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**STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING STUDENTS ENROLMENT IN AGRICULTURAL  
EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN TECHNICAL COLLEGES OF ENUGU**

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**Abstract**

Technical education deals with the training of technical personnel for the purposes of initiating, facilitating and implementing the technological development of a nation and also to create the basic awareness of technological literacy to our youths. In the 21st century, considering the significant role Agriculture plays to the socio-economic development of every society it has become imperative to the quest for improved skill acquisition and youth empowerment and if Agricultural education is aggressively enhanced by injecting funds into Technical colleges of education, Nigeria would witness formidable changes in her standard of technological literacy with reference to Agriculture. This paper titled: "Strategies for Improving Students Enrolment in Agricultural Education Programs in Technical Colleges of Enugu" is written to review strategies with which Vocational and Technical Education in Enugu and in the Nigeria society can be of a better reputation especially in this fourth republic of the democratic dispensation. The paper elicited data from secondary sources such as textbook, magazines, Journals, newspapers and periodicals. It recommends that the nation/state's policies and program be adequately strengthened to address the challenges facing the study of Agricultural sciences in Technical colleges in Enugu.

**Key words:** Agriculture, Agricultural education, Vocational, Technical Education.

## 1. Introduction

A technical college is a college of higher learning (education) providing courses of practical subjects, such as information technology, applied sciences, engineering, agriculture, secretarial skills and so on. Vocational and Technical Education have become imperative in the 21<sup>st</sup> century considering the significant role it plays to the socio-economic development of every society (Okolocha and Baba, 2016). Technical education deals with the training of technical personnel for the purposes of initiating, facilitating and implementing the technological development of a nation and also to create the basic awareness of technological literacy to our youths (Uwaifo, 2009). Technical and vocational education (TVE) has been described as that form of education, which equips its recipients with the knowledge and skill necessary for transforming the findings of science into goods and services for the benefit of humanity (Raji, 2006). Shimare and Sallah (2005) described TVE as a vital instrument for changing and managing the environment recourses for technological, political, social and economic advancement of a nation. TVE is offered in technical colleges, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Universities in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the training of technical personnel has witnessed formidable challenges ranging from poor funding to inadequate facilities both quantitatively and qualitatively, non-availability of adequate human capacity, resource drain and poor staff training and retention profiles. Others include weak university/industry partnership, defective curricula, traditional approach to teaching, poorly equipped laboratories, poorly monitoring standards for the training of prospective technologists and an inadequate ICT environment.

### 1.1 What is Agriculture and Agricultural science education?

Agricultural science is a broad multidisciplinary field of biology that encompasses parts of exact, natural, economic and social sciences that are used in the practice and understanding of agriculture. Agriculture remains the oldest occupation of man and source of human existence. It is said to be the life wire of the economy as it's the major source of livelihood, income foreign earnings and employment. Although Nigeria depends heavily on the oil industry for budgeting, it's predominantly an agricultural society. Approximately 70% of her (Nigeria) population engages in agricultural production at a subsistence level because the importance of agriculture can't be over emphasized.

Decline in Agricultural production in Nigeria began with the advent of the petroleum boom in the early 1970s. The boom in this sector brought about a distortion in the labor market. This distortion in turn produced adverse effect on the production level of both food and cash crops. Government has paid farmers low prices over the years on food for the domestic market on other to satisfy urban demand for cheap basic food product.

This policy and others put together have progressively made agricultural work unattractive within our colleges and research institutes which have led to the poor enrolment of students into agricultural programs in technical colleges in Enugu state. The problem has been general one and here are strategies to make agriculture more interesting and enticing to our youths in our technical college to salvage our sloping agricultural sector.

Since enhancing human capacity and technical knowhow is the basic function of technical college of educations, it is important that agricultural science be introduced into the learning scheme of work of technical colleges as it stands to be one of the fastest means through which agriculture can be injected into the society.

Agricultural science have not been given its rightful place in Nigeria, even though efforts are been made by the government and stake holders to fix this is still have not yet yielded much. These efforts are been hampered by series of factors (Inyiagu, 2015). These obstacles among which are problems of structural imbalance, system configuration, inadequate resources, alternative forms of education etc. have resulted to factors which have becomes setbacks to getting students to register for Agricultural education in colleges of education. These setbacks include;

- **Inadequate Supply of Technical Workshop and Instructional Materials;**

Most technical colleges cannot boast of adequate and functional agricultural workshops, tools and equipment, but even then the lectures may be ready to lecture the students, in spite of poor remuneration. There are some cases where technical equipment was supplied but no workshop to install this equipment which may eventually lead to frustration on the part of the college lecturers. Instructional materials and consumables in technical colleges are very expensive and the federal and state governments have not been providing funds to address this critical area. All we are getting is just lip service to technical education. Even when the teachers are ready to improvise instructional materials, the little amount of fund needed could still not be received from the college authorities (Uwaifo, 2010)

