Cooperative Education: Extent of utilization in Nigeria's Vocational Agricultural Education programmes

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CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION: EXTENT OF UTILIZATION IN NIGERIA'S VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the co-operative education component of education in Nigerian Agriculture. It identified lapses in the implementation of the components and suggested implementation strategies that could enhance the improvement of cooperative education in the country. The paper concludes that unless something positive is done to change the present trend in agricultural education in favour of cooperative education in agriculture, its role will continue to be reduced to skim on the fringe of instructional programmes in Nigerian agriculture.

REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

Despite the contribution of the oil sector to the Nigerian economy, to say that Nigeria is an agricultural country is not an overstatement. This is because agriculture directly supports 65% of the Nigerian population (Abba et al, 1985). Nigeria has an area of 93 million hectares, most of which supports agriculture in one form or the other (Onazi and Mayer, 1976, Anande-Kar, 1986 and Amile-Gyuvo, 1987). A close inventory of Nigerian landmass as expressed by the above reports show that 40 million hectares of the land is under Sahel, Sudan and Guinea Savannah. This parcel of land is used extensively for grazing by the nation’s herd. 8.3 million hectares are devoted to forest reserves, while 9.1 million hectares are used for arable and tree crops. The rest are either used for residential purposes or left to fallow. However, Nigeria’s agriculture is traditional. Its chief characteristics are small holding, use of small tools and hard labour, use of predominantly unimproved seeds and other propagative parts, production of low yielding species of plants and animals, over supply of cheap human and animal labour, and compartmentalization of agricultural land. Another
characteristic is that the majority of farmers are illiterate who are not knowledgeable about modern practices in agriculture.

Today agricultural education is looked at as a veritable tool for positive changes in Nigerian Agriculture. For agricultural education to effectively discharge this role, the learning activities provided have to be carried to the doing state. One of the ways of carrying these activities to the doing state is by cooperative education in agriculture. Burdine (1978) considered cooperative education as a vital activity in agricultural education, because according to him, it helps to bridge the gap between school life and the world of work by blending meaningful job experiences with related educational courses. Further, cooperative education in agriculture enable students to carry out professional responsibilities in their area of choice in agriculture. This develops their occupational competencies and brings about a more rapid maturation of the students in their chosen area of specialization as they become aware of their weaknesses during training and work towards improving same.

These advantages of cooperative education in agriculture corroborates the fact expressed by Ogbazi (1985) that there exist series of occupation in the world of work which, when learned without experience on the job, leave the students inadequately prepared for employment in the occupation of their choice.

The fact about work-oriented education is also true of programmes of agricultural education. As at the moment, agricultural education in Nigeria seems to be too slow in bringing about the desirable socio-economic and agricultural transformation among the recipients of the education. This is raising questions as to whether the training needs of the clientele are being met. It is the view of many (Ogbazi, 1985 and Abelega, 1994) that lack of cooperative education in agriculture is responsible for this poor quality of agricultural education in Nigerian schools and colleges. Therefore, this paper focuses on the cooperative component of agricultural education programmes with the view to ascertaining its status in Nigerian schools; its quality and relevance to the needs of the students and society, factors militating against it, as well as, the extent to which such programmes are being implemented. This enable us to demonstrate, whether or not the absence (or presence) of cooperative education in Nigerian agriculture is responsible for the inability of current graduates of agriculture to perform creditably to facilitate such a change. An assessment of this nature is also important because it will necessitate complete re-orientation that will be practically and socially desirable by the employers, staff, students and parents.
THE MEANING OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

It would have been unnecessary for us to define cooperative education to a cream of scholars as would be reading this article. However, the human intellect empower each individual to modify the general concepts used in everyday life for his peculiar use in certain instances for purpose of effecting communications among members of the *homo sapiens*. Consequently, we shall put together few definitions that will provide the framework upon which our discussion will take its roots.

