



A Study Of Sociology And Extension As Complementary Disciplines

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Abstract

Sociology and Extension are often treated as separate academic disciplines, yet both share a deep concern with understanding and improving human society. This paper explores the academic and research-based similarities between Sociology and Extension, highlighting their shared commitment to social change, community engagement, interdisciplinary thinking, and applied research. Through a comprehensive literature review and comparative analysis, the study demonstrates that both fields not only investigate social systems and structures but also aim to translate knowledge into practical interventions that benefit individuals and communities. The paper argues for greater interdisciplinary collaboration between sociologists and extension professionals to foster holistic approaches to societal development. Key shared themes such as social capital, community development, participatory research, and behavior change theories are examined. The study concludes with recommendations for integrating sociological insights into Extension programs and vice versa, emphasizing the need for a more unified academic response to complex social issues.

Keywords: Sociology, Extension, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Social Change, Community Engagement, Applied Research



Introduction

Sociology, as a multifaceted discipline, grapples with the intricate structures and dynamics of human societies, exploring the patterns of social relationships, social interaction, and culture that shape individual and collective behavior (Lewis, 2006). It meticulously examines the micro-level interactions between individuals and small groups, while also analyzing macro-level phenomena such as social institutions, social change, and global processes (Elias, 1978). Sociology employs a diverse array of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to unravel the complexities of social life, seeking to understand how societies function, how they evolve, and how individuals are influenced by their social environments (Agger et al., 2001). Extension, on the other hand, is an applied field deeply rooted in the dissemination of knowledge and the facilitation of positive change within communities (Longo et al., 2021). It acts as a vital bridge connecting research-based insights with practical applications, striving to empower individuals, families, and communities to improve their livelihoods, enhance their well-being, and address pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. Extension employs educational strategies, community organizing techniques, and participatory approaches to foster learning, build capacity, and promote sustainable development (Campbell, 2021).

Sociology and extension are two distinct yet interrelated disciplines that together play a crucial role in understanding and facilitating societal transformation, particularly in rural and agricultural contexts. While sociology provides a theoretical framework for analyzing social structures, institutions, behaviors, and interactions, extension serves as an applied field that translates knowledge into action to foster development and change. The convergence of these two disciplines has become increasingly important in addressing complex social issues, especially those concerning rural development, agricultural innovation, community empowerment, and participatory governance.

Sociology, as a social science, investigates the patterns and causes of human behavior within social contexts. It equips researchers and practitioners with the tools to understand how societies function, how social norms are formed, and how inequalities manifest and persist (Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum, & Carr, 2017). This understanding is essential for effective intervention and development planning, especially when considering the diverse needs, beliefs, and traditions of rural populations.

On the other hand, extension—particularly agricultural and rural extension—is an educational process aimed at improving the lives of rural people by enhancing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It focuses on the dissemination of scientific and practical knowledge to rural communities to bring about behavior change and improve productivity, health, and sustainability (Swanson & Rajalahti, 2010). Modern extension practices have evolved from top-down, technology-transfer models to more participatory and inclusive approaches that emphasize community engagement and local knowledge (Anderson, 2007).

The synergy between sociology and extension lies in their shared goal of fostering social change. Extension efforts that are informed by sociological insights are more likely to be socially sensitive, culturally appropriate, and therefore more effective. For example, understanding power dynamics, gender roles, and cultural norms through sociological lenses can help extension agents design interventions that are equitable and sustainable (Roling & Pretty, 1997). Moreover, sociology helps in evaluating the impacts of extension programs, enabling continuous learning and improvement.



In the context of rural development, especially in developing countries, the collaboration between sociologists and extension professionals becomes indispensable. The challenges faced by rural populations—such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of infrastructure, and environmental degradation—are deeply rooted in social structures. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated approach that combines the theoretical depth of sociology with the practical orientation of extension services (Van den Ban & Hawkins, 1996).

