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UTILIZING AGRICULTURE EXPERIENCE PROGRAMMES FOR GENERATING IN-SCHOOL YOUTHS INTERESTS IN FARMING OCCUPATIONS

EKONG, Antiabong Okon
Agricultural Education Unit, University of Uyo, Uyo

ABSTRACT

The acquisition of relevant farming skills through direct experiences cannot be compromised. who are in school and those out-of-school seem to suffer neglect. It might not be wrong to associate the Youths in schools, exposed to agricultural training are potentially effective future farmers to ensure continued and sustained production. Youths In schools seem to manifest absolute disinterest in practical experiences thereby graduating as theoretical rather than practical farmers. The training strategies may not be absolved afterall. This paper discusses the possibility of employing experience programme approach to stimulate In-school youths Interests in farming occupations to ensure the production of future practical farmers who would be effective.

Keywords: Experience, Experience Programmes, Farming Occupations, Interests, Planning, Supplementary Farm Experience, Improvement Project, Productive Farm Enterprise Project.

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INTRODUCTION

Experience is explained here as the knowledge or skill acquired from regular practices of defined skill-oriented activities at the real situation. Experience Programmes in agriculture is therefore essential in developing psycho-productive skills useful in farming occupations. It will lead to internalization and perfection of the skills learnt while under practical learning by the youths.

Farming occupations are specified on-farm enterprises with varying and designated practices. Such occupations include crop production, vegetable production, livestock production, fish farming, soil management, snail farming and so on. The various farming occupations as stressed by Olaitan (1984) are all science of agriculture and which does not only include the on-farm productions of crops and livestock enterprises but also many non-farm occupations that require skill and knowledge of related disciplines. Such disciplines include marketing, agricultural product processing and servicing of agricultural industry. The different farming occupations constitute the integral component of the school agriculture programmes for which in-school youths study and practice during field (farm) experiences. The practices are primarily focused at making in-school youths acquire relevant skills for farming occupations which could be utilized in later *life*.

Despite the organized exposure of the school youths through the schools agriculture programmes to various farming practices, experience of the author indicates that the youths still manifest visible evidence of skill deficiencies in many areas of farming activities. There is no gain-saying that the ultimate goal of the in-school youths I are to gain employment after graduation. The goal is very realizable but in most cases haphazardly planned for by the youths while in school. The result has been the non-acquisition of relevant skills upon graduation.

The choice of farming occupations by youths neglect with lack of interest on the part of the youths. Interest is an intrinsic driving force that moves an individual toward a particular object, activities, skills or focus on the achievement of specified objectives. Interest is defined by Inyang (1998) as a temporary or permanent feeling that aids preference for something. It could also be described as the readiness to give attention and time to something. The result of interest generation is that of having favourable disposition about the thing or activity in question. Instructionally, interest is the key factor that stimulates and controls readiness and willingness of youths to lend themselves to instructional prerequisites of the various farming occupations. The role of interest in learning for skill acquisition is supported by Cushman et al (1968) who recorded that the productive utilization of the potentials of youths and the attainment of individual vocational satisfaction are contingent on interest generation. Interest serves as a pep that supports and facilitates the youths learning toward the acquisition of desired skills in any chosen farming occupation.

It is dangerous not to acquire relevant farming skills chosen as potential areas of engagement after graduation. As stressed by I3inkley and Hammond (1970), students who do not choose specified farming skills while in school based on their areas of interest do experience frustrations in the world of farming occupations. The problem of decision making in relation to suitable farming occupation to take to, in later life, becomes imminent. The need therefore to develop interest in school youths cannot, be overlooked. This paper therefore discusses the various agriculture experience programmes that could be useful in generating the interest of in-school youths in farming occupations.

IN-SCHOOL YOUTHS AND FARMING OCCUPATIONS

Some evidence points to the manifestation of the youths' negative tendencies toward farming occupations. The tendency is buttressed by the observations of Ekong (2001) that the youths show negative attitudes and desire toward continuing and sustaining of existing agricultural occupations. The youths lack the foresight of seeing the relevance of acquiring farming skills to support their later life engagement in farming vocations. A remark by Inyang (1988) on youths lack of foresight on the need to acquire farming skills noted that despite the recognition accorded farming occupations in school-farm programmes, youths in school continuously offer resistance to the practical productive aspects of agriculture. The significance of school farm programmes in skill acquisition is stressed by Ekong (1999) that the initial formal preparation for taking up fanning as a vocation is done in the school through school farm practical activities. Inyang (1988) also noted that the negative attitude of youths is inimical to positive development of interest in farming activities and therefore constitute significant constraint to farming occupational choice for future vocational engagement, as a means of livelihood. This is a deviation from the understanding that the school should be the centre for the exposure of youths to, and to train them on the numerous farming skills to make them employable after graduation. The fault however, may not be entirely that of the school but also of the in-school youths themselves through their disinterest in the agriculture programmes. The disinterest by the youths is associated with the following features exhibited by them such as disturbing remarks against the agriculture teacher; escapes from participation in practical farmwork; wanton destruction of crops and at times the livestock designated for practical training purposes; stealing of farm tools, portable equipment and other materials meant for practicals; partial and haphazard completion of assigned farm activities as well as unprecedented absence from school particularly on the days of practical farmwork. To control this kind of negative tendencies manifested by youths, demands an organized and sustained action to redirect the trend and ginger the youths' interest in the farming activities through experience programmes.