Johnson (1978) defined cooperative education as any cooperative efforts between businessmen and educators for purpose of providing hand-on type experiences for students in actual business establishment. According to him, this arrangement tailors the training in the school in such a way as to complement the on-the-job training. When viewed this way, cooperative education becomes a means of inculcating skills, attitudes, and knowledge required to achieve the occupational objectives of the students. The time devoted to it is other than the regular classroom activity. This time may or may not be paid for, because, it is considered an integral part of the total education programme for an individual preparing for or progressing in a chosen occupation. Further, U.S. Vocational Bulletin 225 quotes the American Vocational Amendment of 1968 (P.L. 90-576) as defining cooperative education thus.

... Vocational education for person who, through a cooperative arrangement between the school and employers receive instruction including required academic courses and related vocational instructors by alternation of study in the school with a job in any occupational field, but these two experiences must be planned by the school and employees so that each contributes to the students’ education and his employability. Work periods and school attendance may be alternate half-days, full days, weeks or other periods of time.

When cooperative arrangement is made for the purpose of providing students who have chosen agriculture as a profession with hand-on experiences in agriculture, it is called cooperative education programme in agriculture. Evans (1978) defined cooperative education in agriculture as a method whereby agriculture students are encouraged to work in a
supervised occupational experience related to their career objectives. He maintained that cooperative education programme is a unique plan of education designed to integrate theoretical classroom and shop study with planned and supervised occupational experience in selected educational employment assignments that assist student to establish and achieve goals appropriate to their specific needs. Williamson (1978) view cooperative education in agriculture as a structured, comprehensive on-the-job training programme for students (who) enrolled in vocational agriculture to explore their career objectives and learn additional skill which will be saleable when the student enters the world of work after completion of school. In his opinion, the programme is designed for the student who demonstrates the maturity and understanding that are expected of him from his employer, parents, community and teacher/coordinator.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the word co-operative defines the atmosphere and arrangements that exists between the school and the employers. Consequently, we can conclude that any cooperative arrangement between the school and an employer for the purpose of educational value to a student could be termed cooperative education.

Furthermore, it needs to be noted that the job in which the student is placed is selected because of its appropriateness for the occupational objectives of the student, and that the experiences are given under a cooperative arrangement between the school and the business involved.

ACTIVITIES OF A CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN AGRICULTURE

Before meaningful assessment of the extent of utilization of any activity is carried out, one needs to be familiar with the activity itself. This is because without a full knowledge of the activity and the issues involved, one may find himself at sea as to what - and - what to look for in his assessment.

For this reason, we would briefly examine the activities involved in worthwhile co-operative education. Phipps (1980) identified the following activities in co-operative education:

- Exploratory experiences;
- Placement in agricultural oriented business and jobs; and
- Related and general related instruction.
Exploratory Experiences

Exploratory experiences involve study visits with workers in agriculture for the purpose of getting a feeling for the work involved in the various jobs, understanding the working conditions and getting acquainted with the life style of workers in the different jobs.

Placement

Placement activity involves locating students with inadequate opportunities for practical skill on the job to acquire desirable manipulative skills, attitudes, work habits and understanding necessary for success in their chosen agricultural occupation. By so doing, it enables students to develop realistic conception of the world of work in agriculture that leads to genuine interest and participation in productive activities.

Related and General Related Instruction

Related instruction is that aspect of cooperative education that correlate technical related knowledge with on-the-job activities. They are mainly provided to assist the students who is involved in co-operative education to be able to solve problems he meets on the job. This is the aspect of job experience that must be studied in the classroom in order to bring about mastery of technical aspect required for participation on the job. On the other hand, general related instruction enables the student to effect a smooth transition to the world of work. It provides instructions on how to apply for a job, how to work with others, career planning, the government and you, etc. General related instruction is distinctive of any cooperative education programme (Nelson 1978).

STATUS AND PRACTICE OF CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AGRICULTURE

The initial educational system in Nigeria was fashioned after the British Public Schools. As a result, the curriculum remained the type that would prepare prospective graduates of post-primary institutions, especially, secondary school, for entry into the university until 1981 when the 6-3-3-4 system came into operation.

Under the British administration, the concept of a comprehensive secondary school which will include a vocational or occupation education was not there. Education was mainly to provide interpreters, clerical staff
and artisans for the colonial structure established and maintained by their home government. Although the colonial masters left at the instance of our attainment of independence and self government, the educational system was maintained, and in some cases, jealously guided. What emerged in the name of a change was an uncontrollable struggle amongst the elites in respect of who and who will step into the existing social structure. The summary is that an elitist neo-colonial bourgeois class emerged. Its main pre-occupation was to use the instrument of state power to intentionally groom and perpetuate their progenies that will take over the leadership of this country from them. Consequently, there was no sympathy for those who had talents outside of the prevailing mental and academic orientation.

