

Evaluation of Extension Agents' Job Characteristics: A Case Study of Enugu State Agricultural Development Project, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper evaluated job characteristics of Extension Agents (EAs) of Enugu State Agricultural Development Project (ADP). Data for the study were collected from 60 EAs, using a structured questionnaire schedule. Data were analyzed through the use of frequency distribution, percentages and mean scores. The findings indicated that a greater proportion (58.3%) of the EAs were relatively young. About 68% of them were males and almost all (63.3%) of them were married. Not less than 67% of them attained B.Sc and /or M.Sc. certificates. Those that were on secondment (sent from the ministry of Agriculture to work with ADP for a period of time) from the Ministry of Agriculture accounted for only 18.3%. About 88% of the EAs had more than 6 years working experience. Their role within the organization was fairly clear ($\bar{x} = 4.1$) to them, while majority of them perceived many of their professional routine duties as being fairly important ($\bar{x} = 3.9$). Their working-time was spent on both agricultural and non-agricultural development activities. Much more time was spent on crop production. Majority of them perceived many of the 12 months in the year as being busy. The implications of the findings for necessary administrative actions by the agency (Enugu State ADP) were drawn.

Introduction

Agricultural extension aims at providing farmers with necessary education, skills and technical information to enable them to make effective farm management decisions to enhance their daily practices. An effective extension service is therefore an essential factor for the accelerated development of agriculture in developing economies (Oyebanji, 1994). In 1974, the Federal Government of Nigeria in conjunction with the World Bank and then, the Northern Government established enclave (pilot) Agricultural Development Projects at Funtua and Gusua (Mabawonku, 1986).

The increase in agricultural production achieved through the enclave Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) encouraged the Nigerian Government to establish ADPs on a nation-wide basis in all the states with the focus on small-scale farmers. The ADPs thus became the extension arms of the State Ministries of Agriculture. The Training and Visit (T and V) extension methodology was adopted. The T & V system is a management procedure involving regular intensive training for village extension workers followed by a scheduled of visits to farmers (Benor, 1979). Gradually, Unified Extension Approach which aims at

professionalizing extension duties to a level of helping farmers in raising production and increase income was introduced; thereby, each extension agent was expected to deal with the transfer of technology on all the agricultural sub-sectors (Unamma, 1989). Therefore, the central and most important feature of ADPs is reliance on the Extension Agents (EAs) as a vehicle for achieving its objectives (Fatunbi, 1994).

Having realized the importance of the EAS, efforts were made to recruit male and female extension agents. Besides, professional personnel were sent from the State Ministry of Agriculture to occupy some key positions within the ADPs. Efforts were also made at equipping the EAs technically through the Forth-Nightly Training (FNT) programme for the purpose of bringing about desirable changes in their technological competencies. The FNT programme is a process for bringing about desirable changes in the EAs' behavior (knowledge, skill, attitude and aspiration), which help to solve farm/home problems and improve their job characteristics. It (FNT programme) enables the extension agents to constantly receive training on various fields of agriculture forthrightly.

The term “Job Characteristics” contains two different components, namely, “Job” and “Characteristics”. The term “Job” refers to the “Piece of work either to be done and/or completed, while the term “Characteristics” refers to “forming part of”. When these two components are brought together, they could generate different meanings to different people in different disciplines. Within the context of this study, the term “Job Characteristics” refers to the intrinsic traits which the EAs should possess on the job. The possession of such intrinsic traits will improve their performance on the job. The expected intrinsic traits of the EAs within and ADP as an organization include: (1) adequate role clarity; (2) favorable perception of professional routine duties; (3) favorable perception of monthly work-load and (4) effective time budgeting.

Role clarity relates to clarity about the EAs’ activities, clarity about their supervisors’ expectations and clarity about the method of their evaluation etc. Perception is the process that goes on continuously as we see, hear, taste, touch and smell the world around us. Perception of professional routine duties refers to the understanding of job description. All extension agents should have an understanding of their job description. Perception of work-load has two aspects: (1) it relates to the way in which an EA perceives the various components of his/her job such as its structure, relative importance of its contents, tasks, etc. and (2) it relates to his/her idea about how much work-load is involved in the performance of the tasks assigned to him/her. Effective time budgeting by an EA is a function of his/her degree of role clarity, perception of professional routine duties and work-load (Patel, 1983).