This study explores the complementary relationship between sociology and extension, highlighting their respective contributions and the potential benefits of their integration in research, policy-making, and field practices. By examining theoretical foundations, practical case studies, and methodological approaches, this paper aims to reinforce the argument that these disciplines, when working together, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of development initiatives.

In the evolving landscape of academic disciplines, there is a growing recognition of the need for interdisciplinary approaches to address complex societal challenges. Sociology and Extension, though traditionally seen as distinct fields, share a number of academic and research commonalities that make them inherently complementary. Sociology provides critical insights into the structure and function of society, while Extension emphasizes the application of research to address real-world problems, especially at the community level. This paper aims to explore and demonstrate how these two disciplines can collaborate, enhance one another, and jointly contribute to the broader goals of societal well-being and development.

Conceptual Overview Of Sociology And Extension

Sociology and extension science are two interconnected yet distinct disciplines that share a mutual interest in understanding and shaping human behavior, social systems, and community development. While sociology offers a theoretical and analytical framework to examine social structures, norms, and institutions, extension serves as a practical and applied discipline that facilitates learning, behavior change, and development through educational outreach, particularly in rural and agricultural contexts (Van den Ban & Hawkins, 1996).

Sociology is fundamentally concerned with understanding social interactions, institutional dynamics, and the ways in which societies maintain cohesion and manage conflict. It employs both qualitative and quantitative research to uncover patterns in human behavior, social inequality, power relations, and cultural transformations (Giddens et al., 2017). Central to sociology is the goal of not only interpreting society but also identifying possibilities for social change and justice.

In contrast, extension science—especially agricultural and rural extension—is primarily action-oriented. It aims to disseminate knowledge, build capacities, and enable innovation by connecting scientific research with real-world practices. Historically, extension was seen as a top-down process of technology transfer; however, contemporary models increasingly emphasize participatory approaches, community empowerment, and local knowledge integration (Swanson & Rajalahti, 2010).

Despite their differing emphases, sociology and extension are complementary in both purpose and practice. Sociology equips extension practitioners with the contextual understanding of communities, helping them recognize the role of social norms, power structures, and cultural values in influencing adoption and behavior (Roling & Pretty,



1997). Conversely, extension provides sociology with a practical arena to apply theories of change, participation, and development.

Moreover, both disciplines converge around concepts such as social capital, participation, empowerment, and collective action. These concepts are central to addressing contemporary development challenges, including poverty reduction, food security, education access, and environmental sustainability (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

In sum, a conceptual integration of sociology and extension creates a more holistic and responsive approach to development, where theory informs practice and practice enriches theory. This integration is essential for designing interventions that are socially inclusive, culturally appropriate, and sustainable in the long term.

Sociology

Sociology is the systematic study of society, social behavior, institutions, and structures. It aims to understand the ways in which individuals interact with one another and with social systems, and how these systems evolve over time. Sociological research employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, interviews, ethnographies, and statistical analyses, to analyze social phenomena such as inequality, culture, identity, and social change. Sociology and extension science, though distinct in their primary focus and application, share several theoretical foundations that serve as a common ground for their integration in development and social change efforts. Both disciplines are deeply rooted in the understanding of human behavior, social systems, and collective action, and both aim to improve societal conditions by influencing attitudes, behaviors, and structures. Their complementary nature is evident in their mutual reliance on key social science theories such as structural functionalism, diffusion of innovations, participatory development, and symbolic interactionism.

Extension

Extension refers to the process through which academic knowledge is disseminated beyond the boundaries of educational institutions to reach and benefit communities. Often associated with fields like agriculture, health, and education, Extension focuses on practical, participatory, and community-based strategies to foster development. It emphasizes the co-creation of knowledge, applied research, and capacity-building among marginalized and rural populations.

The Need For Integration

While Sociology is more theory-oriented and Extension more application-oriented, both are inherently concerned with societal improvement. Recognizing their overlap offers a unique opportunity for interdisciplinary synergy, where sociological insights can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of Extension programs, and Extension can provide practical contexts to test and refine sociological theories.

