

QUALITATIVE AND FUNCTIONAL AGRICULTURAL
EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN
NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria, being one of the developing countries of the world needs a qualitative and functional agricultural education for he sustained development. This paper emphasized on the need for the government to continue to initiate and embrace programmes that will foster national unity, food security and the employment of the unemployed youth roaming our streets. It also gives more light on the need for the utilization of Agricultural education to bring about sustainable development in Nigeria, pointing out the challenges that are being envisaged in the delivery of the qualitative and functional education. These include; the obsolete curriculum, deficit funding of educational programme and projects, deficit method of assessment in agriculture and poor attitude of the populace towards agriculture. In line with the purpose of agricultural education, certain recommendations were proffered.

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The key goal for vision 2020 in Nigeria according to the vision statement is that “by 2020 Nigeria will be one of the 20 largest economies in the world able to consolidate its leadership role in Africa and establish itself as a significant player in the global economic and political arena”. Education and agriculture were recognized as well as other parameters to be needed by the country to enhance her economic development performance in this direction. Qualitative and functional agricultural education is seen as a handy tool for the much needed sustained development in the nation. This means new knowledge, new technology and moral values that would generate national consciousness in the populace, who are meaningful contributors to social and economic development.

Quality, according to Oxford Advanced Learner’s dictionary of current English (2000) is defined as “high standard” and qualitative as “connected with how good something is rather than with how much of it is there”. The national policy on education (2004) in Nigeria places emphasis on making education both functional and utilitarian. The policy has the following objectives as it affects the teaching and learning of agricultural science:

1. To stimulate and sustain interest in agriculture
2. To enable students acquire basic knowledge and practical skills in agriculture
3. To prepare students for occupation in agriculture
4. To prepare students for further studies in agriculture.

The changing world phenomena towards technology needs to be spread to farmers hence there is need to give qualitative and functional education to the students, who are future farmers so that they would be able to apply the modern farming techniques for sustained agricultural development in Nigeria. A useful agricultural education for the Nigerian citizenry should have as a target the total well being of the people. A qualitative and functional agricultural education is needed to explain new technology to farmers and teach them how to adapt and adopt improved production practices in order to increase their production and income levels for much needed sustained development. There is need to acquire new knowledge and train the youths in agricultural practices (Egun, 1995) that will ensure steady and increased supply of food and some needed raw materials for industrial development in the country.

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of current English, to “sustain” means “to provide enough in order to live or exist or to make something continue for some time without becoming less”. A sustainable agriculture has to be ecologically safe, economically viable, socially just and humane. Sustainable agriculture

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is therefore producing enough to meet present needs without depleting the soil and other resources that supply them.

Development according to Uzo (2002) is a process of advancing from lower to a higher stage in economic terms. It means to advance from a traditional agrarian economic system to a modern industrialized one. Therefore a society is under developed when it is traditional society, that is, it had failed to develop mechanism which can launch it into a sustained process of economic growth.

The Need for Qualitative and Functional Agricultural Education for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Nigeria in terms of rich soil and mineral resources should have a better economy that is agriculturally driven in line with the vision 20 – 2020 and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the Federal Government. According to Wikipedia free Encyclopedia (2010), the logo 20 – 2020 means that by the year 2020, it is expected that Nigeria would be one of 20 largest economies in the world and it is also expected that Nigeria will consolidate its leadership in Africa.

Various Nigerian leaders had tried to improve the Nigerian economy through different means but with little impact. The former president, late Yar’adua came up with a strategy that could guide this decision and action to make it happen. In order for the new idea to be workable, he initiated a 7 – point Agenda. The major issues in the 7 – point agenda were power and energy, food security and agriculture, wealth creation and employment, mass transportation, land reform, security and qualitative and functional education (Aluko, 2007).

Food security stands as one of the points of the 7 – point Agenda and it is very important as Nwanze (2010) emphasized that agriculture and nutrition are part of food security and are vital and important issues that are needed to be addressed in our effort to fight poverty, make even development and create wealth in the nation, Nigeria. The desire to achieve the food security and national development objectives as exposed in the 7 – point Agenda makes the strengthening of agricultural production, storage and marketing as well as research and training needs much imperative. Amobi (2010) noted that national food security programme according to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources is to ensure sustainable access, availability and affordability of quality food to all Nigerians for the country to be a significant provider of food to the global community. Food security can be defined in this context as a goal to be achieved

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when there is an adequate food supply to which all members of the population have full access to (Christensen, 1991).