The pertinent questions that are to be answered at this juncture include: (1) to what extent are the EAs’ role clear to them? (2) How do the EAs perceive their professional routine duties? (3) How do they perceive their monthly work-load? and (4) what proportion of their working hours do they apportion to each of the agricultural and non-agricultural activities, which they are engaged in? In order to provide answers to these questions, the study was designed to assess the job characteristics of Extension Agents of the Enugu State ADP. The Enugu State ADP was one of the Multi-State-wide ADPs that came into

existence in August, 1985. Specifically, the study was designed to:

1. Describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the extension agents;
2. Determine the role-clarity level of the EAs;
3. Determine the extent to which the EAs perceived their professional routine duties;
4. Determine the monthly perceived work-load of the EAs and
5. Determine the EAs’ proportion of working hours apportioned to each of their agricultural activities.

Evaluation of the job characteristics of EAs of a given agricultural agency is a good administrative decision and an action aimed at establishing qualitative and stable extension system. The understanding of the EAs’ job characteristics will go a long way in bringing about meaningful and timely information about the needed adjustment in the objectives, policies and implementation strategies of such an extension agency (Patel, 1983). The growing interest in job characteristics evaluation has been positively remarked and it has resulted largely and significantly in improving project planning, implementation and management performance of ADPs in the developing countries (Maddock, 1986).

Methodology

The Enugu State ADP was made up of three Agricultural Zones (AZs); namely, Enugu, Awgu and Nsukka zones. According to the Enugu State ADP Memorandum (1998), there were 70 EAs: 22 in the Enugu zone, 22 in the Awgu zone, and the remaining 26 belonged to Nsukka zone.

From each of the three zones, 20 EAs were selected, using a simple random sampling technique. In all, a total of 60 EAs were involved in the study.

A structured questionnaire was developed and used in the collection of the data. The questionnaire contained five different sections

based on the objectives of the study.

The role clarity of the EAs was measured by asking them to indicate the degree to which they were clear about a set of five role clarity items on a six-point Likert scale. The six points on the scale were weighted in order of degree of clarity: not very clear =1; not clear =2; clear =3; fairly clear =4; very clear =5 and most clear = 6. The clarity mean score was calculated for each of the five role clarity items by dividing the total role clarity score by the number of respondents. Their role clarity level was calculated by dividing the total role clarity mean score by the number of role clarity items.

The level of perception of professional routine duties by the EAs was measured by asking them to indicate their perceived importance of their professional routine duties on a five-point Likert scale. The five points on the scale were weighted in order of the degree of their importance: not very important = 1; important = 2; fairly important = 3; very important = 4 and most important = 5. The mean score for each of the professional routine duties was calculated by dividing the total score by the number of the respondents. The level of perception of the importance of their professional routine duties was computed by dividing the total professional routine duties mean score by the number of professional routine duties items.

Data for the monthly perceived work-load by the EAs were collected by asking them to indicate the extent to which they perceived their monthly work-load on a five-point Likert scale. The five points on the scale were graded as follows: not very busy = 1; not busy = 2; busy = 3; fairly busy = 4 and very busy = 5. The mean perceived work-load for each of the 12 months was calculated by dividing the total perceived work-load score by the number of respondents. The actual level of their perception of the monthly work-load was computed by dividing the total perceived work-load mean score by number of the months.

Data on the time spent on the various agricultural and non-agricultural activities were generated by asking the EAs to indicate the percentage (0%, 10%, 25%, 50%, 75% and 100%) of their time spent on each of the identified activities.

Basic statistical tools such as mean scores frequency and distribution percentages were used in the analysis of the data.

Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the EAs

Entries in Table 1 show that majority (58.3%) of the EAs were between 30 –39 years of age. Those that fell within the age range of 20 –29 years accounted for 15.0%. The remaining five percent were above 50 years. The implication of these findings is that a greater proportion of the EAs were relatively young and hence, they would be expected to be very active and productive unlike the older ones.

Table 1 further reveals that majority (63.3%) of the EAs were married, while the remaining 36.7% were single. According to Ozor (1996), marital status is one of the most important factors conditioning the level of the EAs' job performance. Once an individual gets married, there is the tendency for such a person to be affected by family problems which may have trickle-down effects on his/her job-performance. The table also shows that 68.3% of the EAs were males, while 31.7% were females.