Shared Theoretical Foundations

Another major theoretical convergence is found in **Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory** (Rogers, 2003), which is extensively utilized in both sociology and extension studies. This theory explains how new ideas, practices, or technologies spread within a social system over time. It emphasizes the role of social networks, opinion leaders, and communication channels—key sociological constructs—in the adoption process. Extension practitioners use this theory to design and implement effective communication strategies that facilitate the uptake of innovations in rural communities.



Participatory development theory also serves as a shared foundation, emphasizing bottom-up, inclusive, and people-centered approaches to development (Chambers, 1994). In sociology, this theory aligns with critical perspectives that highlight the importance of empowering marginalized groups and challenging existing power dynamics. In extension, participatory methods such as farmer field schools and community-led development projects operationalize these theoretical principles, leading to more locally relevant and sustainable outcomes.

Social Change

Both Sociology and Extension are deeply interested in understanding and promoting social change. Sociological theories such as modernization theory, conflict theory, and structural functionalism provide frameworks for understanding societal transformation. Extension programs use these insights to guide interventions aimed at changing behaviors, practices, or institutions at the community level. **Social change** refers to the significant alteration of social structures, cultural patterns, values, norms, and behavior over time. It encompasses transformations in the way society is organized, including shifts in institutions, relationships, and practices that shape individual and collective life. For both **sociology** and **extension science**, social change is a core concept—sociology seeks to understand and explain it, while extension actively works to facilitate it, particularly in the context of rural development and community empowerment. The **diffusion of innovations theory** by Rogers (2003) highlights how new ideas and practices lead to social change when adopted by members of a community over time. This theory is central to extension, as it explains the mechanisms through which innovations—technological, behavioral, or institutional—are introduced, accepted, or resisted. The adoption of new agricultural methods, for example, not only improves productivity but also alters social roles, economic relations, and community dynamics.

Social Capital

The concept of social capital—defined as the networks, norms, and trust that enable collective action—is central to both fields. In Sociology, it is used to analyze community cohesion and inequality. In Extension, it guides strategies for mobilizing community resources and building partnerships for sustainable development. In development, education, health, and rural extension contexts, social capital is widely recognized as a critical driver of **collective action**, **community resilience**, and **sustainable development**. High levels of social capital can improve governance, foster innovation, and reduce transaction costs in collective activities (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002).

Community Development

Community development is a shared concern. Sociologists study the dynamics of community formation and disintegration, while Extension professionals implement programs aimed at strengthening community capacities. Theoretical models such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and community capacity-building are utilized in both disciplines. Community development is about **empowerment**, **capacity building**, and **participatory governance**. It emphasizes bottom-up approaches that involve local people in planning and implementing change, ensuring that development is relevant, inclusive, and sustainable (Green & Haines, 2015).

Community development is guided by key principles, including:

- **Participation:** Engaging community members in identifying needs and decision-making.



- **Empowerment:** Building individual and collective skills, knowledge, and confidence.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Ensuring fair access to opportunities and resources for all groups.
- **Sustainability:** Promoting long-term social, economic, and environmental health.
- **Social Justice:** Addressing inequality and promoting fairness in policy and practice.

Effective community development incorporates **capacity building** (e.g., training, leadership development), **networking, collaboration** among stakeholders, and the mobilization of **local assets and social capital**. It often takes place in areas such as housing, education, health, employment, environment, and civic engagement (Phillips & Pittman, 2014).

Participation And Empowerment

Participatory approaches, including Participatory Action Research (PAR), are fundamental in both fields. Empowerment theory, which emphasizes giving individuals and communities control over their own development, is frequently applied in both sociological research and Extension programs. **Participation** and **empowerment** are foundational principles of community development, social work, extension services, and sustainable development. Together, they emphasize the importance of involving people in decisions that affect their lives and enabling them to take control of their social, economic, and political conditions.