Food security during the world food conference of 1974 was discussed with emphasis on maintaining a network of sufficient food to meet the food needs of each country. Many developing countries, like Nigeria, thought that food security will depend on food importation. However, World Bank (as cited in Wanmali and Isiam, 2002) emphasized that food security is understood as having physical and economic access to sufficient food for healthy life by all the people. Agriculture is seen as the engine of economic growth and therefore requires to be enhanced through qualitative and functional educational system. Wanmali and Isiam (2002) also emphasized that investment in the agricultural sector will lead to increase in food production and household income and also strengthen linkages between agricultural sector as well as rural economy.

Agriculture is seen as a key part of the Nigerian economy and hence the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (2005) and Ukonze, Eze and Olaitan (2010) asserted that agriculture is one of the main source of national wealth in addition to oil. Agriculture provides food (as one of the basic needs of man), employment to the unemployed and raw materials to the industries. Wikipedia (2009) has observed that agriculture was the crucial factor which led to the rise of civilization in the husbandry and domestication of animals, cultivation of crops, thereby creating food for the increasing human population. Agricultural production cannot be successful where there are no innovations and new technologies in its teaching and learning situations, hence qualitative and functional agricultural education becomes imperative for sustained development in Nigeria.

Challenges of Agricultural Education for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Some of the major challenges of agricultural education for achieving sustained development in Nigeria include the following;

1. **Curriculum:** The curriculum of education constitutes one of the greatest challenges in the nation's educational system. The curriculum of all Nigerian educational system have become obsolete, not matching with current trend for science and technological development that is needed for the country to grow. It is true that the educational curriculum has not been thoroughly reviewed since the era of the British, who established our educational system and assisted in their development (Adeyegbe, 1992).

2. **Funding:** School environment requires a lot of infrastructure that are needed for effective teaching and learning. These infrastructures do not include only buildings but also farm implements such as tractors, simple farm tools and other farm inputs for the training of the youth in schools. It is hoped that the federal government will provide the bulk of funds along with the state governments assisting sufficiency to ensure qualitative and functional education in Nigeria. Relatively speaking, the statistics available shows how insufficient Nigeria's allocation to the educational sector has been. It is a general consensus that the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria are grossly under-funded. This is one of the causes of strike actions by the teachers and the lecturers in our tertiary institutions.
3. **Method of Assessment:** Assessment in school is based on written examination. The concept of examination though old as a measure of skill acquisition is still currently in use today. This system of written examination rather than practical examination in the field of agriculture is variously criticized (Faluyajo, 1986, Yoloye, 1988, Emeka, 1996) principally for being deficient in assessing of knowledge, more so, the system neglects the dimensional growth and development of the individual.
4. **Attitudinal Change:** Attitude is an individual predisposition or tendency to reach in certain ways towards objects, creatures, individuals, institutions, races, religion or practices. Uti and Sunday (1993) reported that students' attitude towards the vocational agriculture in particular has been negative expressed in not participating in practical lesson. This tendency by students usually causes poor performance in the practical programmes in agricultural education studies.

Summary

Qualitative and functional agricultural education has been found to become a key to the sustainability of agricultural development the world over. This is the one reason why many successive government in Nigeria Tried their best to make agricultural development a more crucial component of the national economy apart from the oil. The contributions of agricultural education to the training of youths can not be overemphasized, as this group of people will constitute the future farmers, producing to feed the nation, hence ensuring food security at global level.

Conclusion

The Purpose of agricultural education in Nigeria has been found to encourage and foster national unity and development. This has informed many of the reform programmes of many successive governments towards making agricultural production a

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crucial issue in the nation. It has been emphasized that the best education is one that opens our minds to think critically, our heart to embrace all even when we disagree and our hands to be practical in all endeavours. This depicts the whole aspect of qualitative and functional agricultural education, which is much needed to foster a more sustainable development in Nigeria, and should be given the right of place in the national planning of this nation.

Recommendations

Given the above need for qualitative and functional agricultural education for sustainable development in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proffered;

1. The government and the various stakeholders in curriculum planning, development and implementation should widen the scope and content of the existing curriculum, introducing new knowledge and innovations in the training of manpower to take up agricultural production as their mainstay.
2. The government should be able to seek for ways of funding enterprising schools leavers from the secondary schools and tertiary institutions in the country who want to make agricultural production their mainstay.
3. The family which is the first socialization centre should be able to inculcate good moral attitude in their children towards making agricultural production a rewarding business.
4. School, colleges and universities engaged in the training of future farmers should be well equipped with modern and sophisticated machines which are able to increase the student's knowledge and skills in agricultural production.
5. The government and the various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should be able to provide and supply inputs such as fertilizers and agro-chemical to be used in farm demonstration practical so as to ensure summative evaluation.
6. Schools should offer to the students trained as young farmers the opportunity to be engaged in farm practical in conjunction with written examination.

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