Just like other vocational education programmes that suffered neglect, vocational agriculture education was operational only outside of the secondary schools in form of farm institutes and farm centres. These farm centres and farm institutes were ran and administered by the various state ministries of agriculture. The objective of the institutes was to enable primary seven leavers to acquire improvement in agricultural technology and disseminate same to their local communities when they return to their family land. On the other hand, farm training centres provided a nine month training avenues for employees of ministry of agriculture field overseers whose duty it was, to instruct and bear the brunt of extension efforts in the states by carrying agricultural technology and innovations to the farmers. The highest form of co-operative education that could be identified in the pre-6-3-3-4 system of education is the industrial attachment that was undertaken by students of schools of agriculture administered by the university, and Federal and State Ministries of Agriculture. However, the co-operative agricultural education was not closely supervised by teacher co-ordinators. Much of what the student learned on the job depended on his initiative and his employer’s discretion.

As it was in the days of the pre-6-3-3-4 system of education, co-operative education as a formalised component of vocational instruction has not been properly accorded its place in Nigerian agriculture education programmes. There are weak links in the planning and implementation of the programme between teachers, the students, the parents, and the employers. What teacher co-ordinators do is that as soon as the student indicates choice of an employer, a letter of introduction is issued to him without the teacher co-ordinator determining whether or not the agency is successful in what it is purported to have been doing in terms of suitable facilities and equipment, as well as desirable work environment. Further, the teacher-co-ordinator does not make an outline of the competencies that
should be acquired, let alone, visiting the employer to ascertain whether or not he will be willing to spend time and money necessary for the student to reach these objectives. As expected, some of the students quickly make friends with their immediate bosses with the result that they become covered whether or not they come to work. This orientation in co-operative education becomes anything but quality supervised occupational experience, which should be the whole mark of quality co-operative education in agriculture. Handling co-operative agricultural education this way results in turning out graduates without practical skills in occupation they are trained in. It is little wonder that Ogbazi (1985: 83) commented that:

in Nigeria labour market today, much emphasis is place on experience because high school and college graduates have no opportunity to gain experience while they are in school....

When this basic experience-in-training is denied the graduates, they are left with less technical competence that is well grounded in practical experience. It is for this reason that it is important to get potential workers to gain experience while in training instead of acquiring them while out of training. This is because, as Ogbazi (1985) observed, experience gained while out of training can not be compared with experience gained by workers while in training.

As if these lapses in the operation of co-operative agricultural education programmes at the post-secondary Nigerian school system are not enough, most post-primary schools that need co-operative agricultural programme do not have it in their curriculum. Consequently, this has led to a loss in one of the most essential component of a well-rounded vocational education that our leaders are paying lip service to. The neglect of this essential component of vocational education in our educational situations precipitated the situation that warranted Okorie and Ezeji (1988) to advise the government to incorporate such a programme in the secondary school system with a view to promoting the acquisition of skills in Industry.
CONSTRAINTS TO EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF CO-OPERATIVE AGRICULTURE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Our discussion so far has shown that co-operative education in agriculture is needed in our public school system to make skill acquisition a reality in our educational system. However, a close look at the school system reveals almost a total absence of this essential component of agricultural education. What is responsible for this apparent neglect and/or inefficiency in its utilization? Is it that our educational administrators are unaware of the importance and existence of this vital facet of vocational agriculture? Put in other words, is it deliberate that this essential part of the total vocational education programme in agriculture is poorly served or totally omitted? Or are there structured problems militating against the utilization of co-operative education in agriculture? These and other questions are answered in this section of the paper.

