INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRATION: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR EFFECTIVE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

C. I. Obi

Abstract

This paper discusses institutional integration as an alternative for effective Agricultural education at all levels in Nigeria. In spite of the national policy on education, which is supposed to provide for skills acquisition, and in spite of the avenues for agricultural skills acquisition outside the formal schools, young school leavers still roam about unemployed. This is an indication that the agricultural curricula just like other school curricula need restructuring for better and brighter opportunities of employment after school and for production of self-directed and self-reliant persons. This paper therefore, proposes an alternative approach, which is a combination of informal, non-formal and formal educational strategies to prepare and equip the young school leavers for agricultural occupations for productive life.

Introduction

Nigeria education has come a long way, from the pre-independence colonial era when it was expected to serve the purpose of providing basic knowledge in reading, writing and arithmetic to the present era where it is expected to respond to the nation's aspirations of using education as a strategic tool to ensuring and enhancing human and material development for Nigeria. For some people, education has not fully addressed the problems of human and material development because of the more confounding problems affecting the nation. These problems according to Ali (2000), include endemic and pervasive poverty, ignorance, malnutrition, disease, low levels of production and manufacturing initiatives, unemployment and so on.

Over the last two decades or so, even the stone-deaf has heard of how education is denigrated as a result of under-funding, funds mismanagement, abuse of academic freedom, student cult activities, dilapidated infrastructure, lack of vision on the part of government in terms of putting in place an education that is responsive to national strategic goals, and so on and so forth.

Because it is not likely that the problems that burden education will be addressed in the near foreseeable future, new and different kinds of educational alternatives need to be identified and tried for complementing the present role which formal education is expected to play in our quest for national development and economic empowerment. It is in response to this search that this paper is conceived to address institutional integration as an alternative to effective agricultural education at all levels.

Concept of Institutional Integration

Institutional integration in this context refers to the combination of formal, non-formal and informal educational approaches for agricultural education. In recent years the field and concept of education have widened to include a variety of learning opportunities outside the formal school system. This has taken into account the fact that rural dwellers learn under various situations, some of which are more organized and supervised than others. Formal education according to Egohu (2000) refers to the highly institutionalized chronologically graded and hierarchically structured system of education beginning from the primary to the tertiary level. In contrast, informal education points to the life long process by which every person requires and accumulate knowledge, skills, attitude and insight from daily living experience at home, at the place of work or from social interaction. Non- formal education on the other hand refers to any other organized systematic educational activity outside the school system, which provides learning experiences to a group of people. Examples of this include adult literacy programmes, agricultural extension programmes, occupational skill training, political enlightenment programmes, instructions in family planning methods, instructions in oral dehydration therapy, and general adult education programmes.

None of these forms of education can be said to be inferior to the other, though they have some inadequacies which could be blamed on lack of the awareness of the need to integrate them so that the young school leaver has opportunities to acquire the necessary skill as well as the intellectual

formation for self development and self actualization. It has been observed that it seems justifiable, therefore, not to draw a sharp demarcation line to separate "formal" education in schools from non-formal and informal education outside the school as though these were innate structures of the educational field. The point has further been made that the more appropriate approach would be to consider the diversified educational field as a whole without any prejudice in order to take stock of its component parts, their specific features and the linkage between them.

Meaning of Effectiveness in Agricultural Education

Effectiveness according to Olaitan ***et al:(*** 1999) is an indication of the impact of a group of activities performed on the achievement of intended learning outcome. In relation to a programme or curriculum in agriculture, it is the observed impact of that programme in achieving it set goals and objectives. An effective programme is result oriented. It is rooted in functional components whose characteristics enhance the achievement of results within the framework of the set goals.

The characteristics of effectiveness denote some of that intrinsic factor that stimulates a programme to assist its participants to realize the objectives of that programme. In an educational cultural these factors will always culminate in bringing about a broader spectrum of experience, which the learner needs. In this circumstance, the programme now assists the learner to learn the techniques of learning, the skill of listening, thinking and doing and how to critically evaluate experiences acquired. Some of the characteristics of effectiveness include:

(i) The programme should have good quality teachers who are dedicated to their teaching and can go along with the learners in their efforts to learn.

(ii) The programme should accommodate students who need the programme and can benefit from it, progress within it and thereafter become dedicated on the job and useful to themselves and the community.

(iii) The programme should have a functional working curriculum that has a mission and which should not be above the capacity and competence of both the teachers and learners.

(iv) The Programme should be provided with adequate and functional facilities both in the major and minor segments of learning tasks.

(v) The programme should be within minimal cost, to ensure that all those who are interested and need the programme are accommodated.

(vi) The programme should be flexible within acceptable limits in order to accommodate all levels of students, and their characteristics or individual differences.

(vii) The programme should subject itself to acceptable and relevant evaluation technique that can help to detect its strengths and weaknesses.

(viii) The product of the programmes should have opportunities for gainful employment in the world of work.

(ix) The programme should have traits that can make it to compete successfully with other programmes and finally.

(x) The programme should be capable of satisfying the aspirations of its learners for gainful living.

Current Educational Practice in Nigeria

The current practice of agricultural education in Nigeria at all levels has been the traditional formal schooling. Contemporary educators such as Alaezi (1987, 1989), Olaitan and Aguisiobo (1991), Okorie (2000, 2001), to mention a few have criticized the traditional schooling system of education as being too bookish, theoretical, elitist, autocratic and more importantly bureaucratic and as such does not care much for the practical and individual aspirations and needs of the learners.