It is also evident from Table 1 that 15.0% of the EAs had West African School Certificates, while 18.3% had Ordinary National Diploma Certificates. About 57% had B.Sc./B. Agric. Certificates, while those who had M.Sc. Certificates accounted for 10.0%. Since a greater proportion (about 67%) of the EAs acquired B.Sc. and/or M.Sc. qualifications, the standard of professional input on the job would be expected to be high. The few EAs with low level of education should be encouraged to undergo in-service training for proficiency on the job.

Table 1

Percentage Distribution of EAs on the basis of their Socio-demographic Characteristics (n = 60)

Socio-Demographic Characteristic	%
Age (Years)	
20-29	15.0
30-39	58.3
40-49	21.7
Above 50	5.0
Marital Status	
Married	63.3
Single	36.7
Sex	
Male	68.3
Female	31.7
Educational Qualification	
WASC	15.0
OND	18.3
B.Sc./B. Agric	56.7
M.Sc.	10.0
Working Experience (Years)	
3-5	11.7
Above 6	88.3
Mode of Employment	
Direct	81.7
Secondment	18.3

Majority (81.7%) of the EAs were employed directly by the agency, while 18.3% were sent from the State Ministry of Agriculture. To maintain a high standard of performance right from the beginning of the agency, some professional personnel were sent from the State Ministry of Agriculture to occupy certain important key positions. A greater proportion (88.3%) of the EAs had above six years working experience, while the remaining 11.7% had 3 – 5 years working experience. A long working experience aids to increase proficiency on the job (Igben, 1988). A long working experience also gives room for acquisition of knowledge and skills which are crucial to effective job-performance.

Role Clarity Level of the EAs

Data in Table 2 show that the job activities of the EAs were very clear (= 5.0) to them, while the supervisor's expectations (= 4.1), evaluation methods (= 4.1) and decision-making process within the organization (= 4.1) were fairly clear to them.

The role conflict resolution (= 3.4) was just clear to them. The EAs' role clarity level was computed to be 4.1; implying that on the whole, their role within the organization was fairly clear to them.

Table 2

EAs' Role Clarity Mean () Scores

Roles Clarity Area	Mean Score()
Clarity about job activities	5.0
Clarity about the supervisor's expectations	4.1
Clarity about evaluation methods	4.1
Clarity about decision-making process	4.1
Clarity about role conflict resolution	3.4
Total Mean Score () =	20.7
Role Clarity Level (20.7/5) =	4.1

EAs' Level of Perception of their Profession Routine Duties

According to Table 3, attendance at Block Meeting (= 4.2), drawing up a work plan for the week (= 4.1), working out a fixed visit schedule to farming groups (= 4.1), listing the names of contact farmers (= 4.0) and delineating of circle into eight sub-circles (= 4.0) were perceived to be very important. On the other hand, conversant with the geographical limit of one's circle (= 3.9), attendance at two forth-nightly training meetings per month (= 3.9), living within the geographical area of the cell (= 3.9), recording of all scheduled activities in the work-book (= 3.8), keeping of clear, accurate and up-to-date records of extension activities (= 3.8) and making one special visit that is necessary (= 3.3) were perceived to be fairly important. The EAs' level of perception of their professional routine duties was computed to be 3.9; indicating that on the whole, the EAs perceived their professional routine duties to be fairly important to them.

Percentage Work-time Spent on Agricultural Activities by the EAs

Data in Table 4 reveal that the EAs spent their time on both agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Majority (42) of the EAs spent 70-100% of their working-time on crop production activities, while the remaining 18 EAs spent not less than 50% of their working time on crop production programmes. A total of 38 EAs did not spend any of their working-time on irrigation activities, while a total of 20 EAs spent 10-25% of their working-time on irrigation. Only two of them spent 50-70% of their working-time on

irrigation projects. A greater number (56) spent 0-50% of their working-time on irrigation projects. A greater number (56) spent 0-50% of their working-time on animal production activities, while those who spent up to 70% of their working-time on animal production were just four in number.

Table 4 also shows that a large number (37) of the EAs spent 0 – 10% of their working-time on fisheries activities, while 21 of them spent 25-50% of their working-time on fisheries projects. Only two of them spent up to 70% of their working time on fisheries activities.

