

COPING WITH THE CHALLENGES OF THE IMAGE OF AGRICULTURE IN SCHOOLS: IMPLICATIONS ON CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to determine the Challenges of Image of Agriculture in Schools and the implications in childhood education in Nigeria. One research question of 15 questionnaire items guided the study. Thirty (30) students each from six Junior Secondary Schools all totaling 180 students and 72 non-agricultural science teachers randomly selected from the Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State of Nigeria formed the sample of the study. Data collected from the respondents on the research questionnaire items were analysed using frequency and mean. From the analysed data, the following findings were made;

1. *Agriculture to the respondents is an energy sapping, very tedious school subject.*
2. *Agriculture involves drudgery in which one puts in much and gets little or nothing in return.*
3. *That the respondent strongly believed that agriculture is synonymous with farming.*
4. *That agriculture wastes much of the student's time on the school time table including their leisure hours.*
5. *That agriculture is not easily divorced from the school punishment.*

Based on these, some recommendations like the introduction of the use of machinery on the farm to reduce drudgery, reduction of the time of period for practical lesson, better education on agriculture and farming to students and total avoidance of the use of school farm for punishment ground were made.

INTRODUCTION

In the rural areas of Nigeria, pre-school and early childhood education through traditional means have been particularly appealing intervention by which parents on one hand and the teachers on the other have encouraged their wards' life participating in domestic subsistence agriculture.

Parents through day-to-day interaction with their wards have enormous opportunities to develop their skills, habits and training expected of an average child regarding farm activities. These basic trainings in farm activities though prominent in the rural areas are totally absent and non-existent in the highly urbanized settings in the country.

These basic trainings when properly developed in the early childhood education in conjunction with high quality programme is

likely to serve as an antidote to poverty and enhance overall national development through the possibility of the youths taking to agricultural occupations later in life. In addition too, they can offset social inequities among peers as the tendency exists for all to be gainfully employed and independent in agricultural occupations in later life. Before the advent of the oil boom in Nigeria in the early 70's, agriculture was the greatest contributor to the economic development of Nigeria. But with the advent of the "oil-boom", agriculture-growing of crops and rearing of livestock for man's uses was relegated to the background by the government and the general populace in search of the golden fleece - the oil money.

The economic recession of 80's and 90's propelled government to launch various

programmes and policies aimed at boosting the image of agriculture. In realization of the role that the youths of this nation can play towards the achievement of our national goal and aspiration of self sufficiency and self reliance in food production, the government through the National Policy on Education (1989) made agriculture as one of the core subjects as clearly indicated in section 15 sub-section 6 and section 18 sub-section 6 of the document. Of most concern is the present lukewarm attitude of students towards agriculture in schools which ultimately affect their future careers in life (Alademmerin 1996). To the youths, farming is a profession for the school drop-outs and never-do-well in the society. A way of coping with the challenges of the poor image of agriculture is to create awareness and interest in our youths through a meaningful childhood education programme.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The purpose of the study was to determine the image of agriculture in schools among students

and teachers. The research question was; What is the image of agriculture as perceived by the students and non-agricultural science teachers in schools?

RESEARCH METHOD:

The study was conducted with the use of questionnaire to determine the students and teachers opinions and on the research question. Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to test for the internal consistency and this was 0.86. The study was carried-out in six (6) Junior Secondary Schools in two local government areas in Ogun State of Nigeria systematic random sampling was used to get 72 teachers and 180 students involved in the study.

Data collected by the researcher were analysed using frequency, mean and percentages. A mean of 2.50 and above was taken to mean agreement and a mean below 2.50 was taken to mean disagreement.

Analysis of Data:

The overall data collected for this study are presented below. The method discussed earlier was used in analyzing the data.

What is the image of agriculture as perceived by the students and non-agricultural science teachers?

