
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SELF- PRODUCTIVITY

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Abstract

Agricultural education can play a facilitating role in ensuring stability in nation building by developing skills, attitudes and scientific capabilities in farmers to produce enough food and raw materials for local industries and export. The need to achieve substantial and immediate increase in food production in Nigeria, for a more productive, efficient and sustainable system of good agricultural education programme that will train the individual for a rewarding business in farming. This paper draws attention to the fact that despite the wealth of this nation, many of us are unemployed and poor. The paper highlights on skills acquisition through vocational agriculture for self-productive. It also touches on causes and consequences of poverty and how agricultural education can be used to alleviate poverty and the constraints in the effective programme of agricultural education and the way forward.

Nigeria is one of the developing countries that is faced with the problems of unemployment and rising crime rates not because the nation is not wealthy but because most undergraduates and postgraduates cannot create jobs but want jobs to be created for them. This due to the fact that they were not trained for jobs but were trained about them, that is to say that they lack skills necessary to enable them create or fit into created jobs, for their own development and their societies. The wealth of a society, determines to a large extent development of that society. A rich society is one, which is capable of meeting her economic, social, moral and political needs (Adam 1998). A

nation enjoys economic stability if she is industrially buoyant, agriculturally sufficient, and technologically up-to date. Agricultural Education is a vehicle towards making a nation rich.

Agricultural Education

Agricultural Education is that aspect of education that makes individuals more employable than other educational areas because it is designed to imbibe individuals with the right type of knowledge, skill, competencies and attitudes for specific occupation geared toward self productivity.

Ukpongson (2000), opined that those who undergo vocational education are assumed to have already chosen their life occupation and thus, need relevant skills and knowledge to enable them progress and develop in such occupation.

Agricultural education is the type of education that is employed in training learners in the process of agricultural productivity. as well as in the techniques for the teaching of agriculture. Agricultural Education prepares young and adult farmers to produce high quality food and raw materials for the industry.

Agricultural education will provide young people with a sound knowledge of the basic principles and techniques of agriculture and the motivation with which they can translate this knowledge into real improvements in agricultural productivity. Agricultural education can also play a facilitating role in ensuring stability in nation building by developing skills, attitudes and scientific capabilities in farmers to produce food and raw materials for local industries and exports. The need for increase in food production in Nigeria calls for a more productive, efficient and sustainable system of a good agricultural education programme that will train the individual for a rewarding business in farming.

Self productivity and Poverty in Nigeria

Self productive situation in which an individual is trained For a job, or is trained to acquire skills necessary to enable him create or fit into created jobs. Vocational subjects like Agriculture Home Economics, Business, Fine and Applied Arts etc. prepare their recipients with the necessary skills that will make them self productive.

Poverty is a concept that may not be adequately defined for others to appear because it is a multifaceted phenomenon. One has to experience it personally. It is not only an expression of life condition, but a state of mind and a perception of self in the complex web of social relation. Notwithstanding this view, some people attempted defining poverty. In this paper, poverty is described and' not defined. In order to live and function adequately in a community, the essential needs of life have to be met. Therefore, a poor man is a person who is not:

- Gainfully employed
- Sustaining a satisfactory nutritional base

- Maintaining one's family and engaging in meaningful and functional personal and social relationship, including ability to understand and participate in such social relationship. If these aspects of life are not met or are being denied, a person or family is said to be poor. However, poverty cannot 'be restricted to the failure to satisfy physical needs. Poverty includes lifestyle and social activities. Therefore, someone who is regarded poor in one geographical location may be considered fairly rich in another e.g. A family that is considered as poor in Lagos, Abuja or Kano may not be considered as poor in a remote village.

The idea of being wealthy in Nigeria is viewed as having a "secured life and peace of mind" with access to essential services, such as food, health, education, living in a good accommodation and the availability of opportunities which in turn enable offsprings have access to such services and while poverty is perceived as lacking security, living in poor houses, having no access to essential services and being perpetually in debt and constantly having to borrow. In rural areas wealth is expressed in terms of land ownership and capital availability along with access to markets (UNDP, 2001).

Causes and Consequences of Poverty

As with the definition, it is also difficult to determine the causes of poverty. This is because as we have seen poverty differs from place to place and from time to time, so are its causes. Poverty can be linked to colonial exploitation, neo-colonialism, instability of government, internal colonialism, globalization, tribalism, corruption, prodigal attitude, poor management of resources or wasteful use of resources, government policies, joblessness, illiteracy, inequality of income distribution, negative and or poor attitude to life and responsibility. Others are large family size without necessary financial backing; urbanization caused by migration of unskilled and uneducated migrants. Sincerely some are poor because they are born into poor families. While corruption, insincerity of implementers of poverty alleviation programmes, gross under-development of the nation's abundant resources, debt servicing burden and military misrule are some of the factors that facilitate the perpetration of poverty in our society (UNDP. 2001).

