

READINGS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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AN APPRAISAL OF THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAMES

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INTRODUCTION

The development of Agricultural Education has become worldwide in scope and interest, cutting across continents in both the developed and developing worlds. The early approaches to the development can conveniently be traced to the 1950s when recorded and conscious efforts were initiated by individuals and groups which resulted in comparative studies across countries. The efforts were not without deficiencies and as highlighted by the International Encyclopedia on Education (1991), the efforts lacked comprehensiveness which were attributed to constraints of obtaining comparative information which was timely and relevant.

This write-up focusses on the early development programmes of Agricultural Education, their characteristics and some criticisms of the different programmes.

Early Approaches

The initiation and stimulation of researches into the developments in Agricultural Education owe credit to International Organizations.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED) in the early 1960s conducted extensive studies on three levels of Agricultural Education across Europe, Canada and the United States. Towards the end of that decade the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made researches on global scale but focussing at regions starting with the Asian countries. In the 1970s, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in conjunction with UNESCO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) mounted a worldwide Conference on Agricultural Education and Training. The deliberations of the conference were based on eight regional papers which constituted the blue-print for broadening the scope of knowledge about Agricultural Education as a vocational oriented discipline. Gradually the knowledge of Agricultural Education expanded in bounds and limits resulting in the identification of five distinct Agricultural Education programmes and practices in the present world setting.

Types of Agricultural Education

The current world practices of Agricultural Education falls within five distinct categories (International Encyclopedia of Education 1991):

- (1) The Classical type
- (2) The North European type
- (3) The North American type
- (4) The East European type
- (5) The Neoclassical type

Each of these has a unique development process, and characteristics.

The Classical Type

The classical type of Agricultural Education evolved from the Central and North European countries at the onset of the 19th century. It was meant for early adolescents.

The basic elements or components comprised:

- (1) Classroom instruction
- (2) School farm practices
- (3) The hostel life

Classroom instructions was an adopted forum for instructions to the learners on the basic principles and techniques of agricultural productions.

The school farm practices served in exposing the students to field practical experiences. The strategy here was the individual and collective practical application of the learnt principles and techniques with close observations.

The hostel life provided not only accommodation for the students but created avenues for communal living, disciplined behaviours, exchange of ideas, cooperation, hardwork which are ingredients of successful agricultural occupation.

The system was applied in the French Military Academy and in the Religious Seminaries in European countries. The approaches adopted were the Military field training for appreciation of the dignity in labour. The seminaries adopted the disciplinary system which were transmitted from the hostel life.

The major characteristics of this type were

- (1) Instructionally in the classroom, both theory and practices were provided.

- (2) The elements of the school farm and the hostel life were indispensable
- (3) The farms served both the students and adult farmers within the catchment area.
- (4) The home-to-school farmers had no classroom instructions hence no provision of instructions on rural community life.
- (5) The total training programme served majorly the early stages of agricultural development.

A critical examination of the programme reveals the following and which constitutes the shortcomings of the type. The approach to instruction was not child-centred. Little or no considerations were given to individual differences or initiatives. There was the absence of the school/student/community relationship which would have strengthened effectiveness therefore making the programme more of an ivory-tower and rigid in orientation.

The programme focused more on agricultural production rather than the incorporation of programmes that would create opportunity for academically minded students who may wish to progress in academics. The school farm training was ineffective and unrealistic in transforming the agricultural engagements of the learners, or that of the rural communities.

The North European Type

The North European type was a modification of the classical type. It evolved as a result of the realization of the limitation and ineffectiveness of the school farm training in satisfying the agric-business needs of students and the adult farmers as well as due to the neglect of the development of the rural communities.

The philosophy behind the type was proposed by the Jorgen Carl la Cour in 1950 in Denmark which stated that "a young man could be prepared better and more economically by living and working with a master farmer". The training provided was apprenticeship and was in consonance with the development of the rural communities in Northern European countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden and Netherlands) around 1860s.

The basic elements were modifications of the elements of the classical type -

- (1) The use of theory-practice approach (rather than the classroom instructions).

- (2) Apprenticeship training in many farms (rather than the school farm practices).
- (3) Non-residential seasonal training (rather than the hostel life).

The theory-practice approach required the field experience as the prerequisite for the formal classroom instruction of the school. In the apprenticeship training, the students were trained under a "master farmer" in many school farms they wished. The non-residential seasonal training provided studies at intervals particularly during Winter when the volume of work at the home farms must have reduced.

The prominent characteristics of the type were

- (1) The need for pre-condition of practical experience prior to admission into the actual programme
- (2) There was a replacement of the structured farm experience with apprenticeship training strategy.
- (3) The training programme was also more seasonal than the steady formal setting
- (4) The hostel communal living was replaced by the home-school farming experience where the learners were non-residential.

By the philosophy of the programme which emphasized apprenticeship, the field experience required as a pre-condition was irrelevant. There was no measure of assurance as regards the effectiveness of the apprenticeship training. It is believed that the level of skill of the master farmer would have determined the effectiveness. Poorly skilled masters would of course produce poorly skilled trainees.

There was no clearly defined basis of ascertaining the relevance and adequacy of the field practical experiences of the would be student. The seasonality of the programme hindered continuity of the programme operation vis-a-vis the skills acquired by the trainees.

