

SKILLS REQUIRED BY EXTENSION AGENTS FOR EFFECTIVE EXTENSION EDUCATION SERVICE DELIVERY IN CROSS RIVER STATE FOR SUSTAINABLE GLOBAL ECONOMY

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Abstract

This study was conducted in Cross River State of Nigeria. The researcher adopted a survey research design. Two specific purposes guided the study with two corresponding research questions. The population of the study was 84 extension agents. Data were collected from the respondents with the aid of structured questionnaire. The instrument was validated by 5 experts, in agricultural extension, measurement and evaluation and state ministry of agriculture. The reliability of the instrument was determined using cronbach Alpa, which yielded reliability coefficient of 0.96. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation. Based on the data analyses, it was discovered that extension agents require skills in pedagogics and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended among others that ICT and pedagogies training should from time to time be given to extension agents by specialist in collaboration with the State government for effective extension education service delivery.

Keywords: Skills, extension agents, rural farmers sustainable global economy.

Introduction

Agriculture plays important role in the development of any nation. In Nigeria, before the discovery of oil (petroleum), about 90% of the population of people in Nigeria were engaged in Agricultural production. Inspite of the dominance of oil industry, agriculture still occupies a position in the Nigeria economy. This is so because food is a primary necessity of man and agricultural products provide the needed fiber and raw materials for man's manufacturing and processing industries. For Nigeria's agricultural potentials to be fully realized and productivity increased, there should be effective and massive extension education service (Gebrahiwot and Fekadu, 2016). The Agricultural Extension and Education Service (ACES, 2016) noted that if education is to make a significant contribution to social and economic advancement, it has to be perceived as a long- term investment. There must be a continuous development of human resources through investment in agricultural education for sustainable economic.

Agricultural Extension Education Service is a system of education which assists farmers and rural people to improve their farming method and techniques, increasing production efficiency and income and bettering their levels of living (Tsion, 2019) Agricultural Extension Education Service basically aim at providing farmers with essential knowledge and skills that could assist them in taking vital decisions which would ultimately lead to increase in agricultural production.

Agricultural Extension Education in the content of this study means educational assistance or advise given to help farmers to identify and solve their farming problems by themselves. Agricultural extension education service is aimed at ensuring sustainable food production especially in sub-saharan African countries where agricultural production is dominated by small holder farmers. Agricultural extension education service information gets to the famers through extension Agents.

The Extension agents (EA) or Extension workers include all trained persons in extension education who are made to spread agricultural innovations to rural farmers, (National

Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Service, NAERLS, 2017). Extension agents in this study, are educated trained professional working constantly with their farmers.

The extension agent is also called a “change agent” literally because they help to change the lives of rural farmers through extension education. The effectiveness of agricultural extension education service is highly dependent on the availability of professionally qualified extension agents who are motivated and committed to the ever changing social, economic and political environment of the farmers. Anderson and Feder (2012) noted that the adoption of technology by farmer can be influenced by educating rural farmers about such thing as the use of improved varieties of crops and animals, adoption of modern cropping techniques, use of modern storage facilities, more efficient method of production management. To do so, the extension agents must be capable of being more committed and practical than just communicating messages to the rural farmers. In this study, rural famers are those farmers in the rural areas. It is the duty of the extension agents to reach out to the rural farmers scattered around the country with useful and practical information for increased agricultural production.

For extension agents to effectively execute their duties, they required some basic skill in the area of extension services. Skills can be seen as the ability of an individual to learn and perform certain tasks. Skills are the acquired habit of acting, thinking and behaving in a specific pattern, in such a way that the process becomes natural to the individual competent and enable him earn a living (Okoro 2010). In this study, skill is a condition where there is a gap between “What is and what should be” in terms of knowledge, attitude, and behaviour for a particular time. According to Bassey (2019), skills are acquired through training that enables the extension agents broaden their knowledge base which make them more effective members of the society.

The ability of an extension agent to guide farmers from the awareness stage to sustained adoption of agricultural innovation depends on his training and experience in agriculture and extension method (Obiduaku, 2015). Extension agents needs to acquire basic skills for effective extension service. The acquisition of these skills will enable the agent function effectively in delivering extension services.