It is also evident from Table 4 that 51 EAs spent 0-25% of their working-time on the formation and working with co-operative societies, while nine of them spent 50 – 70% of their working-time on co-operative societies. In the same vein, 36 of EAs spent 25 – 70% of their working-time on rural community development activities.

The implications of these findings are that, the EAs spent their working-time on both agricultural and non-agricultural activities. With respect to agricultural development activities, much more time was given to crop production by the EAs. On the other hand, less working-time was spent on animal and fisheries production. One of the major problems militating against effective livestock extension system in Nigeria is the poor recognition accorded it by the agricultural agencies and their agents (Williams and Williams, 1991; Akeeb, 1997). In case of the non-agricultural development activities, more working-time was spent on rural community development activities than those of the co-operative societies.

Table 3

EAs' Professional Routine Duties Perception Mean () Scores

Professional Routine Duty	Score()
Being conversant with geographical limit of one's circle	3.9
Delineating the circle into eight sub-circles	4.0
Listing the names of contact farmers	4.0
Specifying a precise and regular meeting point with contact farmers	3.9
Working out a fixed visit schedule to farming groups	4.1
Drawing up a work plan for the week	4.1
Recording all scheduled activities in a work-book	3.8
Attending two forth-nightly meetings per month	3.9
Making one special visit that is necessary	3.3
Living within geographical area of the cell	3.9
Keeping clear, accurate and up-to-date monthly records of extension activities	3.8
Submitting monthly summary report to Block Extension Supervisors	3.9
Attendance at block meetings	4.2
Total Mean () Score	50.8
Perception Level (50.8/13)	3.9

Table 4

Frequency Distribution of EAs on the Basis of Their Working-time Spent on Agricultural and non-Agricultural Activities (n =60)

Activity	0%	10%	25%	50%	70%	100%
Agricultural Development						
Crop Production	0	0	0	18	20	22
Irrigation	38	12	8	1	1	0
Animal Production	1	7	21	27	4	0
Fisheries Production	19	18	13	8	2	0
Non-Agricultural Development						
Establishment of cooperative societies	23	17	11	3	6	0
Community Development	6	18	12	14	10	0

Monthly Work-Load Perception by the EAs

Figure 1 shows that the EAs perceived the month of July to be a very busy month (= 5.0) of the year. This is because the month forms the peak of farming activities in many areas of Enugu State (e.g. Nsukka zone). April (= 4.4), May (= 4.8), June(= 4.8), August (=4.7) and September (= 4.1) were perceived by the EAs as fairly busy months. May and June could be seen as fairly busy months because at times, they serve as the beginning of rainy season in many parts of the state. For instance, in 1998, rain did not start in Nsukka until around May/June. The

rainy season always marks the beginning of extension activities. The months of August and September are the months when cropping activities in terms of crop production maintenance and demonstrations are going on in the farmer's farms; hence, the EAs from the study area are expected to be fairly busy.

The month of March (=3.5), October (=.5) and December (=3.4) were perceived by the EAs to be busy, probably because these are the fairly dry periods when campaigns for storage and dry season vegetable production are being executed. January (= 2.0); February (= 2.4)

and November (= 2.9) were perceived as not busy months. This is most likely due to the dry nature of the period. During this period, many of the farmers are always off-season and hence, less extension activities are normally carried out by the EAs. Their monthly work-load

perception level was computed to be 3.9; indicating that the majority of them perceived many of the 12 months in the year as busy probably due to their involvement in the fortnightly training programme and the weekly routine activities.

