Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme (SAEP): A Veritable Tool for Entrepreneurial Skills Development among Nigerian Youths

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One of the core components of Agricultural education programme is the “Supervised agricultural experience programme (SAEP). A supervised agricultural experience programme has been identified as a programme designed to practically help students apply knowledge and skills learned to experiences that will prepare them for agricultural career. The purpose of this paper was to explore SAEP as a veritable tool for entrepreneurial skills development among Nigerian Youths; to examine the relevance of entrepreneurial skills; and prospects in SAEP to Nigerian Youths. The paper highlighted the philosophy and principles of SAEP, types of SAEP programme and proficiency areas of SAEP. Associated entrepreneurial skill necessary to aid the implementation of the acquired SAEP and the challenges facing SAEP were also identified. It was therefore recommended among others that the proficiency award areas in SAEP should be enriched with professionalism as to enhance self-employability of the Nigerian Youths and make them productive entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme, Veritable Tool, Entrepreneurial skills, Nigerian Youths

**INTRODUCTION**

In Nigeria, problem of poverty has for a long time been a cause of concern to the government. Attention was initially focused on rural development and town planning as practical means of dealing with the problem (Agu, 2013). Youths in Nigeria suffer high unemployment due to lack of opportunities, physical and psychological challenges resulting from poverty. Some youths respond to these challenges by engaging in criminal or violent behaviour while others suffer from despair or depression. Unemployment creates a wide range of social ills and young people are particularly susceptible to its damaging effects namely; lack of skills, low self-esteem, marginalization, impoverishment and wasting of enormous human resources. These problems according to Agu, 2013 in Ajani, Mgbeka, & Onah, 2015, associated with unemployment can be solved by empowering the youths through agricultural development programmes which will enable them to have opportunities for self-employment in agriculture (Agu, 2013).

Past Nigerian governments has come up with different agricultural measures intended to better the lot of Nigerians, especially people living in rural areas such as youths. These agricultural measures are programmes embarked upon which included Green Revolution, Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), National Agricultural and Land Development Authority (NALDA), Seed Multiplication Programme, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), among others (Ndem, 2008). Such measures of agricultural projects were aimed at providing gainful employment, food for the populace and raw materials for industries, housing and educational programmes. The overall objective in the case of agriculture was to ensure food sufficiency for the country and this is what agricultural education provides.

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Agricultural education has a rich heritage of preparing students for their futures. Students enrolled in agricultural education programme get exposure to the opportunities that await them after high school and gain the experience needed to be very employable. Olatan (2010) in Famiwole & Kolawole (2013), emphasized that the teaching and learning of agriculture in secondary schools must be more than in-class instructions but should include learning by doing to gain the experience needed for the establishment of one job or career after graduation (Aderogba, 2011). It has been observed that sometimes a person does not get a particular job because the person lacks the experience needed for that job. It is therefore imperative for any agricultural education student to get experience for a career that interests him/her while learning, hence, the word “Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme”

A supervised agricultural experience programme (SAEP) is a planned Practical activity that helps a student develop skills, competencies, and experience in a career area of the student’s choice in agricultural education programme (CAERT, 2008). SAEP is a required component of a total Agricultural Education Programme and intended for every student. Through the student’s involvement in the programme students are able to consider multiple careers and occupations, learn expected workplace behaviour and develop specific skills within an industry. They are also provided opportunities to apply academic and occupational skills in the workplace or a stipulated workplace environment (NCAE, 2015)

According to Policy Handbook (2017), supervised agricultural experience is defined as the individual and independent application of knowledge acquired in the agricultural classroom by a student under the supervision of the agriculture teacher and is in direct correlation to success in the classroom and within Future Farmers of America (FFA). A Supervised Agricultural Experience is a component of the total agricultural education programme and is instrumental in preparing a graduate that is career and college ready. SAEP or Work-based learning include strategies that allow agricultural education programmes to extend beyond the classroom and into the community in order to develop industry and career-based student competencies. Through these work-based strategies, students learn how to apply what they are learning in the classroom as they prepare to transition into the world of college and career opportunities. The mission of SAEP according to Phipps, Osborne, Dyer, & Ball (2008) is to prepare students for successful careers and lifetime of informed choices in the global agriculture, food, fibre and natural resources sectors which are being guided by philosophy and principles.

