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Training Needs of Communication Officers of Agricultural and Rural Development Agencies for Entertainment-Education Script Writing in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

The use of Entertainment-Education (EE) for information dissemination in agricultural extension agencies requires that key frontline professionals are trained in EE script writing, therefore the training needs of communication officers in EE script writing was probed in this study. All (42) communication officers of agricultural development agencies in the study area were interviewed. Data were collected using questionnaire to elicit information on communication officers' socioeconomic characteristics, awareness of the components of EE script writing, perception of integration of script writing skills for agricultural information dissemination and training needs for EE script writing in agricultural information dissemination. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages and means. Results indicate that respondents' mean age was 43.0 ± 6.8 years, 38.1% had Bachelor's Degree and were mostly male (64.3%). Most respondents were aware of the components and sub-components of EE scriptwriting, 52.4% had favourable disposition to the concept and had most training need on message, character and plot components. The study concludes that communication officers are abreast of the components and subcomponents of EE scriptwriting, and are favourably disposed to the concept of EE script writing. Training on EE script writing for communication officers of agricultural development agencies should focus on message, character and plot components.

Keywords: Agricultural development agencies. Agricultural information, Communication officers, Entertainment education script writing,

Introduction

Entertainment Education (EE), as conceptualised by Wang and Singhal (2009) is a theory-based communication strategy for purposefully embedding educational and social issues in the creation, production, processing and dissemination process of an entertainment programme. This is with the aim of targeting individual, community, institutional, and societal changes among the intended media user populations. The combination of entertaining and educating elements in itself is not new (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Singhal & Rogers 2004) as it has been used across the globe in form of drama, music, dance and other forms of folk media for recreation, reformation and

instructional purposes. Entertainment-Education is particularly able to influence behaviour rooted in traditions that are difficult to change through the use of drama, music and other communication formats that engage the emotions to inform audiences and change their attitudes, behavior and social norms (Goldstein, Usdin, Sheepers & Japhet, 2005). The influence of entertainment is therefore recognised for its value in education specifically for its ability to advance health, agricultural and developmental agendas, especially in cases where an educational programme alone fails to attract, maintain and engage with viewers (Govender, 2013). The benefits of EE format and or strategy have been laid bare in the various

evaluation reports of its impact in many development-oriented milieus. For instance, studies have established that many different EE formats have influenced knowledge, attitudes and behavior related to family planning and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS, as exemplified in a television drama in South Africa, *TshaTsha*, which addressed HIV prevention, HIV testing, and stigma (Barker & Sabido, 2005). In the United Kingdom, a radio drama entitled *The Archers*, motivated people to adopt agricultural innovations (Singhal and Rogers, 2004). Furthermore, Olajide and Oresanya (2016) describe several programmes in Nigeria that have utilised the EE format to broadcast pro-social behaviour, including the Society for Family Health-sponsored radio soap opera, *One Thing at a Time*, through which precise and clear messages concerning reproductive health, HIV/AIDS prevention and family health were disseminated.

Agricultural extension has traditionally been the conveyor of agricultural development information through the use of several communication strategies, including EE (Olajide, 2011). Considering its proven potency, EE strategy is able to expand the knowledge capacity of the present and prospective farm families, and other rural economic operators (processors, marketers and rural agro-industrialists) that need to succeed in farming and farm-related activities, if effectively deployed. However, EE script writing is a challenging art form requiring writers to be dedicated to the three aims of creating a strongly entertaining story, blending in naturally, gradually and subtly the necessary educational messages and providing strong behavior change motivation for the chosen audience(s) (de Fossard, 2018). Thus, EE

script writing is different from entertainment drama writing because of these very specific needs. Regrettably, extension officers still struggle with effective communication of innovation to the end users. This could be due to the ineffectiveness of the communication strategies employed. For instance, in using EE strategy, extension practitioners with little experience often make mistakes when drawing up its EE scripts. These include inculcating so many messages into the story such that audience become overwhelmed; placing too much emphasis on the educational content and too little on the entertainment; and making the messages too obvious or too artificial, instead of weaving them seamlessly into the story.