The effects of poverty are evident in some families, as demonstrated by their inability to feed well, poor health and high susceptibility to health problems, infant mortality, low-life expectancy; Poor housing or lack of shelter; and single—parental families. Others are Street children due to parental neglect or abuse; inability to send children to school; high school dropout rates; mental derailment; prostitution, and increased male migration from rural to urban areas in search of manual jobs. Restiveness of unemployed youths; increase in drug abuse and violent crimes; loss of self esteem; powerlessness or inability to participate meaningfully in political and social life is also evidence of poverty effects (Toungos and Mahmood, 2005). From the

foregoing, you will agree that the wide spread poverty in Nigeria is caused by several factors as enumerated above.

Agricultural Education and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

Nigerian agricultural potentials have hardly been exploited. Out of the 98.32 million hectares of land available in the country, 75% is rich arable land stretching from the shore to the Sahelian part of Nigeria (Agbede, 2004).

At present over 90% of the total food and raw materials produced in this great country is produced by literate and bound small-scale farmers. They employ traditional technology usually called the 'hoe — cutlass' culture. Agriculture which plays a key role in economic growth and nation building especially in developing countries has in the last three decades witnessed concerted efforts to promote overall economic development through rapid industrialization even though it has not been successful. Acquisition of modern skills and science-based knowledge is a sine qua non for food production, hence the need for agricultural education. Many countries such as United States of America, Canada and Japan have used agricultural education (at the secondary school level) to provide the semi—skilled farm labour, which transformed their agricultural sector. Unfortunately, secondary school leavers in Nigeria were found to regard farming as a career fit only for school dropouts and the illiterates (Oluwasami, 1981).

The National Policy on Education (2004), gives agriculture a prominent position as a school subject especially at the post primary school level. The overall objectives of agricultural education at the secondary school level has been outlined by Olaitan (1984), as follows:

- (i) To provide students with adequate skills to make a living and progressively advance in farming.
- (ii) To advance food production through improvement of agricultural production techniques in secondary schools.
- (iii) To provide occupational entry — level skills in agriculture to interested secondary school students.
- (vi) To prepare secondary school students for conservation of soil and other natural resources.
- (v) To prepare secondary school students adequately for producing and marketing farm commodities efficiently.

The focus of agricultural education at whatever level is the production of educated and skillful individuals who would be useful to themselves and the society through their contributions to productive agriculture in particular and nation building in general. The mission of agricultural education as a facilitator in nation building is effective preparation of the individuals for the world of work in agriculture.

In general terms, agricultural education has an essential role to play in reversing the falling social and economic of the world, the status of agriculture. In Nigeria, as in many other countries of the world, the need for agricultural education has been aptly identified, hence its prominent position in the National Policy on Education (2001).

Successful agricultural education programme can be an instrument par excellence (facilitator) in nation building. Agricultural education will provide young people with a sound knowledge of the basic principles and techniques of agriculture and the motivation with which they can translate this knowledge into real agricultural productivity.

Malassis noted that the objectives for creating national 4 institutions should be to shield the youths from the powerful traditional influence, to facilitate the integration of all into the national community, and to propagate the attitudes most favourable to change and to technical progress. This can be achieved through successful agricultural education programme as an aspect of the general education system to ensure stable nation. The territory which Nigeria occupies as a nation has about 68 million hectares of arable land out of which only forty five percent is under cultivation. The wide variation of climate in the country favours growth of different varieties of crops such as root tubers, cereals, tree crops, vegetables and livestock rearing (Agboola, 2000). A successful agricultural education programme will produce new generation of farmers who will embark on farming as a business and produce affordable food for the present generation as well as provide ecological friendly environment for the future generation to satisfy their own needs. The focus of a successful agricultural education programme should be on self-sufficiency, self-reliance and overall development and integration of individual farmers into dynamic and productive society.

For agricultural education to be successful and a factor in building a strong and virile Nigeria, the following imperatives need to be considered in its development and implementation.

- (i) **Political Consideration** Self-sufficiency in food production is one of the elements of national power, so politics and agricultural education cannot be separated. Politics should play a vital role in fashioning the philosophy and direction of agricultural education programme. People should develop positive attitude towards agriculture as a worthy and noble occupation which man cannot do without. Value reorientation is needed for a favourable attitude towards farming because the peoples' attitude to farming is a reflection of societal values. There should be concerted efforts by all agencies of socialization; namely the school, home, voluntary organizations like Boys' Scout and Girls' Guide, the community etc. for a change of attitude towards farming. Stronger political will and commitment are required of the government to utilize petroleum oil revenue to develop agriculture across the country and evolve a workable land use rights for genuine farmers. Existing institutional structures such as banks and agricultural credit corporation should therefore be encouraged to vote a favourable percentage of their loan for agriculture. If credit is ensured in adequate quantum and on time, much of the constraints would be eradicated and credit obtained would be used on agro - inputs, farm tools, development of roads, market centers, warehouses and other necessary facilities.

