line graph
    B. A pie chart
    C. A bar graph
    D. A table

13. Written communication is less effective when readers must
    A. find the information they need within the communication.
    B. follow the writer's logical train of thought.
    C. work to understand what the communication means.
    D. spend a minimum amount of time reading the communication.

14. Before sending a professional email message to a business associate, a businessperson should
    A. make sure that the message is typed in capital letters.
    B. code the message's importance as "high priority."
    C. proofread the message for spelling and grammatical errors.
    D. insert a vague statement in the message subject line.

15. Which of the following is an example of an informational message geared toward an external audience:
    A. An inventory report
    B. An employee handbook
    C. A print advertisement
    D. An office calendar

16. Which of the following information should be shared immediately with all staff:
    A. A customer has requested that the business extend its hours.
    B. An employee of the business has been caught shoplifting.
    C. A customer has complained about the service s/he received.
    D. An employee of the business may soon be transferred out of town.

17. Which of the following will help you have a pleasant voice when speaking to customers:
    A. Speaking at a comfortable volume
    B. Speaking very slowly
    C. Speaking quickly
    D. Speaking in a monotone voice

18. A business's service orientation is its level of commitment to
    A. satisfying customers.
    B. maximizing profits.
    C. surpassing competitors.
    D. gaining respect.

19. "I'd like to have that in writing before I give you my money," best describes the ___________ customer.
    A. slow/methodical
    B. dishonest
    C. disagreeable
    D. suspicious

20. A good way to immediately calm an irate customer who has just made an angry complaint is to
    A. tell the customer s/he needs to contact the corporate office.
    B. explain company policy related to the complaint.
    C. ask the customer why s/he thinks there is a problem.
    D. thank the customer for identifying the problem.

21. A company consistently fulfills its brand promise by using
    A. external publicity.
    B. touchpoints.
    C. product-line extensions.
    D. tangible services.

22. A determining factor in what consumers buy and what producers make is
    A. price controls.
    B. market research.
    C. economic votes.
    D. money.

23. Tuition reimbursement is a way to combat the problem of limited
    A. natural resources.
    B. human resources.
    C. capital goods.
    D. consumer goods.

24. Monica has $850 for a new computer. The salesperson at the electronics stores tries to get Monica to purchase a computer that costs $1,100, but Monica can't because she doesn't possess the
    A. buying power.
    B. equilibrium.
    C. elasticity.
    D. utility.

25. Selling goods and services to customers in their homes is an example of
    A. wholesaling.
    B. retailing.
    C. discounting.
    D. producing.

26. A business purchases insurance to protect against the risk of burglary. This is an example of __________ the risk.
    A. transferring
    B. preventing
    C. retaining
    D. bonding

27. A business advertises, "Prove to us that you can buy it cheaper somewhere else, and we'll meet the lower price." This is an example of which of the following competitive techniques:
    A. Price fixing
    B. Discounts
    C. Price matching
    D. Rebates

28. One way in which the government helps protect business property is by
    A. setting tariffs.
    B. granting subsidies.
    C. issuing bonds.
    D. registering trademarks.

29. Why is it important for individuals to assess their personal strengths and weaknesses?
    A. To be able to negotiate their contracts
    B. To get the most bang for their buck
    C. To be able to respond appropriately in a crisis
    D. To improve their performance

30. How can interest and enthusiasm give people a good outlook on life?
    A. By enabling them to keep their frustrations to themselves
    B. By keeping frustrations from coming their way
    C. By minimizing the impact of frustrations
    D. By enabling them to be aggressive with others who cause frustrations

31. When Joe finishes stocking shelves, he waits to be told what to do next. Joe's manager would like for Joe to keep himself busy. Which of the following traits would Joe's manager like for Joe to develop:
    A. Initiative
    B. Creativity
    C. Leadership
    D. Assertiveness

32. Christie's coworkers know that she won't repeat what they tell her if they ask her not to do so. This indicates that Christie is a(n) __________ coworker.
    A. trustworthy
    B. straightforward
    C. tactful
    D. efficient

33. Anna's boss frequently demanded that she work late, even though she would not be paid for her overtime hours. Because of this, Anna lost respect for her boss and decided to look for a new job. This example demonstrates
    A. how fairness has little impact on decision-making.
    B. how fairness is important to professional relationships.
    C. how the justice approach to fairness is limited.
    D. how a lack of empathy undermines equality.

34. Every time you spend money on yourself, you expose yourself to
    A. future debt.
    B. relational risk.
    C. financial risk.
    D. poverty.

35. It's important to look at ethical dilemmas as
    A. negatives.
    B. challenges.
    C. opportunities.
    D. experiments.

36. Which of the following is a question you should ask yourself to determine whether you're facing a problem or a true ethical dilemma:
    A. Is money at stake?
    B. Could someone be unhappy?
    C. Is there an easy or hard choice?
    D. Could someone be hurt?

37. Even when things are not going well for Mark, he still believes everything will work out all right. Mark has a(n) __________ attitude.
    A. positive
    B. indifferent
    C. superior
    D. negative

38. Susie is not happy with her job because her coworkers are always telling her she doesn't do her share of the work. Susie's feelings are the result of
    A. negative feedback.
    B. consideration.
    C. lack of skill.
    D. cooperation.

39. Students at a local high school must now pay to participate in the sports program because the school levy failed. This situation is the result of what type of change?
    A. Governmental
    B. Personal
    C. Social
    D. Technological

40. Being able to feel what another person is feeling is known as
    A. empathy.
    B. perspective.
    C. jealousy.
    D. suspicion.

41. An American manufacturer launches a product line that offends many customers in Middle Eastern countries where the product line is considered inappropriate. This is an example of
    A. product adaptation.
    B. nationalization.
    C. cultural imperialism.
    D. globalization.

42. Assertive people are direct and upfront rather than being
    A. respectful.
    B. considerate.
    C. manipulative.
    D. talkative.

43. Jasmine needs to hold a staff meeting in the conference room at the same time that Jason needs the conference room to meet with a new client. The reason for conflict in this situation is
    A. limited resources.
    B. unclear boundaries.
    C. inconsistent behavior.
    D. desire for authority.

44. Which of the following is a true statement regarding ethical behavior:
    A. Ethical behavior always leads to increased profits.
    B. If you see the importance of ethics, you will never make mistakes.
    C. Ethical behavior is not difficult to implement.
    D. Sometimes even ethical people are tempted to act unethically.

45. A mission statement primarily deals with
    A. what you are doing right now.
    B. what your original idea was.
    C. what you have done in the past.
    D. what you regret not doing in the past.

46. One of the benefits of being adaptable is that it enables employees to
    A. manage their time.
    B. deal with change.
    C. take the initiative.
    D. avoid a conflict.

47. A business manager who wants to lead change in the company needs to be
    A. persuasive.
    B. emotional.
    C. forceful.
    D. conservative.

48. Taking responsibility for your team's success or failure in achieving the vision is part of a team leader
    A. being enthusiastic.
    B. establishing good working relationships.
    C. being an example.
    D. being a good listener.

49. Workers who enjoy close supervision and specific instructions will feel most comfortable working under a(n) ___________ leader.
    A. republican
    B. authoritarian
    C. democratic
    D. laissez-faire

50. Being exposed to conflicting viewpoints can help you
    A. earn more money at work.
    B. improve your social standing.
    C. decrease your workload.
    D. broaden your horizons.

51. Chris is at the grocery store deciding between two very similar candy bars. One is $1.50, and the other is $3.00. He decides to buy the $1.50 candy bar because it is cheaper. Chris is using money as a _____________ to make his decision.
    A. store of value
    B. medium of exchange
    C. unit of measure
    D. commodity

52. Putting $100 in a savings account today and earning 4% interest over the next year illustrates the concept of
    A. principal modification.
    B. the time value of money.
    C. opportunity cost.
    D. inflationary impact.

53. A business advertised new-product financing with a 10% down payment and a low interest rate with monthly payments spread over four years. What type of loan was the business offering?
    A. Single payment loan
    B. Installment loan
    C. Cash payment
    D. Revolving credit loan

54. Insurance is a key element in lifelong financial planning that
    A. provides protection against financial losses.
    B. protects a person from unethical salespeople.
    C. guarantees a solid financial future.
    D. is available only to property owners.

55. Using a credit card is
    A. like getting a free loan if you pay the balance each month.
    B. a good way to pay for impulsive purchases.
    C. an inexpensive way to borrow money for an extended period.
    D. a privilege reserved for working adults.

56. When Jeremy develops his personal budget, he should categorize the money that he spends on food, clothing, and entertainment as
    A. periodic investments.
    B. fixed costs.
    C. relational outflows.
    D. variable expenses.

57. The key factors involved in compounding growth are the amount of money you invest, how much your investment grows each year, and
    A. how long your money is invested.
    B. how you earn the money that you invest.
    C. your educational background and career.
    D. your mutual fund manager's education.

58. If William wants to determine the dollar amount that he has earned before taxes and other deductions for the pay period, he should look at the ___________ on his paycheck stub.
    A. net pay
    B. gross wages
    C. year-to-date gross earnings
    D. year-to-date net income

59. Which of the following pieces of information appears on a check:
    A. The payee's name
    B. The payer's credit account number
    C. The name of the payee's bank
    D. The payer's credit score

60. Matt is balancing his checkbook for the first time. He compares the checks he has written over the last month with those listed on his statement and finds that all of his checks have cleared. Next, he verifies that his latest paycheck, which he deposited the previous day, is on the list. It is not, so he adds it to his statement balance. After this, he should
    A. call the bank for a new statement.
    B. subtract any interest.
    C. subtract fees and charges.
    D. consider everything done.

61. When Jake pays his bills, he must write a check or provide his credit card number on the bills, which he then places in envelopes to mail. To protect himself from identity theft, he should
    A. put the envelopes in his mailbox for pick up.
    B. take the envelopes to the post office.
    C. make sure that he includes his address on the envelope.
    D. verify that his billing information is correct.

62. Failing to pay credit card bills on time will likely result in
    A. an increase in credit score.
    B. no penalties or consequences.
    C. late fees and interest charges.
    D. being fired from your job.

63. Which of the following is an example of an ownership investment:
    A. Money market accounts
    B. Certificates of deposit (CDs)
    C. Stocks
    D. Savings accounts

64. For financial information to be relevant, it must also be
    A. digital.
    B. certified by an auditor.
    C. timely.
    D. perfect.

65. Information that a business keeps in its accounting records includes its
    A. goods and services.
    B. revenues and expenses.
    C. trends and forecasts.
    D. market share and profit.

