

Technology Use and Preferences of Paraprofessional Educators in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP)



Mira Mehta, PhD¹; Beth Peralta, MS, RD²; Kavitha Sankavaram, PhD¹; Lisa Martin, MS, RD³; Joan D Paddock, BS, MPH⁴; Jennifer McCaffrey, PhD, MPH, RD²

¹University of Maryland, College Park; ²University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; ³Kansas State University; ⁴Cornell University



Abstract

Low-income families face many issues and reaching them via traditional face-to-face nutrition education can be a challenge. Technology could help nutrition educators stay connected to program participants for longer periods. This study investigated access and use of technologies by paraprofessional educators providing direct nutrition education to low income families/youth in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). A 26-item survey instrument was developed consisting of questions regarding technology use, frequency of use, location where technology was accessed, preferred platforms, reason for accessing different devices as well as demographic information such as ethnicity, gender and years of education. The survey was administered to educators serving low income communities in Maryland, Illinois and Kansas. Results (n=62) indicate that 88% of educators used a computer every day and accessed the device from their place of work; 92% sent and received texts from their mobile device and 73% used a Smartphone to download applications. A majority used Android devices, 91% of educators accessed the internet each day. 84% reported that they have high speed internet where they live, 99% use the internet to access nutrition information with healthy eating, recipes and exercise tips as the most popular internet topics. 85% of educators also used social media with Facebook, Pinterest and YouTube representing the most popular sites. Technology use and preferences differed considerably between states and sample size was not large enough to be representative of the nation. Understanding technology preferences and use by EFNEP educators might aid in developing strategies to improve retention and graduation from EFNEP.

Goal

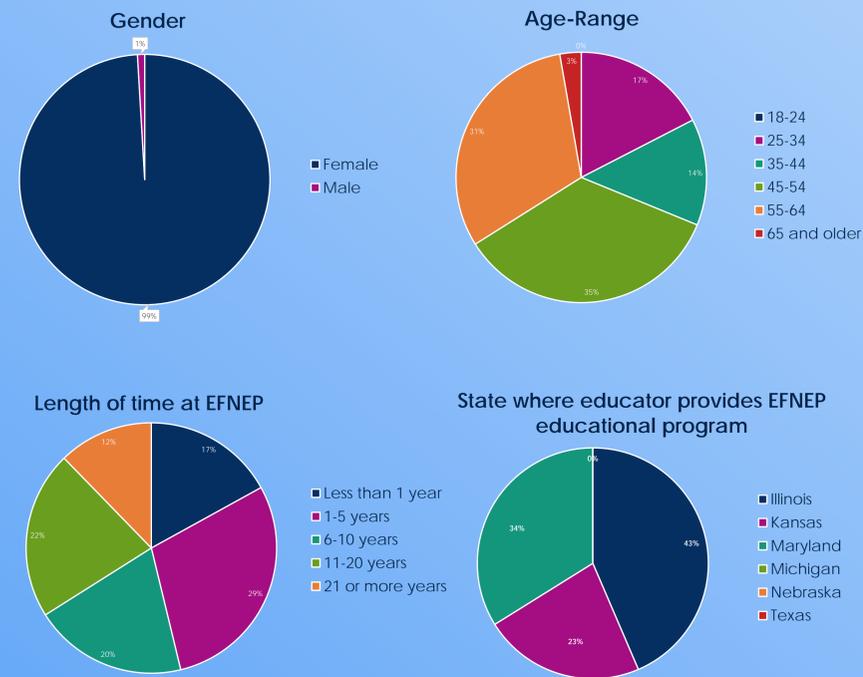
Develop a better understanding about technology use and preferences of EFNEP paraprofessional educators to inform the feasibility of incorporating targeted technology in EFNEP programming.