Furthermore, successful EE strategies require skilled managers, producers and script writers which could pose a heavy financial burden on extension organisations. Thus, there is a need to tackle these twin challenges if EE will be fully exploited for agricultural information dissemination. A critical way to do this is to train communication officers of Agricultural and Rural Development Agencies on the art of script writing as basic skills are needed to fully operationalise this idea. This implies that communication officers need to be trained on EE script writing if the different EE formats (drama, songs, puppetry, soap operas, sitcoms) will be put to best use for agricultural information dissemination.

Several studies on Entertainment-Education (EE) had demonstrated the potency of EE model in promoting health, agriculture and other social issues. Harnessing the gains of EE in development milieu requires that institutions and structure are in place to deploy its potentials

to promote development issues, one of which is agriculture. One of the very critical ingredients to launch EE usage is training of key frontline professionals in extension agencies, who sometimes double as media officers in these agencies. This is against the backdrop of huge cost of bringing on board crop of core professional script writers in collaborative efforts. Aside cost, the mindset of most core script writers suggests apathy as they do not see development issues as particularly interesting and entertaining (Ladigbolu, 2016; Sheila & Cody, 2013).

The media and communication officers in most agricultural and rural development agencies are first and foremost either graduates of agricultural disciplines with interest for communication and extension or are of communication and language arts, English Language and or journalists turned professional agricultural information officers. This suggests that they do have necessary background in their initial training that could be tapped or built upon with requisite in-service training to circumvent the indifferent disposition of core professional script writers. This study therefore explored the possibility of identifying the training need of communication officers in agricultural development agencies as precursor to training communication officers to take up responsibility of script writing for EE use in agricultural information dissemination. Communication officers require training in script writing so that they could convey educational content and positive values in an entertaining manner. It is against this backdrop that the training needs of communication officers of agricultural and rural development agencies for EE script writing in agricultural information

dissemination in southwestern Nigeria was investigated in this study. In specific terms, the study

Profiled the socioeconomic characteristics of communication officers of agricultural and rural development agencies in the study area.

Ascertain the awareness of the communication officers of the components of EE script writing for agricultural information dissemination.

Established communication officers' perception of integration of script writing skills for agricultural information dissemination.

Identified the training needs of communication officers for EE script writing in the study area.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in southwestern Nigeria consisting of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo States. The southwest zone boasts of four national agricultural research institutes and the International Institute of Tropical Agricultural (IITA). All the national research institutes are directly supervised by the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARC/N). The population of this study consisted of communication officers of the agricultural and rural development agencies in southwestern states of Nigeria. The development agencies of concern to this study included Agricultural Development Programme, Fadama, research and training institutes (CRIN, NIHORT, IITA, FRIN, IAR&T). In all of these institutions, a total of 42 communication officers were populated and all were interviewed for the purpose of this study. Validated questionnaire was used to collect data on key variables (socioeconomic

characteristics, awareness, perception and training needs) that were investigated in this study.

Awareness of the components of EE script writing for agricultural information dissemination was measured with 31-item scale of all the sub-components of EE script writing as proposed by de Fossard (1996) namely theme, character, plot, setting, and message. Response options were either Yes or No with assigned scores of 1 or 0, respectively. For perception, a 20-item scale comprising positive and negative statements was used. Using a Likert-type scale of Strongly agreed, Agreed, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly disagreed, all positive statements were scored 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively, while negative statements were scored in reverse order.

The dependent variable of this study was the training needs of communication officers on EE scriptwriting. This was measured with the same 31-item scale used for awareness. The training need was measured on a 4-point scale of high, moderate, low and no need and scores of 3, 2, 1 and 0 assigned, respectively. Data were analysed using simple frequency counts, percentages and means.