66. Which of the following documents will allow the beneficiary of an estate to avoid probate:
    A. Will
    B. Living will
    C. Living trust
    D. Power of attorney

67. What is the first step in the staffing process?
    A. Determining need
    B. Hiring
    C. Interviewing
    D. Recruiting

68. Determine which function of marketing addresses the following question: Is the product packaged appropriately?
    A. Product/Service management
    B. Selling
    C. Marketing-information management
    D. Pricing

69. Todd needs to develop an overall plan for his business but does not know what type of information to include in the document. Todd logs onto a search engine to quickly locate the information he needs. Which of the following search terms is most likely to provide Todd with desired search results:
    A. Plan components
    B. Develop planning document
    C. Business plan elements
    D. Business document components

70. Information that has been printed for publication is often more reliable than many Internet sources because
    A. the information is typically carefully checked for accuracy.
    B. authors have affiliations with professional organizations.
    C. published information is current and up to date.
    D. publishers do not support special interest groups.

71. Which of the following is an advantage to businesses of using web-based services for storing business records online:
    A. Web-based service companies rarely experience technical problems.
    B. The online service provider updates the records daily.
    C. Outdated records are automatically discarded without permission.
    D. The information is available at all times from any computer.

72. How does appropriate information management affect a business's relationship with its customers?
    A. Businesses earn higher profits.
    B. Businesses serve customers more effectively.
    C. Businesses lose focus on customers.
    D. Businesses make better financial decisions.

73. When a business uses computer technology to manage its money and move it among different accounts, it is taking advantage of
    A. electronic transfer of funds.
    B. hardware.
    C. expert systems.
    D. electronic data interchange.

74. You cannot communicate with your computer without
    A. Microsoft Windows.
    B. a wireless mouse.
    C. an operating system.
    D. a mobile device.

75. Which of the following is usually the quickest way that businesses can obtain information about unknown potential new vendors that are located in other parts of the country:
    A. Phone an agent
    B. Send an email to the vendors
    C. Fax a request to the vendors
    D. Search the Web

76. Businesses often use word-processing computer software to produce
    A. detailed reports, memos, and contracts.
    B. complex graphics, letters, and reports.
    C. research reports, spreadsheets, and tables.
    D. business plans, contracts, and spreadsheets.

77. If a business wants to send a mailing to customers in specific geographic regions, it should set the database query to sort its customer information by
    A. name.
    B. sales volume.
    C. state.
    D. street number.

78. Computer programs that allow businesses to manage all types of activities, such as inventory control and finance, are known as
    A. integrated software application packages.
    B. electronic communications programs.
    C. interactive information display packages.
    D. wireless connectivity programs.

79. What is an important consideration when selecting graphics and posting them on a business's website?
    A. Font size
    B. Download time
    C. Descriptive links
    D. Log files

80. Operations activities are most closely related to a business's
    A. taxes.
    B. name.
    C. product.
    D. location.

81. Who is responsible for making sure that a business is a healthy, hazard-free place to work that complies with government regulations?
    A. The employer
    B. Employees
    C. The government
    D. Local law enforcement

82. To prevent injuries when operating machinery, it is important to
    A. know standard first aid.
    B. purchase the most efficient equipment.
    C. purchase the newest equipment.
    D. follow the instruction manual.

83. What is the first thing an employee should do when s/he accidentally spills coffee in the tile hallway?
    A. Leave it for the cleaning crew
    B. Wait for the floor to dry
    C. Tell others about the spill
    D. Wipe it up immediately

84. Which of the following is a safety procedure that businesses use to track employees who must evacuate a building during an emergency:
    A. Training an employee to perform CPR if others are injured
    B. Assigning an employee to change the smoke-alarm batteries
    C. Requiring employees to call managers when they arrive home
    D. Designating a central meeting place for all employees

85. Jasmine owns a boutique on a busy street. Although her shop is small, it gets a lot of foot traffic, and she has many customers. Which of the following security procedures should Jasmine follow:
    A. Keep a large amount of cash in her cash register at all times.
    B. Have another person present when she opens up in the morning.
    C. Avoid making eye contact with customers who walk into the store.
    D. Keep the lighting dim to create an upscale mood.

86. Which of the following is an aspect of any team project that you should monitor during the course of the project:
    A. Team members' friendships
    B. The planning process
    C. Emails
    D. Team members' performance

87. In addition to purchasing, Sherita's job responsibilities include developing partnerships and alliances with suppliers, watching for business threats and opportunities, and looking for ways to improve processes. Sherita is involved in
    A. marketing planning.
    B. negotiation.
    C. strategic planning.
    D. productivity.

88. Some businesses use an automatic reorder system to maintain an adequate
    A. inventory of supplies.
    B. work environment.
    C. budget for expenses.
    D. maintenance system.

89. Why is production important to businesses?
    A. It eliminates competition.
    B. It creates goods and services businesses can sell.
    C. It enables businesses to charge high prices.
    D. It informs businesses about consumers' needs and wants.

90. Your daily personal grooming habits directly impact your personal
    A. hygiene.
    B. relaxation.
    C. skills.
    D. education.

91. What is the <u>first</u> step in developing a personal plan of action?
    A. State your goal(s).
    B. Record your progress.
    C. Evaluate the effectiveness of your plan.
    D. Develop a plan for achieving your goal.

92. A computer company creates a new kind of software. Which type of innovation is this?
    A. Paradigm
    B. Process
    C. Positioning
    D. Product

93. Which of the following is a true statement about developing self-understanding:
    A. No one else can help you identify your interests.
    B. Self-understanding and self-information are the same.
    C. You can learn as much from your failures as you can from your successes.
    D. Choosing a career should be based on your current skills and talents.

94. Paul is a 45-year-old manager of a large company who makes offensive, gender-related comments to Elizabeth, a 28-year old buyer, who has been with the company for six months. Paul's behavior violates Elizabeth's workplace rights because he is engaging in
    A. age discrimination.
    B. cultural supremacy.
    C. sexual harassment.
    D. ethnocentrism.

95. The best way for people to obtain information about a variety of career fields and options is by
    A. accessing online employment services.
    B. joining social organizations.
    C. completing job applications.
    D. reading virtual textbooks.

96. Lucy, who works for the Green Corporation, is responsible for handling special events and responding to requests for information about the company. Lucy works in
    A. merchandising.
    B. marketing research.
    C. marketing communications.
    D. professional selling.

97. A job applicant can best answer an interviewer's questions if the applicant __________ during the interview.
    A. talks excessively
    B. reads brochures
    C. listens closely
    D. takes notes

98. What is the main purpose of writing a follow-up letter after a job interview?
    A. To send a reference list
    B. To thank the interviewer
    C. To ask for the job
    D. To forward a résumé

99. What type of information may be listed in the work experience section of a résumé if the person has had only a few paying jobs?
    A. Personal references
    B. Technical training
    C. Career objectives
    D. Volunteer positions

100. Entry-level positions provide employees with
    A. high salaries.
    B. basic job experience.
    C. few advancement opportunities.
    D. limited training.

1. D
   Sole proprietorship. This is a form of business ownership in which the business is owned by only one person, and that person receives any profits made by the business. A merger is the absorption of one company by another rather than a type of business ownership. A partnership is owned by two or more people, and profits would be split between them. A corporation is owned by people who own stock in the business, and they split the profits.
   SOURCE: BL:003
   SOURCE: LAP-BL-001—Own It Your Way (Types of Business Ownership)

2. B
   A bibliography. Citing sources verifies that a website is using accurate information in the same manner that citing sources in a written report confirms accuracy. A table of contents simply shows what is included in the site. It doesn't confirm the accuracy of the contents. A professional look to a website only confirms that the site is designed by a good designer. It does not guarantee that any of the content is accurate. While a recently updated website confirms that information is timely, it does not confirm that the information is accurate. Opinions expressed yesterday by one person are not necessarily accurate, even though they may be current.
   SOURCE: CO:054
   SOURCE: University of Wisconsin Green Bay. (2018, April 2). *How can I tell if a website is credible?* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://uknowit.uwgb.edu/page.php?id=30276

3. D
   Read step one and then perform step one. Repeat this process in sequential order until all of the steps are completed and you have removed the paper. When assembling or fixing equipment, it is usually easier to understand directions by reading the step, performing the step, and then moving on to the next step in the sequence. By doing so, you are less likely to hurt yourself or the machine. You are more likely to make mistakes (and more likely to hurt yourself or the machine) if you briefly skim the manual, read the manual before performing the steps, perform the steps in reverse order, or perform the step before reading the instructions.
   SOURCE: CO:056
   SOURCE: Classroom. (2017, March 31). *How to follow written instructions*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://classroom.synonym.com/follow-written-instructions-2251998.html

4. D
   Make comments such as "yes" or "I see" occasionally. When someone talks to you, nod and make short comments such as "yes" or "I see" occasionally. By doing so, you signal that you are listening to the speaker and hearing what s/he has to say. And, when you nod and make short comments, you show your support and encouragement for the speaker. It is very rude to interrupt the speaker to debate what s/he has said. It is not necessary to clap as the speaker makes each of her/his main points. Rather than not making any noise while the speaker is talking, you should limit yourself to short comments.
   SOURCE: CO:082
   SOURCE: Grohol, J. (2018, April 12). *Become a better listener: Active listening*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://psychcentral.com/lib/become-a-better-listener-active-listening/

5. A
   Past experiences. People often think they know what someone is going to say before s/he says it and as a result do not listen well. People's past experiences may influence how well they listen because they think they already know the answer or understand the explanation. Effective listeners try to block out past experiences and focus on what the speaker is saying. Age differences, attention span, and language skills are other factors that may affect how well people listen, but they do not apply to this scenario.
   SOURCE: CO:119
   SOURCE: University of Minnesota Libraries. (2016, September 29). *5.2 Barriers to effective listening*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://open.lib.umn.edu/communication/chapter/5-2-barriers-to-effective-listening/

6. A
Tone of voice. People can change the meaning of their words by changing their tone of voice. For example, the same words can be a request or a command depending upon the tone used to deliver them. Tempo is the rate of speed or rhythm the speaker uses. Economy of speech is using as few words as possible to express an idea. Accuracy refers to the correctness of the message.
SOURCE: CO:147
SOURCE: SocialMettle. (2018, September 11). *Learn to express yourself with good verbal communication skills*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://socialmettle.com/verbal-communication-skills

7. A
Anger. Nonverbal cues are the elements of communication that use gestures and facial expressions rather than words. Nonverbal behavior can indicate what the sender and/or the receiver think about a message. If the recipient responds to a message by frowning and clenching his/her fists, it is likely that the message has made the recipient angry. Message recipients might cry or cover their faces with their hands if the message contains sad news. Smiling and jumping up and down usually indicate that a message contains good news, which causes joy. Message recipients might express nervousness by tapping their toes, shaking, twitching, or biting their fingernails.
SOURCE: CO:059
SOURCE: Reid, M. (2017, November 21). *Nonverbal signs of anger*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://classroom.synonym.com/nonverbal-signs-anger-15253.html

8. B
Giving directions out of order. Directions should be given in the order that tasks should be completed. By giving directions out of order, Ashley risks confusing Laia or causing her to forget some of the directions. Ashley's directions are not challenging, and she isn't using big words. Ashley isn't using negative language.
SOURCE: CO:083
SOURCE: Tower, D. (2008-2014). *How to give instructions in English*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://www.helping-you-learn-english.com/how-to-give-instructions.html

