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Self-Directed Learners or Not? Delivering Agroforestry Technology to Farmers in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an evaluation of the usefulness of a participatory approach and adult learning principles for agroforestry extension in the Philippines. Visual observations and analysis of interviews with farmers during an extension program found that their ability to act as self-directed adult learners changed according to the situations with which they were faced. Farmers used a self-directed approach to their selection of inputs for the establishment of woodlots. However, when propagating seedlings, lack of technical knowledge caused them to shift to a state of dependency on 'top-down' didactic instruction. Farmers' familiarity with agricultural crops, e.g. rice and coconuts, did not provide them with the skills to raise tree seedlings. A consequence of farmers applying their own interpretation of woodlot establishment procedures was that some sites were destroyed and seedling growth on other sites was poor. These failed woodlots are likely to present a negative image of the program in the future. Contributing influences to farmers' limited uptake of technology may have been a lack of other sources of support and information and the difficulty of interacting and sharing ideas with their peers. The practical implications of this research are that farmers in developing countries may lack the education, support services and peer-to-peer interaction to behave similarly to self-directed learners in developed countries. A totally participatory approach to program delivery may maintain participants' enthusiasm and commitment but may result in unforseen outcomes. Hence, a flexible approach to the use of adult learning principles may be necessary.

KEYWORDS

Participatory, Adult Learning, Constructivist

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