Realistically, no one has the capacity to diagnose Nigeria’s problems. Just as it is impossible to diagnose the problems of Nigeria’s macro-society, it is equally difficult to isolate the problems of the sub-sets of the educational system. This is also true with respect to co-operative education in agriculture. For this reason, whatever we will be able to do in this section may appear as scratching the tip of the iceberg deeply embodied in the sea. Nevertheless, half bread is better than none. Accordingly, we have selected the following problems for brief discussion:

1) Non-availability of criteria for approving training centres;
2) No training plan for the students on co-operative education in agriculture;
3) Large student population with limited agricultural businesses and industries
4) Poor communication and other infrastructure facilities
5) Inadequate finance
6) Inadequate trained manpower to handle co-operative agricultural education
7) No co-operation between the school and industry for training agricultural manpower;
8) Inadequate planning by the school personnel; and
9) Agricultural teachers are overloaded with regular classwork.

Non-availability of Criteria for Approving Training Centres

The selection of training agencies for individual students is the cornerstone of a successful co-operative occupational experience programme. This is because these centres provide the first real-life working environment for the trainee to experience, master and evaluate their skill in
their occupational choice. For this reason, it would be helpful for an instructor to speak individually with the student concerning their vocational interest. Once such interest(s) is/are identified, an honest search for an ideal agency should be initiated. While locating a training agency, emphasis should be placed on students' interest, the suitability of facilities and equipment, the desirability of the working environment as well as the efficiency of operation of the agric-businesses being used. Unfortunately, these necessary steps are hardly followed in Nigeria. Consequently, the participants in (what appears to be) co-operative agriculture education benefit very little from the programme.

2. No Training Plan for the Students of Co-operative Education in Agriculture

Two essential components are paramount in the design of a quality co-operative education in agriculture. These are related instruction and the skill to be performed on the job. In designing the training plan, a list of topics to be taught at school is prepared in addition to an outline of skills to be performed on the job. This plan is then sent to the parents students and employers to validate. The essence of doing this is to get the employer, students and parents to agree and understand their commitment to the programme. When this step is not taken the parents, students, teachers and employers do not have a thorough understanding of the knowledge and skill to be learned in the training programme. As a result, the consequences of poor performance is hidden. We venture to say that this is one of the reasons responsible for poor quality of cooperative agriculture education in Nigeria.

2. Poor Communication and Infrastructure Facilities

Communication system in Nigeria is very inefficient. This is true of land transport, as it is for water air, surface, mail and wireless. The consequence is that there is a wide gap between the parents (especially rural parents), employers and staff in agricultural education. This wide gap results in inadequate flow of information to and from the interested parties in the education process. When there is a break-down in communication, co-operation which is a necessary ingredient in co-operative education in education is impaired. Poor communication also hinders flexibility in movement.

It is common sight to see concerned parents spending a whole day trying to get in touch with his child’s teachers and vice versa. This type of
contact could be easily made by telephone where the services are available and efficient.

Finance

Students and staff involved in co-operative education in agriculture need to move about. The resources needed for co-operative education have to be purchased. Emoluments for students have to be paid. All these activities result in heavy demand for money. Unfortunately, the economy of Nigeria is not buoyant enough to foot all these bills accruing from the procurement and utilization of these resources. As a result, anything but quality co-operative education emerged.

No Co-operation Between the School, Parents and Industry for Training

As noted earlier, for cooperative agriculture education to succeed, there should be adequate co-operation between the school personnel, the parents, students and the industry. This co-operation can only be secured by an understanding of the aims and purposes of co-operative education programme by all persons concerned. The development of this understanding have to be undertaken before the co-ordinator launches the classroom instruction on co-operative education. Unfortunately, no such efforts is made before students are posted out for co-operative agriculture education in Nigeria. As a result, ignorance compels interested parties, especially Nigerian employers, to feel no commitment to students’ cooperative education in agriculture. They look at it as the school programme forgetting that the individuals being trained will ultimately be turned to them for employment. This state of affairs is greatly reducing the efficiency of co-operative education in agriculture.

Inadequate Co-ordination by the School Personnel

An ideal co-operative education in agriculture is planned year-to-year for students to gain the greatest benefits possible. Before this can be accomplished, a training agreement which is an understanding on the part of the students, parents, teachers and employers relative to condition of employment is needed to secure a satisfactory situation in which the student and employer need to be aware of what students need to be taught in the classroom and what is expected of them when they are placed on the job. This demands that the teacher should make an outline of the competencies that should be acquired and then visit the employers to see if he is willing to spend the time and money necessary for the students to reach these objectives.
As pointed out earlier, this type of co-ordination is scarcely done in Nigeria. As a result, co-operative education in agriculture, which is philosophically and psychologically sound become haphazard and the chance that proper skills can be developed becomes purely accidental.