9. C
Critical feedback. When employees present their ideas to management or coworkers, they should be prepared to defend those ideas and provide supporting information. They also should be willing to accept critical feedback because others might not agree with the ideas or have different opinions. Being prepared will help employees remain objective and be able to offer logical evidence to back up their ideas. Critical feedback is often useful because it allows employees to view their ideas from a different perspective. Defending ideas usually does not involve accepting additional responsibility or nonverbal support. It is not acceptable to attack employees on a personal level because of their ideas.
SOURCE: CO:061
SOURCE: Baldoni, J. (2010, April 22). *Defend your idea without being defensive*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://hbr.org/2010/04/defend-yourself-without-being

10. C
Thank the caller. Answering the telephone and taking messages for coworkers is often part of an employee's everyday routine. It is important for the employee to properly handle the call, and this involves thanking the caller. In many cases, the caller is a customer who is leaving an important message. Therefore, the person taking the call should always thank the caller for contacting the business. The employee taking the message should obtain the necessary information, but does not need to write a detailed explanation or write an inquiry. It is usually not necessary to contact a supervisor unless there is a problem that must be addressed immediately. It is not appropriate to file the information.
SOURCE: CO:114
SOURCE: Money Instructor. (2002-2018). *Basic business telephone skills*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://content.moneyinstructor.com/1543/telephoneskills.html

11. C
Organize information. Organizing information helps you communicate your message to your audience in a meaningful way. One way to organize information is to write down key points on notecards (index cards). Then, you can place the cards in the order of their importance or categories. The advantage to using notecards to organize information is that you can move them around and reorganize as needed. When you have the information in the order that you want it in, you can efficiently write an outline, report, manual, or article, or prepare a presentation. Placing key points on notecards and placing the cards in a certain order will not help you access files, revise facts, or verify the information's accuracy.
SOURCE: CO:086
SOURCE: A Research Guide for Students. (2017, August 28). *How to write a research paper*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.aresearchguide.com/1steps.html

12. B
A pie chart. Pie charts are the best way to show how categories make up the whole. For example, a pie chart could help you illustrate how your budget is allocated to the different departments in your company. It would not be as effective to use a bar graph, a line graph, or a table to show this information.
SOURCE: CO:087
SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *How to choose which type of graph to use?* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/help/user_guide/graph/whentouse.asp

13. C
Work to understand what the communication means. Effective written communication presents information in a clear, easy-to-read style so that readers do not have to try to figure out what the communication is all about. Readers should be able to grasp the communication's message in a minimum amount of reading time. Written communication should follow a logical train of thought, and readers should be able to find the information they need within the communication.
SOURCE: CO:016
SOURCE: Mind Tools Content Team. (1996-2018). *Writing skills*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/WritingSkills.htm

14. C
Proofread the message for spelling and grammatical errors. Although many people view email as an informal method of communication, it is a vital communication tool in today's business world. Therefore, it is important to maintain a professional tone when developing business-related emails. The text in a professional email should contain proper grammar and correct spelling. To ensure that the message does not contain spelling and grammatical errors, the businessperson should proofread the message and make necessary corrections before sending the message to the intended receiver. Only the most critical email messages should be sent as high priority messages. Capitalizing all of the letters in the text often implies an angry tone, so this practice should be avoided. Although the subject line should be brief, it should contain enough information for the message recipient to determine the message content. If the subject line is too vague, the recipient may delete the message before reading it.
SOURCE: CO:090
SOURCE: Colorado State University. (1993-2018). *Netiquette rules*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://writing.colostate.edu/guides/page.cfm?pageid=1498&guideid=74

15. C
A print advertisement. Informational messages involve communicating data, facts, or knowledge to a message receiver. Print advertisements communicate information about a business's products to customers or potential customers, which are external audiences. An employee handbook, an inventory report, and an office calendar are types of information provided to the business's employees, who are an internal audience.
SOURCE: CO:039
SOURCE: Duggan, T. (2018, June 30). *Examples of external communications in the workplace*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://smallbusiness.chron.com/examples-external-communications-workplace-10949.html

16. C
A customer has complained about the service s/he received. This kind of complaint is the type of information that should be shared with all staff right away since it could affect the entire company. In addition, all staff should be reminded of company policy in such areas. Information about employees' problems is likely to be passed through the grapevine, but it should not be announced to staff. Such business decisions as the transfer of employees or changes in hours are usually announced at an appropriate time after they have been made by management.
SOURCE: CO:014
SOURCE: Szaky, T. (2011, September 8). *How much information do you share with employees?* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://boss.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/08/how-much-information-do-you-share-with-employees/

17. A
Speaking at a comfortable volume. To speak pleasantly with customers, you should speak at a comfortable volume—not too loudly or too softly. You also need to vary the tone of your voice and speak neither too quickly nor too slowly.
SOURCE: CR:004
SOURCE: LAP-CR-004—Set Your Mind to It (Customer-Service Mindset)

18. A
Satisfying customers. A business's service orientation is its philosophy of a certain level and quality of service. A business communicates its service orientation in many ways. For example, a business that is committed to providing excellent service will hire competent, courteous employees who are knowledgeable about the business's products. Another way a business communicates its service orientation is through its service policies. A business that is committed to providing excellent service might have liberal product return or replacement policies. When a business provides good service, it is satisfying customers and encouraging repeat sales. The reason customers return to the business is because they appreciate and respect the business's service efforts. Repeat business increases profits and often provides the business with a competitive edge over its competitors.
SOURCE: CR:005
SOURCE: Wellington, E. (2017, May 26). *What does it mean to be "customer service oriented?"* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.helpscout.net/blog/customer-oriented/

19. D
Suspicious. These customers want facts and proof before making the final buying decision. They tend to question everything you tell them. This skepticism may be the result of bad experiences with other businesses. Disagreeable customers are unpleasant and hard to help. Dishonest customers try to avoid paying part or all of the price for a good or service. Slow/Methodical customers require a lot of time to make buying decisions because of shyness or indecisiveness.
SOURCE: CR:009
SOURCE: LAP-CR-009—Making Mad Glad (Handling Difficult Customers)

20. D
Thank the customer for identifying the problem. Letting the customer know that you appreciate hearing about the problem helps calm irate customers. It's difficult for those customers to remain angry when you're letting them know how much you appreciate their information. Asking the irate customer why s/he thinks there is a problem or telling the customer to contact the corporate headquarters would be likely to increase the customer's anger. Explaining company policy may help the situation, but it would be a later step in handling the complaint.
SOURCE: CR:010
SOURCE: LAP-CR-010—Righting Wrongs (Handling Customer Complaints)

21. B
Touchpoints. A brand promise is a company's agreement, spoken or unspoken, with customers that it will consistently meet their expectations and deliver on its brand characteristics and values. Touchpoints are all of the opportunities that a company has to connect with its customers and reinforce its brand value. Touchpoints may include the company's employees, product attributes and packaging, and technological systems. A company uses various touchpoints to create these experiences for its customers to fulfill its brand promise. By fulfilling its brand promise, the company is more likely to develop loyal customer relationships and repeat business. Companies cannot always control the publicity that they receive from external sources. A product-line extension occurs when the company adds a new product to the existing product line. Services are intangible touchpoints.
SOURCE: CR:001
SOURCE: Glatstein, S. (2018, February 9). *Steps to building a strong brand*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.thebalancesmb.com/steps-to-brand-building-2948332

22. D
Money. Limited amounts of money force consumers to choose between products for sale and determine which products producers make based on effective allocation of resources. Market research is how producers find out what consumers want to buy. "Economic votes" is a term given to the purchasing choices consumers make. Price controls are artificial ceilings or floors set by governments or by common consent within the market to manipulate the market for consumer or producer benefit.
SOURCE: EC:002
SOURCE: LAP-EC-010—Get the Goods on Goods and Services (Economic Goods and Services)

23. B
Human resources. Tuition reimbursement attracts people to certain jobs over others when there is a labor shortage. Natural resources are items found in nature used to make goods and services. Capital goods are manufactured items used to make other goods and services. Consumer goods are those that are produced for personal use.
SOURCE: EC:003
SOURCE: LAP-EC-014—Be Resourceful (Economic Resources)

24. A
Buying power. Buying power is the amount of money available. If consumers do not have money to spend, they cannot buy products. Because Monica only has $850, she doesn't have the necessary buying power to purchase a $1,100 computer. Equilibrium is the point at which the quantity supplied is equal to the quantity demanded. Elasticity is an indication of how changes in price will affect changes in the amounts demanded and supplied. Utility is a product's ability to satisfy a customer's wants or needs.
SOURCE: EC:005
SOURCE: LAP-EC-011—It's the Law (Supply and Demand)

25. B
Retailing. Whenever a sale of goods or services to the ultimate consumer takes place, retailing has occurred. Retailing can take place anywhere —in a store, over the phone, by mail, on the street corner, in a customer's home, etc. Discounting is reducing the price of a good or service. Wholesaling is the process of buying goods from producers and selling them to retailers. Producing is the process of making goods and services.
SOURCE: EC:070
SOURCE: LAP-EC-070—Business Connections (Business and Society)

26. A
Transferring. A risk is reduced or eliminated by transferring, or shifting, the risk factor to some other person or business. When an employee is bonded, his/her employer has purchased an insurance policy to cover possible theft or loss involving that employee. Hiring security guards is an example of preventing the risk. If the business takes no precautions, then it is retaining, or keeping, the risk.
SOURCE: EC:011
SOURCE: LAP-EC-003—Lose, Win, or Draw (Business Risk)

27. C
Price matching. Price matching is a trend among some discount businesses to attract and hold customers by meeting competitors' prices. Price fixing is an illegal practice that occurs when businesses agree on prices of their goods or services, resulting in little choice for the consumer. Rebates are refunds usually offered by the manufacturer of the product. Discounts occur when businesses deduct an amount from the price of a product at the time of purchase.
SOURCE: EC:012
SOURCE: LAP-EC-008—Ready, Set, Compete! (Competition)

28. D
Registering trademarks. Trademarks are symbols, designs, or words used by producers to identify goods or services. They can be registered with the government to prevent their use by others. A subsidy is government financial help given to a business. Bonds are interest-bearing certificates issued by government and promising to pay bond owners a certain sum at a specified time. Tariffs are taxes on imported goods. Both tariffs and bonds raise revenues for the government.
SOURCE: EC:008
SOURCE: LAP-EC-016—Regulate and Protect (Government and Business)

29. D
To improve their performance. Each individual has personal strengths and weaknesses. Assessing strengths will allow an individual to build on those strengths. It is also important to assess weaknesses because those are areas that need improvement. For example, an individual might find that it will be necessary to improve his/her computer skills in order to improve performance and be considered for a promotion. It may be difficult to improve performance if individuals have not identified their personal strengths and weaknesses. Assessing personal strengths and weaknesses will not necessarily help individuals respond appropriately in a crisis, negotiate contracts, or get the most bang for their buck.
SOURCE: EI:002
SOURCE: LAP-EI-017—Assess for Success (Assessing Personal Strengths and Weaknesses)