Results

Socioeconomic characteristics of communication officers

Data in Table 1 show that half (50.0%) of the respondents were between 31 and 40 years old, while very few (14.0%) were above 50 years. The mean age was 43.0 ± 6.8 years. Table 1 indicates further that majority (64.3%) of the respondents were male, while fewer proportion (35.7%) were female. On respondents' educational

qualifications, more than one-third (38.1%) of the respondents had Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) and same proportion (38.1%) had Bachelor's Degree. Only very few (11.9%) had PhD. Furthermore, Table 1 reveals that one third (33.3%) of the respondents had 6-10 years of work experience, while very few (4.8%) had above 25 years of work experience.

Communication officers' awareness of components of EE scriptwriting in agricultural information dissemination

Information in Table 2 depicts a generally high awareness for most components and subcomponents of EE scriptwriting by the communication officers. On awareness of theme as a component of EE script writing, more than three-quarter (88.1%) of the respondents affirmed that they knew about introduction as an element of theme, while 83.3% also stated they were aware of conclusion in the theme of a script. Regarding the respondents' awareness on the message of a script, 81.0% averred they knew about the theme or emotional focus of the message, while 78.6% affirmed that they were aware of scope and sequence of the message. Concerning character as a component of EE scriptwriting, 81.0% asserted that they knew about realistic and believable characters and 85.7% affirmed that they were aware about the appropriateness of characters to the message. On awareness of respondents on the plot of a script, 85.7% stated that they knew about exciting, locally appropriate story in a plot, while 73.8% affirmed that they were aware of treatment into full treatment in a plot and on the subject of the setting of a script. Also, 78.6% averred that they were aware of location map in the setting of a script and 76.2% affirmed that

Table 1: Distribution of communication officers by selected socioeconomic characteristics (n=42)

Variables	F	%	Mean±SD
Age			
= 30	1	2.4	43.0±6.8years
31-40	21	50.0	
41-50	14	33.3	
Above 50	6	14.3	
Sex			
Male	27	64.3	
Female	15	35.7	
Educational qualification			
OND	2	4.8	
NCE	16	38.1	
HND	3	7.1	
BSc	16	38.1	
PhD	5	11.9	
Years of experience			
1-5	3	7.1	15.2±9.2years
6-10	14	33.3	
11-15	12	28.6	
16-20	7	16.7	
21-25	4	9.5	
Above 25	2	4.8	

Source: Field Survey, 2017

they knew about conveying location to the radio audience in the setting of a script.

Perception of communication officers on EE script writing for agricultural information dissemination

Table 3 presents the perception of communication officers on EE scriptwriting. Respondents perceived that training on EE script writing will serve as a useful skill to effectively pass extension and development messages and this ranked highest ($\bar{x} = 4.7$). This was followed by their perception of how writing script with

easily understood messages will be easily achieved if they are exposed to training ($\bar{x} = 4.5$). Also, respondents averred that having the knowledge of target audience will facilitate their capacity to use EE script writing for agricultural news dissemination ($\bar{x} = 4.4$). Respondents identified with the fact that their professional background has a role to play in learning how to write attractive stories ($\bar{x} = 4.3$) and that writing scripts for different media or channels for EE use for agricultural information dissemination could further enhance capacities of workers of development

Table 2: Distribution of communication officer by awareness of components of EE script writing

Components of EE script writing	F	%
Theme		
Introduction	37	88.1
Development of climax	32	76.2
Resolution or denouement	32	76.2
Conclusion	35	83.3
Message		
Measurable objectives	37	88.1
Inclusion of the purpose of the message	35	83.3
Lifestyle of the audience and their current attitudes and practices with regard to the new behavior	32	76.2
Theme or emotional focus of the message	34	81.0
Scope and sequence of the message.	33	78.6
Glossary definitions to be used for specific technical terms.	35	83.3
Character		
Realistic and believable characters	34	81.0
Appropriateness of characters to the message	36	85.7
Appropriateness of characters to the audience	34	81.0
Personality of characters	34	81.0
Number of characters required	32	76.2
Choice of character	32	76.2
Plot		
Exciting, locally appropriate story	36	85.7
Event list	33	78.6
Treatment of the main plot	35	83.3
Treatment of each sub-plot	33	78.6
Spread of message among the plots	34	81.0
Central uniting character	32	76.2
Treatments into full treatment	31	73.8
Setting		
Dialogue and sound effects	36	85.7
Real time	35	83.3
Flashbacks	34	81.0
Location map	33	78.6
Conveying location to the radio audience	32	76.2