**Agricultural Teachers are Overloaded with Regular Classroom Work**

You will agree that co-operative agriculture education is energy and time consuming. Therefore, it is required that adequate time and energy be made available for the programme. This is not the case in Nigeria. Instead, co-operative education in agriculture is looked upon as an appendage to classroom vocational instruction. Consequently, little or no time is made available for supervisory staff of the programme to plan, design, implement and co-ordinate the programme. As a result the quality of the programme suffers. It is no surprise therefore, that co-operative education has been reduced to skim on the fringe of instructional programme in vocational agriculture education in Nigeria.

**Strategies for the Improvement of Co-operative Agricultural Education in Nigeria**

All hope is not lost for co-operative agriculture education in Nigeria. The role of co-operative education can be achieved in Nigeria agriculture education if:

1) Teachers co-ordinators organise local advisory committees. These committees should be made of laymen, professionals, parents and employers. The aim is to get as many members of the community represented in the programme as possible. These committees will be valuable communication links with the committees in advertising the programmes to friends and associates, as well as suggesting potential individuals or business that might be interested in assisting with the cooperative programme. The committees may also bring to the notice of the teacher-co-ordinators the opportunities that exist in the communities which they are aware of. This will no doubt, improve the image of the programme and facilitate community co-operation and participation.

2) Teacher-co-ordinators make visits to potential agencies to:
   i) See whether suitable opportunities and facilities are available for developing the needed abilities.
   ii) Find out what will be expected of the student and the nature of work to be done.
iii) Discuss the objectives of co-operative education in agriculture and the reason why the students need the experience.
iv) Find out what the working condition will be.
v) Secure the full co-operation of the employer.
vi) Work out a plan that will provide for effective training and for the development of the abilities needed for training and for the development of the abilities of needed by the student(s).
vii) Discuss the amount of wages.
viii) Point out the need for students to develop abilities through the use of approved practice; and
ix) Discuss, and if possible, demonstrate to the employer procedures to use in training the students on the job.

5. The school creates and maintains an efficient placement service which will be charged with the responsibility of locating a student on a farm for experience. This placement service should be primarily for students not living on the farms but interested in securing farm experience that provides vocational skills necessary for employment and those whose home farm facilities provide inadequate opportunities for practical skills.

6. Teacher-co-ordinators launch public campaign to popularise co-operative education in agriculture. It is necessary for teacher-co-ordinators to develop in the general public, an understanding of the activities of the co-operative agriculture education so that the public will realise that some of the most effective teaching in agriculture is done outside the four walls of a classroom and that much of the instruction required is best given where a job is done.

7. The teacher-co-ordinator evolves workable criteria for approving training agencies that offer on-the-job training for the students of co-operative education. As pointed out before, predetermined criteria for approving training agencies are basic to effective co-operative education in agriculture. These criteria may require that:

i) the training agency should fall within the area of interest indicated by the students;
ii) the training agency should have suitable facilities and equipment;
iii) the training agency should be a successful and well run business and
iv) the training agency should provide a desirable environment in which the student may develop saleable skills, pride in accomplishment and a desire to achieve.

8. The teacher-co-ordinator makes the educational objectives known to the employer, especially co-operating supervisory staff.
Summary and Conclusion

We have seen that co-operative education in agriculture is an important means of inculcating skills in students that enroll in agricultural education programmes. Unfortunately this aspect of agricultural education is highly misused or under utilised in Nigeria’s agricultural education programmes due to unavoidable problems. As a result, this precious gift to agricultural education by the American Vocational Education Act of 1963 USA Bulletin of Federal Vocational Education Acts, Pp. 18 has become a worthless speck of dust in Nigeria agriculture Education. Unless something is done to change this present practice, the role of co-operative education will continue to be reduced to a skim on the fringe of instructional programmes in Nigerian Agriculture.

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**NEW TECHNOLOGY**

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