PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE AND PRACTICES OF PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT STEPS AND PRINCIPLES BY EXTENTION SUPERVISORS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Enormous efforts have been made by the government to improve local extension services. However, weaknesses and discrepancies in extension services relating to programme development are still being voiced out. This study was an attempt to determine the importance and frequency of practice in the field, of the steps and principles of programme development in the field as perceived by extension supervisors in the Department of Agriculture. another objective of the study was to identify the constraints faced by the extensión supervisors, who are graduates of the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia, in their effort to carry out the programming steps and principles as being taught in the University.

The respondents were 14 Agriculture Officers and 50 Assistant Agriculture Officers from three state Departments of Agriculture in Peninsular Malaysia. Questionnaire schedules were used for data collection. Follow-up group interviews were also conducted with selected respondents.

The analysis of data revealed that all except two of the eight programming steps (analysis of the situation and preparation of the programme document) taught in the University were perceived as important in programme development. However, none of those steps were reported to be frequently practised in the field. Similarly, five of the principles of programme development tested (except Cooperation and coordination) were perceived as important, but none had been consistently emphasised by the extension supervisors during the process of extension programme development.

The extension supervisors faced constraints with three of the eight programming steps. The biggest constraints were with evaluation and accountability. The most frequently mentioned constraints were, problems related to clients who were part-time farmers; lack of time due to work overload on the part of the extension supervisors; lack of adequate knowledge and skills in extension programme development; lack of up-to-date information about the clients; insufficients funds; low cooperation among extension officers; environmental situations; political influence and low interagency cooperation.

Several recommendations were suggested to improve the programme development practices in the DOA. These include strengthening the pre-service and in-service trainings by the DOA and UPM, reviewing the teaching approach by these two institutions, training local leaders in programme development, making early provisions for cooperation and coordination with other agencies, and providing clear statements of roles of those involved in programme development. It was also recommended that the extension supervisors be relieved from most administrative duties so as to enable them to give more concentration on extension activities. Lastly, a follow-up study using the qualitative approach was proposed to determine an indepth picture of the status of programme development practices and constraints faced which resulted in their low level of practice in the field.

THE PROBLEM

Numerous efforts had been made by the government through development agencies and educational institutions to strengthen extension work in the country to help improve the lives of the people particularly in the rural areas. However, weaknesses in the extention service were still being voiced out by local researchers, professionals and politicians. Those weaknesses were related to the important steps of programme development. Since effective extension programmes are the result of programming using the right procedures and principles, hence it was thought that those weaknesses arose due to deficiencies in programme development practices.

The aim of this study was to focus on the importance and frequency of the practice of extension programme development steps and principles as perceived by extension supervisors in the DOA. The study also examined the problems and constraints experienced by the extension supervisors in implementing the extension programme development model taught at the University.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study involved 64 respondents from the DOA in three states of the Peninsular Malaysia. The respondents consisted of Agricultural Officers and Assistant Agricultural Officers in the extension unit at the state as well as at the district levels.

Questionnaires were utilised to gather data. The construction of these instruments was an important part of this study. The criteria included in the study were validated by a selected panel of experts. This panel of experts were made up of experienced lecturers in the Centre of Extension and Continuing Education, Universiti Pertanian Malaysia.

Data gathered were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The subprogrammes of FREQUENCIES was utilised in the study.

THE FINDINGS

Objectives one and two of the study were to determine the degree of perceived importance of the programming activities and the frequency of these activities being carried out by the extension supervisors in the field. Table 1 summarises the overall findings pertaining to these two objectives.

The data revealed that six of the eight programming steps taught in UPM were perceived as important step in programming. However, all the eight steps had not been frequently practised in the field. Situational analysis and preparation of the programme document were perceived to be the least important and the least frequently practised steps in programming.

Observations on the overall data in Table 1 revealed a regular pattern of the inconsistencies between perceived importance and the frequency of the programming steps being carried out by the extension supervisors. The programming steps which were

Table 1

The Degree of Importance of the Programming
Steps and Their Frequency of Practice

Programming Steps	Degree of Importance			Frequency of Practice		
	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
Organisation for Programme Planning	4.02	0.56	5	3.51	0.54	6
Analysis of the Situation	3.93*	0.53	7	3.50	0.53	7
Formulation of Objectives	4.18	0.49	1	3.79	0.49	3
Identification of Resources and Support	3.98	0.56	6	3.81	0.39	2
Developing a Plan of Actions	4.08	0.48	4	3.73	0.44.	4
Preparing the Programme Document	3.73*	0.63	8	3.14	0.70	8
Programme Implementation	4.10	0.47	3	3.83	0.45	1
Evaluation and Accountability	4.13	0.57	2	3.56	0.59	5

Note : * = Perceived to be moderate importance.

perceived to be important by the extension supervisors had not been frequently carried out. The major findings pertaining to the two research objectives mentioned above are as follows:

1. The planning committee members for programme development had not been properly selected. The normal practice as revealed from the group interviews was to appoint the members of the Village Development and Security Council as the programme planning committee.