The North American Type

This is the type that was associated with the formal secondary school system. Stimson and Lanthrop (1954) pointed out that the First Secondary School to start Agricultural Education was in Massachusetts in the 1830s and by the 1890s the programme had spread to other states.

Practices of the classical type (school farms and hostel life) were adopted. But like the situation in Denmark where shortcomings like

limited scope and ineffectiveness bedevilled the programme, these practices were also found to be ineffective for the students.

Consequently, rather than adopt the "Apprenticeship Approach" like in Denmark, the "Home Farm Project" was proposed by Dr Stimson as far back as the 1900. The home-farm project replaced the school farm training which were common in European countries.

The development of the home farm project gave birth to Agricultural Clubs for students and by 1928 the Future Farmers of America (FFA) emerged which became nation-wide.

The basic element of the type were:

- (1) The home farm project;
- (2) Introduction of Youth Organizations (Future Farmers of America);
- (3) The employment of classroom instructions;
- (4) The prominence of Extra-mural classes for the rural youths and adult farmers around 1930s. Later this was transformed into the Young Farmers programme and Adult Farmers Programme.

It is noted that these are prominent features of Nigerian Agriculture presently though not functional.

Characteristically the type incorporated the following features.

- (1) Learning-by-doing approach to teaching
- (2) Home farm projects for a more closer and personal farming practices by learners at their homes
- (3) Leadership and citizenship training through students involvement in future farmers activities.
- (4) The training curriculum were project oriented which helped students in individual learning
- (5) There was the school/community relations which created and reinforced opportunity for programmes to be carried out in community schools.
- (6) This type also ensured continuity of training at informal levels through continuing Education programme. It involved organization of evening programmes for youths and adult farmers.

This type (North American type) seem to constitute the bulk of current world practices in Agricultural Development vis-a-vis Nigeria. The major criticism is in the non-assurance of the effectiveness of the Continuing Education in the provision of Agricultural Education practical training.

The East European Type

This type of Agricultural Education is known to have developed after the 1930s with the introduction of the technical school system and polytechnism in the curriculum of general education in the Russian Education system. The Russian revolution of 1917 ushered in changes in the education system (Agricultural Education inclusive).

Furthermore, the constitution of the Eastern European block of political arrangement after World War II with prop from the Soviet Union gingered a chance of transmitting the ideas (polytechnism and secondary technical programmes) to other Eastern European Countries (Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Czarist). This marked the genesis of the East European type.

Agricultural training was provided particularly for future technicians who would constitute the manpower for both State or group farms.

The basic elements of the type comprised

- (1) out-of-school training
- (2) state or group farm centers
- (3) correspondence education

The out-of-school training was meant for youths and adults for Agricultural training at all levels. The state or group farm centres provided easy access to direct practical training. The correspondence education was meant to provide continuous training for learners agriculturally.

The characteristics of the European type included:

- (1) The replacement of school farms with the state or group farms. Really the socialist ideology de-emphasized the legitimacy of private and individual ownership of farms. Consequently the future farmers training scheme was done away with in socialist countries.
- (2) The Agricultural training was technical oriented geared towards the production of future agricultural technicians with the skills of production
- (3) The correspondence education and the out-of-school training of youths and adults was well integrated.
- (4) Agricultural education was operated side by side with polytechnism and technical training to provide students with balanced skills, knowledge and experience in the socialist production system.

A technical or polytechnic programme is skill-oriented the world over. One then wonders how learning by correspondence would provide

recipients of such instructions with technical skills. It is obvious that the approach would not meet the needs of the State which seemed to have been the production of labour force for the State farms.

The Neoclassical Type

The neoclassical type was an integrated one developed after the end of the World War II and was very similar to the classical type. There was the adoption of the basic elements of classrooms instructions, school farm practices and the hostel life. The uniqueness of the type was the supplementing elements aimed at amending the deficiencies inherent in the classical type.

The supplementing elements included the introduction of:

- (1) Short term apprenticeship scheme (similar to the North European type but which was of a much longer period).
- (2) Home farm project (similar to the North American type)
- (3) Farm mechanization at the youth training centres which was unique to the type.

The integration of the system is justified by the adoption of practices or modifications of the elements of the classical, North American and the North European types.

The neoclassical type had the following characteristics:

- (1) The provision of a more dynamic and realistic training than the classical type though supplementary elements and new scheme like the farm mechanization.
- (2) The core of the programme was the supplemental modifications to the elements of other programmes. Students were assigned to undergo shorter periods of apprenticeship training for updating the classroom theoretical principles learnt.
- (3) A rigorous and comprehensive home projects formed a part of the programme
- (4) Farm mechanization at youth training centres healed opportunity for adopting the programme to the changing needs of the learners, the youths and adult farmers within the vicinity.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the differences in socio-economic transformation between countries have accounted for the varying development of Agricultural education. It is interesting to note that Agricultural Education is under continuous and significant transformations to adopt to recent changes and agricultural developments. For instance in the 1970s efforts in curriculum revisions vis-a-vis North American Agricultural Education introduced technical areas such as production agriculture, ornamental agriculture, agricultural supplies, agricultural mechanics, food processing and agricultural marketing. But generally there seem to be a slow pace in Agricultural Education programme development.

There is therefore the need to develop a functional, structural framework as a basis of diversifying and activating Agricultural Education programmes to serve the needs of students as well as the changing economic trends particularly in the Nigerian Nation.

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