Teacher Efficacy of Extension Agents as Adult Educators

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Introduction & Literature Review

Extension agents serve as a transfer system of university research to their local communities. Agents take university research and share it with local individuals as practical applications. Extension agents have significant independence in designing and delivering their educational programs (Prawl et al., 1994). This is notable given that most agents enter their careers with subject expertise but limited formal training in adult education (West et al., 2009).

Past research has shown that teacher efficacy is a large contributor to student success (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teacher efficacy was defined by Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) as "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (p. 233). While teacher efficacy has been researched and established in K-12 contexts, research examining teacher efficacy within Extension agents and adult educators remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the teacher efficacy levels of Kansas State Extension (KSE) agents as adult educators.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory. The theory explains how people exercise control through reciprocal determinism among personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. The key construct framing this study is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy represents an individual's beliefs in their own capabilities to execute actions to achieve certain goals (Bandura, 1977). Teacher-efficacy is a form of self-efficacy that focuses on a teacher's confidence to execute teaching-related tasks (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Purpose & Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher efficacy levels among KSE agents serving as adult educators. This study sought to describe Extension agents' perceived efficacy in participant engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management within non-formal adult education. The objectives were: 1) Describe the overall level of teacher efficacy among KSE agents. 2) Describe Extension agents' perceived efficacy in three dimensions: participant engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management.

Methods

This quantitative study employed a descriptive survey design to examine teacher efficacy levels among KSE agents. The population consisted of 187 county and district-based agents in agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and community vitality. Due to seven undelivered emails, only 180 agents were notified. Dillman's tailored design method was employed by an initial notification, two follow-ups, and a final notice, each a week apart. Of the 105 responses received, one was removed for straight-lining and 13 for incomplete scale items, yielding 88 usable responses (48.9%). The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale short form was utilized to measure teacher efficacy amongst the population (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The researcher adapted the instrument by replacing words to meet the context of adult education. Sentence structure and meaning remained consistent with the original instrument. The scale was altered to a 5-point Likert scale to maintain consistency with other constructs on a broader

survey. A pilot study was conducted with Extension agents in a different state. The pilot study demonstrated an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = .81$) (Kline, 2000).

Results

Respondents were predominantly female (70.3%, $f = 64$). The largest age groups were 45-54 years (28.6%, $f = 26$) and 55 or older (27.5%, $f = 25$). The smallest age group in the study was 18-24 years old (3.3%, $f = 3$). Half of the respondents have a bachelor's degree (50%, $f = 44$), while 48.9% ($f = 43$) have a master's degree. To address the nonresponse error, early responses were compared to late responses using an independent samples t-test. No statistically significant difference was found between the groups ($t(58) = .362$, $p = .719$) (Lindner et al., 2001).

Overall, Extension agents reported moderately high teacher efficacy ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.50$) on a 5-point scale. This represented 75.8% of the maximum possible score from the normal scale. Mean scores for each teacher efficacy dimension are presented in Table 1. Extension agents reported the highest efficacy in instructional strategies ($M = 3.84$), followed by participant engagement ($M = 3.78$) and classroom management ($M = 3.77$). Differences among the dimensions were minimal. While instructional strategies were the strongest area, participant engagement and classroom management remained within the moderately high range.

Table 1
Mean Scores

	M	*SD*
Participant Engagement	3.78	0.56
Instructional Strategies	3.84	0.50
Classroom Management	3.77	0.57
Overall Teacher Efficacy	3.79	0.50

Conclusions, Implications, & Recommendations

The findings reveal KSE agents possess moderately high teaching confidence. This suggests that agents perceive themselves as capable of organizing and implementing effective programming for adult learners. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) noted that teachers with higher teacher efficacy invest greater effort into their teaching. Extension agents reported the highest confidence in instructional strategies, with slightly lower efficacy in participant engagement and classroom management. This aligns with Disberger & Ammons (2025), who found that KSE agents reported low confidence in learning educational program delivery in new agent training.

These results show the importance of teaching Extension agents principles of adult education. The inclusion of facilitation techniques, learner engagement strategies, and non-formal classroom management in their training and professional development may support Extension agents and increase their self-perceived teacher efficacy. According to Bandura (1977) mastery experiences are the greatest source of self-efficacy. Allowing new agents to practice teaching adults in a low-stakes environment would allow them to increase their teacher efficacy.

Future research should replicate this study across additional state Extension organizations to enhance generalizability. Future research should also explore factors that predict higher levels of teacher efficacy among Extension agents to inform future training.

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