S/N	Image	N1	N2	fx1	fx2	x1	x2	Remarks
1	It is always considered an energy sapping and very tedious school subject.	180	72	515	198	2.86	2.75	Agree
2	It involves much drudgery and students put in much and get little or nothing in return	180	72	558	216	3.1	3.00	Agree
3	It consumes most of the students hours of working on the school farm	180	72	551	213	3.06	2.96	Agree
4	It is to train and motivate in farm only through excursion and trips	180	72	564	163	3.13	2.27	Variation
5	It is a money making venture in the school and of very low prestige value in the society	180	72	551	230	3.03	3.19	Agree
6	It does not actually involve real practicals of agriculture as the teaching is devoid of teaching/instructional aids.	180	72	393	207	2.18	2.88	Variation
7	It involves engagement of the students on farms by the school authority mainly to rake in money for school use.	180	72	539	212	2.99	2.94	Agree
8	It is largely influenced by the neighbouring environment of the student	180	72	560	217	3.11	3.01	Agree
9	It is to train students the art of marketing farm produce advantageously to the public only	180	72	429	168	2.38	2.33	Disagree
10	It is too practical oriented with the use of crude implements – cutlasses, hoes, etc	180	72	558	209	3.1	2.90	Variation
11	Teaching methods of teachers consumes too much time on the school time table.	180	72	553	220	3.07	3.06	Agree
12	It is to train on field only and to expose students for industrial work experience	180	72	555	167	3.08	2.32	Variation
13	It is not really a science subject as the school laboratory is not well equipped like Physics, chemistry and biology	180	72	393	210	2.18	2.92	Variation
14	It is more of farm work and makes students look untidy and rough after the practicals on the school farm	180	72	531	211	2.95	2.93	Agree
15	It is concerned mainly with the production of farm products and not proper and effective teaching of students	180	72	429	206	2.28	2.86	Variation

Keys:

N1	=	No. of students used for the study
N2	=	No. of teachers used for the study
Fx1	=	Total of responses of students used
Fx2	=	Total of responses of teachers used
X1	=	Mean of students
X2	=	Mean of teachers

In table 1 above, there are fifteen (15) items and each item is a variable and a matter that positively or negatively affect the image of agriculture by the students and non-agricultural science teachers in Junior Secondary Schools. Of the 15 items, the students and the teachers agreed on items that relate to the poor image as a result of the subject being energy sapping and tedious (item 1), that it involves drudgery (item 2), consumes most of the students hours by working on the farm (item 5), for money making by school authority (item 7), influenced by neighbouring environment (item 8), wastes times on the timetable (item 11), farm work, makes students look untidy and rough. They disagreed with questionnaire item on the fact that it is to train students on the art of marketing farm produce advantageously to the public. The students and teachers were at variance in their mean responses to the item relating to train and motivate through excursion and trips (item 4), lacks the use of teaching aids (item 6), too practical oriented with the use of crude implements (item 10), to train on field only and expose to industrial work experience, poor and inadequately equipped laboratory (item 13) production of farm produce and not effective teaching (item 15). There was no consensus on the six items out of 15 items.

Findings:

The following results were got from the analysed data;

1. The image of agric education by students and non-agricultural science teachers are based on the fact that;
 - a. It involves much drudgery and students put in much and get little or nothing in return.
 - b. It consumes most of the students leisure hours of working on the farm.
 - c. It is a money making venture in the school and of very low prestige value in the society.
 - d. It involves engaging the students on farms by the school authority mainly to rake in money for the school's use.
 - e. It is largely influenced by the neighbouring environment
 - f. It consumes too much time on the school time table

g. It is more of a farm work and makes students look untidy and rough after the practicals on the school farm.

DISCUSSION:

It is quite obvious and convincing from the data analysed and the findings established that the image of agriculture by the respondents is very poor. Agricultural education in carrying out what it is supposed to project to the people, is negatively and always poorly perceived.

One of the important objectives of agricultural education is to provide young people with a sound knowledge of the basic principles and techniques of agriculture and the motivation with which they can translate this knowledge into real improvements to meet the agricultural productivity or the occupational needs of the young in a developing country such as Nigeria.

From the study, it has been found out that the students constitute a major factor in the determination of the status or image of agriculture in the schools and as such, they are very significant. The qualities, the teaching methods and the leadership style of teachers of agriculture have very serious effect on the image of agriculture as clearly revealed in the study.