30. C
By minimizing the impact of frustrations. Interest and enthusiasm are part of a positive attitude which gives people a good outlook on life. They will still encounter frustrations, but that won't keep interested, enthusiastic people down very long. Their interest in life and their enthusiasm will soon reassert themselves. People should discuss their frustrations to clear them up. Aggressive behavior is generally not an advisable approach to take with frustrating individuals because that often creates more problems.
SOURCE: EI:020
SOURCE: Cleverism. (2018). *Enthusiasm*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.cleverism.com/skills-and-tools/enthusiasm/

31. A
Initiative. Initiative is the willingness to act without having to be told to do so, or the willingness to accept/seek additional or unpleasant duties. Developing initiative would prompt Joe to look for other work to do rather than waiting for instructions. Creativity is the ability to generate unique ideas, approaches, solutions, etc. Leadership is the ability to guide other people's activities. Assertiveness is the ability to express yourself; to communicate your point of view; and to stand up for your rights, principles, and beliefs.
SOURCE: EI:024
SOURCE: LAP-EI-002—Hustle! (Taking Initiative at Work)

32. A
Trustworthy. Being trustworthy means that people can rely on you to do what you say you will do. Trustworthy people will not tell anything they have been asked not to tell or pass along rumors that might not be true. An efficient person is one who performs in an effective, organized manner. A straightforward person is direct, open, and honest. A tactful person has the ability to do or say the right thing in any circumstances.
SOURCE: EI:022
SOURCE: LAP-EI-138—Sincerely Yours (Demonstrating Honesty and Integrity)

33. B
How fairness is important to professional relationships. Treating others with fairness is essential for forming positive professional relationships. When you treat someone fairly, your relationship with that person is equal and balanced. One person is not taking advantage of the other or getting more out of the relationship than the other. In this case, Anna's boss did not treat her fairly, so they did not develop a relationship of respect and trust. Therefore, Anna looked for a different job. This example does not demonstrate how fairness has little impact on decision-making, how the justice approach to fairness is limited, or how a lack of empathy undermines equality.
SOURCE: EI:127
SOURCE: LAP-EI-127—Fair or Foul? (Demonstrating Fairness)

34. C
Financial risk. Anytime you spend money you expose yourself to financial risk because it affects your budget and your savings. Spending money on yourself does not necessarily affect your relationships or cause you to experience future debt or poverty.
SOURCE: EI:091
SOURCE: LAP-EI-091—Worth the Risk (Assessing Risks of Personal Decisions)

35. C
Opportunities. It's important to remember that each ethical dilemma you encounter is an opportunity to make the right decision and show that you can follow ethical principles. While ethical dilemmas can be challenging, viewing them as opportunities will help you feel motivated to make the right decision rather than intimidated. Ethical dilemmas are not negative; rather, they are chances to demonstrate positive choices. Finally, an experiment is a data-collection method that tests cause and effect. Ethical dilemmas do not test cause and effect, and they should not be used to collect data. If you pick the wrong choice, someone or something could be harmed. Instead, it is important to make the right decision.
SOURCE: EI:124
SOURCE: LAP-EI-124—What's the Situation? (Reasons for Ethical Dilemmas)

36. D
Could someone be hurt? Three questions you can ask yourself to figure out whether what you're facing is simply a problem or a true ethical dilemma are: Could someone be hurt? Is there a right and wrong choice? Are ethical principles being violated? People can be unhappy with decisions made in ethical dilemmas and regular problems. Ethical dilemmas are not determined by whether the choices are easy or hard or whether there is money at stake.
SOURCE: EI:125
SOURCE: LAP-EI-125—Make the Right Choice (Recognizing and Responding to Ethical Dilemmas)

37. A
Positive. A positive attitude is an outlook that focuses on the good side of things. People with positive attitudes feel good about themselves, their jobs, and other people. They are better able to weather life's problems because they believe things will work out all right in the end. An indifferent attitude is one that expresses lack of interest. A negative attitude is an outlook that focuses on the bad side of things. A superior attitude is displayed by those who feel they are better than others.
SOURCE: EI:019
SOURCE: LAP-EI-003—Opt for Optimism (Positive Attitude)

38. A
Negative feedback. Negative feedback is criticism or disapproval. Susie's coworkers are expressing their criticism and disapproval of her lack of consideration and cooperation on the job. Susie's coworkers have reached negative conclusions about her behavior, but they have not said she lacks skill.
SOURCE: EI:003
SOURCE: LAP-EI-015—Grin and Bear It (Using Feedback for Personal Growth)

39. A
Governmental. Governmental changes are the result of new or revised laws, regulations, policies, public services, leadership, etc. This change reflects the action of the school board in response to decreases in school revenues. Social changes reflect shifts in our values, tastes, and habits. Technological changes are developments, breakthroughs, and other changes in such fields as science or engineering. Personal changes are changes concerning our bodies, minds, life styles, etc.
SOURCE: EI:026
SOURCE: Saez, A. (2017, September 26). *What are the causes of change in an organization?* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://bizfluent.com/info-8230942-causes-change-organization.html

40. A
Empathy. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in another person's place and identify with their thoughts, feelings, values, attitudes, and actions. It enables an individual to listen from the speaker's point of view. Jealousy is a form of envy, and suspicion is a feeling that something is wrong. Perspective is outlook or point of view.
SOURCE: EI:030
SOURCE: LAP-EI-030—Have a Heart (Showing Empathy for Others)

41. C
Cultural imperialism. Businesses in some countries, especially more developed ones, may have an attitude that their approach, tastes, or preferences are "better" than those of other countries, particularly less developed ones. Or, they may believe their cultural beliefs and attitudes are the only ones and neglect other countries' cultures altogether. This is cultural imperialism. It is not an effective business practice and does not lead to success in the long run. Globalization refers to keeping a product and advertising message the same around the world, while nationalization refers to something whose ownership is taken over by the government. Product adaptation is changing a product in some way to make it more appropriate for another country's preferences.
SOURCE: EI:033
SOURCE: Historyplex. (2018, March 5). *Examples of cultural imperialism that affected the whole world.* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://historyplex.com/cultural-imperialism-examples

42. C
Manipulative. Assertive people are direct and upfront rather than being manipulative. This is part of honest communication. Assertive people may also be considerate, respectful, or talkative, but these qualities are not necessarily associated with being direct and upfront.
SOURCE: EI:008
SOURCE: LAP-EI-018—Assert Yourself (Assertiveness)

43. A
Limited resources. Because two employees need the conference room at the same time, the conflict involves a limited resource. Conflict due to unclear boundaries involves a lack of clear understanding of what constitutes appropriate behavior. Inconsistent behavior (e.g., moodiness) can also create conflict because people do not know how to act or behave. Conflict involving a desire for authority occurs when individuals want to control or be in charge of a situation. For example, when two coworkers apply for the same management position, it can create a conflict for authority.
SOURCE: EI:015
SOURCE: LAP-EI-007—Stop the Madness (Conflict Resolution in Business)

44. D
Sometimes even ethical people are tempted to act unethically. While ethical behavior is important, it is also challenging. Even those who understand and believe in ethics are sometimes tempted to act unethically depending on the situation. Understanding the importance of ethics can help you avoid making poor decisions, but you cannot completely avoid ever making a mistake. Ethical behavior can be difficult to implement. Finally, ethical behavior does not always lead to increased profits, though it can help people and organizations be more successful.
SOURCE: EI:132
SOURCE: LAP-EI-132—Practice What You Preach (Modeling Ethical Behavior)

45. A
What you are doing right now. A mission statement deals with what you are doing right now and how it is helping you achieve your personal vision. A mission statement does not reflect what you have done in the past, what your original idea was, or what you wish you had done in the past.
SOURCE: EI:063
SOURCE: LAP-EI-063—Picture This! (Determining Personal Vision)

46. B
Deal with change. Adaptability is the ability to adjust or modify attitudes and/or behavior to new situations or circumstances. Changes and new situations are common in the workplace. When employees are adaptable, they are able to deal with change and even learn from new situations. This is a benefit because employees who are not adaptable may experience stress or not be able to be productive when faced with new situations. Being adaptable does not necessarily enable employees to manage their time, take the initiative, or avoid a conflict.
SOURCE: EI:006
SOURCE: LAP-EI-023—Go With the Flow (Demonstrating Adaptability)

47. A
Persuasive. Business managers who want to lead change in the company need to have certain characteristics to be effective. They should be persuasive which means they have the ability to get people to see things their way, do things their way, or agree with them. Change doesn't just happen on its own. Change leaders need the involvement and help of many different people. Effective change leaders are able to persuade the right people to go along with them and help make the change happen. A manager who wants to lead change does not need to be emotional, forceful, or conservative.
SOURCE: EI:005
SOURCE: LAP-EI-022—Start the Revolution (Leading Change)

48. C
Being an example. Taking responsibility for your team's success or failure as it works toward the vision is being an example and a sure sign of solid leadership. This responsibility does not necessarily relate to working relationships, being enthusiastic, or being a good listener.
SOURCE: EI:060
SOURCE: LAP-EI-060—Vision Quest (Enlisting Others in Vision)

49. B
Authoritarian. Authoritarian leaders give very few, if any, decision-making responsibilities to employees. Workers who prefer this style of leader would not feel comfortable with a democratic leader who exerts only moderate control, or with a laissez-faire leader who exerts little or no control. Republican is a term that describes a political party in the United States.
SOURCE: EI:037
SOURCE: LAP-EI-037—Can You Relate? (Fostering Positive Working Relationships)

50. D
Broaden your horizons. Being exposed to conflicting viewpoints can help you broaden your horizons by opening your mind to new ideas that you may not have considered before. Being exposed to conflicting viewpoints cannot necessarily improve your social standing, decrease your workload, or help you earn more money at work.
SOURCE: EI:136
SOURCE: LAP-EI-136—Pick a Side (Considering Conflicting Viewpoints)

51. C

Unit of measure. Money can serve as a unit of measure to determine or compare the relative worth of different products. Chris compares the monetary value of the two candy bars and selects the less expensive one. While money does serve as the medium of exchange in this example, the fact that Chris is using money instead of some other medium of exchange does not directly impact his decision. Money would serve as the medium of exchange even if he purchases the more expensive candy bar. Store of value means that money can be held over time and still have purchasing power at a later date. The money that Chris is using is not a commodity because it does not have another use.

SOURCE: FI:060

SOURCE: CliffsNotes. (2016). *Functions of money.* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guides/economics/money-and-banking/functions-of-money

52. B

The time value of money. The term "time value of money" refers to the increase of an amount of money as a result of interest or dividends earned. A basic illustration of the time value of money is money and the interest it earns in a savings account. Principal is the deposited amount, which is not modified. Opportunity cost is what you have to give up when you make a choice. In this case, the opportunity cost of depositing $100 is spending it on something else. Inflation has a negative impact on the time value of money.