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 3: Distribution of communication officers by perception of use of EE for Agricultural Information Dissemination

Perception statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean
Training on EE script writing will serve as a useful skill to effectively pass extension/development messages	73.8	23.8	2.4	0.0	0.0	4.7
Acquiring basic skills for EE script writing for agricultural information dissemination will not be enhanced by necessary infrastructure	7.1	16.7	9.5	35.7	31.0	3.7
Due to lack of technical capacity, writing creative and original stories will pose a serious challenge	14.3	54.8	14.3		2.4	2.4
The ability of communication officers to use EE script writing for agricultural news dissemination does not depend on their knowledge of the target audience	0.0	33.3	7.1	47.6	11.9	3.4
Writing attractive stories that convey messages will be easy to learn irrespective of professional background of communication officer	2.4	19.0	11.9	31.0	35.7	3.8
Exposure to training will not make a difference to writing scripts with easily understood messages	0.0	11.9	9.5	38.1	40.5	4.1
Writing scripts for different media or channels for EE use for agricultural information could further enhance capacities of workers of development organization	59.5	26.2	4.8	7.1	2.4	4.3
Communication officers in development agencies should find it easy to learn EE script writing	26.2	52.4	7.1	14.3	0.0	3.9
With clear guidelines about message content, communication officers will fit into the use of script writing for EE use for agricultural information dissemination.	45.2	47.6	2.4	0.0	4.8	4.3
The use of theme in EE script writing for agricultural dissemination has no benefit for communication officers	2.4	4.8	14.3	47.6	31.0	4.0
Training on EE script writing to pass extension and development messages will not be productive	0.0	9.5	7.1	28.0	54.8	4.3
With necessary infrastructure, acquiring basic skills for EE script writing for agricultural information dissemination should not be too challenging	21.4	61.9	9.5	0.0	7.1	3.9
Writing creative and original stories will not be difficult despite lack of technical capacity	4.8	45.2	7.1	23.8	19.0	2.9
The knowledge of target audience possessed by communication officers will facilitate their capacity to use EE script writing for agricultural news dissemination	45.2	52.4	2.4	0.0	0.0	4.4
Professional background of communication officers has a role to play in learning how to write attractive stories	45.2	47.6	4.8	2.4	0.0	4.4
If exposed to training, writing script with easily understood messages will be easily achieved	57.1	38.1	2.4	2.4	0.0	4.5
Capacities of workers of development organizations will not be improved by writing scripts for different media or channels for EE use for agricultural information	7.1	11.9	9.5	47.6	23.8	3.7

Writing EE scripts is a difficult skill to learn for communication officers in development agencies	7.1	16.7	11.9	33.3	31.0	3.6
Communication officers do not need to rely on clear guidelines about message content to effectively use EE script writing for agricultural information dissemination	4.8	11.9	9.5	54.8	19.0	3.7
The use of theme in EE script writing for agricultural information dissemination offers a great advantage for communication officers	45.2	40.5	4.8	9.5	0.0	4.2
Grand Mean						4.3

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 4: Categorization of communication officers by their perception of EE Script writing

Perception Level	F	%	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Favourable	22	52.4	78.2	9.7	60.0	94.0
Unfavourable	20	47.6				

Source: Field Survey, 2017

organisation ($\bar{x} = 4.3$). Furthermore, respondents perceived that the use of theme in EE scriptwriting for agricultural information dissemination offered a great advantage for communication officers ($\bar{x} = 4.2$). However, their perception of how lack of technical capacity will pose a serious challenge to writing creative and original stories ranked lowest ($\bar{x} = 2.3$). In the overall, Table 4 indicates that more than half (52.4%) of the respondents had a favorable perception of EE scriptwriting.