The paper is an opinion article which relied heavily on current literature from journals, Internet, books, magazines, and observations in the study area.

SAEP Philosophy and Principles

The National Council for Agricultural Education (NCAE, 2015) provides the following belief statements in regard to high quality SAEP. These serve as the philosophy and principles of SAEP. The following are some of the beliefs:

- A key component of quality SAEP is documentation of not only financial recordkeeping but also a record of skills and knowledge attained, credentials or certifications earned as an evidence of prior planning, evidence of reflection and evidence of career planning.
- Students can engage in suitable SAEP for which no FFA outcome may currently be available since there are over three hundred careers in agriculture. SAEP is not defined by FFA award or recognition programs.
- SAEP should be teacher supervised and guided with the help of appropriate adult mentors to connect to classroom instruction and ensure a safe learning environment for the student.
- SAEP supervision does not equate to an onsite visit by the teacher every time and in every instance. Supervision can occur in groups, using computer technology, using social media or any other appropriate measures that allow teachers to be as efficient with their time as possible. However, this does not mean that onsite instructional visits are not valuable for many types of SAE.
- All SAEPs should conform to national and state youth labour standards and students should attain all appropriate recognized safety and/or certifications needed to perform necessary job functions included within the SAEP. Exploration of career interests, requirements and opportunities within a chosen career pathway is a key component of quality SAEP.
- SAEP provides for application of classroom learning (both academic and technical) in a real world setting or simulated real world setting.
- SAEP can happen in the school facilities and occasionally during the school day as long as the programme is student managed, outside formal instructional time, simulates a real world.
- SAEP allows for the establishment of a clear connection between education and the world of work including participation in authentic work related tasks.
- SAEP helps students assess and understand the expectations of the workplace.
- SAEP supervision requires additional instructor time outside the classroom/laboratory component of the program and should occur on a year round basis; therefore some of this additional time occurs beyond the normal teaching contract. To accommodate this individualized, year-round instruction, the teacher should be provided extended contract days to facilitate supervision during summer months.

The overall effect of the philosophy and principles guiding the SAEP is that, it showcases quality indicators for a Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme.
Indicators for a Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme

Quality indicators for a Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme according to Phipps et. al., (2008) include:

1. All students have experiential learning (SAEP) programmes based on career pathways / interests and agricultural curriculum standards;
2. Experiential learning (SAEP) programmes are planned, developed, and managed by the student with instruction and support from the agriculture teacher, parents and/or employer;
3. The agriculture teacher maintains accurate records of all experiential learning (SAEP) supervision;
4. Continuous instruction and supervision of student experiential learning (SAEP) programmes are provided by the agriculture teacher throughout the calendar year;
5. Each student maintains up-to-date and accurate experiential learning (SAEP) records;
6. An annual summary of students’ experiential learning (SAEP) programs is completed and submitted to the appropriate entities;
7. Students have comprehensive experiential learning (SAEP) programs that show evidence in growth in size and/or scope;

Types of Supervised Agricultural Experience Programmes (SAEP).

There are four types of Supervised Agricultural Experience Programmes. These are Exploratory, Entrepreneurship, Placement, and Research/Experimentation SAEPs. Each student’s SAE is based on the student’s interests and available opportunities. These are being explained by CAERT, (2008)

Exploratory SAEP

An exploratory SAEP allows a student to have a wide range of experiences to learn more about career opportunities or the agricultural industry in general. This type of experience is not a long-term project or even necessarily focused on a single career path. Rather, it is intended for the student to “get a taste” of a variety of experiences. By getting a variety of experiences, students can make better choices about their future, including the type of education they need and the career opportunities that interest them. Exploratory SAEPs may involve job shadowing. Job shadowing is spending time with someone during the person’s normal work day. Other types of exploratory experiences include: Visiting a factory or production facility to see how machinery is made, Assisting in the care of plants in the school greenhouse, Caring for small animals at home, Observing a soil conservationist prepare an improvement plan for a farm, Assisting a landscaper install flowers or grass, Visiting a museum to learn about the history of agriculture (CAERT,2008).

