

Communication Experiences of Exemplary Agricultural Extension Workers with Non-Agricultural Education in Tangerang Regency

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Abstract

The activities of agricultural extension involve a communication process between the extension agent and the farmers. An extension agent with deep agricultural knowledge and good communication skills can establish effective communication with farmers. In Tangerang Regency, there is an extension agent named Ratna who, despite having a non-agricultural and non-communication educational background, won the exemplary extension agent award at the Tangerang Regency level in 2021. This study aims to understand the communication experiences of agricultural extension from the perspective of an exemplary agent with a non-agricultural background. This study employs a qualitative method with a constructivist paradigm. The approach used is Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, focusing on understanding the essence of individual experiences, combined with Albert Bandura's social learning theory, emphasizing observation and imitation in the learning process. The results indicate that Ratna's communication experience in extension involves a strong motivation to learn and significant role models in her journey. Motivation drives her to continually improve her skills and knowledge. Moreover, role models provide inspiration and concrete examples of how an extension agent should act and communicate with farmers.

Keywords: Communication Experience; Communication; Extension; Agricultural Extension Agent; Exemplary

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INTRODUCTION

Agricultural extension agents are individuals tasked by the state to serve as communicators, educators, facilitators, mediators, and motivators in the agricultural sector (Bakti, 2023). This means that agricultural extension agents play a crucial role in supporting the development of the agricultural sector and the welfare of farmers in Indonesia, with their main duty being to conduct extension activities in the form of guidance and empowerment of farmers, as well as helping to solve agricultural problems in their respective regions.

Agricultural extension activities involve a communication process where field agricultural extension agents act as sources of information and farmers as recipients of information (Rusdy & Aryo, 2020). Agricultural extension agents who have technical knowledge and strong similarities with farmers can build more effective communication and enhance farmers' understanding of the information conveyed. Similarity encourages people to be mutually attracted, and because of this similarity, their communication becomes more effective (Mulyana, 2015).

A phenomenon that has attracted the attention of researchers is about a high-achieving agricultural extension agent in Pasar Kemis District, Tangerang Regency, named Ratna, who holds a degree in Nutrition. Despite not having an educational background in agriculture or communication, Ratna has dedicated herself as an agricultural extension agent for over 10 years and received the first-place award as the exemplary agricultural extension agent at the Tangerang Regency level for her dedication to agricultural development in 2021.

Nutrition education is part of public health science that studies the basics of knowledge about types of nutrients and non-nutrient substances in food, direct and indirect factors affecting nutritional status, with targets focused on every life cycle of humans, from infants, toddlers, children, adolescents, to adults. This means that Ratna did not study agriculture or aspects of communication related to extension services, thus requiring her to independently learn the knowledge needed as an agricultural extension agent, one of which is communication science.

Tangerang Regency, where Ratna works, is listed in the Ministry of Industry's data as an industrial area with more than 6,000 companies, making the majority of the population in Tangerang Regency work as laborers/employees. Pasar Kemis District is recorded as the most densely populated area in Tangerang Regency, with a population of 277,214 people, but its land area is only 2.70% of the total area of Tangerang Regency or only 27.9 km², while its agricultural land area is only 430 hectares (BPS Data, 2022).

This explains that in Pasar Kemis District, Ratna faces unique challenges in conducting extension services in an area where the majority of the population works as factory laborers and has little interest in the agricultural sector. Ratna also needs to develop effective communication strategies to actively engage the community in the agricultural sector and create sustainable agriculture in the area.

The assessment indicators for exemplary agricultural extension agents are outlined in the Minister of Agriculture Regulation No. 13 of 2011 on Guidelines for Assessing Exemplary Agricultural Extension Agents. Some of the aspects assessed include identifying regional potential in the last three years, which consists of analyzing, mapping, and providing solutions related to problems occurring in the guided areas together with farmers and other stakeholders, where agricultural extension agents must be able to communicate all related aspects.

The educational competence of an agricultural extension agent is also regulated in the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Regulation No. 35 of 2020, on Functional Positions of Agricultural Extension Agents, where an agricultural extension agent must have at least a bachelor's degree or a diploma four in the field of agriculture. This educational background provides the technical knowledge foundation needed in relation to agricultural practices covering various aspects, from plant cultivation, land management, to agricultural human resource development.