Behavioral Change Theories

Both disciplines utilize behavioral change models to understand and influence individual and group behaviors. Theories such as the Transtheoretical Model, Diffusion of Innovations, and Social Cognitive Theory serve as bridges between academic understanding and practical application. **Behavioral change theories** are conceptual frameworks that explain how individuals adopt new behaviors or change existing ones. These theories are widely applied in health promotion, environmental education, community development, and extension services to design interventions that effectively influence attitudes, intentions, and actions (Glanz et al., 2015).

These models help practitioners understand:

- Why people behave the way they do,
- What motivates or hinders change,
- How change can be facilitated sustainably.

Key Behavioral Change Theories

1. Health Belief Model (HBM)

Developed in the 1950s by social psychologists at the U.S. Public Health Service, the HBM posits that people are more likely to change behavior if they:

- Believe they are susceptible to a condition,
- Believe the condition has serious consequences,
- Believe taking action would reduce their risk,
- Perceive fewer barriers to taking action (Rosenstock, 1974).

2. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Ajzen's TPB (1991) argues that behavior is driven by:

- **Attitudes** toward the behavior,
- **Subjective norms** (social pressure),
- **Perceived behavioral control** (self-efficacy).

These factors shape **behavioral intention**, which predicts actual behavior.



3. Transtheoretical Model (TTM) / Stages of Change

Proposed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983), this model views behavior change as a process occurring through stages:

1. Precontemplation,
2. Contemplation,
3. Preparation,
4. Action,
5. Maintenance.

Interventions are more effective when tailored to a person's stage.

4. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Developed by Bandura (1986), SCT emphasizes:

- **Observational learning** (modeling),
- **Self-efficacy** (belief in one's ability),
- **Reciprocal determinism** (interaction between person, behavior, and environment).

5. Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Rogers (2003) explains how new ideas and practices spread within social systems. Key elements include:

- **Innovation characteristics,**
- **Communication channels,**
- **Time,**
- **Social system structure.**

Adoption categories: Innovators → Early adopters → Early majority → Late majority → Laggards.

Comparative Academic and Research Approaches

Aspect	Sociology	Extension
Research Focus	Social systems, culture, institutions	inequality, Community development, practical change
Methodologies	Surveys, ethnography, statistics	interviews, Program evaluation, needs assessment, participatory research
Theory Development	High emphasis on creating and testing theories	Application of theories to real-world problems
Audience	Primarily academic	Community, policy-makers, NGOs
Goals	Understanding and explaining society	Improving quality of life through knowledge transfer
Collaboration	Among academics and researchers	With community members and stakeholders

Despite these differences, both fields aim to improve society by generating and applying knowledge. Recognizing this shared goal can lead to more robust, relevant, and impactful research and programs.

Value Of Integrating Sociology Into Extension

Integrating sociological methods and insights into Extension programs can offer multiple benefits:

Deeper Diagnosis of Social Issues: Sociological tools can help Extension professionals understand the root causes of social challenges.



Culturally Sensitive Program Design: Using sociological frameworks ensures that interventions are context-specific and culturally appropriate.

Better Community Engagement: Concepts like social capital and empowerment enhance the ability to connect with and mobilize communities.

Improved Research and Evaluation: Sociological rigor can strengthen the research design, data analysis, and interpretation of Extension projects.

Strengthened Collaboration: Interdisciplinary teams can foster innovation and holistic problem-solving.

Methodological Note

This study employs a **qualitative, non-empirical research design**, primarily based on a **thematic literature review** and **comparative analysis** of foundational and contemporary scholarly works in the fields of sociology and extension science. The purpose of this methodological approach is to synthesize existing knowledge and generate a conceptual framework that elucidates the complementary nature of the two disciplines.

Thematic Literature Review

A systematic yet flexible **thematic review** strategy was adopted to identify, categorize, and interpret core themes that emerge at the intersection of sociology and extension. Academic databases such as **Scopus, JSTOR, Science Direct, Google Scholar, and Springer Link** were used to source relevant peer-reviewed articles, books, and theoretical papers. Keywords included "sociology and extension," "social theory in development," "participatory extension," "social capital," and "community development theory."