SOURCE: FI:062

SOURCE: Campbell, S.R. (2010). *Foundations of personal finance: Teacher's edition* (p. 266). Tinley Park, IL: Goodheart-Willcox Company.

53. B

Installment loan. Loans that must be paid back in regular installments over a certain amount of time at a specified rate of interest are installment loans. They are frequently used to purchase costly items, such as automobiles, furniture, and appliances. Single payment loans are loans that must be paid off in a lump sum at a designated time in the future, possibly three months. Revolving credit loans are loans that are repaid on a regular basis in at least the minimum required amount. Cash payments are made for the full amount at the time of purchase.

SOURCE: FI:002

SOURCE: LAP-FI-002—Give Credit Where Credit Is Due (Credit and Its Importance)

54. A

Provides protection against financial losses. Insurance is designed to protect against financial losses, whether those losses are related to property, health, or even life. Insurance does not protect a person from unethical salespeople or guarantee a solid financial future. Insurance is available to property owners and non-owners alike.

SOURCE: FI:064

SOURCE: Investopedia. (2018, June 28). *Insurance*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.investopedia.com/terms/i/insurance.asp

55. A

Like getting a free loan if you pay the balance each month. When you pay the balance on a credit card each month, you are getting what amounts to a free loan. A credit card is not a good way to pay for impulsive purchases—impulsive purchases are usually a bad idea no matter how you pay for them. Credit cards are not an inexpensive way to borrow money for an extended period. Nowadays, easy access to credit cards is a growing problem.

SOURCE: FI:065

SOURCE: US Bank. (2018). *How credit cards work.* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.usbank.com/credit-cards/how-credit-cards-work.html

56. D
Variable expenses. A budget is an estimation of income and expenses. Developing a personal budget helps individuals better manage their money. Variable expenses are expenses that change from month to month, such as food, clothing, and entertainment expenses. Fixed expenses are expenses that do not change every month, such as rent and loan payments. Relational outflows and periodic investments are not budgetary categories.
SOURCE: FI:066
SOURCE: Pant, P. (2018, May 5). *What's the difference between fixed & variable expenses*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.thebalance.com/what-s-the-difference-between-fixed-and-variable-expenses-453774

57. A
How long your money is invested. The most important factors to consider in compounding growth are how much money you invest, how much your investment grows each year, and how long your money is invested. Investing is using money to make money, which means that if you invest money in the stock market, for example, you are likely to make an average of 10% each year. As the years pass, your investment will grow tremendously because you will be earning interest on interest. So, it is beneficial to invest for as long as possible to earn the largest amount of compound interest as possible. How you earn the money that you invest, your educational background and career, and your mutual fund manager's education have a much smaller impact on compounding growth than time does.
SOURCE: FI:270
SOURCE: Investopedia. (2013, August 22). *Compound interest explained*. [Video]. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wf91rEGw88Q

58. B
Gross wages. Gross wages are the total income earned for the pay period before income taxes and other deductions are subtracted from the wages. Net pay is the amount of money that the worker receives after the taxes and other deductions have been subtracted from his/her wages. Year-to-date gross earnings are an employee's total gross pay from the beginning of the calendar year to a specific pay period. Year-to-date net income or net pay is an employee's total net pay from the beginning of the calendar year to a specific pay period.
SOURCE: FI:068
SOURCE: Pay Stubs. (2017, December 28). *Sample pay stub*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://www.pay-stubs.com/sample-pay-stub/

59. A
The payee's name. The payee is the party to whom the check is made payable. That information, along with the date, check amount, and payer's signature, has to be filled out on checks. The payer can choose to record the purpose for which the check is being written. The check itself is imprinted with the name of the payer's bank, the payer's bank account number, the check number, and the bank's routing number. The payer's credit account number would only be needed if the payer wrote a check to his/her credit card company. The payee's bank name does not appear on a payer's check. The payer's credit score is irrelevant to check writing.
SOURCE: FI:560
SOURCE: Pritchard, J. (2018, April 13). *How to write a check - A step-by-step explanation*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.thebalance.com/how-to-write-a-check-4019395

60. C
Subtract fees and charges. To complete checkbook balancing, Matt needs to subtract fees and charges. Some financial institutions charge a monthly fee on bank accounts, especially those with less than a certain balance. They also have charges for new checks, bounced checks, etc. All of these charges must be subtracted from the balance in the check register to obtain an accurate monthly balance. Interest is added to, not subtracted from, the check register balance. Matt does not need to call the bank for a new statement just because the latest deposit is not on his current statement. He does need to subtract fees and charges and add any interest before he can consider everything done.
SOURCE: FI:070
SOURCE: Capital One. (2018). *Balancing and budgeting—Balancing your checkbook*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.capitalone.com/financial-education/money-basics/balancing-budget/balance-your-checkbook/

61. B
Take the envelopes to the post office. People tend to associate identity theft with computer hacking; however, thieves often use very simple methods to steal others' personal and financial information. One of the easiest ways to steal confidential or personal information is by simply taking a person's outgoing mail from his/her mailbox. Bills submitted to payees via "snail" mail might include checks that have bank account numbers printed on them as well as payment vouchers in which individuals include their credit card information. To reduce the risk associated with this type of theft, individuals should take their outgoing bills directly to the post office. Jake should make sure that he includes a return address on the envelope in case there is a problem with delivery and should verify that he has provided the correct billing information to ensure prompt payment; however, these actions do not reduce risks associated with identity theft.
SOURCE: FI:073
SOURCE: Ledford, J. (2018, May 30). *Your risky mailbox: Identity theft 101*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.thebalance.com/your-risky-mailbox-identity-theft-101-1947529

62. C
Late fees and interest charges. It is important to pay your credit card bills in full each month because interest charges and fees can quickly accumulate if you pay late. There are penalties and consequences of failing to pay your credit card bills on time; you will receive interest charges and/or late fees, and your credit score may decrease. It is unlikely that you would be fired from your job because you failed to pay your credit card bills on time, since employers do not have access to your credit information.
SOURCE: FI:565
SOURCE: Credit Karma. (2016, April 21). *How late payments can affect your credit*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.creditkarma.com/credit-cards/i/late-payments-affect-credit-score/

63. C
Stocks. When people buy a company's stock, they are, in effect, becoming an owner of a piece of that company. Certificates of deposit, money market accounts, and savings accounts are examples of lending investments.
SOURCE: FI:077
SOURCE: LAP-FI-077—Invest for Success (Types of Investments)

64. C
Timely. For financial information to be useful, it must be relevant (applicable to its users' purposes), and to be relevant, it must also be timely (up to date). Financial information does not necessarily need to be certified by an auditor, presented digitally, or perfect to be considered relevant.
SOURCE: FI:579
SOURCE: LAP-FI-009—By the Numbers (The Need for Financial Information)

65. B
Revenues and expenses. Accounting is the process of keeping and interpreting financial records. Information that a business keeps and tracks in its accounting records includes its revenues and its expenses. Revenues refer to income or money that flows into the business from activities such as sales. The business also keeps track of its expenses in its accounting records. Expenses are the monies the business owes to others (e.g., vendors) and flows out of the business. By keeping records of revenue and expenses, the business can evaluate its profits—the amount of money left over after all the expenses are paid. Products (goods and services), trends, forecasts, and market share are types of marketing information.
SOURCE: FI:085
SOURCE: LAP-FI-085—Show Me the Money (Nature of Accounting)

66. C
Living trust. A living trust is a legal arrangement that can serve as an alternative to a will. It transfers control of a living person's assets to a trustee. Upon death, the assets are transferred to the beneficiary without going through probate. This saves considerable time and expense. A living will is a legal document that outlines a person's wishes for medical treatment under specific circumstances. A will provides details of how an estate should be handled upon death, but does not avoid probate. A power of attorney assigns someone the right to act on another's behalf.
SOURCE: FI:572
SOURCE: Fabio, M. (2015, November). *Top three benefits of a living trust*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.legalzoom.com/articles/top-three-benefits-of-a-living-trust

67. A
Determining need. Before an HR manager does anything else, s/he should determine need. S/He must figure out where the company is lacking human resources and determine if the positions are permanent, temporary, full-time, or part-time. Recruiting, interviewing, and hiring all come after determining need.
SOURCE: HR:410
SOURCE: LAP-HR-035—People Pusher (Nature of Human Resources Management)

68. A
Product/Service management. Product/Service management involves obtaining, developing, maintaining, and improving a product mix in response to market opportunities. Product packaging is an element of product/service management. Selling is determining consumer needs and wants through planned, personalized communication that influences purchase decisions and enhances future business opportunities. Marketing-information management is a marketing function, which involves gathering, accessing, synthesizing, evaluating, and disseminating information for use in making business decisions such as what and how much it can expect to sell. Pricing involves determining and adjusting prices to maximize return and meet customers' perceptions of value.
SOURCE: MK:002
SOURCE: LAP-MK-001—Work the Big Seven (Marketing Functions)

69. C
Business plan elements. To retrieve the most applicable results from an Internet search engine, a computer user should enter terms into the query field that are most likely to bring up the desired information. "Business plan elements" are words that are most likely to retrieve the information Todd needs to include in his business plan. If Todd is not satisfied with the results that his initial search returns, he could use search terms such as "business plan components" or "business plan parts." The remaining search terms are too general and would likely not provide the information Todd desires on the first few pages of the results, which would reduce Todd's efficiency in retrieving the desired information.
SOURCE: NF:078
SOURCE: Google.com. (n.d.). *How to search on Google*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/134479?hl=en

70. A
The information is typically carefully checked for accuracy. Most printed publications go through several rounds of editing and review to ensure they are accurate. Authors affiliated with professional organizations could have bias toward a special interest group, which can result in biased information. Published information can become quickly outdated. Publishers do sometimes support special interest groups, but they clearly indicate those associations so a researcher can determine if s/he trusts the information.
SOURCE: NF:079
SOURCE: Purdue OWL. (201). *Evaluating sources of information*. Retrieved on September 20, 2018, from https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/conducting_research/evaluating_sources_of_information/index.html

71. D
The information is available at all times from any computer. The advantage of storing records via web-based storage services is that the business can access the information at all times from any computer. Online storage service providers do not update another business's records on a daily basis nor do they automatically discard outdated records without permission. Web-based storage services can experience technical problems, which is a disadvantage of online record storage.
SOURCE: NF:081
SOURCE: Wang, J. (2011, December 7). *How to store your financial documents*. Retrieved September 18, 2018, from http://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-store-financial-documents-2011-12

72. B
Businesses serve customers more effectively. Managing information appropriately helps businesses focus on the important task of serving customers more effectively, which in turn *may* help lead to higher profits, although it is not a guarantee. A business's financial decisions may or may not have to do with serving customers.
SOURCE: NF:110
SOURCE: LAP-NF-110—In the Know (Nature of Information Management)

73. A
Electronic transfer of funds. When a business uses computer technology to manage its money and move it among different accounts, it is taking advantage of the electronic transfer of funds. This is the same technology you use at the ATM. Hardware refers to the physical components of a computer. Expert systems are software programs that mimic the knowledge of human experts. Electronic data interchange refers to documents rather than money.
SOURCE: NF:003
SOURCE: LAP-NF-004—TECH-tastic (Technology's Impact on Business)

74. C
An operating system. An operating system is the program that manages and supports the hardware and software on a computer. It lets you "communicate" with your computer. You do not need a wireless mouse or a mobile device to communicate with your computer. Microsoft Windows is just one operating system; you can also use others.
SOURCE: NF:085
SOURCE: Goodwill Community Foundation. (1998-2018). *What is an operating system?* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://www.gcflearnfree.org/computerbasics/understanding-operating-systems/1/

75. D

Search the Web. The World Wide Web (WWW) links millions of computers throughout the world by way of the Internet. Obtaining information is one of the most common ways that businesses use the Web. For example, a business in one state that wanted to locate a potential vendor in another state can search the Web to find out if that vendor has posted information on its web page. Searching the Web is fast and allows business employees to obtain vital information without leaving the office. In order to send an email or fax a request, a business first needs to obtain an email address or a fax number, which often are listed on a web page. Phoning an agent would not necessarily provide a business with information about new vendors.