2. Comprehensive analysis of the client's situation had not been frequently carried out in the field. This resulted in an inadequate basis of background information to enable accurate identification and interpretation of client's needs.

3. The programme objective had not been adequately specified in the educational terms. Generally, the major goals of extension programmes developed and implemented by the DOA were production oriented. Little emphasis had been given to the behavioural changes such as knowledge, attitude and skills.

4. The local leaders and órganisations, subject matter experts and other relevant agencies had not been identified as possible resources in programme development.

5. The plan of actions was not normally developed to indicate the organisation of resources and learning activities, the subject matter involved, and the calender of activities for Programme execution.

6. No comprehensive programme documents had been prepared for the programmes developed by the DOA. The project proposal submitted for approval of top officers in the department were insufficient to be regarded as a programme document for it lacked several important items. These items include the general statement of the client's situation, specification of educational objectives, a comprehensive plan of actions (whereby learning activities for each specific objective are specified), and avenues for cooperation and coordination with other agencies or organisations.

7. Not much effort had been made to ensure effective programme implementation. Firstly, the clients were not normally informed about the contents and benefits of the programme. The learning activities had not been frequently organised in the logical sequence and continuity, and no prior preparation of the learning resource materials were made.

8. Evaluation and accountability had not been frequently and adequately practised. Monitoring of the utilisation of resources during programme implementation was poorly conducted. The contents, methods and strategies used, behavioural outcomes of the programme and performance of the people involved in programme implementation were also not frequently assessed.

9.   Evaluation data was seldom analysed and interpreted. Hence, such valuable feedback information could not be utilised in developing and improving future programmes. Evaluation reports were also not communicated to the public and related parties to whom the DOA is accountable, unless requested to. Hence the accountability of the success or failure of extension programmes implemented could not really be ascertained.

The third objective of the study was to determine the degree of emphasis of the programming principles by the extension supervisors in the field. These principles are; Needs and needs assessments, Clarity of objectives, Clients' participation, Use of local leadership and organisations, Cooperation and coordination and Programme evaluation. The findings revealed that all but one of the six principles tested, were regarded as important by the extension supervisors. However, none of the principles had been well emphasised by the extension supervisors in the process of developing their extension programmes. The major findings for this research objective are as follows :

1.   Needs assessments were based on inadequate analysis of the clients' situation. This resulted in inaccurate interpretation of client's needs hence, giving the wrong basis for objective formulations.

2.   Educational programmes objectives were not normally specified. The major concerns of the objectives of extension programmes developed by DOA were not educational in nature but more project or activity oriented.

3.   Provisions had not been adequetely made in the plan of actions to ensure a high degree of client participation in the programming process. The clients were seldom informed of the contents and benefits of the extension programmes. Learning activites and learning resource materials had not been well organised and prepared to ensure effective participation of the clients.

4.   Local leadership and organisations were not fully utilised especially in the major decision making process such as determining possible solutions to the identified problems of the clients, developing the plan of actions and preparing the programme document.

5.   The extension supervisors sometimes liaised with other agencies for support. However, no provisions for cooperation and coordination with such agencies were being made in the written programme document.

6.   Programme evaluation, was insufficiently emphasised.   A
      majority of the monitoring and evaluation activities suggested
      by the extension supervisors in the field. Evaluation data were
      also rarely analysed, interpreted, recorded and communicated
      to the public or interested parties unless they requested for
      them.

      The fourth objective was to identify the constraints experienced by
the extension supervisors in practising the programmes development
activities.   The study revealed that although the programming model
provided by UPM was thought to be important, the extension supervisors
however, were not able to practise it fully due to several constraints.
Three of the programming steps, namely, situational analysis,
implementations and evaluations and accountability had mean scores of
2.75, 2.89 and 2.95 which were very close to 3.00. this indicate that the
extension supervisors frequently experience constraints when practising
these three steps. However, constraints were only sometimes encountered
by the extension supervisors when carrying out the remaining five
programming steps namely, organisation for programme planning,
formulation of programme objectives, identification of resources and
support, development of the plan of actions, and preparation of the
programme document.

      Among the types of constraints encountered were those related to
problems with clients who were part-time farmers, time constraints due to
work overload, lack of adequate knowledge and skills in extension
programme development, lack of up-to-date information about the clients,
insufficient funds, low cooperation among extension officers, environmental
situations, political influences, and low interagency cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

      This study has revealed some significant informations about the
practice of programme development activities and principles in the DOA.
The general findings indicated that extension programmes implemented
by the DOA were not educational in nature and had not been adequately
planned and developed.   The extension supervisors, who were all
graduated of UPM, had taken courses in programme development.

