
Functional Agricultural Education: Implication for National Development

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Abstract

The need to achieve substantial and immediate increase in food production in Nigeria calls for a more productive, efficient and sustainable system of good agricultural education programme that will train the individual for a rewarding business in farming. Agricultural education can play a facilitating role in ensuring stability in nation building by developing knowledge, values, skills and scientific capabilities in farmers to produce enough food and raw materials for local industries and export. This paper focuses attention on the fact that despite the wealth of this nation, a larger population, especially

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youths are unemployed and poor. The paper examined the basic concept of Agricultural education, knowledge and skill opportunities offered by Agricultural education, constraints to effective programme of Agricultural education, appropriate recommendations aimed at improving Agricultural education for national development were made.

Nigeria is one of the developing countries that is faced with the problems of unemployment and rising crimes rate not because the nation is not wealthy but because most graduates cannot create jobs even in areas where they have been trained, that is, to say that, they lack skills necessary to enable them creates or fit into created jobs, for their own development and their society. 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. Vocational Agricultural Education is a vehicle towards making a nation rich.

The Basic Concept of Agricultural Education

The Federal Government of Nigeria, in recognition of the importance of agriculture in the national economy, introduced pre-vocational agriculture in the junior secondary school curriculum in order to equip the students with necessary pre-vocational or entry skills into agricultural occupations.

The National Policy on Education (2004), gives agriculture a prominent position as a school subject especially at the post primary school level. The overall objective 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.
- iv. 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 efficiency.

The focus of agricultural education at whatever level is the production of values, knowledge, and skillful individuals who would be useful to themselves and the society through their contributions to productive agriculture in particular and national

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development. The mission of agricultural education as a facilitator in nation building is effective preparation of the individuals for the world of work in agriculture.

Egbule, (2004), defined agricultural education as 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. Presently, agricultural education in Nigeria takes place at the informal and formal levels. At the informal level, learners are trained to modern agricultural production processes outside the formal school system. At the formal level, agriculture is studied at various levels in the Nigerian educational system.

Agricultural education is concerned with that aspect of learning that prepares people and personnel to become teachers of agriculture, extension and other professionals in areas that requires a broad knowledge of agriculture. It among other things focuses on the development of leadership skills needed in planning and achieving long range goals and objectives, including improved agricultural production, conservation of natural and human resources and provision of education programmes for personal family and community development.

In Nigeria, it is not surprising to find that most of our universities offer agriculture as a field of study. This trend is however not complemented by a commensurate number of students. For instance, of the over 60% of the agriculture labour force that are women, only 25% of these women studied agriculture. A survey among the students found the most cited reasons to be personal. The view of their teachers however contrasted sharply with the position of the students. The teachers opined that students studied agriculture simply to have a degree and rarely practiced farming (Afonja and Omolara, 1995).

To meet the challenges of agricultural production and food security facing Africa today in the 21st century, countries must be willing to invest in human capital development. Improving human capital in agriculture is especially important in the low income food deficit countries of Africa where the shortage of trained human resources is a major limiting factor to development.

Knowledge, Values and Skills Opportunities of Agricultural Education

Ijere (1995), noted that unemployment is among the greatest plagues of Nigeria society and it is therefore not surprising that one of the efforts of government is the provision of educational training for her citizens to be able to face the world of work.

Training in vocational agriculture in institutions of learning should be seen as a design by government to equip youths with specific knowledge, values and skills as to

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be able to employ themselves on graduation. Vocational agriculture programme is designed to provide knowledge, values and practical skills in areas of agriculture such as crop production, animal husbandry, soil science, horticulture, agricultural economics and extension, fishery, forestry and wildlife. Other areas include agricultural Engineering, Agricultural Extension, etc.

According to Aghimine and Ojo (2001) a well trained vocational agriculturist who has the zeal and commitment can use the knowledge and skills acquired in any of the above subject areas to provide not only self reliance but can on the long run be an employer of labour in the following fields.