- **Lack of Adequate Motivation and Poor Professional, Personal and Public Image;**

Technical college lecturers are subjected to deplorable working conditions. Hardly are they found in furnished offices, instead they are put in large staff rooms, at times with students type of desks and chairs, whereas their counterparts in other sectors could have executive air-condition offices, private secretary or even messengers and reserved parking spaces, and could belong to prestigious clubs and association, be entitled to tree lunch etc. these help to boast their ego as they are looked upon as being successful. Therefore, if education at the technical college level will be restored to acceptable level. Hygiene-motivator principles must be applied in the administration for the purpose of getting teachers to have satisfaction from their job. (Ariwerikuma, 1986, Abassah 2011).

While the general attitudes of the public towards technical education have been found to be negative, the teachers themselves act and talk that way instead of reorienting and correcting the misconceptions that the public have about technical education. The general public must be made to recognize that technical teachers are the backbone of any nation for technological development

- **Lack of Well Equipped Library for Research Work/Project;**

Technical College lecturers that are ready to carry out some research work/projects cannot do this successfully because the libraries are not stocked with up-to-date textbooks and periodicals in their area of specialization. Where the textbooks are available locally, the teachers could not afford them because of meager salaries. Therefore, the technical teachers may - not be motivated to embark on any project that will be useful to society

- **Resource drain**

In the context of this paper, resource drain refers to the movement of lecturers of technical education which are needed for the socio-economic and technological advancement of Nigeria from one university to other universities or to other professional (including politics) calling for better conditions of service. Akintunde (1989) identified five different components of brain drain:

- i). Experts in academics who moved to the industry where they get better pay for their services.
- ii). Lecturers and students who leave the country to acquire more knowledge and skill but later refused to return.
- iii). Lecturers who move from one country for better conditions of service.
- iv). Skill professionals who abandon the practice of technical education in favor of other more lucrative economic activities and political appointments which are not related to their training.
- v). Skilled professionals, although in their field of training, who do not devote their full attention to their job because of their efforts to supplement their earnings through other unrelated economic activities. In the 70s, Nigerian universities were able to attract experts from other countries e.g. India because the economic conditions then were favorable. But with down turn of the economy and consequences of the ineffective efforts of the government to resuscitate it, this resulted in the return of the foreigners to their countries and exodus of their Nigerian counterparts from the shores of Nigeria in order to earn a better living. Bassi (2004) reported that:

- i) About 45% of all Nigerian Professionals including technical educators have left the Nigerian shores over the decades since colonization.
- ii) Between 1997 and 2007 alone, Nigeria lost over 10,000 middle level and high-level managers to the western economies.
- iii) About 500 Lecturers from Nigerian universities continue to emigrate each year, particularly to Europe, America and other African countries where the condition of service is relatively better. These Nigerian in diaspora contribute 35 times more wealth to Europe, American and other African economy.

- **Staff situation**

Many colleges across the country are inadequately staffed both qualitatively and quantitatively. In most departments especially in technical education program, the proportion of staff without PhD out numbers those with PhD. Uwaifo (2005) asserted that it is difficult to get people trained to the level of PhD because academic is not as attractive in commensurate to the effort, commitment and finances put in to acquiring it, whereas a first degree graduate can function well in the industry and politics etc. and earn good money. Most lecturers in technical education departments in these schools, who have obtained their PhD, have been drained away from these schools because of the unattractive nature of the lecturing profession in Nigeria. In order to spur locally needed Science and Technology activities, it is imperative that Nigeria governments should seriously consider proper retention schemes for their best talents by providing special working conditions including income supplements and adequate research supports to stem this problem of brain

The training of academic staff is ordinarily a continuous exercise to ensure consistent improvement in the quality of their outputs. The training is in two-fold: training to acquire minimum qualification (PhD) to teach and continued professional training. Both types of training can be acquired either locally or overseas. Usually, local training within the nation is cheaper than overseas training but more strenuous because of inadequate facilities, literature and distractions arising from the need to meet the necessary demands. Overseas training requires a lot of foreign exchange but the enabling environment exists to achieve success in a

record time. However, over time it has always been difficult to get the trainees back to their respective countries after the completion of their study. In the 70s the Nigerian universities were able to recruit foreigners and retain them and the indigenous academic staff because of the low exchange rate. Then, one US dollar (\$1.00) was equivalent of seventy kobo (70k). But now that a dollar (\$1.00) exchanges for three hundred and fifty naira (N350.00) provides good attraction to move out. This is not to say that salary is the only issue, self-fulfillment in terms of output via research efforts is also part of the driving force. The salary and service benefits paid to technical education teachers in Nigerian is about the lowest in the world and because of this, they migrate to other countries especially the United States of America, or local industry for better pay. Academics from within and outside Nigerian also migrate to Botswana and South Africa because of high wages that they pay to the academics and the relatively better equipped laboratories.