For extension agents to effectively carryout their duties, they need to possess extension pedagogies method skills and ability in information and communication technology (ICT) skills for sourcing information in their activities. Pedagogies method skills are techniques possessed by extension agent that can be used to create situation in which communication can take place between the farmer and the extension agents. They are method of extending new knowledge and ideas to the rural people by drawing their attention, arousing their interest and helping them to have a successful experience on new practice in agriculture (NAERLS, 2017). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are transformed career information and guidance service just as they are transforming service delivery in agricultural sectors. For improved quality of education offered to extension agents, ICT Facilities in instructional delivery in agricultural extension services will serve a dual purpose and more efficient service instruction.

In agriculture farmers seek for information in terms of extension message to improve their productivity and uplift their level of living standard, also the extension agents need the skill to obtain up to date information in agricultural innovation in order to extend such information to rural farmers. This is necessary especially for sustainable global economy. The people of Cross River State engage in agricultural production as the occupation of rural farmers. There has been poor yield and food shortage in the area. The poor performance of the extension agent may be lack of some basic extension skill need by an extension agent. This situation has made the rural farmers in the State not to enjoy the services of extension education services.

Therefore, based on the foregoing, there is a problem in extension delivery in the State due to lack of skill required by the extension agent. It is against this situation that it becomes necessary to conduct this study to identify the skills required of extension agents for effective extension education service delivery in Cross River State for sustainable global economy.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to determine the skills required by extension agents for effective extension education service delivery in Cross River State for sustainable global economy.

Specifically, the study is designed to determine

1. The pedagogic skills required by extension agents for effective extension education service delivery in Cross River State for sustainable global economy.
2. The ICT Skills required by extension agents for effective extension education service delivery in Cross River State for sustainable global economy.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

1. What are the pedagogics skills required by extension agents for effective extension education service delivery in Cross River State for sustainable global economy.
2. What are the ICT Skills required by extension agents for effective extension education service delivery in Cross River State for sustainable global economy.

Methodology

This study was carried out in Cross River State. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study was 84 extension agents. There was no sampling; the entire population was studied, because the sample size was small. The instrument used for the study was self-developed questionnaire with 35 items. The instrument was validated by five experts, two experts from the Department of Agricultural extension and two from measurement and evaluation from University of Calabar and one from State Ministry of Agriculture Calabar. Mean statistics was used to answer the research questions. The reliability of the instrument was determine using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.96. The decision rule was that any item statement that attained a mean of 2.50 or above was regarded as the skill required while those below 2.50 was regarded as not required by extension agents for effective extension education service delivery in Cross River State for sustainable global economy.

Research Question 1

What are the pedagogics skill required by extension agents for effective extension global economy.

Table I: Mean ratings of the respondents on extension pedagogics skills required by extension agents for effective extension education service delivery.

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	REMARK
1	Individual contact method	3.49	0.62	Required
2	Group contact method	3.36	0.88	Required
3	Use of mass media contact	3.20	0.70	Required
4	Farm and home visit technique	3.20	0.86	Required
5	Demonstration method	3.21	0.81	Required
6	Group discussion method	3.24	0.76	Required
7	Farm/ field trip method	3.20	0.80	Required
8	Office visit technique	2.90	0.85	Required
9	Letter writing method of dissemination of information	2.61	0.89	Required
10	Ability on result demonstration method	3.12	0.94	Required
11	Experimental techniques	2.96	0.86	Required

12	Fortnightly Training (FNT)	3.26	0.84	Required
13	Monthly technology review meeting (MTRMS)	3.24	0.74	Required
	GRAND MEAN	3.15		

Table I shows that the mean responses of the respondents ranged between 2.61 and 3.49 which are highly required. and their standard deviation ranged between 0.62 to 0.94. This indicated close relationship in their responses. The grand mean is 3.15.

Research Question 2

What are the ICT Skills required by extension agents for effective extension education services delivery in Cross River State for sustainable global economy.

Table 2: Mean and Standard deviation of the respondent on ICT Skill required by extension agents for effective extension education services delivery in Cross River State for sustainable global economy.