Communication officers' training need for EE script writing

Having ascertained the awareness and perception of the respondents, this study went further to investigate the training needs of the respondents on EE scriptwriting. Using grand mean for each of the component on EE script writing, data from Table 5 indicates that whereas respondents expressed no training need in theme and setting subcomponents, but

expressed training need in some items in message, character and plot. For instance in message subcomponent, respondents will need training in understanding the lifestyle of the audience and their current attitudes and practices with regard to the new behavior ($\bar{x} = 3.6$) and how to include glossary definition to be used for specific technical terms ($\bar{x} = 3.6$) For character subcomponent, communication officers need training in articulating the personality of the characters ($\bar{x} = 3.5$), number of characters required ($\bar{x} = 3.4$) and choice of character ($\bar{x} = 3.5$) For plot, communication officers averred that they will require training in drafting the treatment of each sub-plot, including the message to be included and underlying theme ($\bar{x} = 3.5$) and checking the message is spread among the plot naturally, subtly and gradually ($\bar{x} = 3.5$).

Discussion

Data on respondents' age implies that half

Table 5: Distribution of communication officers by training need on EE script writing

Training need	Not a need	Low need	Moderate need	High need	Mean
Theme					
Introduction	7.1	2.4	21.4	69.0	3.5
Development	4.8	2.4	35.7	57.1	3.5
Climax	2.4	7.1	26.2	64.3	3.5
Resolution or denouement	2.4	9.5	21.4	66.7	3.5
Conclusion	4.8	9.5	14.3	71.4	3.5
Grand mean					3.5
Message					
Writing measurable objectives	0.0	4.8	16.7	78.6	3.7
Proper inclusion of the purpose of the message	0.0	7.1	19.0	73.8	3.7
Understanding the lifestyle of the audience and their current attitudes and practices with regard to the new behavior	4.8	4.8	19.0	71.4	3.6
Understanding the theme or emotional focus of the message	0.0	2.4	28.6	69.0	3.7
Understanding scope and sequence of the message	2.4	2.4	14.3	81.0	3.7
Including glossary definitions to be used for specific technical terms	0.0	4.8	33.3	61.9	3.6
Grand mean					3.7
Character					
Developing realistic and believable characters	4.8	0.0	19.0	76.2	3.7
Appropriateness of characters to the message	2.4	2.4	26.2	69.0	3.6
Appropriateness of characters to the audience	2.4	4.8	26.2	66.7	3.6
Personality of characters	2.4	9.5	23.8	64.3	3.5
Number of characters required	2.4	9.5	38.1	50.0	3.4
Choice of character	4.8	4.8	26.2	64.3	3.5
Grand mean					3.6
Plot					
Writing an exciting, locally appropriate story	4.8	4.8	19.0	71.4	3.6
Putting together the event list	0.0	2.4	28.6	69.0	3.7
Drafting the treatment of the main plot, including the message to be included and the underlying theme	0.0	2.4	19.0	78.6	3.8
Drafting the treatment of each sub-plot, including the message to be included and the underlying theme	7.1	0.0	26.2	66.7	3.5
Checking that the message is spread among the plots naturally, subtly, and gradually	2.4	7.1	28.6	61.9	3.5

Training need	Not a need	Low need	Moderate need	High need	Mean
Determining the central unifying character	2.4	4.8	26.2	66.7	3.6
Combining all the treatments into the full treatment	0.0	2.4	21.4	76.2	3.7
Grand mean					3.6
Setting					
Establishing time through dialogue and sound effects	4.8	2.4	19.0	73.8	3.6
Maintaining real time	0.0	7.1	23.8	69.0	3.6
Use of flashbacks	2.4	2.4	31.0	64.3	3.6
Establishing a drama's location	2.4	2.4	26.2	69.0	3.6
Sketching the setting	2.4	4.8	28.6	64.3	3.6
Creating a location map	0.0	7.1	28.6	64.3	3.6
Conveying location to the radio audience	0.0	7.1	21.4	71.4	3.6
Grand mean					3.6