Methodology

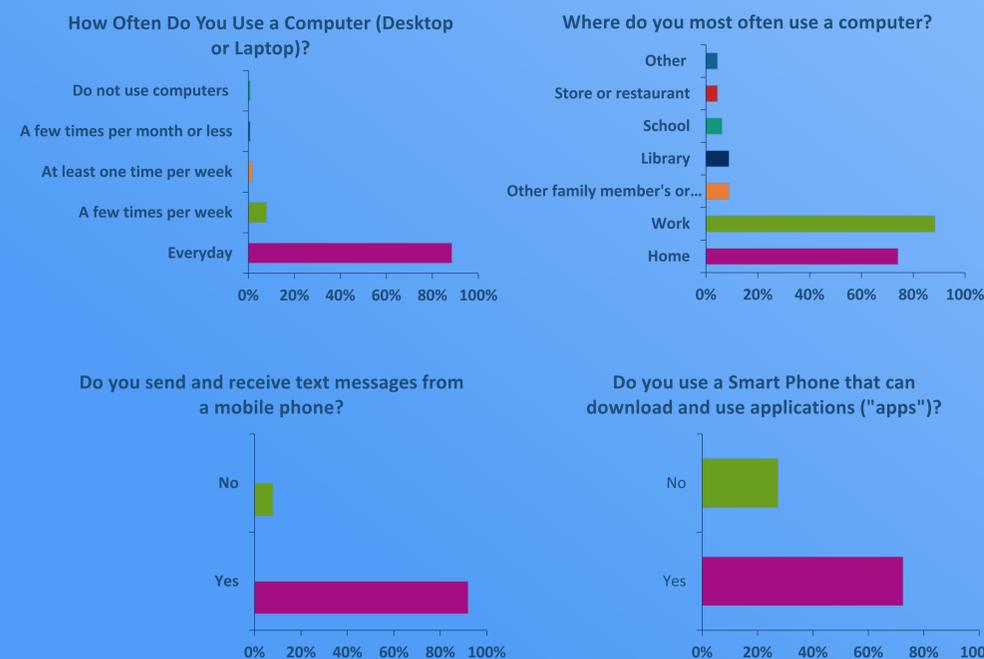
A 26-item survey instrument was developed with questions related to technology use, frequency of use, location where technology was accessed, preferred platforms, reason for accessing different devices, and demographic information such as ethnicity, gender and years of education. It was administered to EFNEP paraprofessional educators, who serve low income communities in Maryland, Illinois and Kansas. Questions ranged from general (i.e. "How often do you use a computer (desktop or laptop)?") to more specific about EFNEP (i.e. "How are you currently using technology in your EFNEP programming or classes? Please select all that apply."). Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the University of Maryland, College Park, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and Kansas State University prior to administering the surveys.

Data/Results

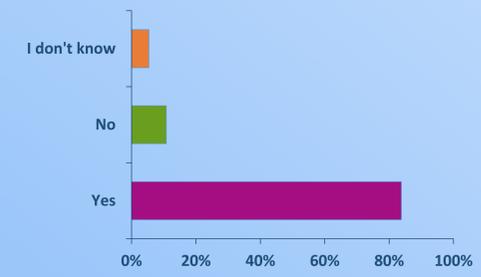
Demographics



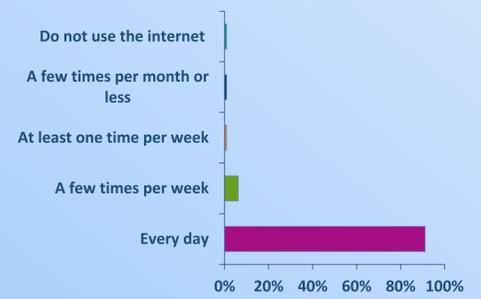
Technology Use



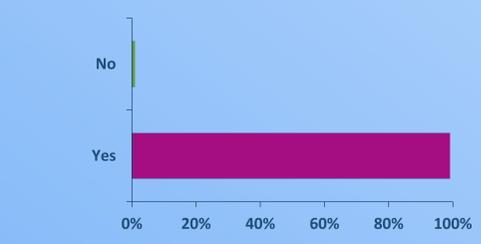
Do you use high-speed Internet where you live?



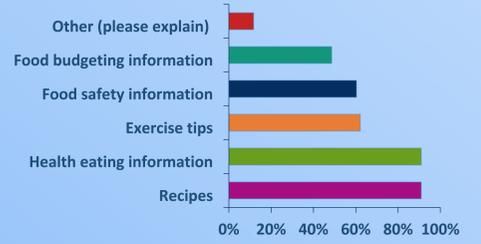
How often do you use the Internet?



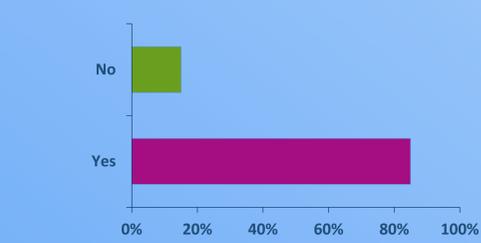
Do you use the Internet currently to look up or read about nutrition or food information?



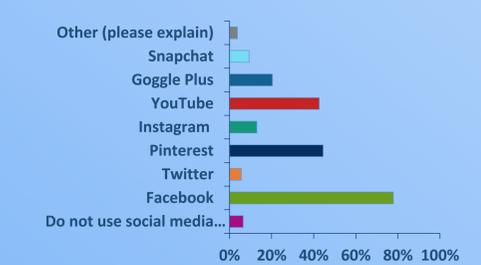
Please select what you have used the Internet to learn more about in the past month (select all that apply):



Do you use social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Pinterest?



Select which social media sites that you use at least weekly (select all that apply):



Conclusion & Implications

A high percentage of EFNEP paraprofessional educators use technology in their everyday lives, with almost all indicating the use of internet to access nutrition information, thus indicating great potential to incorporate targeted technology into EFNEP programming to increase participant retention and graduation rates.

Greater use of technology in EFNEP may help increase the reach and impact of programs on participants. However, due to limitations of the sample size and differences in educator preferences for technology use, the methods for integrating technology into these programs need to be studied further. A better understanding of educators' comfort level with technology, and ways to effectively incorporate technology into EFNEP without disrupting the unique peer-to-peer hands-on teaching and role-modeling structure of the program is needed.