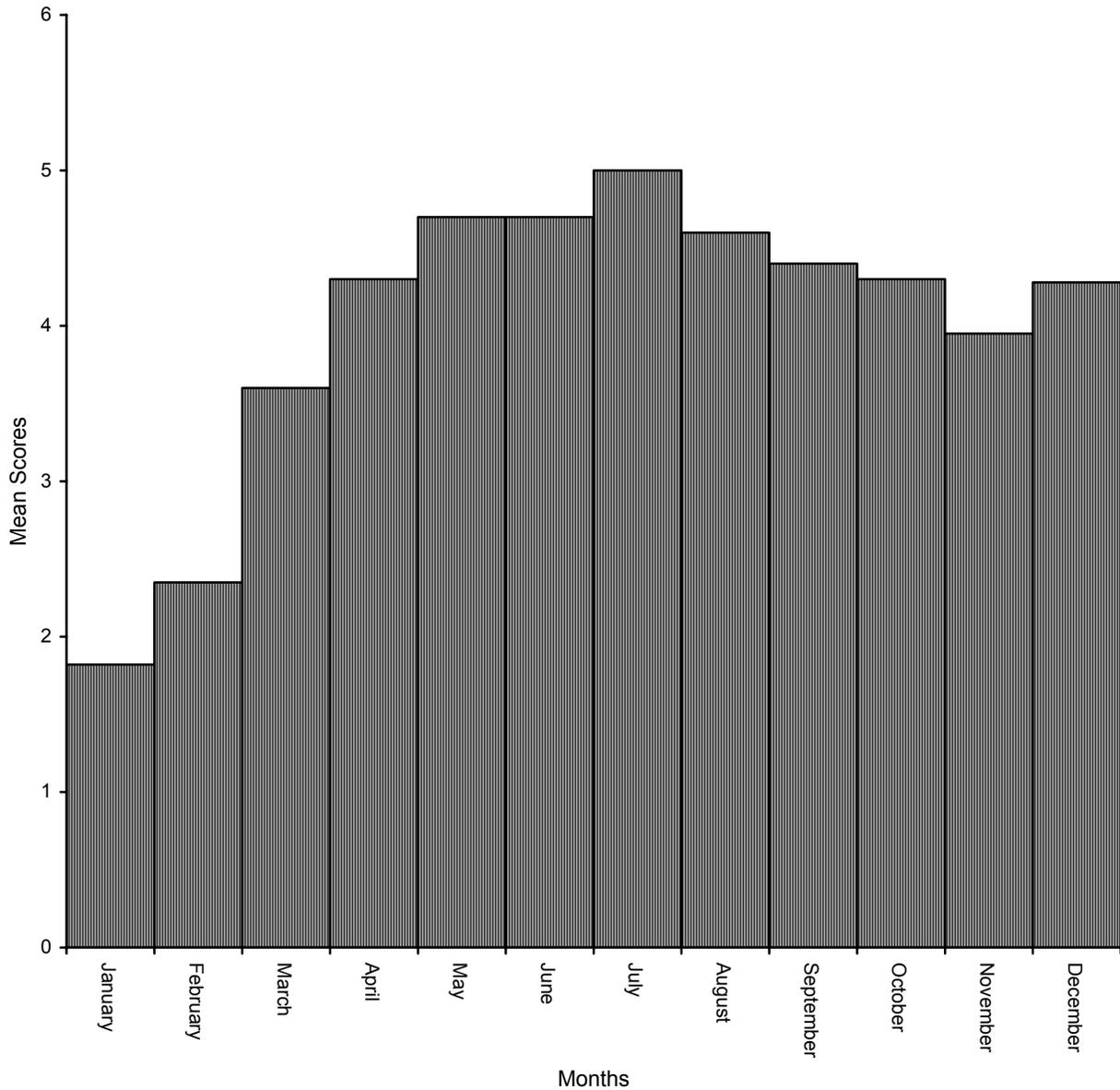


Fig. 1: Monthly Work-load Perception Mean Scores by EAs

Conclusion

A greater proportion (58.3%) of the EAs were relatively young. About 68% of them were males and almost all (63.3%) of them were married. Not less than 67% of them attained high levels of education. Those that were on secondment from the Ministry of Agriculture accounted for only 18.3%. About 88% of the EAs had above 6 years working experience.

The EAs' role within the organization was fairly clear to them, while the majority of them perceived many of their professional routine duties as being fairly important. Their working-time was spent on both agricultural and non-agricultural development activities. In the area of agricultural development activities, much more working-time was spent on crop production. A majority of the EAs perceived each of the 12 months in the year as being busy.

In conclusion the relatively young age of the EAs should serve as an added advantage to the agency. The agency should motivate the young EAs so that they will be willing to stay on the job and develop the necessary experience and expertise required by a functional organization. The EAs with low level of education should be encouraged to undergo in-service training in order to improve their proficiency on the job. For their role and professional routine duties within the organization to be very clear and at the same time, be of very importance to them, they should be given orientation in the area of philosophy, objectives, principles and organizational structure of the agency. Agricultural development agencies and their agents should accord both crop and animal production equal recognition and time frame since majority of the rural farmers are engaged in both crop and animal production.

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