



QUALITY AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION: A KEY TO SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCY IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture has been described as the mainstay of the economy of any nation. It is described as work oriented programme that is capable of providing the needed knowledge and skills for human resources development which will in turn contribute towards national development. This paper therefore discusses the concept of quality agricultural education, entrepreneurial competency, challenges of quality agricultural education as well as the strategies for sustaining entrepreneurial skills in agriculture through quality agricultural education, it was recommended that adequate finding be extended to the various vocational training and agricultural research institutes to ensure the sustainability of already acquired skills in agricultural production. Also, Seminars and Workshops should be organized by vocational education institutions for industrial workers, supervisors, and students on how best to provide entrepreneurship skills in agriculture.

Introduction

Agriculture is the activity most essential for human survival; it feeds people, produces basic commodities for society and provides gainful employment for the majority. Yet with rapid population growth in Nigeria, demand for agricultural products outstrips supply with the result that natural resources are being depleted through deforestation, soil degradation, pollution and loss of biological diversity among others. The search for sustainable forms of agriculture and rural development is related to the need to provide quality agricultural education that will inculcate entrepreneurial skills, generate employment, increase food production and above all prevent the depletion of the natural resources or promote climatic change.

Concept of Quality Education

The standard of education and the level of achievement can be measured by the quality of its input and output. Quality education refers to the degree of excellence both in educational input

and output. Oguntimehin in Tijjani (2007) defines quality as the concept which emphasizes the worth or appropriateness of the resources available to education. Quality is the degree of conformity to standard and interest or enduring good traits or characteristic that makes a person somewhat special or superior. According to Fadipe (2004) quality in education deals with issues of relevance, validity, functionalism, excellence and efficiency in the achievement of educational goals and priorities.

Vocational Education

Vocational education is an educational programme that prepares individuals for the world of work as a teacher, office employee or to be self-employed. A lot of definition, have been given to vocational education by many authors. According to Okoro (1993) vocational education is any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare person for employment in recognized occupation. Similarly, Oranu (1992) perceives vocational education as the training that enables one to carry on successfully a socially useful occupation. He stated that this definition refers to vocational education as training for useful employment in trade and industrial, agricultural, business, home making etc. vocational education therefore is a process of getting people ready and keeping them ready for the types of services needed by the society.

Agricultural Education

Osinem (2005) saw agricultural education as a programme designed to inculcate skills, abilities and knowledge in vocational agriculture to youth who make up about 80 percent of any country's labour force. It is aimed at raising the productivity of people by improving their skills, enterprise, initiative, adaptability and attitude. Quality Agricultural Education therefore is that type of agricultural education that is capable of providing the needed competency (knowledge and skills) in various aspect of agriculture such as tillage, crop production, animal production, processing, storage, soil conservation, irrigation, drainage just to mention few for sustainable agricultural production; these needed competencies could be referred to as the entrepreneurial competency required by an individual to be successful in agricultural production.

Entrepreneurial Competency

Entrepreneurship deals with attitude modification to create and develop an enterprising mind. Entrepreneurship has been defined in a variety of ways by different authors, Ubenyi (2007) described entrepreneurship as individual's ability to seize opportunities and to turn idea into action, ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives and be creative, innovative and ready to take risks. While competency according to Robenson (2001) is the ability to do something to a level that is acceptable to an individual. Therefore, entrepreneurial competency, according to kinggundy (2002) refers to the sum of the entrepreneur's requisite attribute for successful and sustainable entrepreneurship, these attribute includes attitude, values,

belief, knowledge, skills, abilities, personality, wisdom, expertise (social, technical and managerial) mindset and behavioural tendencies. Also Cunningham and Lischeron (1991) identified six schools of thought on entrepreneurship that explain what constitutes an entrepreneur, of the six schools, three assert that entrepreneurial traits are innate and cannot be developed or trained in the classroom. The other three schools of thought hold that entrepreneurial skills and competencies can be acquired through formal training. Rabbior and Lang (1996) mentioned some entrepreneurial skills that should be given priority attention by teachers and managers of training institution to include coaching and mentoring, effective sharing of information, thinking in new ways, seeing opportunities that others do not, seeing the need for something not produced, innovating and using new and existing technology in new ways, considering more than one solution to a problem, seeing problems as opportunities in disguise and recognizing trends and changes. The aforementioned attributes can only be transmitted through quality agricultural education for improving entrepreneurial competency towards the realization of the objectives of agricultural education.

Objectives of Agricultural Education

The following are objectives of agricultural education as stated by Drawbough and Hull in Olaitan (1996).

1. To develop agricultural competencies needed by individual engaged in or preparing to engage in production agriculture.
2. To develop an understanding of and appreciations needed to enter and progress in agricultural occupation.
3. To develop agricultural competencies needed by individuals engaged in or preparing to engaged in agricultural occupations other than production agriculture.
4. To develop the ability to secure satisfactory placement and to advance in an agricultural occupation through a programme of continuing education.
5. To develop those abilities in human relation which are essential in agricultural occupation.
6. To develop the abilities needed to exercise and follow effective leadership in fulfilling occupational, social and civic responsibilities.

Challenges of Quality Agricultural Education

Providing quality agricultural education is hampered or impeded as a result of mountains of setback especially in Nigerian setting. Some of these challenges include.

Inadequate facilities; equipment in the training institution. Vocational Institution like every other educational institution are inadequately equipped. Classroom, and desks, workshop, laboratories, libraries, school farms are inadequate for effective teaching and learning, tools and equipment

necessary for imparting knowledge are inadequate. The ones available are obsolete. Olaitan (1996) vocational education cannot achieve much in producing quality skilled human resources when facilities necessary for the training are inadequate.