SOURCE: NF:006

SOURCE: Mind Tools. (2018). *Seven ways to find what you want on the internet*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/internet-searching.htm

76. A

Detailed reports, memos, and contracts. Businesses use word-processing software to create a variety of business-related documents including reports, memos, contracts, business plans, letters, and tables. Spreadsheets are generated by other types of software programs (e.g., Excel) that organize, calculate, and analyze numerical information. Although many word-processing applications have basic drawing capabilities to produce simple graphics, the more complex graphic elements are generally created by special graphics and design programs (e.g., Freehand).

SOURCE: NF:007

SOURCE: Farese, L.S., Kimbrell, G., & Woloszyk, C.A. (2012). *Marketing essentials* (p. 213). Columbus, OH: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill.

77. C

State. A database software program allows a business to sort customer information by various criteria—customer name, sales volume, customer type, zip code, etc. Queries are database fields that the business uses to sort the data. The type of data that the business wants to retrieve or analyze determines the database query (sorting mechanism) that the business uses. To obtain a list of customers in specific geographic regions, the business should sort by state. Depending on the business's needs, it may also use zip code, city name, or country to sort by geographic location. Sales volume, customer name, and street numbers are not queries that will sort customer information by geographic location.

SOURCE: NF:009

SOURCE: Chapple, M. (2018, June 11). *What is a definition of a database query?* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://www.lifewire.com/query-definition-1019180

78. A

Integrated software application packages. Integrated software application packages allow businesses to manage all types of business activities, such as inventory control, finance, tracking, invoicing, etc. For example, businesses can track the placement of an order, when the order is shipped and received, when an invoice is generated, and when payment is received. These types of computer programs are not known as electronic communications programs, interactive information display packages, or wireless connectivity programs.

SOURCE: NF:088

SOURCE: Farese, L.S., Kimbrell, G., & Woloszyk, C.A. (2012). *Marketing essentials* (p. 219). Columbus, OH: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill.

79. B

Download time. The file size of a graphic affects the amount of time that it takes to appear on the computer screen. The larger the graphic, the more time it takes to download or appear on the computer screen. If graphics are too large, computer users might exit the website because it takes too long for the graphics to appear on the web page. The font size and descriptive links relate to text elements rather than graphics. Log files are files that provide information about the activities of website visitors.

SOURCE: NF:042

SOURCE: Halvorson, S. (2013, February 21). *How to speed up your website load times*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://www.webdesignerdepot.com/2013/02/how-to-speed-up-your-website-load-times/

80. C
Product. Operations activities are most closely related to a business's product. The product a business makes or provides affects every aspect of operations. A business's name, taxes, or location are not as directly related to its operations activities.
SOURCE: OP:189
SOURCE: LAP-OP-189—Smooth Operations (Nature of Operations)

81. A
The employer. It is an employer's responsibility, not the local law enforcement's duty, to be sure his/her company is a safe and healthy place to work. Employees also have a responsibility to make sure they are behaving in ways that are safe and healthy. Employers must comply with all governmental health and safety regulations.
SOURCE: OP:004
SOURCE: Minnesota Department of Health. (n.d.). *Lesson 7: Worker safety laws and you*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/occhealth/documents/lesson7.pdf

82. D
Follow the instruction manual. Each piece of machinery comes with an instruction manual that outlines its proper use. Even experienced workers should read and follow these instructions. Without proper usage (as written in the instruction manual), a worker can be injured on any type of equipment, including machines that are very new and very efficient. While knowing first aid will help after an injury occurs, it does not prevent injuries.
SOURCE: OP:006
SOURCE: Monash University. (2014). *Safe work instructions*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/ohse/safety-topics/workshop/safe-work.html

83. D
Wipe it up immediately. Spills may make the floor slippery and create a safety hazard. Others may not notice the spill, fall on the wet surface, and suffer injuries. All employees are responsible for helping maintain a safe environment. They should not wait for the floor to dry, tell others about the spill, or leave it for the cleaning crew.
SOURCE: OP:007
SOURCE: Root, G.N. III. (2015). *What are some workplace safety issues?* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from smallbusiness.chron.com/workplace-safety-issues-1303.html

84. D
Designating a central meeting place for all employees. Businesses must be prepared for unexpected situations such as fires and bomb threats. Evacuation plans are procedures that help businesses handle emergencies in ways to keep employees safe. Businesses designate a central meeting place to take a "head count" to ensure that all employees are out of danger. As part of the evacuation plan, management may assign certain employees to conduct the head count of department members. If someone does not arrive at the meeting place, the coordinator can report the information to the appropriate person and take steps to locate the missing person. Changing smoke-alarm batteries and CPR training are not activities that will help businesses track the whereabouts of their employees during an emergency. Employees may not be able to communicate by phone with their managers during emergencies; therefore, employees should not go home until they report to their central meeting place and check in with their designated emergency coordinator.
SOURCE: OP:010
SOURCE: Clark, B., Sobel, J., & Basteri, C.G. (2010). *Marketing dynamics: Teacher's edition* (2nd ed.) [pp. 409-410]. Tinley Park, IL: Goodheart-Willcox Co.

85. B
Have another person present when she opens up in the morning. It's a smart idea for Jasmine to have another person present when she opens up for business in the morning. Two people are better able to check for security breaches. Jasmine should not keep a large amount of cash in the cash register. She should make eye contact with customers who walk into the store; this lets customers know that she recognizes them. The lighting should be bright so that she can see all customers clearly.
SOURCE: OP:152
SOURCE: Clark, B., Basteri, C.G., Gassen, C., & Walker, M. (2014). *Marketing dynamics* (3rd ed.) [pp. 686-687]. Tinley Park, IL: The Goodheart-Willcox Co.

86. D
Team members' performance. The specific criteria that you monitor will depend on the nature of your project. However, there are some general aspects of any project that require your attention. While some projects might be individual efforts, most are done by teams, or at the very least include a couple of other people. People are important resources for the success of your project. As a project leader, you'll need to check in on team members' performance. You should not necessarily monitor emails or your team members' friendships; these are not necessarily relevant to your project's success. The planning process happens before the project begins.
SOURCE: OP:520
SOURCE: LAP-OP-520—Check Your (Project) Pulse (Monitoring Projects and Taking Corrective Actions)

87. C
Strategic planning. When a purchasing specialist develops partnerships and alliances with suppliers, watches for business threats and opportunities, and looks for ways to improve processes, s/he is engaging in strategic, long-term planning for the company. Negotiation is the process of one party reaching an agreement with another party to meet specific needs and wants. Marketing planning involves developing strategies for attracting the target customer to a business. Productivity is the amount and value of goods and services produced from set amounts of resources.
SOURCE: OP:015
SOURCE: LAP-OP-002—Buy Right (Purchasing)

88. A
Inventory of supplies. When businesses use an automatic reorder system, an order for additional supplies is placed when the inventory decreases to an established level. This makes it possible for a business to effectively maintain an inventory of supplies at the right level. The business does not tie up funds by purchasing too many supplies, or risk running out of supplies. Businesses do not use an automatic reorder system to maintain an adequate work environment, budget for expenses, or maintenance system.
SOURCE: OP:031
SOURCE: Clark, B., Basteri, C.G., Gassen, C., & Walker, M. (2014). *Marketing dynamics* (3rd ed.) [pp. 421-431]. Tinley Park, IL: The Goodheart-Willcox Co.

89. B
It creates goods and services businesses can sell. Production is important to businesses because without production, businesses would have nothing to sell. All businesses must have products to sell to remain in business. Production does not eliminate competition. Businesses must control production costs so that they do not have to charge higher prices than competitors. Marketing research, not production, informs businesses about consumers' wants and needs.
SOURCE: OP:017
SOURCE: LAP-OP-017—Can You Make It? (Nature of Production)

90. A
Hygiene. The ways in which you groom yourself daily directly impact your personal hygiene. Your personal grooming habits are not likely to directly impact your education, skills, or relaxation.
SOURCE: PD:002
SOURCE: LAP-PD-002—Brand Me (Personal Appearance)

91. A
State your goal(s). A personal plan of action is a written planning device to help you reach a goal of your own. You cannot develop a plan of action unless you have a direction or focus goal. After a goal has been stated and a plan devised for achieving that goal, then you can record your progress and evaluate the effectiveness of your plan.
SOURCE: PD:018
SOURCE: LAP-PD-016—Go For the Goal (Goal Setting)

92. D
Product. Product innovation occurs when a business either creates or improves a product. When a computer company creates a new kind of software, this is considered product innovation. Process innovation focuses on *how* something is done. Positioning innovation occurs when the *purpose* of a product is changed. Paradigm innovation occurs when there is a significant change in thinking.
SOURCE: PD:126
SOURCE: LAP-PD-126—Ideas in Action (Innovation Skills)

93. C
You can learn as much from your failures as you can from your successes. Both your failures and your successes tell you things about yourself. You should pay attention not only to what you do well but to what you do less well. Self-understanding and self-information are not the same. You need self-information in order to develop self-understanding. There are tests available that will help you identify your interests. Choosing a career should not be based only on your current skills and talents but also on your interests and abilities.
SOURCE: PD:013
SOURCE: Jacox, C. (2017, September 1). *Self-awareness and perception: will you succeed or fail?* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://winningtherelationship.com/self-awareness-perception-will-you-succeed-or-fail/

94. C
Sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is any unwelcomed sexual remarks, advances, conduct, or requests. Employees have certain rights in the workplace, including the right to not be sexually harassed by other employees and managers. The example is not age discrimination, cultural supremacy, or ethnocentrism.
SOURCE: PD:021
SOURCE: MSBA. (2018, March 12). *Employees' rights in the workplace.* Retrieved September 20, 2018 from https://www.msba.org/blog/employees-rights-in-the-workplace/