An extension agent who has an understanding of agricultural techniques is considered capable of providing more accurate and relevant information in extension activities to farmers and helping them face challenges in managing their agricultural businesses. Extension activities



mean an educational process aimed at increasing awareness and behavior (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) of the community to become stronger and achieve a better and more prosperous life (Muljono in Bakti, 2023). Agricultural extension agents must ensure that the information provided is not only understood but also correctly applied by the farmers.

The preliminary research results found that Ratna's communication ability is hindered by her shy nature, making her feel awkward and reluctant to socialize with farmers. This discomfort hinders her in delivering important agricultural messages clearly and persuasively. Her lack of confidence in communication also affects her interactions with farmer groups, both individually and in group meetings.

Limited knowledge about agriculture also becomes a factor that limits Ratna's communication ability when conducting extension services. As an agricultural extension agent, a deep understanding of agricultural aspects is key to providing accurate and useful information to farmers. Ratna realizes that to be an effective extension agent, she needs to improve her knowledge of agriculture and her overall communication skills.

By understanding communication, an agricultural extension agent will know the appropriate communication patterns to use when conducting extension services. One such pattern is two-way and multi-way structured communication. Two-way communication occurs during individual extension services provided by the agent to farmers in need of extension. Meanwhile, multi-way communication occurs during meetings between the agent and farmer groups in the village.

This explanation is also reinforced by Lumintang (2023) in his research, explaining that by understanding communication, an agricultural extension agent will know the appropriate communication patterns to use when conducting extension services. One such pattern is two-way and multi-way structured communication. Two-way communication occurs during individual extension services provided by the agent to farmers in need of extension. Meanwhile, multi-way communication occurs during meetings between the agent and farmer groups in the village.

Ratna becomes an interesting phenomenon in Communication Studies with her achievements as a high-performing agricultural extension agent. This uniqueness arises from her extraordinary efforts to learn effective communication skills with farmers, despite her educational background not being in agriculture or communication. This becomes more interesting because the title of exemplary extension agent at the regency and provincial levels previously in 2020 was awarded to an agricultural extension agent with a bachelor's degree in animal husbandry. This means that Ratna has brought a new dimension to the world of agricultural extension with her non-agricultural educational background.

Referring to the complexity of the issues and background mentioned, the researcher is interested in investigating further in a study entitled "Exploring Communication Experiences in Agricultural Extension from the Perspective of an Exemplary Agricultural Extension Agent with a Non-Agricultural Educational Background in Tangerang Regency."

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method to provide in-depth explanations through comprehensive data collection. According to Bogdan and Taylor (as cited in Moleong, 2014), qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words derived from observed behavior and people. The approach used in this research is phenomenology, which seeks to reveal reality based on consciousness grounded in experience. Creswell (as cited in Roem, 2023) explains that phenomenological researchers must strive to identify essential elements, invariant structures (essences), or fundamental meanings of experiences, emphasizing the intensity of consciousness where experiences consist of external appearances and what resides within each individual's consciousness based on memory, images, and meanings.



The basic premises used in phenomenological research according to Kuswarno (as cited in Roem, 2023) are: (1) An event will be meaningful to those who experience it directly. (2) Objective understanding is mediated by subjective experience. (3) Human experience exists within the structure of the experience itself and is not constructed by the researcher. Therefore, phenomenological research focuses on personal experiences, including parts of individuals who share experiences with each other.

This approach aligns with Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that humans learn through observation and interaction with others. Bandura emphasizes the importance of the social environment in learning, where individuals acquire behaviors, attitudes, and values through imitation and modeling (Bandura, 1977). In the context of this research, the subjective experiences of observed individuals and their interactions can provide rich insights into the social learning processes occurring within their community. This study focuses on exploring the individual experiences of communication from the perspective of an exemplary agricultural extension agent with a non-agricultural educational background.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Through in-depth analysis, two main themes emerged from Ratna's communication experience as an exemplary agricultural extension agent with a non-agricultural educational background: motivation and the significant role of role models in influencing Ratna's communication abilities in extension activities.