- (ii) **Identification of Genuine Clientele and their Needs:** We are not advocating that all Nigerian Youths should become farmers. Successful agricultural education programme should only be for those who want it, need it and can benefit from it. Government and non-governmental organizations' efforts should focus on this category of Nigerian Youths. One way of identifying such future young farmers is to monitor the implementation of agricultural education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (2004). There should be effective mobilization and organization of small-scale farmers into viable co-operatives and farmers association for the task of self-sufficiency in food through "local" production. Cooperatives constitute the most appropriate institutional mechanism for reaching the millions of peasant farmers scattered all over this country for the development of the rural areas and for food production in addition, formation of Young Farmers' Club (YFC) should be made part of the agricultural education. Young farmers' club should be made compulsory in our post-primary institutions and voluntary at post- secondary school level. It should also be formed at rural community levels. Young Farmers' Club not only stimulates interest of the youths in practical agriculture but makes them veritable channels for disseminating modern farm technologies to their parents and other relations. Moreover, the level of agric extension service effort should be improved through intensive personalized attention. Agricultural education outfit should be improved through intensive personalized attention. Agricultural extension service, a non -formal agricultural education outfit, should be taken more seriously by stakeholders such as government and non- governmental organizations. The small scale farmers who produce about 90% of total food consumed in this country should be reached in their rural communities through effective extension service. Participatory research approach should be adopted by agricultural extension workers to develop and disseminate farm technologies to rural farmers.
- (iii) **For Agricultural Education to be Relevant, a Distinct Policy Must Be Formulated** This policy must place emphasis on practical agriculture as well as make adequate provision for funding and supply of production inputs. Both teachers and students of agriculture should be motivated.
- (iv) Schools on their part need to develop carefully formulated policies for operating school farms in order to ensure effective utilization of the farm for educational purposes.
- (v) Greater part of Education Trust Fund should be allocated specifically for the implementation of sustainable agricultural education programme.

Constraints to Effective Programme of Agricultural Education

A number of problems are preventing the achievement of' the objectives of agricultural education programme in Nigeria. The causes of the problems are as wide spread as the problems themselves. The all-embracing factor is the total negative

environment under which formal education system operates. According to Taiwo (1980), Nigerian formal education and the Nigerian education system has been influenced by Nigerians themselves-whether as parents, teachers, administrators, policy makers or members of the public than is usually realized or admitted. Each factor has, of course, its cause for its negative role, which is primarily blamed on the overall economic problems of the society. Many parents have very poor and negative attitude towards agricultural education and so discourage their children from pursuing careers in agriculture. The government has been inconsistent in its agricultural development policies yet everybody needs food.

Lack of instructional resources is another problem. The provision of adequate resources for teaching and learning of agriculture in schools has remained a problem. Such resources include physical, such as land, farm buildings/structures (e.g. animal pens, storage facilities, laboratories, houses, etc.) farm implements• and agricultural chemicals. Also included are personnel, library facilities, audio-visual aids, etc. Although statistics are not available to show the national shortfall in these resources, the consensus is that there is inadequate supply in schools (Oluwale, 1987).

Agricultural-Education programmes at all levels have failed to incorporate classroom/laboratory instruction with actual field practical experience enough to stimulate and hold students' interest. Above all, students who possess both interest and ability for farming have not been reached in adequate number. Young Farmers' Club has ceased to exist in most of our post-primary institutions. Evidence in some other countries such as United States of America, Canada and Japan, mentioned earlier, suggests that it is through these clubs that many youths are made to get interested in practical agriculture.

Specifically, problems confronting agricultural education programme in Nigeria are multifarious and they can be summarized to include the following:

- Misconception of agricultural education by stakeholders as education for the dropouts or the “less intelligent ones”.
- Gross under-funding due to government's misplaced priority.
- Very poor and inadequate facilities in institutions offering agricultural education.
- Weak agricultural extension delivery system
- Government as the sole financier of the agricultural education programme in Nigeria.
- Limiting land ownership and use rights especially in the south-eastern states.
- Mass illiteracy among the rural farmers.
- Outright neglect of rural areas in provision of basic social amenities such as electricity, all season roads, and health facilities in food producing areas.
- Lack of modern farm inputs/resources.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to focus on the pivotal role of Agricultural Education in the overall development of individuals for self-productively as a means for employment as enshrined in the blue print of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS).

There is no doubt that by virtue of the unique characteristic of Agricultural Education, it can play a significant role in the empowerment of individuals or its recipients. Direct and effective involvement of Agricultural Education in our millennium development goals is a very logical means of accomplishing one of our most important objective of improving the lot of the suffering malnourished, ignorant and poor masses.

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