Entrepreneurship SAEP

An entrepreneurship SAEP involves personally owning all or part of an enterprise in agriculture or a related area. The student has an ownership interest in the materials, supplies, and inventory of the business. He or she may be the sole owner or have an ownership share. Regardless of a student’s ownership interest, he or she is expected to be actively involved in the planning and work involved in the business. The student is responsible for the risk and reward of ownership. Normally, an entrepreneurship SAE starts small and grows in size and scope. Scope according to CAERT (2008), refers to the amount of responsibility, labor, and assets that the student has involved in the project. Owning a business enterprise usually involves getting the needed tools, supplies, or inventory to start. An entrepreneurship SAE may be a production enterprise or an agribusiness enterprise. A production enterprise involves producing plants or animals for sale or home use. An agribusiness enterprise involves providing services or selling products that you do not produce.

Placement SAEP

A placement SAEP involves gaining work experience and competencies in an agricultural or related business by working for another person or a company. The work may be paid or unpaid, depending on the experience and arrangement. You may already have a part-time job that is a natural fit for a placement SAEP. A school’s agricultural education facilities may provide an opportunity for an unpaid placement experience by managing a school greenhouse or mechanics laboratory as observed by CAERT, (2008). An aquaculture placement SAEP is possible by managing the school aquaculture facility. Through a placement SAEP, competencies of a career without the risk of operating a particular own business ensured is, one learns the value of workplace skills and financial management skills.

Research/Experimentation SAEP

A research/experimentation SAEP is a science-based experience. It may involve using a science laboratory or an environmental site for study. In Research/Experimental SAEP, students plan and conduct an agricultural science experiment using the scientific process. Research and experimentation SAEPs can combine science and agriculture into science fair projects or other research-based activities. A student placed in a local laboratory may have the opportunity to study under an experienced agricultural scientist. Students who participate in science fairs could use their projects as research and experimentation SAE programmes ( CAERT, 2008) Some examples of research and experimentation supervised agricultural experiences include; working with an agronomist to improve a crop variety, studying the effects of salinity on seed germination, experimenting to see how certain feed additives affect weight gain in livestock,
testing different food packages to see which ones are most effective and conducting water testing around agricultural fields among others. The different projects of SAEP aforementioned above can be carried out under the different proficiency areas of SAEP.

Proficiency Award Areas of SAEP

According to National FFA (2013), some of the award areas under Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme are highlighted below:

- Agricultural communication
- Agricultural education
- Agricultural services
- Agricultural processing, agricultural sales-entrepreneurship
- Agricultural sales-placement
- Livestock production, small animal production and care
- Fibre and oil crop production
- Forest management and products
- Agricultural mechanics design and fabrication among others

Famiwole, (2015) noted that to equip the in-school youths with saleable and marketable skills in the proficiency areas of SAEP, there is the need to provide vocational guidance to them, to learn by doing through the various experiential activities embedded in the programme which will in turn bring about self-reliance. Invariably, this makes the SAEP in agricultural education have the potential of gearing up the entrepreneurial traits in the students; thereby making them to be creative and innovative in their thinking, attitude and actions. One of the ways of empowering the youths is to rekindle their spirit of creativity in entrepreneurship, so that they will be able to link their education with enterprise development and innovations so as to fully utilize their head, hands and heart for sustainable agricultural development. (Famiwole, Bandele and Oke 2013).