      However, this study revealed that the programming guidelines
provided by the University, although perceived to by important, had not
been fully practised in the field by these graduates. Several constraints
were mentioned which prevented them from implementing the
programming steps fully. Among the major ones were problems related

to clients who were part-time farmers, time constraints and inadequate knowledge and skills in programming.

Based on the overall findings of the study, several conslusions could be drawn. Firstly, there was not consistency in the understanding of the various steps and principles of programme development among extension supervisors in the DOA. Different individuals had their own understanding and interpretation about similar concepts in the programme development process. This was revealed by the different ratings given to the eight programming steps. If there was a coherent understanding about the programming concepts, all the eight programming steps and six principles should have been given equal ratings for their perceived importance.

Secondly, what was perceived to be important had not been frequently practiced in the field. This inconsistency as shown by the data, indicated some irregularities in the implementation of programme development by the DOA. Scholars such as Beal et. al. (1966), Boone (1985) and Boyle (1981) agreed that all the programming steps are of equal importance, interrelated and inseparable. Each individual element has its own functions and goals, but still interrelated to the other sequential steps which goes on in a cyclical manner. It was speculated that the discrepancy found in this study between perceived importance and actual practice could be due to three factors, namely :

1.   Inadequate training in extension programme development. Extension supervisors might have not adequately received the appropriate training in programming which could equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills.

2.   Lack of opportunity to practise the programming activities and principles.   This could be related to the programme development policies adopted by the DOA. Policies such as predetermining the types of programmes to be implemented at the federal level might not provide the oppotunity for the extension supervisors to decide and choose their own programmes based on the actual needs of their clients.

3.   Lack of emphasis and support by top officials to motivate the extension supervisors in adopting the complete programming process. This could arise due to lack of understanding of the importance of the programming functions and procedures by these top officials.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, conclusion and implications drawn from this study, the following recommendations are suggested which could be considered so as to improve the programme development practices in the DOA. These recommendations are as follows :

1.   In-service training in extension programme development should be provided for the extension supervisors as well as all other senior officers in the DOA. This should be stressed so that they understand and appreciate the programming concepts and skills and be more capable of developing major impact extension programmes in the future. Among the things that need to be emphasised in the training programmes should include :

    a.   Continuous analysis of the client's situation whereby, a general situational statement based on such analysis should be drawn and made available to all extension supervisors and other related persons involved in developing and planning of extension programmes. This will provide the much needed up-to-date information about the clients so that more programmes that could fulfill the needs of the people could be developed.

    b.   The importance of educational programme objectives should be heavily emphasised to ensure sustainable change and progress in the livelihood of the people. Physical changes such as increase in acreages and production are tangible outcomes which are easy to assess and evaluate. However, such changes are not the only indicator of change. It is also important to consider the qualitative aspects such as changes in knowledge, attitudes and skills of the target audience.

    c.   The importance of evaluation reports in future planning should be stressed. Evaluation information should be continuously analysed, interpreted and recorded for use in future planning. This report should also be made available to all extension supervisors and related people involved in developing and planning of extension programmes. Such reports provide valuable information that could be considered for the improvements of future programmes.

d.   The accountability of extension efforts is another matter
that needs to be continuously emphasised. Evaluative
reports need to be communicated to the public, such
as the policy makers, planners and   other related
people.

2.   It is suggested that the teaching approach in extension
education in UPM and the training division in the DOA be
reviewed and some changes may need to be made. Perhaps
more emphasis should be given to the practical aspect of
really practising the programming activities and principles.
Trainees need to be given more exposures to the real life
situation in order to be able to master the skill of adapting
theory into practice. To achieve this, lecturers teaching the
subject also need to have enough practical experience and
skills in programming.

3.   Training of local leadership in programme development is
another important aspect that should be looked into. More
efforts should be made to upgrade their participation from the
very beginning of the programming process. Such participation
would enable them to learn through experience and thus
acquire the appropriate skills in programming.   This would
greatly facilitate future programme development efforts by
the DOA for its target audience.

4.   Another crucial issue is the cooperation and coordination
between extension agencies in programme development. This
has not been given mush emphasis as shown in the findings of
the study. It is suggested that provisions for the cooperation
and coordination of such agencies should be made in the
programme document and the plan of actions. The agency
concerned should also be informed about this matter from the
very beginnig. Their involvement in the initial planning stage
should also be solicited. This would enable them to also plan
their own schedule in order to provide the appropriate services
at the right time.

5.   Efforts should also be made to avoid conflicts which could
result in low cooperation among extension workers. It is
suggested that a clear statement of the purpose and functions
of programme development and the roles of the different
people involved in it should be made available to the extension
supervisors and other officers within the DOA during the process
of programme development. Such statements of roles and
functions should also be made available to the officers of

other agencies involved in the programming process in order to obtain their commitment.

6.	It is also suggested that extension supervisors be lightened from most of their administrative responsibilities and unrelated functions so as to allow them more time to devote to real extension work which demands proper programming and planning.

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