CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF TEACHING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA SCHOOL SYSTEM

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Abstract
This paper discussed the issue of challenges and prospects of teaching Agricultural Education in Nigerian education system. It has diagnosed the subject matter under the general overview of education and national development, explanation of the concept of agricultural education. It covered the needs for agriculture education for Nigeria; philosophy of agricultural education, challenges of agricultural education, prospects of agricultural education as well as recommendations for Nigeria’s National Development.

The essence of education is to develop in individuals the necessary knowledge, skills and habit that would enable them function effectively in a society they exist. From the colonial concept of training for administrative manpower needs to the present stage, education is still based on integration of individuals into sound and effective citizenry. In the opinion of Ukeje (1995), education is the bed rock and foundation of any developing country, since no meaningful development can take place without adequate manpower development to pilot the affairs of such nation.

In line with this ideology that growth and development of any nation is directly proportional to the nation’s achievement in the field of education, it is therefore necessary to stress that Nigerian can no longer accommodate the idea of producing individuals that are poorly equipped with the necessary skills that can readily ensure their survival in the labour market. Also the quality of education any nation imparts in
her citizens to a large extent, determine the success and shortfalls in a highly competitive economy as in Nigeria.

Disappointingly, agricultural Education which has brought innovation in Nigeria Educational System is rather receiving little or no attention in curriculum content development. In most educational institutions, agricultural education programmes are poorly handled either due to dearth of qualified staff or absence of facilities. Thus the foundation for the application of agricultural programmes for skill development in the citizens has remained poorly laid, incidentally, the technology take-off of the nation has remained delayed. With the fast changes trends as a result of huge financial support, educational development programmes, private and religious institutions investment in the sector, expectations are great from the educational institutions, especially in the training and imparting of skills necessary for the development of individual with worth while agricultural sector and their survival in the existing uncertain world labour market caused by inability of existing government establishment to absorbs or sustain the increasing workforce produced annually from the various schools.

The issue in contention now is to what extent has agricultural education assist in bringing changes in Nigerian education system to make individual independent and a complete being wherever they find themselves.

**Concept of Agricultural Education**

**What is Agricultural Education?**

There has been misconception by various academicians and authors on what agricultural education is. Assessment of each definition shows that agricultural education is considered in three perspectives as follows:

1. Education concerned with training farmers for the society.
2. Special education programmes devised for the preparation of Agricultural teachers for different levels of education.
3. Education process used in assisting established farmers in their farms to enable them over come the day-to-day problems in the farms.

In the context of agricultural education as a vocational subject, Umoh (2002) define it as a formal programme of instructive, systematically organized for in-school learners and established farmers who are willing and ready to be trained for careers in Agriculture. Here educating people through agriculture involves a structured information, delivered to an organized group of learners who are willing to participate in various programmes for innovation and ready to use acquired skills in changing the educational system in Nigeria. The national policy on agricultural education at various levels of institution stresses on imparting skills that the learners must use on specific agricultural jobs and the technical knowledge that support the learner’s knowledge of the jobs they are doing for the successful execution of such jobs. Worthy to note is that development of skills is not limited to crops and animal production but it covers such areas as soil management, machinery operation, processing, and storage of farm products.
Aside this learner acquires information on maintenance of favourable environment, community leadership development, participating in rural leadership activities and agric business such as crop dusting, soil testing machines serving and well devilling.

Akpan (2001) established that the scope of coverage of agricultural education could be examined in terms of eleven (11) occupational areas namely:

i) Crop science technology
ii) Soil science
iii) Animal science technology
iv) Agricultural machinery & Mechanization
v) Agricultural survey and farmstead
vi) Extension and Rural sociology
vii) Forest management
viii) Agricultural economics
ix) Farm youth organization and leadership development

The above coverage gives a good description of areas where innovation can be acquired through agricultural education and therefore confirm it as an education which teaches an individual the basic principles of doing things with a focus on right habits of performing a task in learners through repetitive training in experience from the occupations (Olaitan, 1993). Looking at agricultural education in all embracing perspective, it can be submitted that it is an education geared towards preparing people for skilled work. It also stipulate the training and retraining of individual to enable the person acquire specific appreciation of the patterns of behavior, attitudes, skills, knowledge, values and culture needed to become more productive and efficient in the society.

Philosophy of Agricultural Education

No educational programme including agricultural education can exist without a philosophy. Therefore, philosophy is the foundation upon which the edifice of educational programme is based. Agricultural education is based on the following philosophies.

1. Agricultural education stresses pragmatism: It is theories and practices lay emphasis on results as a test of its validity. As a pragmatic education, its courses, content, programmes and instructional processes and strategies are derived from a task in agricultural world of work.

2. Agricultural education emphases analytical and prescriptive approaches of education. It is on this ground that greater portion of time is spent surveying the needs of the learners and developing, testing and prescribing learning resources and strategies to meet the needs of the learners.

3. Agricultural Education believes that life has purpose and meaning: Human beings have the freedom to determine their own destiny within the constraint of democratic living and the right of others.
Agricultural Education believes that learning situations are designed from present life and work experiences. It is on the basis of this that learners can identify problems and workable solutions for today, realizing that new solutions may be necessary in the future. Hence, agricultural education contents are over flexible and dynamic.

Agricultural education strongly believes in the discovery of knowledge through scientific research and human experience. It is relative and changeable with time and circumstances. Empirical knowledge becomes the root while the basic tool is the problem solving technique.