S/N	ITEM	MEANS	SD	REMARK
1	Knowledge on ICT Capacity building	3.72	0.53	Required
2	Use of audio-visual	3.52	0.75	Required
3	Computer application to process data for information dissemination	3.44	0.77	Required
4	Visual instructional materials	3.54	0.70	Required
5	Use of multi-media projector	3.30	0.83	Required
6	Use of hand set to disseminate information	3.37	0.81	Required
7	How to source information in the internet	3.37	0.74	Required
8	Ability of application of white board interactive	2.96	0.84	Required
9	Use of e-mail	3.00	1.06	Required
10	Use of Whatsapp	2.68	1.19	Required
11	Use of u-tube	2.32	1.19	Required
12	Use of facebook	2.37	1.21	Required
13	Use of twitter	2.16	1.24	Required
14	Use of skype	1.81	1.09	Required
15	Use of palmchart	1.74	1.00	Required
16	Use of g-mail	2.17	1.29	Required
17	GRAND MEAN	2.84		

Table 2 revealed that item I to 7 had their mean score between 2.68 and 3.72 which is above the criterion level of 2.50; Indicating that the 10 items are required. Their standard deviation value ranges from 0.53 to 1.19. Item 11 to 16 had their mean below 2.50 implying that the items were not required. The standard deviation of the 16 items ranges from 0.53 to 1.29. These values were lower than 1.96; indicating that the respondents were not far from the means and each other in their responses.

Findings of the Study

The following findings emanated from the study:

1. Extension agents need skills on extension pedagogies (method) for effective extension service delivery.
2. Extension agents need skills on information and communication technology for effective extension service delivery
3. There was no significant difference in the opinions of male and female extension agents on the teaching method skill need of extension agents.

4. There was no significant difference in the opinion of male and female extension agents on information and communication skill need of extension agents.

Discussion

Findings on research question are reveal that extension agents required skills on pedagogics for effective extension education delivery. The study found out that, the extension agents need skills on teaching methods for effective extension education service delivery. The training of extension agents on teaching method is essential because knowledge is dynamic and as such the extension agents need to be updated on the latest agricultural innovations. The finding is in line with Rogers (2016), who reported that effective training of extension agents on pedagogics is one of the ways of ensuring effective extension education delivery. This is because most extension agents need to improve on their skills, experiences and their performance in the process of extension service delivery. The finding is also in agreement with Obibuaku (2015), who reported that the knowledge and skills in the use of appropriate extension teaching method is necessary for an extension agent. He further explained that extension agents should have the competency to use the right teaching method in the dissemination of the agricultural innovations, these will help the farmers to ask questions and presents their problems and needs to the change agents, this he said lead to effective extension education service delivery. The author further stressed that extension teaching method such as individual contract method, farm visit, office call, and group contract method provide opportunities for face to face contract with the resource person and the recipient. Also, the study revealed that extension agents required skills on ICT in information dissemination.

The study in line with Wisdom and Joyce (2012) who reported that most extension agents serving the farmers are not ICT compliance and as such, they are deficient of the modern technology or techniques in extension education delivery. The observation of Wisdom and Joyce call for retraining of the extension agents on ICT to enable them be current with modern global standard in extension delivery. This is in line with Nzewe (2019) who reported that for effective extension education service delivery to take place, the extension agents who are the key players in the delivery of extension required necessary training on ICT in the modern extension education service.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it revealed that lack of pedagogics method affects the extension service delivery and as a result of this, extension agents in the state must possess pedagogics such as individual contact, group contact, as well as mass or community contact which is useful for creating awareness about new innovation and agricultural technologies. Similarly, it is concluded that extension agents required skill on ICT for effective extension delivery. For improved quality of education offered to extension agents, ICT facilities in instructional delivery in agricultural extension service will serve as a dual-purpose and more efficient serve instruction. Information is an essential element that guides an individual to behave or act in a decent manner.

Recommendation

The following recommendation were made based on the findings of the study.

1. Cross River State Agricultural Development Project (CRADP) should workshop, conferences, training and re-training programmes on extension pedagogics for extension agents in the State. This will enable the extension agents to acquire skill for effective extension service delivery.
2. Information and communication technology skill should from time to time be given to extension agent in the state by ICT specialist in collaboration with the State Government for effective extension education service delivery.

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