Source: Field Survey, 2017

of the communication officers of agricultural and rural development agencies in Southwest Nigeria are still young. This agrees with the view of Ukeju (2011) as cited by Nwaogu and Obinne (2016) that the young and middle ages dominate extension work in Nigeria. There are more men than women among communication officers of agricultural and rural development agencies in Southwest Nigeria. This might have been as a result of a belief held in the past as posited by Airemen (2005) that extension job was reserved for men believing that it was only men that are farmers. On respondents' education, most communication officers have requisite qualifications to function as communication officer in their respective organisations. This is in tandem with Olajide and Amusat (2013) who reported similar trend in educational qualification of extension officers in the study area. Furthermore, most of the respondents have been on the job for reasonable period and may likely be in tune with the emerging needs on the job to place it on high pedestal.

This could affect their familiarity with different areas of agricultural communication especially entertainment education script writing. According to Omoregbe and Koyenikan (2012), job experience confers some on-the-job training opportunity which in turn brings expertise on various aspects of the job.

Overall, the result on awareness shows that communication officers are highly aware of the usefulness of EE to push development agenda. This might be because EE is popular as posited by Piotrow, Kincaid, Rimon and Rinehart (1997). It could also be an affirmation of earlier submission that most communication officers in these agencies had background in Communication and Language Arts and had either practiced as journalists. However, another possibility could be that the level of awareness displayed by the respondents is suspect because it might not translate into knowledge and may as well just be a mere recognition of what the concepts are.

Disposition of communication officers

was positive. A good number of the respondents are favorably disposed to EE scriptwriting and this might contribute to their need for training on it. This contradicts the findings of Olajide and Meroyi (2014) who reported that extension agents are not favorably disposed to the use of EE. It can also be deduced from Olajide and Meroyi;s (2014) findings that with time, EE as a concept is gaining some acceptance as colleagues of set of respondents in the 2014 study are gradually warming up to the concept. With persistent advocacy more officers will embrace the concept, thus serving as platform for establishing critical mass of professionals who can advance the course of EE for agricultural information dissemination. The positive disposition by communication officers to EE scriptwriting suggests a general responsiveness to be trained on the subject.

The training need of communication officer in the aspect of the message component of EE scriptwriting is very instructive as message constitutes the whole essence of EE script writing. Also, the specific items suggest that script writing for the purpose of EE use for agricultural information dissemination should anticipate the frame of mind of farmers who are being persuaded to embrace innovation as most often farmers hinge on what they had always been practicing thus finding it difficult to jettison such for new practice. Also, glossary for technical terms as one of the areas of training for EE script writing in the message subcomponent presupposes that in line with the principle of agricultural journalism that preaches that all technical terms should be clearly explained. It is imperative that such is adhered to as technical terms are seldom avoidable. For

the character subcomponent, it is important to reiterate that while personality and choice of characters revolves round chosen appropriate characters as artistes for effective message delivery, the number of characters needed dwells on making adequate budget for the entire project. This is necessary as previous findings (Yahaya and Olajide, 2003; Olajide and Meroyi, 214) on the challenges of using EE for agricultural information dissemination had implicated financial constraint as impediment to the deployment of this strategy for agricultural information dissemination.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that communication officers of Agricultural and Rural Development Agencies in Southwestern Nigeria were aware of the components and subcomponents of EE scriptwriting, and had favourable disposition to the concept of EE script writing. The communication officers expressed most training need on message, character and plot components. Therefore, training on EE script writing for communication officers of agricultural development agencies in the study area should focus on message, character and plot components.

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