As suggested by Blau (1996:126), "if we want to utilize efficient bureaucracies, we must find democratic methods of controlling them lest they enslave us". It is the contention of this paper, that any educational organization which is committed to the effective and cognitive development of people, the systems associated with the learning function must be flexible and adaptive and should exhibit a low degree of bureaucracy. Merton (1997) suggests that bureaucracy affects personality development in that it encourages tendencies to adhere rigidly to rules and regulations for their own sake.

Bennis (1996), on his part states that when the properties of human personality are matched to the analysis of the formal organization, the concept evolves those healthy individuals will tend to have their self-actualization blocked or inhibited. He further believes that bureaucratic life fosters value systems, which lead to poor, shallow, and mistrustful relationships. Coupled with these consequences is a feeling of alienation, which Seeman (1999), observed.

In addition, the primary, secondary and tertiary education curricula in agriculture in Nigeria are rigidly structured and are disassociated from the realities of daily life (Egonu, 2000). On account of this, their contribution especially to rural development is doubtful since they serve to encourage mass exodus of a potential labour force from the rural sector to the urban areas (Okorie 2000), with attendant socio-economic problems. There appears to be need therefore to look for alternative educational strategies to redress this ugly situation.

Strategies For Institutional Integration

It is important to conceptualize integration of educational programmes in agriculture in terms of relevance and coherence in time and space. This would involve such activities as the identification and grouping of skills, the programming of the stages of acquisition to correspond with the various levels of study in the formal school curricula, as well as timetabling and methods of testing progress made in the acquisition process.

In the secondary school curricula, for example, there would be provision for well-thought out and well-planned skills acquisition programme to go along with the programme of study in the formal school subjects, running from the first to the final year classes. For example formal academic work could be conducted from Monday to Wednesday while skills acquisition lessons involving planned activities in the school farm are scheduled for Thursdays and Fridays weekly. Each student would be allowed to identify his/her interests and arrangement made either for the students to meet the master farmer in his farm or for the master farmer to come to the school and offer practical instructions to the students. Going outside the school once in a while for practical farm work will expose the students to the non-formal education environment and the realities on ground. By the end of the formal school programme, the student would be equipped with both formal education and practical farming skills. The students can then make an informal decision either to pursue further studies or to go into the world of work.

At the tertiary level, institutional integration can be achieved by establishing large school farms covering both crop and animal production ventures, making effective use of resource persons and other community resources and providing adequate support and supervision for the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). Efforts should therefore be made to ensure that the students of agriculture are posted to relevant agricultural establishments for realistic and meaningful practical training during the SIWES.

According to Alaezi (1987), 1989) and Egonu (2000), the developing countries that have integrated programmes of education with records of remarkable success include Ethiopia, Ghana, Tanzania, India, Kenya, and Botswana. It is therefore worth trying in Nigeria, though traces of institutional integration are noticeable in the present Nigerian agricultural education system as suggested by the National Policy on Education. Large-scale application is likely to result to a resounding success with good implementation strategies.

Benefits Derivable From Institutional Integration

The benefits derivable from institutional integration are rather obvious. It is both timesaving and cost-effective. Rather than start skill acquisition after completing formal schooling, the student of agriculture acquires both formal and non-formal education at the same time. For those students who are practically inclined, the opportunity of practical skill acquisition makes the formal school curriculum more tolerable. For them there is variety of programmes. From this will emerge individuals who are both self-directed and self-reliant. The result of this is that, unemployment will be reduced and both the society and the individual would benefit immensely from the integrated programme of education.

The characteristic features of a highly bureaucratic structure, which produce behaviour such as alienation, strict adherence to rules and regulation, spoon-feeding and mistrustful relationship

currently present in our school system, are minimized in programme integration to give way for meaningful development and responsible behaviour.

Recommendations

In the light of the above proposition, the following recommendations are made:

1. Proper avenues should be created at the primary and post-primary levels of agricultural education for meaningful institutional integration.
2. At the tertiary level, the Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) should be adequately financed and supervised as it serves as a link between agricultural theory and practical work.
3. Agricultural production experts and industrialists should be invited on regular basis to come and interact with the students as resource persons and change agents for meaningful learning.
4. Students' performance evaluation including continuous assessment tests should be criterion-referenced based and not norm-referenced. This is to ensure that the production tasks involved in the educational programme are properly mastered before graduation to enhance employment potentials in the job market.
5. As soon as the students come back from SIWES, they should be required to demonstrate practically the skills and practical learning experiences they claim to have acquired during the scheme before they are finally graded. This is more probing than the mere oral defense to which they are hitherto subjected.

Conclusion

It is the view of this paper that Nigerian agricultural education system would benefit immensely form a re-organization and a more meaningful regard to the affective and cognitive development of individuals by offering new opportunities and learning strategies and structures that are flexible, adaptive and less bureaucratic, Consequently an integration of formal and non-formal education structures with well-organized, articulated and flexible programmes is suggested for production of self directed and self-actualized citizens to the benefit of the country. Finally, to enhance desirable results from the integration alternative, there is need for all the stakeholders in the nation's agricultural education system to uphold the virtues of honesty, transparency and good conduct in the management of educational resources to ameliorate the educational problems highlighted in this paper.

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