Selection criteria emphasized:

- Conceptual clarity,
- Theoretical relevance,
- Disciplinary representativeness,
- Recency of publication (with a focus on 2000–2024),
- Authoritative academic sources.

Approximately 40–50 primary sources were reviewed to establish both disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary convergence.

Comparative Analysis

The literature review was followed by a **comparative textual analysis** of selected key texts from both disciplines. This included a comparative examination of:

- Theoretical frameworks,
- Methodological paradigms,
- Core concepts (e.g., empowerment, participation, social structure, development practice),
- Practical applications in rural development, education, and social change.

This cross-disciplinary comparison enabled the identification of both **converging themes** (e.g., social engagement, empowerment, knowledge transfer) and **distinct disciplinary strengths**, thus informing a comprehensive synthesis.

Conceptual Synthesis

Drawing on the insights from the thematic and comparative analyses, the study develops a **conceptual synthesis** that maps the complementary roles of sociology and extension in promoting participatory development and sustainable change. The synthesis is interpretive in nature, guided by principles of **critical social inquiry** and **constructivist understanding** of knowledge production.



Recommendations For Interdisciplinary Collaboration:

To strengthen the collaboration between Sociology and Extension, the following actions are recommended:

Joint Research Projects: Encourage co-authored studies involving sociologists and extensionists.

Integrated Curriculum: Develop academic programs that combine sociological theory with practical Extension training.

Policy Advocacy: Use sociological evidence to inform and improve Extension policies.

Community-Based Research Hubs: Establish platforms where both disciplines work directly with communities.

Capacity Building: Train Extension professionals in basic sociological methods and sociologists in participatory fieldwork.

Conclusion

Sociology and Extension, though rooted in different traditions, are united in their commitment to understanding and improving society. Their shared focus on social systems, community engagement, applied research, and behavioral change presents significant opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. This paper has demonstrated that by recognizing and leveraging their academic and research similarities, both fields can enhance their impact on policy, practice, and community well-being. Future research should continue to explore this intersection and develop innovative models for integrated societal development. This study has explored the conceptual and practical intersections between **sociology** and **extension science**, illustrating how these two disciplines, though traditionally distinct, are inherently complementary in their objectives and methodologies. Sociology offers critical insights into the structure and dynamics of society—its institutions, cultures, behaviors, and inequalities—while extension serves as an applied mechanism for facilitating planned change, knowledge dissemination, and community empowerment, particularly in rural and underdeveloped settings. Through a thematic literature review and comparative analysis, this paper has shown that both disciplines are grounded in shared theoretical foundations such as structural functionalism, participatory development, symbolic interactions, and the diffusion of innovations. These frameworks underscore the importance of social relationships, collective behavior, communication, and cultural context in shaping human action and societal transformation. Furthermore, key concepts such as **social capital**, **empowerment**, **participation**, and **behavioral change** reveal significant areas of overlap, demonstrating that extension initiatives are most effective when informed by sociological understanding. Sociology provides the analytical tools to interpret complex social realities and power dynamics, while extension translates these insights into actionable strategies for change, engagement, and development. In practical terms, this interdisciplinary complementarity enhances the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs aimed at improving livelihoods, strengthening communities, and promoting sustainable development. Whether in agricultural extension, health promotion, education, or community organizing, integrating sociological perspectives into extension work leads to more culturally relevant, inclusive, and impactful outcomes. While this study is conceptual in nature and based on secondary sources, it lays the groundwork for future empirical research that can test and further develop the theoretical linkages discussed. Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers are encouraged to foster stronger collaboration between these fields to maximize the social



impact of development interventions. In conclusion, sociology and extension are not merely adjacent disciplines—they are mutually reinforcing, each contributing essential knowledge and practices to the pursuit of holistic, participatory, and sustainable change. Their integration is not only beneficial but increasingly necessary in addressing the complex challenges facing modern societies.

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