95. A
Accessing online employment services. Online employment services such as Careerbuilder.com and Monster.com provide information about a variety of careers and industries. Employment-services websites provide information about the skills and education needed to perform certain jobs as well as the pay ranges for those jobs. Many of these sites offer career planning quizzes that help individuals determine the types of careers that they may be best suited for. Joining social organizations, completing job applications, and reading virtual textbooks are not the best ways in which people obtain information about a variety of career fields and options.
SOURCE: PD:022
SOURCE: Net Industries. (2018). *Getting a job—Sources of career information.* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://jobs.stateuniversity.com/pages/56/Getting-Job-SOURCES-CAREER-INFORMATION.html

96. C
Marketing communications. Marketing communications involves marketing activities that inform, remind, and/or persuade the targeted audience. Examples of marketing communications techniques include advertising, direct marketing, digital marketing, publicity/public relations, and sales promotion. Lucy is a public relations manager—responsible for handling special events and responding to requests for information about the company. Marketing research jobs focus on marketing activities that involve determining information needs, collecting data, analyzing data, presenting data, and using data for marketing planning. Merchandising careers involve marketing activities that are focused on efficient and effective product planning, selection, and buying for resale. Careers in professional selling involve marketing and management activities that determine customer needs/wants and respond through planned, personalized communication to influence purchase decisions and enhance future business operations.
SOURCE: PD:025
SOURCE: LAP-PD-015—Go For It! (Careers in Business)

97. C
Listens closely. It is important for job applicants to listen carefully to what the interviewers are saying and asking. Failure to pay close attention may result in the applicants giving incorrect information or not completely answering the questions. Not listening also may indicate to an interviewer that an applicant is not interested in the position. Applicants should not read materials while an interviewer is asking questions. While applicants are expected to talk and share information about themselves during job interviews, they should choose their words carefully and not talk excessively. On occasion, applicants may write notes about what the interviewer is saying, but they should not let that interfere with their ability to listen carefully.
SOURCE: PD:028
SOURCE: McMullen, L. (2014, August 19). *7 ways to be a better listener while interviewing.* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from http://money.usnews.com/money/careers/articles/2014/08/19/7-ways-to-be-a-better-listener-while-interviewing

98. B
To thank the interviewer. The main reason for writing a follow-up letter is to thank the interviewer for his/her time. It also gives applicants the opportunity to keep their names in the interviewer's mind and to reinforce their interest in the job. Applicants provide copies of their résumés before the interview. The résumé or job application should contain the names of references. The follow-up letter should reinforce an applicant's interest in the job without actually asking for it.
SOURCE: PD:029
SOURCE: Purdue OWL. (2018). *Follow-up to an interview.* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/634/03

99. D
Volunteer positions. Some job applicants, especially recent graduates, do not have a lot of paid job experience. It is acceptable for them to list unpaid or volunteer positions in the work experience section of their résumés. Volunteer positions indicate job experience and levels of responsibility even if the positions were unpaid. Technical training should be listed in the educational background section. Career objectives and references are separate sections of résumés.
SOURCE: PD:031
SOURCE: The OWL at Purdue. (1995-2018). *Resume workshop.* Retrieved September 20, 2018, from https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/719/01/

100. B

Basic job experience. Entry-level jobs provide a starting point for an individual interested in pursuing a particular career. Many fields are very competitive, and by taking an entry-level job, a worker can gain valuable experience and training. An employee who performs well in the entry-level position could advance to many other positions within the company. Most entry-level jobs do not pay high salaries.

SOURCE: PD:034

SOURCE: Heathfield, S. (2018, September 13). *An entry-level job: a foot in the door.* Retrieved September 18, 2018, from https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-is-an-entry-level-job-1918126

(DECA, 2019)

Appendix I

Exam Blueprints

EXAM BLUEPRINTS

DECA's exams are rigorous, industry-validated, multiple-choice, 100-item exams based on National Curriculum Standards. The charts below show the exam blueprint of items by instructional area for the 2019-2020 exams used at the district level, chartered association level and at the International Career Development Conference.

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION CORE	DISTRICT	ASSOCIATION	ICDC
Business Law	1	1	4
Communications	15	15	11
Customer Relations	5	5	4
Economics	7	7	12
Emotional Intelligence	22	22	19
Entrepreneurship	0	0	1
Financial Analysis	16	16	13
Human Resources Management	1	1	1
Information Management	10	10	11
Marketing	1	1	1
Operations	11	11	13
Professional Development	11	11	9
Strategic Management	0	0	1

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT + ADMINISTRATION	DISTRICT	ASSOCIATION	ICDC
Business Law	4	5	5
Communications	9	7	6
Customer Relations	2	2	2
Economics	7	6	5
Emotional Intelligence	11	9	8
Entrepreneurship	1	1	0
Financial Analysis	8	7	6
Human Resources Management	1	1	0
Information Management	9	7	6
Knowledge Management	4	5	7
Marketing	1	1	1
Operations	20	21	25
Professional Development	6	6	5
Project Management	5	6	7
Quality Management	2	3	3
Risk Management	3	4	5
Strategic Management	7	9	9

ENTREPRENEURSHIP	DISTRICT	ASSOCIATION	ICDC
Business Law	4	4	3
Channel Management	3	3	3
Communications	1	0	1
Customer Relations	1	1	1
Economics	3	3	2
Emotional Intelligence	6	6	4
Entrepreneurship	14	13	14
Financial Analysis	10	9	11
Human Resources Management	5	4	4
Information Management	4	3	2
Market Planning	5	6	6
Marketing	1	1	1
Marketing-Information Management	2	3	2
Operations	13	13	14
Pricing	2	3	2
Product/Service Management	4	4	4
Professional Development	5	5	4
Promotion	6	7	8
Quality Management	1	1	1
Risk Management	2	3	4
Selling	1	1	1
Strategic Management	7	7	8

FINANCE	DISTRICT	ASSOCIATION	ICDC
Business Law	6	7	8
Communications	7	5	4
Customer Relations	4	4	5
Economics	7	6	5
Emotional Intelligence	11	9	8
Entrepreneurship	1	1	0
Financial Analysis	22	25	28
Financial-Information Management	7	9	10
Human Resources Management	1	1	0
Information Management	8	6	5
Marketing	1	1	1
Operations	8	6	5
Professional Development	11	13	14
Risk Management	5	6	7
Strategic Management	1	1	0

HOSPITALITY + TOURISM	DISTRICT	ASSOCIATION	ICDC
Business Law	3	3	3
Communications	7	6	5
Customer Relations	7	8	9
Economics	7	6	6
Emotional Intelligence	11	9	9
Entrepreneurship	1	1	0
Financial Analysis	9	8	7
Human Resources Management	2	2	1
Information Management	14	14	15
Market Planning	1	1	1
Marketing	1	1	1
Operations	13	13	13
Pricing	1	1	1
Product/Service Management	5	6	7
Professional Development	7	7	7
Promotion	2	2	3
Quality Management	1	1	1
Risk Management	1	1	1
Selling	5	7	8
Strategic Management	2	3	2

MARKETING	DISTRICT	ASSOCIATION	ICDC
Business Law	2	2	2
Channel Management	4	5	6
Communications	7	5	4
Customer Relations	2	2	2
Economics	7	6	5
Emotional Intelligence	11	9	8
Entrepreneurship	1	1	0
Financial Analysis	7	6	5
Human Resources Management	1	1	0
Information Management	7	5	4
Market Planning	3	4	4
Marketing	1	1	1
Marketing-Information Management	9	11	14
Operations	8	6	5
Pricing	2	3	3
Product/Service Management	9	11	13
Professional Development	6	6	5
Promotion	7	9	11
Selling	5	6	8
Strategic Management	1	1	0

PERSONAL FINANCIAL LITERACY	DISTRICT	ASSOCIATION	ICDC
Credit and Debt	11	11	11
Employment and Income	19	19	19
Financial Decision Making	28	28	28
Investing	17	17	17
Risk Management and Insurance	10	10	10
Spending and Saving	15	15	15

(DECA, 2019)

Appendix J

Competitor's Checklist

Competitors Name: ______________________________

Competitors Event: ______________________________

Cycle 1 Checklist

Week 1

✓	**Goal**	**Goal Date/Date Completed**
	Pre-test (cycle one week one only)	______/______
	Pre-test role play (cycle one week one only)	______/______
	Advisory Meeting (monthly)	______/______
	Instructional Area #1 Lessons (independent learning) & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #2 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #3 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #4 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Practice Role Play Self-Evaluation	______/______
	Practice Role Play with recorded group feedback	______/______
	Record Role Play with improvements along with self-evaluation	______/______
	Group Exam Review	______/______
	Sample Exam #1	______/______
	Group Exam Reflection	______/______
	Practice Role Play with Advisor	______/______
	Reflection & Goal Setting For next week	______/______

Week 2

✓	**Goal**	**Goal Date/Date Completed**
	Instructional Area #5 Lessons (independent learning) & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #6 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #7 Lessons & quizzes	______/______
	Instructional Area #8 Lessons & quizzes	______/______

	Practice Role Play Self-Evaluation	________/________
	Practice Role Play with recorded group feedback	________/________
	Record Role Play with improvements along with self-evaluation	________/________
	Group Exam Review	________/________
	Sample Exam #2	________/________
	Group Exam Reflection	________/________
	Practice Role Play with Advisor	________/________
	Reflection & Goal Setting For next week	________/________

Week 3

✓	**Goal**	**Goal Date/Date Completed**
	Instructional Area #9 Lessons (independent learning) & quizzes	________/________
	Instructional Area #10 Lessons & quizzes	________/________
	Instructional Area #11 Lessons & quizzes	________/________
	Instructional Area #12 Lessons & quizzes	________/________
	Practice Role Play Self-Evaluation	________/________
	Practice Role Play with recorded group feedback	________/________
	Record Role Play with improvements along with self-evaluation	________/________
	Group Exam Review	________/________
	Sample Exam #3	________/________
	Group Exam Reflection	________/________
	Practice Role Play with Advisor	________/________
	Local Role Play Competition	________/________
	Reflection & Goal Setting For next week	________/________
	Performance indicator worksheets complete (cycle one only)	
	Post-test (cycle three week three only)	________/________
	Post-test role play (cycle three week three only)	________/________

Notes to Share with Advisor

____

____

____

Goal Setting/Reflection Worksheet

After Cycle

What are the most important things that you learned this cycle? ________________________________

____

____

How was your overall growth this cycle? ____

____

____

What things can you do to improve your role-play performance? ________________________________

____

____

What things can you do to improve your test performance? _____________________________________

____

____

How can your advisor help you improve? ____

____

____

____

Appendix K

Consent Forms

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
STUDENT CONSENT FORM
DEVELOPING A DECA COMPETITION PREPARATION PROGRAM THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

Researcher's Statement
I am asking your child to take part in a research study. Before you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you information about the study. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask Ms. Woodley if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want your child to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Kylea Woodley
Career and Technical Education Marketing Teacher & DECA Advisor
Email: Kylea_Woodley@gwinnett.k12.ga.us Phone: 610-470-7101

Purpose of the Study
As a natural part of their practice, teachers update and improve their curriculum to provide a better educational experience for their students. When this process is performed by a teacher who is also a researcher, it is called Action Research. The research that your child would participate in, should you choose to allow them, would involve me as a teacher researching how to improve preparation for DECA competition in which they currently participate. The suggested improvement is to include a conceptual framework known as contextual teaching and learning. I would include practices from self-regulated learning, teaching and learning in multiple contexts, problem-based learning, independent learning groups and conduct authentic assessments to help students grow as competitors. These methods will be useful in teaching students how to solve problems, work independently, and grow their 21st-century skills for the workforce. Throughout the process, I will advise, guide, practice with and assess student growth. I will observe how students understand the concepts being taught as well as seek feedback from the students themselves. Additionally, I will use Competition University, DECA materials, and materials that I've created to help students grow as competitors. This process will help me make informed decisions as to how to continue to improve my instruction as a teacher. This is why the study will be an 'action research' study.