Motivation

The term "motivation" originates from the word "motive" or "motiwom," meaning a moving cause, related to inner drive, impulse, or intention. The word "motive" developed into "motivation," meaning being moved or driven by something. Motivation comes from the Latin "moreve," meaning to move. Thus, motivation can be interpreted as the process that stimulates, directs, and maintains behavior. In other words, motivation, according to Kartini (in Hidayat, 2014: 103), means a drive for someone to want to do something. This drive (driving force) refers to the natural urge to satisfy life needs and the tendency to sustain life.

Motivation can be described as the art of making people do what you want because they want to do it. According to Muslimin (in Hidayat, 2014: 104), motivation varies from person to person and differs among individuals. Therefore, understanding the concept and essence of motivation, as well as the ability to create situations that generate motivation or drive for individuals to act or behave according to their needs, is necessary.

Motivation is also a factor that drives people to act in certain ways. Therefore, motivation is fundamentally a mental condition that stimulates action and provides the strength that directs the achievement of needs, satisfaction, or reduces imbalance (Hidayat, 2014).

There is a strong motivation in Ratna's experience in learning communication to understand agricultural extension communication despite having a non-agricultural educational background. This motivation is divided into elements that direct, sustain, and drive (Shaleh, 2015).

Motivation is an important factor that directs an individual's behavior towards achieving certain goals. Ratna, as an agricultural extension agent, has several strong sources of motivation that drive her to work hard and achieve significant results. Ratna's initial motivation to become an agricultural extension agent came from her brother's offer, providing her with an opportunity to gain valuable experience in a new field.

Support and advice from close people often become significant initial motivators for someone to take the first step in an unexpected career path until it becomes an achieved goal. This aligns with the purpose of interpersonal communication, which is to influence behavior (Roem & Sarmiati, 2019), where her brother's interpersonal communication successfully motivated and influenced Ratna's behavior in making decisions.

Ratna's motivation also reflects her strong desire to contribute positively to her community, especially the women around her. Her desire to help and empower women's farmer groups reflects her intrinsic motivation to see real change in society and empower women in her



environment. Additionally, effective extension communication is a successful extension implementation process that can be measured by how far behavior change has occurred, leading to actions, knowledge, attitudes, and skills of individuals (Setiana, in Hermansyah: 2016:67). This means Ratna has accurately assessed her success from the ability to change the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of the farmers she mentors, as she stated. This shows that her motivation focuses on achieving tangible results and having a positive impact on agricultural productivity.

Motivation also plays a role in maintaining and sustaining behavior to keep commitment and consistency towards achieving goals. Ratna shows strong motivation to maintain and sustain her behavior through a positive outlook on her profession as an agricultural extension agent. This positive outlook strengthens her motivation to continue contributing and working hard in her job.

Ratna's awareness of the importance of good communication in her relationship with farmers is one of her main motivations. Understanding the importance of effective communication in maintaining good relationships with farmers drives Ratna to continuously learn and improve her communication skills. Direct experience in communicating with farmers motivates Ratna to keep learning and developing herself in the field of agricultural extension. This motivation drives her to better understand the characteristics and needs of farmers, so she can provide more effective and relevant extension.

Ratna's motivation to maintain and sustain her behavior as an agricultural extension agent is driven by her desire to keep learning, growing, and contributing positively in her field. A positive outlook on her profession and awareness of the importance of effective communication are the main drivers for Ratna in maintaining her commitment and consistency. This aligns with the definition of learning, which means the process of seeing, observing, and understanding something. When we talk about learning, we talk about how to change someone's behavior through experience (Lubis, 2021).

Motivation that drives the strength in individuals is also an important factor influencing Ratna's behavior in achieving her goals. This motivation serves as the main driver that shapes and directs every step and decision she takes. Ratna has several strong and diverse motivations that drive the strength within her, all of which stem from her good intentions and sincere dedication to helping farmers in her area.

Ratna's good intention to help farmers is not just an ordinary desire, but has become a source of inspiration and continuous spirit within her. This motivation drives her to always strive to give her best in every aspect of her work, ensuring that every action and decision she makes truly benefits the farmers.