### **Political situation;**

Education generally, including technical education program has been grossly neglected in Nigeria. Technical educators have the greatest challenge of convincing the law makers on why the law makers should give priority to the program in allocating resources. Many options of getting positive results have been advocated at different forum, namely, lobbying, participation of technical educators in governance, wooing, etc. Yet the government is playing a lopsided attitude to the proper development of the program in Nigeria. Anyway, let it be made loud and clear that until they begin to change their attitude towards the program, Nigeria will ever remain a technologically backward and dependent nation.

### **2.0 Strategies for improving students' enrolment in Agricultural education programs in technical colleges in Enugu state.**

For progress to be made in improving students enrolment in Agricultural education programs in technical colleges of Enugu state, the challenges confronting technical education must be recognized with deliberate attempt to uplift the program and adequate comprehensive reform made as it's the only panacea to a technological society.

#### **• Creating awareness of agricultural technology and vocational programs:**

This can be done by organizing seminars and work shop programs in agriculture in our secondary schools and other tertiary institutions to enlighten our teenagers on the prospects of agriculture as the life wire of any economy as it's the source of life, income, foreign earnings and employment.

The role of the mass media cannot be over emphasized here as Ani *et. al.* (1997) stated that mass media methods in agricultural information dissemination generally, are useful in reaching a wide audience at a very fast rate. They are useful as sources of agricultural information to people and as well constitute methods of notifying them of new developments and trend. They could equally be important in stimulating interest in new ideas and practices (Ani *et. al.* 1997). Mass media are important in providing information for enabling the rural community to make informed decision regarding their farming activities, especially in the rural areas of developing countries (Iwoga, 2010). Therefore this medium can be harnessed and channeled towards promoting the importance and needfulness of agricultural education and technical studies to the potential Nigerian youth as it is closest to the 21<sup>st</sup> century youth.

- **Promoting the good image of Agricultural technology and vocational education and its students to the society;**

This can be achieved by promoting 21<sup>st</sup> century agricultural technology and programs because agriculture to Nigeria youth is perceived to be strenuous, old and archaic hence have turned away their minds from enrolling in technical colleges. Malaysia took some palm nut from Nigeria in the early 70s and today 80% of their economy is powered by Agriculture because of the support of youth in this sector.

Undergrads are most influenced by the campus atmosphere, the available social activities, the prospectus, open-campus days and recommendations from friends and family, not unlike the studies previously highlighted. So plans can be made to address the stereotypes and build on the positives. A new communications and awareness campaign can be implemented which can;

- Increase attendance at premier career conventions as well as farm shows
- Built profile further away from the campus
- Utilized student marketers
- Increased potential student visits to campus
- Offered short courses to potential students
- Improved relationships and communications with high schools and career advisors
- Develop updated marketing materials with focus on employability including a website as well as personalized and relevant direct mail
- Increased advertising budget

Parents should also be enlightened on the importance of studying agricultural education in technical colleges and negative mentalities the populace share about TVE should be corrected thereby increasing their confidence on the credibility of these institutions.

- **Find means of improving job opportunities of graduates of Agricultural education and vocational education;**

In a bid to make this field of study lucrative and active, government can invest on farms, agro allied industries, agro chemical industries and research institutes to increase job for youths in agriculture and also revive some of our youths agro programs like “school to land program” of 1980 where students of agricultural colleges are empowered on their colleges and stipends are paid to agricultural student

- **Increasing teaching resources of agricultural technology and vocational education programs;**

The national universities commission's need assessment survey which was reported by Emmanuel (2008) indicated that about 30% of Nigerian students' population has adequate access to workshops, laboratories, classrooms, lecture halls and libraries. It also reports that libraries are deficient in terms of current books, journals and electronic support facilities. This minimal provision cannot encourage scholars to partake in this relevant course of study. Hence, technology trends should be imbibed into our agricultural colleges to promote teaching and make learning more convenient and enjoyable by using of computer and related software and other digital means in our colleges to increase research and move with the latest trend in agriculture

Use of Information Technology for Teaching and Learning Information technology (IT) has affected education in revolutionary ways and the momentum has been irreversible. Information Communication Technology (ICT) programs have been incorporated into all

teachers training programs. Technical College teachers can use IT as teaching and learning tool to harness the advantages of educational delivery. The virtual library as a platform for sharing knowledge is aimed at rejuvenating Nigerian schools through the provision of current books, journals, and other information resources using digital technology. The objective of National Virtual Library Project include among others the improvement of the quality of teaching and research at all levels of education in Nigeria through the provision of current book, journals and other library services information and communication technology facilities will ensure that the benefits of the virtual library permeate all levels of education in Nigeria (Miller, 2011).

The government and pioneers of our colleges have to adhere to this point to promote student enrolment in agricultural education to savage the economic problem in Nigeria.

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