Concept of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is ‘an individual’s ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objective’. Fostering entrepreneurial spirit supports the creation of new firms and business growth (EU, 2014). Entrepreneurship is being conceptualized by Timmons & Spinelli (2007) as a way of thinking, reasoning and acting that is opportunity-based, holistic in approach and leadership balanced. Entrepreneurship, therefore, involves innovation which can be simplified as a process of change comprising identification, evaluation and exploration of an opportunity, management and creation of value through the successful exploration of a new idea by an entrepreneur. This is not far-fetched from a SAEP project youth, who becomes entrepreneur having ability to turn ideas into action and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. He possesses some skills as an entrepreneur called entrepreneurial skills.

Entrepreneurial Skills

Entrepreneurial skills are skills needed to have to succeed in business. They are the necessary skills an individual needs to successfully run a business or add value to the work as submitted by Gordon (2017). Entrepreneurial skills are the basic skills necessary to enable you start, develop, finance and succeed in your home enterprise. The entrepreneur is a giver of employment, provider of infrastructures and valuable services to the community. For an entrepreneur to be successful, he/she should possess the following characteristics skills according to Aminu (2009): determination, leadership quality, creativity, self-nurturing, self-discipline, energetic, future oriented among others. The entrepreneurial skills include: communication skill; creative/innovative skills; planning and organizing skills; risk management skills; self-management skills; technical skills, initiative skills; leadership skills; teamwork skills; learning skills among others (Edith Cowan University, 2013).

Roles of SAEP in Entrepreneurship among Nigerian Youths

The role of Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme cannot be over-emphasized; hence Angbre (2016) highlighted the following among others:

- Reduction in rural-migration
- Empowering youth
- Decreasing youth unemployment
- Poverty reduction
- Self-reliance on food production
- Provision of entrepreneurship initiatives
- Raw materials essential for industrial growth.

Reduction in Rural-Urban Migration

Rural-urban youth migration can be seen as the physical transnational of young individuals or group of young people from rural areas to urban centers. Rural-urban youth migration is the most important aspect of labour migration because it affects the structures and composition of the population (Mbah, Ezeano & Agada 2016). One major cause of insecurity and instability in a nation is the mass movement of unemployed youths from the rural areas to urban centers in search of jobs. They easily become available tools for use in promoting insecurity. If these youths are well trained in vocational agriculture, with basic skills acquisition in the various proficiency areas in SAEP, and given the necessary assistance, they can be self-reliant and productive entrepreneurs. This will drastically reduce rural-urban migration, thereby creating enabling environment for effective participation in nation building and development.

Youth Empowerment

The present Nigeria Government has passion and commitment to agriculture and rural development to turn
around agriculture through the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) which has special packages for youths living in rural areas with little or no access to job opportunities to earn a living according to Agu et al. 2013. The author emphasized that, federal government through the Ministry of Agriculture has developed programmes to sustain the initiative such as Youth Employment in Agriculture Programme (YEAP), Youth Collaborative Community Agriculture Programme (YOCAP) and Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture (YISA) among others. Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture (YISA) has embarked on Youth Agricultural Re-orientation workshop to educate Nigerian youths that agriculture is pure business and plays a critical role in the national food security. It also holds a lot of prospects for business-oriented individuals who can seize the opportunities created by some of the programmes mentioned above to better their lots.

YISA do not merely encourage youths to take up agriculture as a business but creates a platform for active participation through the organization’s Youth Collaborative Community Agriculture Programme (YOCAP) (Agu et al., 2013). When youths are exposed to simple farm operations in SAEP like gardening, poultry production, bee production, raising nurseries for seedlings, getting involved in animal husbandry or lawn maintenance and being experiential in them, they will "earn to live" becoming entrepreneurs and be empowered to serve their families and the nations. Hence the rate of crime and involvement in violence will be a thing of the past.

