INFLUENCE OF EXTENSION AGENTS PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON THEIR JOB PERFORMANCE IN EDO STATE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the influence of the personal characteristics of extension agents in Edo State Agricultural Development Programme (ESADP) on their job performance. A well - structured questionnaire was used to collect information from fifty-three respondents, spread across the ADP blocks in the three agricultural zones in the study area. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square. The findings of the study showed that majority of the respondents were male (66.0%) and married (94.3%). Majority (83%) had OND/NCE certificate and were relatively young (average age = 40 years) and experienced as extension agents (average = 14 years). The job performance of majority of the extension workers was rated high (58.5%). Also, Chi- square result showed that there was no significant association between the personal characteristics of the extension agents and their job performance. The study therefore suggests the need to examine organizational factors as crucial incentives needed to enhance the job performance of the workers in the study area.

Keywords: personal characteristics, job, performance, Edo state.

INTRODUCTION

The present global economic trend has made most employers of labour to realized that for their organizations to compete favourably with others, their employees ability and capability must be enhanced. This is because their performance level goes a long way to determining the success of the organization. On the other hand, performance of employees in any organization is vital, not only for the growth of the organization, but also for the growth and development of individual employees (Wright,2013). According to Bashaer, Kumar and Farauk (2016) and Amit (2017), the level of performance of an employee is often influenced by his personal features / characteristics. This means that the personal characteristics of an employee in an organization can either influence his performance positively or negatively. Hence, it is important to determine employees personal characteristics so that decisions on how to accelerate their productivity could be taken with the aim of enhancing and attaining overall organizational goal. According to Bowling(2017), the extension workers personal characteristics may be responsible for low productivity in most agricultural sector. Could this be true in Edo state (ADP)?. According to Agbamu 2005,the slow aggregated growth of agricultural sector in Nigeria has led to low agricultural productivity which encouraged high level of

importation of agricultural products. This problem resulted from the declining ability to produce enough food in the face of increasing population and consumption capacity (Sodipe and Ogunrinola , 2017). To reduce this major challenge developing countries like Nigeria must produce more agricultural commodities to feed her teeming population and provide raw materials for industries. The vital importance of agriculture lies not only in the provision of essential goods , but also, for its essential role as the crucial engine of growth for developing economy generally (AGRA and PWC (2010).

Sound human resources is essential for effective and efficient agricultural production. This necessitate the engagement of suitable man power that are willing, able and qualified to carry out agricultural operations. Hence, the need to ascertain the personal characteristics of extension workers in Edo ADP.The study is on Edo ADP because Edo ADP is the major extension unit of the state ministry of agriculture which is responsible for the training and dissemination of information about new idea, technology or methods of production from the research institutes to the farm families. The quality of extension personnel in ADP will certainly influence both the individual and organization performance.

This study will be of significance because it will ascertain the extent to which the personal characteristics of extension

agents in Edo State ADP influences their job performance. The outcome can be used by the government in Edo State to effectively derive plans for agricultural growth and development.

The general objective of the study was to ascertain the influence of extension agents personal characteristics on their job performance in Edo State, while the specific objectives were to:

1. describe the personal characteristics of extension agents in the study area.

2. ascertain the level of job performance of extension agents in the State; and

3. determine the relationship between respondents personal characteristics and their job performance.

Hypothesis of the study

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the personal characteristics of extension agents and their job performance.

Methodology

Study Area: The study was conducted in Edo State . Edo State is in the South South geo - political zone of Nigeria and has Benin city as its capital. Edo State shares boundary with Kogi State in the North, Delta State in the South-East and Ondo State in the South-West. Edo State lies between Latitudes $5^0 44$'N and $7^0 37$'N and between Longitude $5^0 44$' E and $6^0 43$' E (Edo State Statistical Year Book, 2013).The State has 18 local government areas, distributed across three Agricultural Zones, namely Edo North, Edo Central and Edo South. For administrative convenience Edo State ADP is divided along the three Agricultural Zones which correspond to the three Senatorial districts .The population of Edo State is estimated to be 4,718,632 at a growth rate of 2.74% per annum in 2020 (Worldometer, 2016). Edo State is a major producer of root and tuber crops, grains, fruits, vegetables amongst others.

