

Rural Instructors' Educational Exposure to, Use of, and Attitude Toward the Program of Activities

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Introduction

An issue facing rural instructors in extension education is providing quality instruction that meets the learning needs of rural agricultural population. Rural population are coming to rural instructors with more diversity in their learning styles than ever before. Obviously more attention than ever is needed to meet the challenge of this increasing diversity. One of the most significant challenges that rural instructors face is to be tolerant and perceptive enough to recognize learning differences among various target population. Many rural instructors do not realize that farmers vary in the way they process and understand information. Rural instructors are part-time contract employees who are co-operating with the Ministry of Agriculture in Iran. Their major task is teaching necessary and job-related content like husbandry, horticulture, rural handicrafts, agronomy, fishery, and forestry to farmers mostly in the form of short courses. It is not clear how positive and effective are their teaching indeed? This study focuses on the competencies, which the rural instructors should possess to overcome the communication obstacles and be able to deliver the sound and new technology to the farmers.

Purpose and Methods

The main purpose of this study was to assess the competencies of rural instructors and their perception of their strengths, weaknesses and necessary competencies for their career. The research design used for this study was a descriptive survey method.

A questionnaire was designed to gather needed data from all 102 rural instructors of the province of Isfahan, Iran. The extension organization directory of the Ministry of Agriculture was used to locate the agents in each township. The researchers verified the list before distribution of the survey. The instrument used a six point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = slightly disagree; 4 = slightly agree; 5 = agree; and 6 = strongly agree). Kolmogorov-smirnov test was utilized to assess the significance of priority of expressed competencies.

Major points and Educational Importance

Currently, the introductory animal science course meets three times per week in a large lecture class. It is recommended that the rural instructors consider switching to two lecture periods and have small discussion groups meet for the third period each week. Dividing the course into small discussion groups would allow rural instructors to more closely monitor farmers' progress and make it easier to identify and assist those farmers falling into advising group three or four status who are in need of learning assistance. It is further recommended that after modifications to the course are made that the rural instructors re-evaluate the impact that advising group status has on farmer achievement.