Perceived Effects of Village Extension Agents' Communication Skills in Training Farmers on Extension Recommendations in Surulere Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract- Effective communication implies that learning has taken place, and this may be determined by the communication skills of the teachers. The role of communication skills of trainer cannot be overemphasized in the provision of training for effective learning. This study therefore determined the perceived effects of village extension agents' communication skills in training farmers on extension recommendations in Surulere Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria, Specifically, the study described the socio-economic characteristics of farmers; identified the communication channels used by extension for extension training and determined the farmers' perception towards the effects of village extension agents' communication skills. Multistage sampling technique was employed in the selection of one hundred and fifteen (115) farmers. Data were collected through structured interview schedule and analyzed with both descriptive and inferential statistical tools, and majority (64.3%) of the farmers were male and 35.7% female and different age groups. Larger percent (96.5%) were married with varied educational background and engaged in farming as primary occupation (57.4%). Farmers' association (84.3%), workshop (69.6%), field days (56.5%), scheduled group meeting (55.7%) were among the extension communication channels and farmers have different perception towards the effects of village extension agents' communication skills in training farmers on extension recommendations. The study therefore recommends that recruitment of personnel into extension service should be based on merit through necessary aptitude tests and the existing extension personnel should be encourage through on-the-job training to improve on their extension service delivery for effective communication of extension recommendations to farmers.

Index Terms- Extension Agent; Communication Skill; Training; Farmers; Extension Recommendations

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of agricultural extension in agricultural and rural development cannot be overemphasized. It is belief that no nation will have real growth in agricultural sector without effective extension service, sustenance of food production lies on effective extension service delivery through training via various communication channels such as radio, television, mobile phone, workshop, farmers field days visit exchange, among others. Communication is the process by which two or more people exchange ideas, facts, feelings or impressions in ways that each gains a common understanding of the meaning, intent and use of messages. Effective communication lies so much on the communication skills of extension agent who is saddled with delivery of messages/innovations/technologies received through extension agency via research institutes to his or her clienteles. Much of this responsibility lies on the extension agents' communication skills. Effective communication between change agents and farmers is essential for increasing agricultural production through the use of improved technologies and sound communication skills.

Extension service in agriculture is indispensable and it offers more than just expert assistance in improvement of production and processing, it also enables flow of information and transfer of knowledge and scientific findings to practice. These activities are performed according to rules which regulate establishing of organization, functioning, goals and fields of operation, ways to execute extension activities by the extension agent, their obligations and rights (Zivkovic et al., 2009). Agricultural extension activity is important agrarian-political instrument of the state which stimulates the development of agricultural production. Agricultural extension agent has to be competent in agricultural skills, to communicate efficiently with producers and stimulate them to acquire new knowledge. Agricultural extension agent has the objective to assist family holdings or farmers in improvement of the methods and techniques of agricultural production, farm management, and increase of income and of productivity and production quality, increase of standard of living and elevating of social and educational standards in villages. Objective is to help the farm i.e. holding to gain new information and develop new abilities, as well as to apply directly on the farm the latest scientific knowledge (transfer of technology). Extension agent is obligated to establish good communication with each selected holding and to develop work program which would relate to improvement of organization and economic efficiency of production (Zivkovic et al., 2009).

All technologies developed from research institutions are passed on to the clients through the communication process. Therefore, all categories of extension personnel should be trained in acquisition of communication skills which can help them to interact freely and pass innovations to the end user effectively (Hazel man and Flor, 2004 in Udemezue, 2019). In order to achieve national mission of Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), extension agent plays an important role as the change agent to change farmers' knowledge, skill and attitude. The role of the extension agent will be more of knowledge workers who would give advisory and consultancy services to farmers. The effectiveness of extension services is also highly dependent on the ability of extension agents who are qualified, knowing their roles and competent as the whole extension process is dependent on them to transfer information to farmers (Shah, et al., 2013). The effectiveness of advisory and consultancy services would largely depend on the village extension agents' communication skills This study therefore pursuit to determine the perceived effects of village extension agents' communication skills in training farmers on extension recommendations in Surulere Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study described the socio-economic characteristics of the arable crop farmers, investigated the communication channels used for extension training, ascertained the perception of farmers towards the effects of village extension agents' communication skills in training of farmers on arable crop production. The study also tested for significant relationship between independent and depend variables.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Surulere Local Government Area (LGA) of Oyo State, Nigeria. The LGA is one of the LGAs in Oyo State. Its headquarters is in the town of Iresa-Adu. It has an area of 23 km^2 and a population of 142,070 at the 2006 census. The LGA is predominantly savannah zone inner mingle with scattered forest. It has vast fertile land that is good for cultivation of both food and cash crops. The chief agricultural products in the area include millet, maize, yam, tobacco, cocoa, cashew, cassava, oil palm, etc (Wikipedia). A multistage sampling procedure was employed for the selection of sample for this study. First stage involved selection of one percent (1%) of villages from the registered number of villages in the LGA (Ajegunle, Baya-Oje and Ilajue). During the second stage, fifteen percent (15%) of the arable crop farmers was selected from the registered list. However, One-hundred and fifteen (115) respondents were random selected which constituted the sample size of the study. Structured interview schedule was used to obtained relevant data from the respondents. The schedule was designed based on the objectives of the study. The descriptive statistical tools used include frequency counts, percentages, mean and ranking, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the formulated hypothesis of the study.

III. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

3.1 Socio-economic Characteristics

This section explained the socio-economic variables of the farmers sampled for this study. According to Table1, both male (64.3%) and female (35.7%) farmers were sampled and male Farmers formed the larger population. On the age distribution, 19.1% of the farmers were between less and equal to 25years of age, 23.4%, 26.1% and 31.4% were between the age of 26-30years, 31-40years and above 40years. This result implies that the sampled farmers were from different age groups and majority are at their productive age. Majority (96.5%) of the farmers were married, while only 3.5% were single. This result suggests that most of the farmers sampled are adult and indication that they are expected to make a clear position on the effects of village extension agents' communication skills as it affects farmers' training on extension recommendations. Less than half (44.4%) of the farmers have secondary education, 37.4% have primary school education and only 18.2% did not have formal education. This result revealed that majority of the farmers sampled are literate and their literacy level is expected to have influence their participation in extension training and appropriate application of extension recommendations on their farms. About half (47.0%) of the farmers were Muslim and 44.3% were Christians, while only 8.7% practices traditional religion. Different religion groups constituted the sample. More than half (57.4%) indicated farming as primary occupation, 19.1% each and 4.3% indicated trading, Civil service and Artisan as their primary occupation. Almost all (99.1%) association membership (farmers, cooperative, religion centered association). The result implies that the farmers sampled are members of different association and their membership may have influence on their perception towards village extension agents' communication skills in training farmers on extension arable crop production recommendations.

3.2 Communication Channels for Extension Training

This aspect identified communication channels available for extension training of farmers about different recommendations on arable crop production. The responses here are multiples and 84.3% of the farmers indicated farmers' associations as part of the communication channels used for extension training of arable crop farmers in the area. Again, 69.65, 56.5%, 55.7%, 54.8% and 51.3% of the farmers indicated workshop, field day, schedule group meeting, radio and mobile phone respectively. Also, 47.0%, 40.9% and 37.4%% indicated training centers, visit exchange and television, while only 28.7% indicated entertainment/drama as part of the communication channels used for training on extension recommendations among the arable crop farmers. This result implies that extension agency used varieties of channels for training of farmers on different extension recommendations on arable crop production (Table2).

3.3 Perception of Farmers on the Effects of Village Extension Agents' Communication Skills in Training Farmers

For this objective, Likert scale measurement of level of Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree were employed analyzed the data. Thereafter, statistical mean were computed and the variables were ranked in Table3, and the statement that village extension agents' communication skills would determine the participation level of farmers in extension demonstration had the highest weighted mean score (WMS) of

4.65 and was ranked first (1st), followed by village extension agents' communication skills are expected to influence the interest of farmers to participate in extension activities (WMS=4.62; 2nd), farmers level of adoption and use of extension training recommendations are hanged on the village extension agents' communication skills (WMS=4.07; 3rd), the village extension agents' communication skills inhibit his /her relationship with farmers (WMS=4.05; 4th) and in that order as indicated in Table3. However, the statement that village extension agents with bad communication skills would not be able to teach or train the farmers effectively and may lead to poor assimilation and utilization of any extension training recommendations (WMS=2.27; 11th). The variation in the level of agreement to different statements may due to differences in their perception towards the impact of communication skills on teaching/training and educational background of the farmers.

3.4 TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

The relationship between variables were tested with Pearson Product Moment Correlation as inferential statistical tool. The result of the analysis revealed that some of the selected socio-economic variables (age – r=0.283**, p≤ 0.01; educational level – r=0.415**, p≤ 0.01; primary occupation $-\ r = 0.215 *, p \leq 0.05$ and association membership $-\ r = 0.300 **, p \leq 0.01$) of the farmers exhibited a significant relationship with the dependent variable (perceived effects of village extension agents' communication skills in training farmers on extension recommendations). This result implies that, all the aforementioned socio-economic variables have decisive influence on the farmers' perception towards the effects of village extension agents' communication skills in training farmers on extension training recommendations

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based the reports of this study, information on this study were elicited from both male and female farmers and of different religion affiliation, different educational background and members of different associations. The study revealed different communication channels used for extension training of arable crop farmers. The study therefore concludes that the farmers in the study area have different perception on how village extension agents' communication skills affect training of arable crop farmers on extension recommendations. The result of hypothesis revealed that there is significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers and their perception of effects of village extension agents' communication skills in training farmers on extension recommendations. The study therefore recommends that recruitment of personnel into extension service should be based on merit through necessary aptitude tests and the existing extension personnel should be encourage through on-the-job training to improve on their extension service delivery for effective communication of extension recommendations to farmers.

