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Short Communication

Training Needs of Agricultural Extension Administrators in Planning Extension Activities in Punjab–Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study represents descriptive survey research on the training needs of agricultural extension administrators in planning extension activities in Punjab–Pakistan. The population for this study consisted of 134 Extension Administrators (EAs) employed in the Punjab Province. One hundred and twelve respondents were selected randomly. Face and content validity of the instrument was established by the panel of experts. Questionnaire containing 14 competency statements, were mailed to 112 respondents. The useable response rate was 63%. Data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The discrepancy values based on the mean perceptions of EAs were positive values for all competencies ranging from lowest value 1.38 to highest value 1.82. It was concluded that EAs needed training in all 14 competencies in planning extension activities/programs

Key Words: Extension workers; Training; Punjab; Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

(1) Agriculture is the mainstay of Pakistan economy. Nearly one fourth (24%) of the total output (GDP) and 48.4% of the total employment is generated in agriculture (Govt. of Pakistan, 2003). Farming is Pakistan's largest economic activity. Although there is agricultural activity in all areas of Pakistan but most crops are grown in the Indus plain in Punjab and Sindh. Considerable development and expansion of output has occurred since the early 1960s; however, the country is still far from realizing the large potential yield that the well-irrigated and fertile soil from the Indus irrigated system could produce. For more and better produce, it is the responsibility of the provincial Department of Agriculture (Extension) to motivate farmers to adopt such technologies as recommended by the researchers. There may be constraints like shortage of irrigation water; lack of credit facilities; lack of awareness regarding innovations on the part of farmers; and adulteration in pesticides but it is the responsibility of the Agricultural Extension Service (AES) to educate farmers to overcome these constraints. On the other hand, the weaknesses in the present system such as, according to Siddiqui (1985), there was a very weak linkage between research and extension wings and there existed low coordination between them. Lodhi and Khan (1988) criticized the T & V system as too rigid in terms of fortnightly schedule of visits especially during the slack season. Nawaz (1989) reported that majority of the respondents pointed out lack of the professional knowledge of field staff effecting their working efficiency. It was also observed that extension field staff had lost their confidence amongst the farmers. After the implementation of the Devolution Plan 2001 and decentralization of agricultural extension, no systemic study has been conducted in Pakistan to analyze the competencies of extension administrators in planning the extension programs. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to i) assess the professional competencies of Agricultural Extension Administrators (EAs) and the level of their importance in planning extension activities/programs in the Punjab, Pakistan, and ii) identify and prioritize the training needs of EAs.

METHODOLOGY

Population and sample. The study represented descriptive survey research. The population for this study consisted of 134 extension administrators employed in Punjab Province, Pakistan. The population frame was obtained from Department of Agriculture (Extension Wing), Punjab, Lahore. One hundred and twelve (112) respondents were selected by random sample using the table for determining the sample from given population developed by Fitzgibbon *et al*. (1987).

Instrumentation. The researcher developed the survey instrument by adopting components from the instruments developed by Easter (1985). Face and content validity of the instrument was established by the panel of experts of the Department of Agricultural Extension, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad. Their suggestions were incorporated in the final version of the instrument. Items were rated in terms of being needed by extension administrators using Likert type scale that ranged from 1 to 5 (1=Very Low (VL), 2=Low (L), 3=Average (A), 4=High (H), 5=Very High (VH)

Data collection and analyses. Questionnaires were mailed to respondents along with stamped self-addressed envelope.

Two follow-ups (First in English and second in Urdu) were made to increase the response rates. The response rate was 63%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Planning involves defining an organization's objectives / goals or establishing strategies to achieve these goals and developing a comprehensive hierarchy of plans to integrate and coordinate activities. EAs themselves rated the competencies they possessed and importance levels of these competencies for their job performance. The discrepancy values (DVs) on the basis of differences between the importance levels of competencies for the job performance of EAs and the possessed levels of competencies were calculated. These differences were considered as training needs in the identified competencies. The data concerning these aspects are presented in Table I.

Table I. Rank orders of the training needs of extension administrators on the basis of differences between importance levels and possessed levels of competencies planning extension activities/programs

The ability to	IL	PL	Diff	R
Involve farmers in program planning	4.37	2.55	1.82	1
Prioritize the identified needs	4.44	2.76	1.68	2
Execute programs to meet clients' needs	4.41	2.75	1.66	3
Identify the clients' needs	4.35	2.73	1.62	4
Conduct situational analysis for extension program planning	4.15	2.55	1.60	5
Consult / counsel with other professionals	4.21	2.62	1.59	6
Design a work plan for an extension activity	4.45	2.90	1.55	7
Organize advisory committees	4.37	2.87	1.50	8
Develop an extension program	4.46	2.96	1.50	9
Set objectives for an extension program	4.38	2.89	1.49	10
Develop a calendar of extension activities	4.45	2.96	1.49	11
Evaluate the extension program	4.39	2.96	1.43	12
Design a training schedule	4.39	2.99	1.40	13
Implement the plan of work	4.48	3.10	1.38	14

IL=Importance level, PL=Possessed level, Diff= Difference (IL-PL), R=Rank

The DVs between the importance levels of competencies for the job performance of extension administrators and the levels of these competencies possessed by them were considered training needs of EAs in these competencies. Out of 14 training needs of EAs, the most important (top three) were: (1) the ability to involve farmers in program planning (DV=1.82); (2) the ability to prioritize the identified needs (DV=1.68) and (3) the ability to execute programs to meet clients' needs (DV=1.66). The training needs with lowest importance levels included: (1) the ability to implement the plan of work (DV=1.38); (2) the ability to design a training schedule (DV=1.40); and (3) the ability to evaluate the extension program (DV=1.43).

The discrepancy values based on the mean perceptions of EAs were positive values for all competencies ranging from lowest value 1.38 to highest value 1.82. It means that EAs needed training in all 14 competencies in planning extension activities/programs as identified in Table I.

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