

**Agricultural Education Curriculum Delivery and Learning Experiences In Africa –
Techniques To Improve Learner-Centred Teaching In Nigeria and Eswatini**

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Introduction & Need for LCT Strategy: Appropriate curriculum delivery and learning experiences are sine qua non for curriculum implementation in the schools system as they are to be well directed, focus more and are learner centred. This mode of curriculum delivery which specifically targets learners is to ensure proper bonding of the students with the concepts taught within and out of classroom situations thereby helping students to realise their full potentials. This paper is anchored on the theory of constructivism which says learners construct knowledge rather than just passively take in information. Learner-Centred Teaching (LCT) involves making students how to think, solve problems, evaluate evidence, analyze arguments, generate hypotheses and others in the concepts taught on a topic. The paper discusses further on techniques and strategies to improve LCT in schools.

Connection to Literature: Agricultural Education came into existence in the early 1900s in most countries of Africa. The nature and scope of the formal teaching of Agriculture in Nigeria started with the introduction of Western education in the country in 1842. However, in 1887, the education ordinance provided for increased government grants-in-aid for agricultural and industrial technical education activities. Fafunwa (1974) reported that the teaching of practical agriculture was an important aspect of the African traditional education system before colonial intervention. He further opined that agriculture was taught through the attachment of a learner to understudy a master-farmer. 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. The primary objective of all technical and vocational education and training programmes is the acquisition of relevant knowledge, practical skills and attitudes for gainful employment in a particular trade or occupational area. The need to link training to employment (either self or paid employment) is at the base of all the best practices and strategies observed world-wide. In recent years, in view of the rapid technological advances taking place in the labour market, flexibility, adaptability, and life-long learning have become the second major objective. The third objective, which is particularly important for Africa, is to use TVET as a vehicle for economic empowerment and social mobility and for the promotion of good governance and regional integration (African Union, 2007). Agriculture is fundamental to life. By teaching it, learning it and practicing it, we relate with the discipline in totality. Agricultural education programmes in different countries differ in curriculum, course content, and the duration and methods of imparting theoretical and practical skills. This means that the emphasis which a country places on vocational agriculture in schools will be determined by the extent to which her economy depends on agriculture. 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 (Alademerin, 1996).

Implementation of LCT Strategy: The Nigeria National Policy on Education (2013) explicitly states that teaching at the basic education level especially should be participatory, exploratory, experimental and child- centered. However, the teaching of agriculture at the primary and secondary school levels of our educational system is a mixture of trained professional teachers and others who through their interest or added responsibility find themselves in the classrooms and on the farms, hence resort to abstract teaching of concepts. In 1973 agriculture began as a subject at primary and secondary schools in In Swaziland (now Eswatini). The introduction of Agriculture intended to formulate a framework to integrate agriculture into the occupational and academic aspirations of youth (Dlamini,1995). In Swaziland, according to Simelane, Mkhwanazi and Dlamini (1999), the teaching of Agriculture changed from Agricultural Science to Modern Agriculture and Prevocational

Agriculture. Agricultural Science was mostly theoretical. In 1985 the Modern Agriculture Programme was launched to replace Agricultural Science.

Implications: The aim of pre-vocational agriculture was to provide education that would motivate and prepare learners for employment opportunities. Within the African continent and from opinions well supported by Bailey and Merritt (1997), the main core of learning experiences in agriculture in schools consists of three intra-curricular components which are: classroom instruction, experiential learning through supervised experiences, and leadership activities. When these three components are actualized through a well-designed integrated programme, they provide a context for learning necessary contents and life skills to prepare students for adulthood, regardless of their ideal career areas. When the three-component model is implemented into school-based agricultural education, learners are well prepared and succeed in career choices in global agriculture. This enables the graduates to be competent in the workplace (Stone, 2014).

Agricultural Education is meant for learners to develop the following skills: decision making, development of decision-making skills, career and personal choices, better self-confidence and human relation, application of learned knowledge, time management, record-keeping and development of independence and promoting positive attitudes towards farming among the youth (National Research Council, 2012).

Future Plans: Fully abreast of the numerous advantages of LCT, Anand (2015) highlighted 7 main advantages viz: improves participation, improves retention of knowledge, boosts performance at work, develops problem-solving skills, fosters collaborative learning, makes learning more fun, and; facilitates personalized learning. *According to Chinese proverb "What I hear, I forget; what I see, I remember; what I do, I understand"* - Chinese proverb *"Mihil intellectu quod non fuit prius in sensu"* which literally means *"there is nothing in knowledge which has not first passed through the senses"* (Commenius, 1972). These aptly describe the concept of vocational education in our formal and informal settings. However, the teaching of Agriculture in most countries within the continent falls far below these thereby making the advantages elusive to both the teachers and the students. In Nigeria as with most African countries, most concepts in Agriculture are still taught in abstracts thereby making teaching-learning process cumbersome with uninspiring learning experiences. Over the years, some topics are difficult to teach and have not been traditionally appealing to the teachers themselves as they have poor background knowledge of the topics while at school. With the LCT in place in the school system, it is strongly believed that these topics which are sometimes 'skipped' will be appropriately taught and students will benefit maximally.

Nigeria education system as with what obtains in most African countries still practice the traditional model of education often regarded as "school-centered" or "teacher-centred". For example, many traditional approaches to schooling could be considered "school-centered," rather than student-centered, because schools are often organized and managed in ways that work well for organizational operations, but that might not reflect the most effective ways to educate students (Agofure, 2105).

To improve on the LCT in the African continent, the class size should be drastically reduced to allow for more concentration on the manageable population of students in each class, the use of ICT in teaching-learning should be improved so also the libraries to allow for more independent studies by students, and; staff of the Monitoring and Inspectorate sections of the Ministry of Education should be exposed and retrained on contemporary issues in education as most of these Inspectors are already out of tune regarding 21st century approaches to educational technologies.

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