**Reduction in Youth Unemployment**

In Nigeria, agriculture is a major employer of labour as opined Angre (2016). Training in vocational agriculture allows for skill acquisition in all the disciplines of agriculture which further makes the youths to be self-employed through supervised agricultural experience programme (SAEP). Adabara (2013), affirmed that youth unemployment and poverty are on the increase in Nigeria, with an army of unemployed youths parading the streets in search of limited jobs. He further stressed that this has been responsible for the present security challenges the country is facing. It has also been opined that countries where government is a major employer of labour is bound to face high unemployment rate, Nigeria being a typical example (Kolade, 2012). When these youths are fully engaged with SAEP and become entrepreneurs in their chosen fields, it is perceived that they will no longer have the time to be involved in violence and other criminal activities. This will reduce insecurity and unemployment to the barest minimum in the society (Oluseye, Sylvanus & Joseph 2017).

**Poverty reduction**

The poverty reduction programme being implemented by the Nigerian government in all areas of the economy now is the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), a comprehensive reform strategy geared towards addressing the economic, social and political challenges facing Nigeria. It is primarily being monitored by the National Planning Commission of Nigeria. The sub-objective of the Nigeria poverty reduction programme is to promote agriculture and rural development aimed at reducing extreme poverty in rural areas where 90% of the poor reside (Akpan, 2010). It has been observed that, poverty and hunger have been identified as the major factors that make youths take to crime and other social vices. When youths are being exposed to Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme (SAEP) most especially while in school, it is believed that they will eventually become young entrepreneurs in their field of interest and begin to earn to live.

**Provision of Entrepreneurship Initiatives.**

Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme are designed to pull out the qualities and characteristics of an entrepreneur from students right from the secondary school level. The programme equips potential students of agriculture to start, run and manage a small or medium scale agricultural project, under the supervision of an adviser, subject teacher, professionals in the specific agric-business and at times parents. Students are made to complement the classroom instructions with actual skill development projects on the field, having real agricultural life, so as to be able to ask questions and get improved through such activities as exploratory, ownerships, placement and supplementary projects Famiwole, Bamidele, Oke (2013).

**Self-Reliance in Food Production**

Agricultural development is one of the most powerful tools to end extreme poverty, boost shared prosperity and feed a projected 9.7 billion people by 2050. Growth in the agriculture sector is two to four times more effective in raising incomes among the poorest compared to other sectors. 2016 analyses found that 65% of poor working adults made a living through agriculture (World Bank 2018). Globally, extreme poverty has rapidly declined. New poverty estimates by the World Bank suggest that the number of extremely poor people—those who live on $1.90 a day or less—has fallen from 1.9 billion in 1990 to about 736 million in 2015 (World Bank 2018).

This implies that, when youths put into more practical use the acquired skills in vocational agriculture through SAEP, there would be abundance of food for the teeming population. Through their entrepreneurship ideas and innovations, the increase in food production would be sustained and the country can boast of self-reliance in agricultural production. Poverty and hunger would be eradicated from the society, thereby paving the way for peace and stability to prevail in the country.
**Industrial Growth**

According to Olajide, Akinlabi & Tijani (2012), the agricultural sector contributes a lot to the growth and development of an economy in four major ways namely; food for man, factor contribution, market contribution and foreign exchange earnings. These are major factors to the making of an economy. The role of agriculture is too paramount and would never be over emphasized as earlier stated. Statistically, agriculture engages a larger percentage or greater chunk of the active labour force in Nigeria. Olajide et. al., (2012) wrote that agricultural sector is the largest sector in the Nigerian economy with its dominant share of the GDP, employment of more than 70% of the labour force and generation of about 88% of non-oil foreign exchange earnings. Development economists have focused on how agriculture can best contribute to overall economic growth and modernization. The physiocrats laid more emphasis on agriculture in the development of an economy (Egbulonu & Nwokoro 2016). This is what SAEP offers if the programme is well harnessed.

