

# IMPROVING VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

Vocational Agricultural Education is conceived as a tool for achieving self-realization in agriculture; it is a special type of education, which is noted as a shock absorber to unemployment stress and with it, the future of Nigerian youths would be brighter with a lot of hope. Products of vocational agricultural education are expected to become self-sustained, self-employed and self-reliant in agriculture if and when, as they leave school, they put the acquired skills and competences into action. However, this aspect of education has been so badly and dangerously engulfed by a myriad of attendant problems militating against its very survival and success. This paper is focused on the identification of some of these problems as low funding and over-populated classes, inadequate equipment/tools and qualified manpower, Suggestions such as creating more awareness in terms of enlightenment campaigns, proper funding and re-training of teachers etc were made for improvement.

## **Introduction**

Vocational education involves areas of study that help the learners acquire skills including manipulative and conceptual skills. It is practically oriented. It is geared towards occupational preparation. Vocational Education is any form of education designed to imbue individuals with the right type of knowledge, skill, competencies and attitudes for specific occupations (Nwankwo, 2000). Those who undergo vocational education are assumed to have already chosen their life occupations and thus need all necessary trainings to acquire relevant skills and knowledge to enable them progress and develop in such occupations.

However, vocational agricultural education is concerned with the development of skills; knowledge and attitude in the field of agriculture to enable the recipients take up a career in it. (Usman and Sulaiman, 2006). It is responsible for preparing individuals in various agricultural occupations such as those concerned with growing crops, rearing animals, providing ornamental horticulture, managing farm business and managing farm resources (Ezeagu and Ezema, 2004).

Vocational Agricultural Education deals with the skills necessary for ensuring high-level production of farm products and produce. The use of modern techniques in the area of agricultural mechanization, application of fertilizer and management must clearly be demonstrated and encapsulated within the curriculum of secondary and tertiary institutions so as to enable the students develop interest and acquire vocational skills.

According to Dipaharima (2004), vocational agricultural education assists and provides the individuals or the society with basic or essential agricultural knowledge and skills to innovate and explore the environment to the betterment of the whole society or nation. Vocational agricultural skills is necessary for economic, agricultural, commercial growth and by implication national development. It is a sure way of guaranteeing national development. However, the present state of vocational agricultural education is confronted with some problems which include inadequate tools or equipment, low funding by the government, poor attitude towards vocational agricultural education over-populated classes etc. The purpose of this paper is to proffer solutions to these problems.

### **Objectives of Vocational Agricultural Education in Nigeria**

These objectives according to Ukponson and Mangiri (2000), include:

- a) To develop competences in the broad and highly scientific agriculture and encompasses production, processing, distribution e.t.c.
- b) To develop an understanding and appreciation of career opportunities in agriculture.
- c) To develop those abilities in human relations which are essential in agricultural occupations. '
- d) To develop agricultural competences needed by individuals engaged in or preparing to engage in production agriculture.
- e) To develop the ability to secure satisfaction in placement and to advance in an agricultural

occupation through a programme of continuing education.

### **Role of Vocational Agricultural Education in Nigeria**

According to the National Policy on Education (1998) and Usman and Sulaiman (2006), the role of vocational agricultural education can be summarized as follows:

- i) Development of machinery and other equipment like tractor, cultivator ridges, planter, combined harvester to replace the old tools like hoe and cutlass,
- ii) Development of modern methods of processing plant and animal products like shelling and canning,
- iii) Provision of technical knowledge and vocational skill for agriculture, industrial commercial and economic development,
- iv) Provision of nutritionist who could help in developing different types of foodstuffs for animals and chemical like fertilizers for plants,
- v) Provision of building engineers to develop farm buildings like pens for livestock, pens for poultry and pig, silos, cribs for storage e.t.c

### **Problems Facing Vocational Agricultural Education In Nigeria**

Vocational agricultural education though has every potentiality to facilitate the growths and development of any growing nation as is elaborated above, is besieged with numerous problems in the developing nation, which have hindered its true upliftment of their economy. Some of these problems include:

#### **a) Problem of Qualified Manpower:**

This problem appears to be so grave perhaps, hinging on the fact that no educational system can rise above the caliber of its teachers; or no educational policy, no matter how well planned can succeed without the supply of the right quality and quantity of teachers. Furthermore, the production of a nation's workforce capable of transforming the nation's technological development cannot be done in the absence of qualified and adequate vocational teachers.