- i. Crop Production:** Food crops like rice, maize, guinea corn, beans, yam, groundnut and cassava can be embarked upon by graduates of vocational agriculture. These crops have short production cycles which make it possible to produce them at least two times a year under natural rainfall. These crops are also of great demand throughout the year as they form the staple food of many Nigerians. Huge capital outlay is not required before one can go into the production of these crops.
- ii Production of Vegetable Crops:** Gainful self employment skills can be undertaken in the production of vegetable crops such as tomatoes, pepper, amaranthus, fluted pumpkin, cabbage, lettuce and others are of great demand everyday for different purposes. Another advantage of vegetable production can be carried out throughout the year especially with the adoption of simple irrigation procedure with good production plan; a vegetable producer can generate income all year round.
- iii Livestock Production:** especially pigs and poultry, somebody who chooses to engage in the production of poultry birds such as fowls, turkey, duck and guinea fowls either for eggs or meat and also pigs, will be fully occupied throughout the year which also guarantees income at regular intervals. Moreover, these enterprises can be undertaken with little and small space of land. In some cases, already built poultry or pig houses can be rented for a fee. After few years of steady growth, these projects are capable of employing not only the livestock keeper, but other person's in order to cope with husbandry and other activities so as to meet consumers and market demands for products. Other livestock which could be reared include; sheep, goat and cattle but they require huge capital outlay which a beginner may be unable to provide and large expanse of land which is not easy for a young graduate to provide.

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- iv Fish Production:** As a part of an integrated farming approach, a graduate of vocational agriculture involved in poultry production can be more gainfully employed through the rearing of fishes in ponds and/or tanks. Fishes such as catfish and tilapia can utilize waste food materials thereby reducing cost of feeding to low minimum. Moreover, fishes are of high demand to market with no discrimination of any kind. More importantly, that ponds can be constructed within a living environment is enough encouragement to persons who wish to be engaged in fish production as means of livelihood.

- v Establishment of Horticultural Gardens:** The establishment of flower gardens where different flowers species are raised for sale to individuals corporate organizations for beautification of compounds and living environments is becoming a very good source of self employment. A specialist that operates horticultural gardens can also be involved in landscaping of compounds for private individuals in the raising of seedlings such as those of oil palms which are of great demand. The establishment of horticultural garden does not require heavy capital outlay.

- vi Agricultural Products Processing:** This is another area of agriculture that is capable of generating good employment for young school leavers. This includes the processing of ripped oil palm fruits and palm kernel, processing of cassava into garri and starch, processing of rice, timber logs and others. With little capital, local processing plant can be fabricated and installed for farm products processing business that will yield regular income.

- vii Provision of Farm Services:** A graduate of agricultural education can be engaged in the provision of farm services such as pest and disease control, transportation of farm commodities, land preparation and with special machines and veterinary services.

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 influence 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 primary 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

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in agriculture. The government has been inconsistent in its agricultural development policies yet everybody needs food.

Lack of instructional resources is another problem. The problem 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 programme at all levels has 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, suggest 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:

1. Misconception of agricultural education by stakeholders as education for the dropouts or the "less intelligent ones"
2. Gross under-funding due to government misplace priority.
3. Very poor and inadequate facilities in institutions offering agricultural education.
4. Weak agricultural extension delivery system.
5. Government sole financier hip of the agriculture education programme in Nigeria.
6. Limiting land ownership and use rights especially in the southeastern states.
7. Mass illiteracy among the rural farmers.
8. Outright neglect of rural areas in provision of basic social amenities such as electricity, all season roads, and health facilities in food producing areas.
9. Lack of modern farm inputs/resources.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to focus on the functional role of Agricultural Education in the overall development of individuals for values, knowledge, skills and national development as enshrined in the blue print of the national Economic and Development Strategy (NEEDS).

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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 objectives- that of improving the lot of the suffering malnourished, ignorant and poor masses.

Recommendations

For agricultural education to be functional for values, knowledge, skills and national development, 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 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 organization 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 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 extension services, a non – formal agricultural education outfit, should be taken more seriously by stakeholders such as government and non government 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.

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