Availability of essential agricultural raw materials and its effective utilization can only be achieved when the right skills are acquired through training in Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme. The skilled manpower goes into mass production, which are essential prerequisites for industrial growth. The multiplier effect of this is the fostering entrepreneurial spirit among Nigerian youths which supports the creation of more job opportunities for the unemployed youths, reduction in poverty level and crime. The overall benefit of this to the society is the reduction in security threats. Despite all the laudable benefits of SAEP, the programme is inevitably faced with some challenges, militating against its prevalence among the Nigerian youths.

**Challenges facing Supervised Agricultural Experience Programme (SAEP)**

Literature indicates that there are economic, social and environmental factors affecting rural youths’ involvement in agricultural production in Nigeria (Echebiri, 2005). Economic factors include inadequate credit facilities, low farming profit margins, and lack of agricultural insurance scheme, initial capital and production inputs. Social factors include public perception about farming and parental influence to move out of agriculture. Environmental issues include inadequate land, continuous poor harvests and soil degradation. It has also been observed that declining production, which is a result of poor irrigation, limited adoption of new technology and research, inadequate storage techniques and a lack of access to credit for farmers pose a great challenge to agricultural programmes such as Supervised Agricultural Experienced Programme.

Furthermore, there are many outside factors that can affect the use and growth in a SAEP’s portion of the three-circle model in agricultural education. Many times, the way the school system is set up can have an effect on the way the programme can be implemented and maintained (Croom, Johnson, Flowers & Wilson, 2012). If the setting of the school does not give room for the training and implementation of SAEP, it will definitely mar the programme. Other factors such as budgets for the career and technical education department, along with the teacher’s viewpoints of the three-circle model, can influence if and how SAEP projects are implemented (Croom et.al., 2012). The community and parents can be a big help with these projects, but if they are not in support, this can make it more difficult on the teacher to implement or find placement locations for student projects. There are many views of SAEP projects within programmes based on the student populations that are in the programme and those that the programme seeks to serve. Knowing how to reach out to the students in the school may pose another serious hitch to the programme.

**CONCLUSION**

Agricultural education covers a broad range of formal and informal activities that build capacity within the agricultural sector and for wider national development, encompassing training, skill acquisition and entrepreneurship. Supervised Agricultural Experienced Programme (SAEP), as a component in agricultural education, is a veritable tool for entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skill development among Nigerian youths. As a skill-inclined programme, it inculcates entrepreneurial skills in its recipients. It was established that, SAEP has the potentials of promoting entrepreneurial skills in Nigerian youths. This is because of the investment opportunities it offers. However, SAEP seems to still be at infancy stage due to poor awareness, several economic and infrastructural constraints.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the discussion in this paper, the following recommendations were put forward.

1. Agricultural programme in schools should include SAEP. The state school boards in collaboration with relevant ministries should conduct information on SAEP, workplace and orientation for educational planners, administration and teachers of agriculture in Nigeria.

2. More research is needed regarding the specific scope and structure of SAE in todays to meet the needs of a new clientele as the agricultural industry changes and more non-traditional students and youths enroll in agricultural classes.

3. Nigerian youths should be encouraged to train in Supervised Agricultural Experienced Programme (SAEP). This could be done through career counseling both at home and in schools and also through creation of awareness through the National Orientation Agency.
4. Stakeholders should be encouraged to fund Supervised Agricultural Experienced Programme (SAEP) in order to give ample participation to Nigerian youths who would help to meet the societal needs.

5. Institutions and agricultural education departments are urged to look for alternative means of funding to argument fund from government and proprietors.

6. Only qualified and experienced agricultural educators should be recruited to train youths and students in Supervised Agricultural Experienced Programme at all educational levels. The already recruited ones should as a matter of urgency retrained especially in all the SAEP Projects and its application.

7. Exploratory activities such as excursion to established farms and agric-based industries should be encouraged to motivate the students and increase their awareness of the different opportunities available in Agriculture.

8. Students are to be placed on ownership projects (such as Goat rearing, Pig production, Arable crop production, Poultry management among others, for ownership and managerial experience.

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