This problem is a perennial one because, even as the universities, colleges of Education and the Polytechnics are graduating a large population of Vocational Agricultural teachers yearly, many of them are not found in the classroom but rather in other more lucrative jobs.

#### **b) Low Funding of Vocational Agricultural Education:**

Most educational institutions in the country including Vocational Institutions have been plagued and comatose by the never-ending problem of inadequate funding even to the point that meeting basic operating costs becomes difficult. The far-reaching implication of poor funding is that institutions find it difficult to carry out research, conduct seminars, workshops, send teachers to attend conferences and other training programmes and by extension, cannot replace or maintain worn-out equipment and facilities. For the vocational schools and colleges where skills acquisition is emphasized, this becomes difficult even as effective teaching becomes far-fetched.

#### **c) Societal Attitude Towards Vocational Agricultural Education.**

There is the general negative belief among many people that vocational agricultural education is meant for those who do not have the brainpower for vigorous academic demands of the traditional secondary schools system. To those who hold this view and belief, they think that the vocational school leavers are 'drop-outs' or 'never do-wells' who can only learn skills for vocation. This situation tends to adversely affect those who have chosen to acquire vocational agricultural education and settle down for a functional out-of-school occupational living (Usman and Sulaniman, 2006).

#### **d) Inadequate Equipment and Tools for Vocational Agricultural Education:**

While there is increase in the number of schools established, there is no proportionate increase in the provision of equipment and tools necessary for effective teaching (Ulinfun, 1990). It is sad to note that in spite of inadequacy of this equipment in a number of schools where they exist, they have not been installed particularly in the secondary schools and some colleges (Adigun, 1994). While in schools, where they are installed, they are not put into use due to lack of adequate knowledge of their operations by the teachers. The ultimate consequence is that the training of the students becomes

impeded and they end up not acquiring enough skill to make them self-reliant in vocation.

**e) Over-populated Classes:**

The disadvantages of over-populated classes in the vocational agricultural education institutions are devastating. They deny the students of opportunity of gaining practical experience, the equipment are often over-stretched as a result of which, they become old and worn out. Over-populated classes drastically reduces the chance for good teacher-student interaction; a necessity for good learning.

Opportunity for effective class management is reduced while it becomes virtually impossible for the teacher to give individual attention to the learners (Dipaharima, 2004). **Suggestions for Improvement**  
The following suggestions are made to achieve laudable landmarks in vocational agricultural education in Nigeria, that would be worthy of emulation by other nations. These include;

1) The processes of training, production and retention of vocational teachers should be given serious attention. There is the need to encourage our existing universities of technology and polytechnics to set up faculties/schools of education to enhance training and production of vocational agricultural teachers and they should be made to remain on the job through payment of special allowances/incentives. Only tested and qualified teachers, should be employed for vocational agricultural education.

2) Funding problem can be tackled if the federal government can reconsider and restore the issue of matching grants to state institutions especially vocational colleges to stimulate their growth in specific areas considered as areas of national priority. In accordance with (Ukpongson, 2000) government should make funds available for these institutions to enable them organize workshops, seminars, research and sponsor their teachers on conferences and other training programmes on regular basis.

3) There is need to create more awareness in terms of enlightenment campaigns via intensified use of mass media on the importance of vocational agricultural education in any nation's technological advancement. By so doing, more people would come to appreciate vocational agricultural education as a veritable technological life-wire of our desired march towards technological breakthrough and by extension, there would be a change in societal negative attitude towards it and its product.

4) There is need to adjust our educational system to help individuals and society in general to acquire knowledge that has value and consequently impart on national development. We need to do that because we owe the nation this responsibility.

5) Policy for the structural improvement of vocational agricultural education should be established within the framework of broad policies such as National Policies on Education; National Development Plans, e.t.c Policy should be directed to ensuring quality so as to exclude discrimination between the different educational streams.

6) Particular attention should be given to planning the development and expansion of vocational agricultural education by giving high priority to vocational education in national development agenda as well as in plans for educational reform.

**Conclusion**

The impacts of vocational agricultural education is overwhelming and it has the tendency of developing interest among all people, especially adult. As they are actively involved in the programme, both in and out of school, it keeps them out of mischief, unemployment stress and with it, the future of Nigerian youths would be brighter with a lot of hope as they are expected to become self-sustained, self-employed and self-reliant in agriculture. Vocational agricultural institutions are not dumping ground, rather they are fertile grounds were the seeds of creative minds and skillful hands germinate permanently.

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