From the study, it was discovered that agriculture is strongly perceived as energy sapping, very tedious school subject which involves a lot of drudgery and inputs. This view is strongly held by the students of agriculture in the junior secondary and non-agricultural science teachers. To the respondents, one puts in much into the subject in terms of energy, time etc. but gets very little in return. Coupled with this, the issue of the use of crude and obsolete implements on farms like hoes, cutlasses, machetes etc makes agriculture unattractive.

It was also revealed from the study that agriculture in the secondary school as a subject wastes much of the students leisure hours, consumes too much time on the school time table and above all, makes students look untidy and rough after the practicals on the school farm. The issue of time wastage especially during the agricultural science practicals on the

school farm has directly affected some subject and teachers of these subjects. Such have not been helpful in creating a good image of agriculture in secondary schools.

Chauhan (1978) in his study on urban rural factors found that the residential background of an adolescent affects his vocational interest; and that adolescents who come from rural areas generally tended to aspire to low paid and lower prestige occupations than those from urban areas. From the above study, the findings supported the view that the neighbouring environment largely influence the image of agriculture and above all, students perceive it a low prestige value in the society.

The ideal teaching aid, the regular trips and excursion to agricultural establishments were found to influence the image of agriculture at the secondary school level. Also, the various methods used by teachers of agriculture were also found to have influence on the respondents' image of agriculture.

The environment which includes the home, the school, the peer group etc were also found during the study to be a strong factor in the image of agriculture by students and teachers.

There is a strong belief that the proper way to fulfill the different needs of individual is to offer them opportunities for a wide range of experiences by taking them out to places where agriculture is practiced intensively and let them see things for themselves. Such trips enable students to;

- a. obtain information directly and study real life situations
- b. develop critical thinking and broaden the horizons of pupils as they see people work in different activities.

The above study confirms to a large extent the advantages of field trips and excursions to students learning and understanding.

Poor teaching methods of agriculture were also found to influence the respondents perception of agric education in the secondary schools. In support of this, Comenius (1972) quoting Aristotle, wrote "*Mihil intellectu quod non fuit prius in sensu*" which literally means "*there is nothing in knowledge which has not first passed through the senses*". This goes to show that for agriculture to enjoy a good image,

the teaching methods must be well improved upon to appeal to all senses of the students, especially that of sight.

The poor teaching methods were also found to affect the training of the students which do not expose them well in school. The teacher may need to combine several methods but he should not forget that agriculture is a practical subject and as a result, requires skills and that learning by doing and demonstration are very important teaching methods in agriculture.

Implications on Childhood Education:

The youths constitute the largest percentage of the workforce in all countries of the World and for this reason, their educational programmes deserve utmost care and attention since the future of a nation lies with them. From the beginning of creation; agriculture has been and continues to be man's cardinal vocation to subdue and replenish the earth and has since become the life wire of man.

A veritable venue for advancing agriculture in the secondary school and among the youths is through the establishment of youth clubs and societies so that they can ginger up the interest of the youths into agricultural occupations. This goes in line with a quotation from the Proverb chapter 22 verse 6 "*train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it*".

The major missing gap in childhood education Nigeria is a well focused mobilization efforts regarding the youths in all areas of our national development including the love for agriculture. The word mobilization is an action word with dual meaning, in ordinary sense. It means to put into motion, circulation or use. It also means to become organized and ready as for war (Webster 20th century dictionary). From this perceptive, mobilization becomes the process of pooling together, harnessing, actualizing and utilizing potential human resource for the purpose of development. In addition, it is a process whereby human beings are sensitized and made aware of the resources at their disposal and are also motivated and energized to collectively utilize such resources for the promotion of their spiritual and material well being (Gana, 1987:19).

In the light of the above, students mobilization therefore is not only geared towards making them aware of the socio-political and economic realities of the contemporary Nigeria with a view of changing their value orientation and attitude, but should also aim at having their creative energies properly harnessed and channeled into useful and productive ventures in agriculture at the present moment and later in life.

Early childhood education should therefore stress the pride and the dignity of labour and the realities of the independence of man to live a higher quality life through the use of brains and hands. Youths need encouragement to live a quality life and become self reliant in future through proper guidance and counseling activities while still at school.

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