Why Your Child is Being Invited to Participate
Your child is being invited to participate in this action research study because of their desire to compete in DECA competitions. To be eligible to participate in this study, your child must (a) have signed up to compete in a DECA competition (b) currently be taking or have taken a marketing class.

Study Procedures
If you agree to allow your child to participate, they will be asked to…

- Participate in 3 local monthly competitions at Metro Atlanta High School. Each competition will last two hours.
- Provide information regarding what was helpful and what they think might be helpful
- Take Practice Exams
- Practice Role Plays with peers and advisors
- Record their practices and critique themselves
- Set Goals upon evaluating themselves
- Use Competition University to Prepare for Competition
- Follow my competition checklist each cycle
- We will ask the student to do these things over a 3-month time period. The overall time period will range depending on independent study habits and changes that we make during the cycles

Risks and discomforts

- I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research as it will be conducted as a normal part of teaching, Metro Atlanta High School DECA, and improving this course.

Benefits

- Students may be better prepared for region competition, state competition, and international competition
- Students may obtain a better understanding of their chosen area of study as well as how to solve challenging or difficult problems
- Students may better understand how to apply 21st-century skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, etc.)
- Researcher (teacher) will have a better understanding of how to prepare students for DECA competitions as well as students understanding the process to prepare for competitions.

Alternatives

The study will be performed and implemented as part of the normal classroom and Metro Atlanta High School DECA experience. Therefore, students will be asked to complete the related tasks and to understand the content taught. If a parent or student decides that they do not wish to be included in the research, their evaluations, observations, and all other information will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. The student will not be penalized for withdrawing from the research. Your decision not to participate will have no impact on your participation in the Marketing classes or Metro Atlanta High School DECA.

Incentives for participation

There are no incentives for participation and the student's grade will not be helped nor hindered for their participation or lack thereof.

Privacy/Confidentiality

During the course of the study, the DECA advisors will have access to the students' rubrics, checklists, test-scores, and evaluations. For the purpose of the study, all names will be changed to protect the students. Your students' information will not be linked to them in this research study. We will have access to the information locally just as we would in a normal DECA chapter while preparing for competition. After the research has been completed, all information linking the students to their personal files will be destroyed. We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, we will not communicate outside of our secure servers and will keep all files protected. The researcher (teacher) will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law. No personal information will be used or distributed for future research.

Taking part is voluntary
Your student's involvement is voluntary, you or your student may refuse to participate before the study begins, and discontinue at any time, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which he/she is otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your child's rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu. Additionally, please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Elaine Adams at 706.542.4204, adamsje@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily allow your child to take part in this study, you must sign the attached parental consent form. Your signature indicates that you are allowing your child to participate in this study.

Parental Permission Guidance

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your child's rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu. Additionally, please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr.

Elaine Adams at 706.542.4204, adamsje@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily allow your child to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire Parental Permission Form, and have had all of your questions answered.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

_________________________	_________________________	__________
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_________________________	_________________________	__________
Name of Participant	Signature	Date
_________________________	_________________________	__________
Name of Guardian	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
JUDGE CONSENT FORM
DEVELOPING A DECA COMPETITION PREPARATION PROGRAM THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

Researcher's Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you information about the study. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask Ms. Woodley if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Kylea Woodley
Career and Technical Education Marketing Teacher & DECA Advisor
Email: Kylea_Woodley@gwinnett.k12.ga.us Phone: 610-470-7101

Purpose of the Study
As a natural part of their practice, teachers update and improve their curriculum to provide a better educational experience for their students. When this process is performed by a teacher who is also a researcher, it is called Action Research. The research that you would participate in, should you choose, would involve me as a teacher researching how to improve preparation for DECA competition in which students currently participate. The suggested improvement is to include a conceptual framework known as contextual teaching and learning. I would include practices from self-regulated learning, teaching and learning in multiple contexts, problem-based learning, independent learning groups and conduct authentic assessments to help students grow as competitors. These methods will be useful in teaching students how to solve problems, work independently, and grow their 21st-century skills for the workforce. Throughout the process, I will advise, guide, practice with and assess student growth. I will observe how students understand the concepts being taught as well as seek feedback from the students themselves. Additionally, I will use Competition University, DECA materials, and materials that I've created to help students grow as competitors. This process will help me make informed decisions as to how to continue to improve my instruction as a teacher. This is why the study will be an 'action research' study.

Why You
Your child is being invited to participate in this action research study because we need judges for students to practice with. Your role in the study would be to practice the audio recorded role-play events with students and to provide them with detailed feedback.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to…

- Complete the judge's training

- Participate in 3 local competitions at Metro Atlanta High School. Each competition will last one hour for judges.
- Practice role-play scenarios with students
- Allow the role-play to be audio recorded
- Leave detailed feedback for students
- Take Practice Exams
- Practice Role Plays with peers and advisors

Risks and discomforts

- I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research as it will be conducted as a normal part of teaching, Metro Atlanta High School DECA, and improving this course

Benefits

- Students may be better prepared for region competition, state competition, and international competition
- Students may obtain a better understanding of their chosen area of study as well as how to solve challenging or difficult problems
- Students may better understand how to apply 21st-century skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, etc.)
- Researcher (teacher) will have a better understanding of how to prepare students for DECA competitions as well as students understanding the process to prepare for competitions.

Alternatives

The study will be performed and implemented as part of the normal classroom and Metro Atlanta High School DECA experience. Therefore, students will be asked to complete the related tasks and to understand the content taught. If a parent, student or judge decides that they do not wish to be included in the research, their evaluations, observations, and all other information will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. The student will not be penalized for withdrawing from the research. Your decision not to participate will have no impact on your participation in the Marketing classes or Metro Atlanta High School DECA.

Incentives for participation

There are no incentives for participation and the student's grade will not be helped nor hindered for your participation or lack thereof.

Privacy/Confidentiality

During the course of the study, the DECA advisors will have access to the students' rubrics, checklists, test-scores, and evaluations. For the purpose of the study, all names of competitors and judges will be changed to protect your identity. Your information will not be linked to you in this research study. We will have access to the information locally just as we would in a normal DECA chapter while preparing for competition. After the research has been completed, all information linking you to your personal files will be destroyed. We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, we will not communicate outside of our secure servers and will keep all files protected. The researcher (teacher) will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law. No personal information will be used or distributed for future research.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement is voluntary, you may refuse to participate before the study begins, and discontinue at any time, with no penalty or loss of benefits you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu. Additionally, please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Elaine Adams at 706.542.4204, adamsje@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily take part in this study, you must sign the attached parental consent form. Your signature indicates that you are volunteering to participate in this study.

Permission Guidance

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu. Additionally, please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Elaine Adams at 706.542.4204, adamsje@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire Consent Form, and have had all of your questions answered.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

________________________	______________________	_________
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
________________________	______________________	_________
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

Appendix L

Student Time Commitment

Estimated Time Commitment during the 9 weeks of participation
I have included how much time participants may spend on each task over the next 3 months. I've broken them down into weekly, monthly and overall commitments. The time in which students complete many of the activities may vary based in independent learning strategies.

Weekly / Roughly 5 hours a week

Lessons and Quizzes / 100 minutes
Practice Role Play and Self Evaluation / 20 minutes
Practice Role Play with recorded group feedback / 20 minutes
Recorded Role Play with improvements along with self-evaluation/ 15 minutes
Group Exam review / 30 minutes
Sample Exam #1 / 50 minutes
Group Exam Reflection / 20 minutes
Practice Role Play with advisor / 20 minutes
Reflection & Goal Setting for next week / 20 minutes

Monthly/ Roughly 15 Hours a Month

Advisory Meeting / 15 minutes
Lessons and Quizzes / 300 minutes
Practice Role Play and Self Evaluation / 60 minutes
Practice Role Play with recorded group feedback / 60 minutes
Recorded Role Play with improvements along with self-evaluation/ 45 minutes
Group Exam review / 90 minutes
Sample Exam #1 / 150 minutes
Group Exam Reflection / 60 minutes
Practice Role Play with advisor / 60 minutes
Reflection & Goal Setting for next week / 60 minutes

Overall 9 week period/ Roughly 45 hours
Pretest Role Play/ 20 minutes
Pretest Test/ 50 minutes
Posttest / Role Play 20 minutes
Posttest test/ 50 minutes
Advisory Meeting / 45 minutes
Lessons and Quizzes / 900 minutes
Practice Role Play and Self Evaluation / 120 minutes
Practice Role Play with recorded group feedback / 120 minutes
Recorded Role Play with improvements along with self-evaluation/ 135 minutes

Group Exam review / 270 minutes
Sample Exam #1 / 450 minutes
Group Exam Reflection / 180 minutes
Practice Role Play with advisor / 180 minutes
Reflection & Goal Setting for next week / 180 minutes

Appendix M

IRB Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Tucker Hall, Room 212
310 E. Campus Rd.
Athens, Georgia 30602
TEL 706-542-3199 | FAX 706-542-5638
IRB@uga.edu
http://research.uga.edu/hso/irb/

Human Research Protection Program

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

October 14, 2019

Dear Joyce Adams:

On 10/14/2019, the Human Subjects Office reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	DEVELOPING A DECA COMPETITION PREPARATION PROGRAM THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH
Investigator:	Joyce Adams
Co-Investigator:	Kylea Woodley
IRB ID:	PROJECT00000865
Funding:	None
Review Category:	Exempt Flex 7

We have approved the protocol on 10/14/2019. Please close this study when it is complete, or submit a Progress Report by 10/14/2024.

Since this study was determined to be exempt, please be aware that not all future modifications will require review by the IRB. For more information on modifications that will require review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation, please see Appendix C of the Exempt Research Policy. (https://research.uga.edu/docs/policies/compliance/hso/IRB-Exempt-Review.pdf) As noted in Section C.2, you can simply notify us of modifications that will not require review by using "Add Public Comment."

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).

Sincerely,
Kate Pavich, IRB Analyst
Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia

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