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Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by their socio-economic characteristics

Socio-economic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	74	64.3

Female	41	35.7
Age(years)		
≤25	22	19.1
26-30	27	23.4
31-40	30	26.1
>40	36	31.4
Marital status		
Married	111	96.5
Divorced	4	3.5
Years spent in school		
No formal education	21	18.2
Primary education	43	37.4
Secondary education	51	44.4
Religion		
Islamic	54	47.0
Christianity	51	44.3
Traditional	10	8.7
Primary occupation		
Farming	66	57.4
Trading	22	19.1
Civil service	22	19.1
Artisan	5	4.3
Membership		
Association		
Yes	114	99.1
No	1	0.9

Source: Field survey 2020

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by Communication Channel Used for Extension Training

Communication Channel	*Frequency	Percentage
Mobile	59	51.3
Group meeting schedule	64	55.7
Workshop	80	69.6
Training centers	54	47.0
Radio	63	54.8
Field days	65	56.5
Visit exchange	47	40.9
Farmers' association	97	84.3
Entertainment/Drama	33	28.7

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Multiple responses

Table3: Distribution of Respondents by their Perception towards the Effects of Village Extension Agents' Communication Skills on Arable Crop Production

Perception statements	Frequency (Percentage)						
	Level of Agreement						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	WMS	Rank
Extension agents' communication skills are expected to influence the interest of farmers to participate in extension activities	77(67.0)	34(29.6)	2(1.7)	12(1.7)		4.62	2nd
Village extension agents' communication skills would determine the participation level of farmers in extension demonstration	79(68.7)	33(28.7)	2(1.7)	1(0.9)		4.65	1st

Farmers level of adoption and use of extension raining recommendations are hanged on the village extension communication skills	46(40.0)	45(39.1)	14(12.2)	6(5.2)	4(3.5)	4.07	3rd
The village extension agent's communication skills inhibit his/her relationship with farmers	42(36.5)	51(44.3)	11(9.6)	8(7.0)	3(2.6)	105	4th
Extension training recommendations are better used and applied based on the communication skills of village extension agents	41(35.7)	48(41.7)	16(13.9)	6(5.2)	4(3.5)	4.01	5th
The extent of interpretation and application of extension training recommendation are determined by the village extension agents communication skills	28(24.3)	33(28.7)	19(16.5)	18(15.7)	17(14.8)	3,32	9th
Quality of communication skills of village extension agent would influence the attitude of rural farmers towards the extension training exercise and use of its recommendation	19(16.5)	26(22.6)	23(20.0)	18(15.7)	29(25.2)	2.89	10th
The appropriate use of extension training recommendation among the fanners would be largely determined by communication skills of the village extension agent who achieve such training	35(30.4)	36(31.3)	15(13.0)	17(14.8)	12(10.4)	3.54	7th
The output of the farmers may attribute to the better use of extension training recommendation appropriately delivered by the village extension agent with good communication skills	39(33.9)	32(27.8)	20(17.4)	15(13.0)	9(7.8)	3.67	6th
An extension agent with good communication skills would command large crowd to attend extension training activities and vice versa	25(21.7)	41(35.7)	15(13.0)	15(13.0)	19(16.5)	3.33	8th
Village extension agents with bad communication skills would not be able to teach or train the farmers effectively and may lead to poor assimilation and utilization of any	17(14.8)	9(7.8)	14(12.2)	23(20.0)	52(45.2)	2.27	11th

Source: Field survey 2020

Figure in brackets arc percentages

SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; U: Undecided; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

WMS: Weighted Mean Score

Table4: Test of significant relationship between some selected socio-economic characteristics and their perception of effects of village extension agents' communication skills using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis

Socio-economic characteristic	Co-efficient correlation	p- value	Decision	Remark
Sex	0.098	0.298	NS	Accept H_0
Age	0.283**	0.002	S	Reject H_0
Marital status	0.138	0.141	NS	Accept H_0
Educational level	0.415**	0.000	S	Reject H_0
Religion	0.031	0.739	NS	Accept H_0
Primary Occupation	0.215*	0.02 1	S	Reject H_0
Association Membership	0.300**	0.001	S	Reject H_0

Source: Field Survey 2020

NS: Not Significant; S: Significant

***Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level**

****Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level**