Study Population and Sampling: All the extension agents in Edo State ADP. The population of extension agents in Edo State ADP is 66 comprising 21 extension agents in Edo North, 17 in Edo Central and 28 in Edo South. Because of the small population size , 80% of the extension agents were selected through simple random sampling technique from each block in each of the three zones and used in the study. The total sample size of respondents used was 53 comprising 22 from Edo South, 17 from Edo North and 14 from Edo Central.

Data Analysis Methods: The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics used includes frequency, percentages and mean score, while the inferential statistic used was Chi-square.

Measurement of Variables

Sex: male (coded 1) and female (coded 2)

Marital status: married (coded 1) and single (coded 2)

Age: 21- 30 years (coded1), 31-40 (coded 2), 41-50 (coded 3) and 50-60 years (coded 4).

Years of experience: 6-11 years (coded 1), 11-15 years (coded 2), 16- 20 years (coded 3) and 21- 25 years (coded 4).

Job performance rating of extension agents.

The study examined 12 indices of job performance adapted from Edo State Civil Service Annual Performance Evaluation Report (ESCSAPER) and that of Edo State Unified Teaching Service (ESUTS). The indices included; attendance at T and V fortnightly meetings, punctuality to meetings, readiness to accept additional duties, respect for constituted authority, resourcefulness, level of effective communication, level of contact with farmers, reliability, cordial relationship with other staff etc. The performance of extension agents with respect to these indices were measured on a 5 point likert-type scale of very high (coded 5), high (coded 4), undecided (coded 3), low (coded 2) and very low(coded 1). A mean benchmark score of 3.0 meant a high performance and a mean score less than 3.0 meant low performance. A similar cut off point for a 5 point likert-type scale was used by Okwuokenyen and Onemolease (2011).

The highest score obtainable on the 12 items was 60 and the lowest score was 12.The score obtained by each respondents was aggregated and used to classify them into two group. A score of 36 – 60 was considered high performance and score of 12 – 35.9 was considered low performance. The mean of highest and lowest score $\{ 60 + 12 \} = 36$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 shows that majority (66.0%) of the respondents were male while 34% were female. That male extension agents dominate the agents population in Edo State Agricultural Development Programme (ESADP) agrees with the findings of Odurukwe (2005). In his study he found out that extension agents were sexually unequally distributed in Abia State Agricultural Development Programme (ASADP).

Also, the results shows that a high proportion (94.4%) of the respondents were married compared with 5.7% of the single (not married) respondents. The high proportion of married extension agents in the table confirms the high societal value on marriage with the married considered to be more responsible than the unmarried (Oladele, 2013). This implied that majority of the agents were responsible adults who had dependants and would be desirous to do their best to earn their wages to be able to cater for themselves and their family.

The result in the table also shows that majority (94.4%) of the respondents belonged to the age bracket 31-50 years. This means that majority of the extension agents belonged to the active age as only a few (1.9%) were above 50 years. Agents less than 31 years of age constituted only 3.8% of the respondents. The implication of the observed distribution is that majority of the workers are in their active age cadre; however, a gradually tilting towards pension and retirement is observed. It is therefore expedient to recruit younger agents into Edo State ADP .

Similarly, the table result shows that majority (62.3%) of the respondents had been on the job for 11-15 years. About 19% had put in less than 11 years of service, 5.7% had put in 16 - 20 years and only 13.2% had spent more than 20 years on the job. These findings show that majority of the extension agents in the ESADP had spent over eleven years on the job. This implies that they have the relevant experience required to perform their job perfectly.