Ratna always strives not to disappoint the farmers by giving uncertain hopes. She is very aware that farmers rely on their hopes and trust in her, and therefore, she feels responsible for providing concrete and realistic solutions. This strong motivation makes Ratna work with full dedication and perseverance, always seeking the most effective and efficient ways to help improve the farmers' welfare and increase their agricultural yields.

Overall, Ratna's motivation not only drives her to achieve her personal goals but also to make a significant positive impact on the farmer community she mentors. This motivation is the main key to her success and the reason why she is respected and relied upon by the farmers.

Awareness of the importance of effective communication in agricultural extension work is a strong motivation for Ratna to continuously develop her communication skills. Ratna understands that effective communication is key to providing more meaningful and beneficial extension to farmers. With good communication, information can be conveyed clearly, farmers can more easily understand and implement new techniques, and build more harmonious and trusting relationships.

Ratna always strives to improve her communication skills through various means, such as attending training, reading related literature, and learning from field experience. She realizes that by improving her communication skills, she can have a greater and more positive impact on farmers, helping them to achieve better results in their agricultural efforts.

Support from her husband is also an additional motivation for Ratna to remain committed as an agricultural extension agent. Her husband, who also works in agriculture, understands the challenges and importance of Ratna's work. Moral and emotional support from her husband provides extra strength and spirit for Ratna to continue performing her duties with high dedication and integrity. Together, they work towards the same goal, which is to improve farmers' welfare and advance the agricultural sector in their area.

With a combination of internal motivation stemming from awareness of the importance of effective communication and external support from her husband, Ratna continues to commit and strive hard to be a professional and impactful agricultural extension agent. This motivation drives her to always learn and grow, and to give her best in every aspect of her work.

Ratna also often faces various challenges in her role as an agricultural extension agent. These challenges could include difficulties in conveying information to less-educated farmers, limited resources, and resistance from some farmers who are reluctant to adopt new agricultural methods. Despite this, Ratna maintains strong motivation to continue her role with high commitment.

One of the main sources of motivation for Ratna is the example set by her mother, who often spoke in front of many people as a labor inspector. Her mother was known as a great communicator and was able to influence and guide many people. Seeing how her mother was able to carry out her duties effectively and confidently, Ratna felt inspired to emulate and apply those skills in her work as an agricultural extension agent.

Ratna's motivation aligns with Bandura's theory that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations play a role in driving individuals to imitate behaviors deemed beneficial (Bandura, 1977). This strong motivation drives Ratna to overcome every challenge she faces. She not only focuses on improving her technical skills but also strives to strengthen her communication abilities to be more effective in conveying messages to farmers. Ratna believes that with good communication, she can build trust and closer cooperation with farmers so that the shared goal of improving agricultural yields can be achieved.

Muslimin (in Hidayat, 2014) explains that motivation varies among individuals and is different from one person to another. This means Ratna has her motivation, which is driven by good intentions to help farmers, awareness of the importance of effective communication, family support, and the example set by her mother. These motivations collectively drive Ratna to remain committed to her work as an agricultural extension agent, despite facing various challenges.

Role Model

According to Lockwood (in Ghani, 2023), a role model is an individual who provides an example of success that others can achieve and often provides a template for the behavior needed to attain that success. In discussing role models, it is important to distinguish them from two other types of career development relationships: behavioral models and mentors. In Ratna's experience of learning communication, there are both types of career development relationships.

Ratna uses behavioral models in her development by observing the detailed behaviors and effective approaches of people around her. The exemplary behavior of her mother, who possesses public speaking skills as a labor inspector, inspired Ratna to develop her public speaking abilities, even though her audience is different. This aligns with Bandura's theory of observational learning or modeling, where a person's behavior changes as a result of observing a model's behavior (Yudi, 2016).

Ratna also has a role model in the agricultural field, namely Mr. Arif, a senior at her office. Despite coming from a different cultural background, Mr. Arif's proficiency in communicating with farmers serves as a good example for Ratna to follow. Ratna learned from Mr. Arif's friendly, relaxed, and easily understandable communication style with farmers. A good role model can provide inspiration and motivation to imitate observed positive behaviors (Ghani, 2023). Role models can help individuals develop the skills and confidence needed to succeed in their roles.