Poor organization and supervision of industrial training, the essence of industrial attachment is to provide students the opportunity of acquiring the much needed industrial experience to make up theoretical classroom instruction. The number of well-equipped industries to take in students is indeed very limited and the number of students for these few chances is increasing by the year. Even at that, some organization for certain or inexplicable reasons reject students posted to them for industrial training, one major problems facing proper training for the world of work is the inadequate facilities for attachment. Okoro (1993) stated that, the responsibility for placement has been shifted to students, some of who spent half of the allocated time canvassing for places that would suit their selfish interest rather than their vocational development.

Poor staffing: poor staffing in most of our vocational institution is a direct result of poor remuneration. The situation is most glaring in our public secondary schools where most vocational and technical subject are taught by unqualified teachers or not taught at all due to scarcity of qualified teachers. Our institution have lost most of the qualified staff to the industrial sector who are willing to give them higher pay and incentives. Those that stay do not perform their duties with joy and satisfaction and sometimes engage in private practices that help them make both end meets.

Stigma: stigma according to Ibrahim et al in Sani (2008) found that vocational education is often regarded as education for the mentally handicapped, the less privileged in the society and for those who cannot do well in other popularly accepted fields of study. This is often traced back to the fact that the colonial masters and early policy makers who pioneered education were themselves literary men and women who had qualifications in classics and similar disciplines. Vocational education is therefore poorly managed right from the beginning, as it was left in the hands of those who know little or nothing about it. Other problems are poor funding of training institution and research institutes as well as vocational education programmes and projects.

Inadequate provision for practical teaching and field work. Most students of agriculture are presently not doing enough practical and field work which ordinarily supposed to have provided them with firsthand experience of how to practice agriculture. Laogun (1981) stressed that students should be allowed to do some interesting job in the farm like planting, watering, observing, using improvised institutional materials, students learn best by participation in productive experiences. He added that they become stimulated and interested more by exposure to and discussion of actual experience than from reading a paragraph in a book.

Strategies for Sustaining Entrepreneurial Skills in Agriculture.

1. Establishment of vocational institution – In order to sustain and improve entrepreneurial skills in agriculture, there is need for the establishment of more vocational institution, some of the institution are required at the state level, this include the universities of agriculture, agricultural research institute, colleges of agriculture. While others are required at the local level and towns. These include the vocational training centres, technical colleges, women development centre etc. If these institutions are well located as stated above many people will be trained, human resources will be improved and people will be employed either by government or industries or be self-employed.
2. There should be co-operation and commitment by agricultural industries and companies with vocational education institution in order to support financially and otherwise, in support of this idea, the fourth common wealth education conference (1986) recommended that industries should be closely associated with technical education in and through policy making, human resource planning, curriculum development, provision of opportunities for industrial experiences, consultancy services, part time courses and vocational guidance. It also stated that this cooperation would ensure that the technical education produce the number and quality of technical workers required for industry.

This will greatly help to build up the country's economic status and the require self-reliance.

3. Proper organization and supervision of industrial attachment, qualified and committed staff and supervisors should organize industrial attachment, students of agriculture should be attached to the appropriate industries and farm centres to ensure the acquisition of real life experience in agricultural activities.
4. Updating industrial strategies and content through Information Communication Technology (ICT). A resourceful teacher could generate most recent knowledge both for himself and for his student through the ICT. This technology involves creation, processing, storage, retrieval, transmission of data and information using computers and telecommunication. I.C.T. is categorized into two – The Low Technology Media and the High Technology Media (Amech in Ugwu 2006) the high technology media include the computer internet, electronic mail (e-mail) facsimile (fax), electronic bulletin board, data base, telephone, teleprocessing, teleconferencing, the world wide website (www). Each

of these or their combination could provide any teacher of learners with all that he needs to keep abreast with new knowledge in every field of endeavour.

5. Government should provide social amenities for good administration of vocational education institution, the social amenities such as water, electricity, good road will facilitate the use of tools, equipment and machines for teaching and learning. It should be extended to the rural area to help our rural industries and various vocational centres grow. This will encourage young graduate in the rural area, to start off business on their own.

Conclusion

The nature and quality of education has been the concern of man since inception. Man has been striving to improve the quality of education for the benefit of the society. Quality agricultural education is an integral part of general education which can make the students to become an effective citizen with adequate practical skills and attitude that are essential for success in a specific vocational occupation. The present economic down turns notwithstanding, a well-articulated effort should be made towards the enhancement of vocational agriculture that is capable of providing and sustaining entrepreneurial skills in learners. This will be a right step in the right direction. The aims of vocational agriculture are loud able and if pursued vigorously and

implemented through quality agricultural education it will go a long way in providing employment, reducing poverty as well as improving the economic status of the nation.

Recommendations

1. Adequate funding should be extended to the various vocational training institution and agricultural research institute as well as vocational education programmes and projects to ensure the sustainability of already acquired skills in agricultural production.
2. Seminars and workshop should be organized by vocational education institution for industrial, workers, supervisors, and students on how best to provide entrepreneurship skills in agriculture for their students’.
3. Government poverty alleviation programme such as NAPEP and MDG could be introduced to vocational education students in our various tertiary institutions. Those students with outstanding performance in entrepreneurial skills acquired should be empowered financially or materially on graduation. This may encourage them to set up their own small scale business enterprise.

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