The table shows that majority (83.0%) of the respondents had Ordinary National Diploma OND/Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) and 13.2% had Higher National Diploma (HND)/ Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) degree and only 3.8% had Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE). Similarly, the table shows that only 3.8% of respondents educational qualification were lower than the minimum educational requirements of extension agents, while majority had the basic educational qualification of OND and above. This means that they are knowledgeable and have the fundamental knowledge required to perform their roles efficiently.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents according to their personal characteristics (N = 53)

Personal variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Sex:			
Male	35	66	
Female	18	34	
Age (Years)			
21—30	2	3.8	
31—40	24	45.3	
41 –50	26	49.1	
51—60	1	1.9	40.4
Marital status			
Married	50	94.3	
Single	3	5.7	
Job Experience (years)			
6 – 10	10	18.9	
11 – 15	33	62.3	
16—20	3	5.7	
21—25	7	13.2	13.7
Educational Qualification			
SSCE or Equivalent	2	3.8	
OND/ NCE	44	83	
HND/B.Sc Degree	7	13.2	

Table 2: Job performance rating of respondents

The result in table 2 Shows that respect for constituted authority (m. = 3.6*),and attendance at Training and Visit (T and V) fortnightly meeting(m = 3.5*) were significantly high. It also shows that the level of credibility (m = 3.4), punctuality at fortnightly meeting (m = 3.4), cordiality of relationship with other staff (m = 3.4), demonstrating improved technologies to farmer (m3.4), Oral/ written expression (m = 3.3) and contribution to discussion at meetings were rated low. Ratings on agents concern about farmers welfare (m = 3.0), level of contact with farmers (m = 2.9) and readiness to accept additional duties (m= 2.8) were also rated low .

Table 2 : Job performance rating of respondents (n : 53)

Variables	Mean	SD
Respect for constituted authority	3.6*	0.633

Attendance of fortnightly meetings	3.5*	0.953
Level of credibility	3.4	0.633
Punctuality at fortnightly meetings	3.4	0.968
Cordiality of relationship with other staff	3.4	0.768
Demonstration of improved technologies to farmers	3.4	0.817
Oral/ written expression (communication)	3.4	0.863
Cordiality of relationship with farmers	3.3	0.902
Contribution to discussion at meetings	3.2	0.900
Empathy (i e concern about farmers welfare)	3.0	1.097
Level of contact with farmers	2.9	1.197
Readiness to accept additional duties	2.8	1.223

*High job performance(m ≥ 3.5)

Relationship between Personal characteristics of extension agents and their job performance

The chi-square analysis in Table 4 shows that sex has no significant association with job performance ($\chi^2 = 0.75$; df = 1; $p < 0.05$)$= 0.750 =$). This means that sex of an individual in terms of its functional role (the ability to work) does not influence job performance. Similar result was obtained in other professions like medicine, computer science, teaching and top management position (Bashaer *et al*, 2016 and Bowling, 2017) .

Marital status ($\chi^2 = 0.83$; df = 1; $= 0.829 =$ p≤0.05) showed no significant influence on the job performance of respondents. This suggests that gender of the workers does not affect in any significant way, their job performance or role as extension agents. The table also showed that the age of extension agents ($\chi^2 = 3.69$; df = 3; $= 3.694; df = 3$ p≤0.05) do not affect their performance.

The result did show that most of the agents are within the active age category. Similarly, job experience does not have a significant association with job performance of the extension agents. The implication is that length of stay in the job does not necessarily make one a better worker. The result is consistent with the assertion of Bowling,(2017), that performance of an employee is not necessarily determined by the number of years he/she has spent on the job. $= 4.003; df = 3$

Education qualification attained showed no significant association with the job performance of the extension agents. This corroborates the view of Bashaer *et al* (2016), that beyond having a formal education, crucial to employee's performance is on the –job training and the ability to acquaint themselves with rules, laws and other useful information relevant to enhance job performance.

Table 3: Relationship between personal characteristics of extension agents and their job performance

Characteristics	Df	χ^2
Sex	1	0.75
Marital Status	1	0.83
Age	3	3.69
Job Experience	3	1.28
Educational Qualification	3	4.00

CONCLUSION

Findings from the study established the fact that majority of the extension agents in Edo ADP were male and married . Most of them were rated high on the job performance scale; however, the fact that over 40% rated low is cause for concern. The study attempted to determine if the personal characteristics (Sex , Marital Status, Age , Job Experience and Educational Qualification) of the extension workers played significant role in their job performance. Findings showed that this was not the case. The study therefore recommends the need to examine the work environment and organizational policies in order to identify factors that could affect the job performance of the workers.

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