Ratna's learning method involves observing the actions and behaviors of her role models and directly practicing them the next day, showing that she does not rely solely on theory but also utilizes direct examples from her role models. This hands-on learning process is more effective because it involves direct observation and practice, which aligns with previous research stating that modeling techniques can help individuals quickly learn new skills (Puspitaningrum, 2018). Through this approach, Ratna can identify and address shortcomings in her communication skills and continue to develop.

Role models play a crucial role in individual career development. According to Greenhaus and Callanan (in Ghani, 2023), behavioral modeling focuses on matching specific actions and attitudes between an individual and a model. Common examples of behavioral modeling in organizations involve instructors illustrating specific task skills, goals, and performance norms. The foundation of behavioral model relationships is to facilitate individuals in learning specific tasks and skills through observation. Thus, through observation and imitation, Ratna can develop the communication skills necessary to be an effective agricultural extension agent.

In her development as an agricultural extension agent, Ratna has a mentoring relationship that plays a vital role in providing guidance and direction. This relationship with a mentor or senior helps Ratna learn and develop the skills and knowledge needed in her job. According to research, mentors act as sources of inspiration and guidance that help individuals overcome various challenges they face in their work (Ghani, 2023). Mentors provide not only technical guidance but also emotional and psychosocial support, which is essential for an individual's professional development.

By following the work methods and practices applied by her senior, Ratna can gain valuable experience and knowledge in agricultural extension. Learning from a mentor allows Ratna to effectively develop her competencies and communication skills, ultimately enhancing her performance as an agricultural extension agent. Ratna acknowledges that the role of her mentor is crucial in helping her understand the dynamics of the job and how to handle various challenging situations in the field.

Guidance from a mentor can provide the necessary support to help individuals overcome obstacles in their career development (Rahmatyana & Irmayanti, 2020). In this context, a mentor can help Ratna understand and apply effective communication techniques, as well as provide constructive feedback necessary for continuous improvement. The presence of a mentor also gives Ratna additional confidence, knowing that there is an experienced person ready to assist her when facing problems or difficulties.

Observation and imitation of successful role model behaviors, as well as guidance and direction from a mentor, help Ratna become a competent and effective agricultural extension agent. These two approaches highlight the importance of learning through direct experience and guidance in professional development. Through a combination of modeling techniques and mentor support, Ratna can enhance her communication skills, build confidence, and achieve success in her role as an agricultural extension agent.

Individuals learn through observing and imitating models they deem credible and competent (Bandura, 1977). This is similar to Ratna, who observes Mr. Arif's communication strategies and approaches in overcoming challenges in the field, then imitates these behaviors in her work. The support and advice from Mr. Arif serve as positive reinforcement, strengthening Ratna's confidence to continue developing in her profession. Mr. Arif not only provides technical skills but also demonstrates a strong professional attitude and work ethic, which Ratna internalizes.

CONCLUSION

This study delves into the communication experiences of Ratna, an exemplary agricultural extension agent with a non-agricultural educational background. Utilizing a qualitative method and a phenomenological approach combined with Bandura's social learning theory, the study



reveals two primary themes influencing Ratna's communication abilities: motivation and the role of role models.

Ratna's motivation is driven by various factors, including a strong desire to contribute positively to her community, particularly women's farmer groups, and the support and initial encouragement from her brother. Her intrinsic motivation is evident in her commitment to continuously improving her skills and knowledge in agricultural extension, despite her non-agricultural educational background. Ratna's motivation is further fueled by the positive impact she aims to have on agricultural productivity and the welfare of farmers. Additionally, her husband's support plays a crucial role in maintaining her commitment and enthusiasm for her work.

The significant role of role models is another critical factor in Ratna's development. She draws inspiration from her mother, who is an excellent public speaker, and from her senior colleague, Mr. Arif, whose effective communication style with farmers serves as a practical example for her. By observing and imitating these role models, Ratna enhances her communication skills and professional effectiveness. The guidance and direction from her mentor further help Ratna navigate the challenges of her role, providing both technical and emotional support essential for her professional growth.

Overall, Ratna's experiences underscore the importance of motivation and role models in the professional development of agricultural extension agents, highlighting how intrinsic and extrinsic factors can drive success in the absence of a conventional educational background in the field.

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