Agricultural Education has its value stem primarily from learning by doing. This is the reason it recognizes individual activity, laboratory work, field trips, problem solving, associations and effects and supervised by trained and competent teachers which promote sound teacher-student relationship.

Agricultural Education is student and occupational centred. It used highly flexible curricula, instructional materials grow out of the need of students and are developed and field tested by experienced teachers.

Agricultural Education deals with cognitive, affective, and psychomotor activities in proportion to their daily work and living. It is more purposeful in its prescription of objectives, a natural outcome of daily involvement with students needs.

Agricultural education is dependent upon the technical knowledge of agricultural and agro-business, the psychology and methodology of education as well as the occupational and social aspects of living and working.

Agricultural education has community, which includes learners, teachers, teacher educators, supervisors and administrators. The community is concurred with the continuous development of agricultural education, clearly reflected in its teacher education programme. Teacher education in agriculture means more than pre-service education (certification). It also involves in-service and professional personnel development, curriculum and instructional materials, research and administration.

Agricultural education believes in the role of vocational guidance and counseling. In it, provisions are made for career education in agriculture; self-awareness, work-awareness, career awareness, education awareness, career decision-making and career preparation in agriculture.

Challenges of Agricultural Education in Nigerian School System

Presently, Agriculture Education as viewed by Mbaba (2000) reveals that:

1. Agricultural education at various levels of education is not being given the desired status and priority as a vocational based subject. Some people still consider agricultural education as an area of drop-out and the never do-wells.
2. The curriculums are grossly underfunded by stakeholders.
3. Agricultural education programmes lack modern and innovative facilities like equipment and materials for practical work. Therefore, students learn on theory basis and cannot perform after graduation.
4. The curriculum is inadequate and do not accommodate the diversity interest and needs of individuals, industry and society.

5. There is lack of interest in the sphere of agricultural education due to wrong and poor perception of the vacation by our youths, parents and the society in general. People assume are derogatory and try to walk away from the vocation.

6. There is lack of monitoring and evaluation of agricultural education programme by ministry of education to ensure that learning in this aspect of education is more of practical for skills acquisition.

7. The teaching of agricultural science is handled by graduate from institution of higher learning without practical experience, poor working condition, no proper understanding of roles and requirement of the world of work. Such teachers impact to the student the skills, attitude and knowledge that are inadequate and relevant to the areas in which graduate of the school system subsequently seek employment.

8. There is no textual and instructional material in our schools, the dearth of pupils texts, instructional material and teacher’s guide is detrimental to the acquisition of skills in agricultural training which can bring innovation in the system of education in Nigeria.

9. There is ineffective control especially where heads of agricultural education departments are appointed without regards to their area of specialization.

With no doubt, agricultural education need a review to meet the manpower needs of the nation, increase options available to students and may also serve as a model to other forms of learning in vocationally based subjects.

**Prospects of Agricultural Education**

Inspite of all the problems identified, there is the hope of great expectations that Agricultural Education will graduate from present state to a greater height because.

1. Agricultural Education will provide both old and young people with a sound knowledge of basic principles and techniques of agriculture and the motivation with which they can translate this knowledge into real improvements in agricultural productivity.

2. Agricultural education will help rural farmers to develop an understanding of the interrelationship of urban and rural life and provide counseling about agricultural occupations and the means of preparing for them.

3. It will provide training for specialist agricultural occupations such as livestock and plant breeding, food processing, preservation and storage techniques as well as agricultural financing and insurance to help reduce uncertainties for those producing in the future (Olaitan, 1984).

4. There will be increase in job opportunity for those interested in agricultural production as the continuous success of Agricultural education will attract many people into the profession.

5. The knowledge of Agricultural education will help to increase export trade. This will definitely influence the exportation of output to other countries for use thereby creating more jobs for people and increasing the economy of the country.
through foreign exchange earnings. This will help to diversity the earnings of the nation and boost our economy tremendously thereby reducing poverty.

6. There are many industries that could have been established to produce goods and offer employment to many people but this could not happen due to acute shortage of raw materials and infrastructures that prevented many investors from establishing industries in rural areas for the fear of failure. If agricultural education is encourage, there will be sufficient raw materials to feed into the industries which can produce finished goods or partially finished goods that can serve as raw materials into other industries. (Olaitan, 2009).

**Conclusion**

The survival of Nigeria as a viable society will depend on the health her educational institutions and how well the professors and other supporting staff are treated. The prospects of our educational system is laudable, our own concern at the end is our country to ensure that our educational institutions are able to simultaneously develop programmes and make it possible for us to be relevant in the world through effective participation in global economy.

**Recommendations**

Based on the role of Agricultural education in the vast development of Nigeria school system, we do intend to make the following recommendations;

1. Adequate funding through diversify sources from government, NGO’s and communities.
2. Agricultural education should be separated from general education.
3. Administration and supervision of agricultural education should be entrusted to experienced agricultural educators.
4. Agricultural education should be clearly defined to reflect its status as a vocational subject so that educators would not misconceive it for general education subject.
5. Government should create a training environment in school as obtained in the world of work.
6. Private or community schools with little or no facilities for vocational training should be merged.
7. Methodology should accommodate various methods like practical demonstration, assignment, problem solving approach, excursion and the discovery method.
8. Teachers should be motivated through prompt payment of salary, promotions, in-service training, research grant etc.

**References**