EXPERIENCE PROGRAMMES IN FARMING OCCUPATIONS

Experience programmes in farming are those programmes that expose learners to, and promote the learning of relevant farming skills through supervised practical activities. It also describes the acquisition of farming skills through hands-on experiences. Experience programme in farming as outlined by Binkley and Hammond (1970) comprise of productive farming enterprise projects; Improvement projects and the supplementary farm experience.

The Productive Farming Enterprise Project is a physical and tangible feasible, result-oriented programme that may be, either in the crops and/or livestock farm enterprise. It may involve one or more enterprises owned in partnership between the youth and one or both parents or even friends and so on. The farming project has features such as; exercise of reasonable control by the owner(s); joint ownership for collaborative management; sharing of proceeds and benefits by partners as well as the complete cycle of operation for production right from the stage of conception of such farm enterprise idea to the output and consumption stage.

Improvement projects are follow-up projects mainly for improvement on the productive farming project. The activities extend into the improvement of crops/livestock farm projects, the land, residential environment, farmstead, farm workshops, agricultural produce processing and storage unit and so on. Improvement projects are associated with such strengths as-mostly concerned with improvement activities; provision of opportunity for acquisition of valuable experiences which might not have been possible; provision of opportunity for large agriculture occupational experience programmes; more or less absence of personal benefits from the proceeds of the farm so long as the concentration is restricted to improvement activities; improvement projects are usually individually owned and of course, the cost is borne by the owner alone and above all, it contributes to increasing of family sustenance.

Supplementary farm experiences are the farm occupational experiences directed at the improvement on what have been done in the productive farm projects or in the improvement projects. The activities are mostly the performance of specified tasks directly on the crops or the livestock enterprises. It could involve such tasks as inoculation of the livestock, trimming of hedges around the farmstead, construction of fences, drainage and other protection devices, application of fertilizers as supplements to growing crops. The programmes could be organized competitively as games or contests for awards to ginger youths interest that stimulate thinking and decision making about future occupational engagement in agriculture.

Supplementary farm experiences have such strengths as-helping in the development of abilities in carrying out specified operations with specified and relevant skills; encouragement of improved practices on the farm; helping of in-school youths by introducing new farming practices to their home projects; provision of opportunities for the practice of certain farming activities conveniently at home; enabling of in-school youths to identify farm problems, think of how to solve them and the activities to be carried out while trying to solve them; there is a possibility of carrying out supplementary farm activities at anytime and at anywhere, away from the home environment provided the relevant conditions and facilities are available and in place.

PRINCIPLES OF PLANNING FARM EXPERIENCE PROGRAMMES FOR THE IN-SCHOOL YOUTHS

Planning is the process of making decisions on the farm experience programmes to embark upon. Planning as explained by Olaitan et al (1999) is the strategy for designing and implementing programmes. In farm experience programmes, planning involves the mental perception, designing and trials of farm activities in practical situation and mentally establishing relationship between one farming activity and the other. Successful planning of experience programmes should be guided by such principles as-identifying of the farm occupational needs of the youths in school; identifying of the possible and available farm projects, improvement projects and supplementary farm experiences; determining the available facilities and other favourable conditions for effective performance of the experience activities; clearly understanding how the specific practices based on specific skills are to

be transmitted to the learners; comprehending the theories and arts that guide the various farm experiences and practices in any of the programmes; determining the possible benefits of farm experience programme practices to the youths after being exposed to the experiences; making provisions for ensuring the carrying out of the practices in the individual experience situation; determining the financial requirements of the projects; scheduling the timing for the specific farm experience practices and outlining of the overall plan on paper indicating the starting and ending points.

IMPLICATIONS OF APPLICATION OF FARM EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTHS VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURAL SKILLS.

A full adoption of farm occupational experience programmes in schools agriculture programmes has implications for the development of agricultural occupational focus in the youths in-school. In the first instance, the interest of the youths towards agricultural occupations and practices will be generated. This, hopefully will ensure future decisions of the school youths to get involved in chosen agricultural occupations to ensure employment and sustainable production. The contributions of the foregoing to the economy of both the individuals and of the nation cannot be overstressed. It will also have implications for effective teaching of agriculture in schools. It will reduce the talking and writing efforts of the teacher, reduce time wastage and facilitate memory retention in the learners.

Agriculture activities in the school will be lively thereby ensuring its relevance to the development of the society through sustained productivity.

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