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Apprenticeship in the Academic System among Agricultural Education Lecturers in Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to ascertain the impact of apprenticeship system among agricultural education lecturers in Nigerian Universities. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The study was conducted in Nigerian Universities. Six universities comprising one university each from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria was randomly selected for the study. The study had a population of 86 agricultural education lecturers in the sampled universities. Out of the 86 lecturers, 41 lecturers were purposively sampled which consisted of all agricultural education lecturers with five years or less of work experience. Data was collected from the participants with the use of focus group discussion. Data collected were analyzed qualitatively. Points which were suggested by a majority of the participants formed part of the findings of the study. The researcher used the points raised to make inference. The findings of the study revealed that younger lecturers carry out many academic and non academic activities for their senior colleagues. It also revealed that these activities have positive and negative impacts on the academic and personal life of the participants. The study therefore recommended among others that senior and younger agricultural education lecturers are encouraged to have a gentleman agreement before agreeing to partake in apprenticeship system and senior colleagues should ensure that the personal responsibilities of younger lecturers are considered before dishing out personal responsibilities to them.

These are achieved with the help of lecturers in universities.

A lecturer is a teacher who teaches at the tertiary education level. A lecturer of agricultural education is an individual who has undergone a teacher preparatory programme in the university and charged with the responsibility of imparting to the students the knowledge, skills and attitudes in agriculture (Onu et al, 2019). According to Ekenechukwu and Osaat (2017), lecturers are the greatest assets as well as major stakeholders in the university-industry. The authors affirmed that other than these, lecturers are also exposed to varieties of other duties some of which are complex and sometimes conflicting with their primary roles as teachers and academic staff. Some of these duties include; carrying out research, preparing and delivering regular lectures to students; conducting tutorial sessions, seminars and laboratory classes (where necessary); adapting to the shift to e-learning, combining work and home activities, attending conferences and contributing to the development of research strategies for the school among others. Despite these numerous activities which could be stressful, there is the aspect of apprenticeship among young agricultural education lecturers that is rarely talked about.

Keywords : Academic System, Agricultural Education, Nigerian Universities

Introduction

Agricultural Education is a programme of study aimed at imparting knowledge, skills and attitude to individuals in the field of agriculture. Agricultural education is aimed at training and imparting knowledge and skill to its recipients in the field of agriculture such as crop production, livestock management, soil and water conservation, and marketing among others (Onu et al, 2019). According to Ejiofor and Nwakile (2013), agricultural education is a programme that imparts skill in cultivation of land, rearing of animals, marketing of agricultural produce and teaching others about agriculture. Osinem (2007) stated that agricultural education has trained the youths in the skills necessary to assume leadership positions, lifelong knowledge and soft skills that employers seek as well as the creation of future entrepreneurs.

Apprenticeship is a system that involves training a new generation of practitioners of a trade or professionals usually with on the job training. According to International Labour Organization and World Bank (2013), apprenticeship refers to a unique form of vocational education, combining on-the-job learning and school-based training, for specifically defined competencies and work processes. The author further posited that it should be regulated by law and based on written employment contract with a compensatory payment, and standard social protection scheme. Apprenticeship means a systematic acquisition of complete skills sets at the workplace, for a full occupation (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012). The author further posited that apprentices can be considered as “employees” who learn while they work at the company. Mortari, Silva, Girelli and Ubbiali (2017) posited that a common characteristic of apprenticeship programs is that they provide



benefits to learners and employers alike. However, in the context of this study, apprenticeship refers to a situation common among agricultural education lecturers in universities where senior colleagues (Agricultural Education lecturers with more than five years of experience) utilize the services of their younger colleagues (Agricultural Education lecturers with five or less years of experience) without any form of agreement between the two parties. Usually, the relationship between the two parties could be symbiotic or parasitic.

Symbiotic relationship among agricultural education lecturers in the apprenticeship system refers to a situation in which younger colleagues and older colleagues benefit from each other. In this system, more experienced lecturers mentor the younger ones in research methodology, teaching methodology and grant writing among others. On the other hand, the younger colleagues assist the older lecturers in preparing their lectures, setting up projectors and undertaking practical classes which could be more strenuous for the older lecturers. At other times, the relationship could be parasitic in that younger lecturers could be observed running personal errands for the older lecturers such going to the bank, weeding personal farms of older colleagues and going to the market for older colleagues with little or no rewards attached to undertaking these activities. All these could have an effect on the academic and personal lives of the young colleagues.

In Nigeria, the activities agricultural education lecturers undertake is already strenuous enough. They teach courses to the students, take students to the farm for practical, supervise projects of students, write articles and textbooks required for promotions, attend conferences in numerous locations and contribute to the development of research strategies for the school among others. For the younger agricultural education lecturers, they have to carry out these activities coupled with serving their 'masters' who in this case are the older colleagues. Many times, this could have a positive or negative effect on the lives of these lecturers. For those in symbiotic relationships, the stress seems to be worth it because they improve in their research skills and teaching skills even though they may be found wanting in their personal lives. For those in parasitic relationships, they could be found wanting in their academic and personal lives due to stress. Although few studies (ILO, 2011; ILO, 2012; Mortari, Silva, Girelli & Ubbiali; 2017; Kuczera, Bastianić & Field, 2018) have carried out studies on apprenticeship, there is a dearth of information on the impact of apprenticeship system in the academic system

among agricultural education lecturers in universities in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to ascertain the impact of apprenticeship in the academic system among Agricultural Education lecturers in Nigerian universities. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain the academic and non academic activities undertaken by young lecturers for their senior colleagues as well as the impact of apprenticeship system on the academic and non academic life of young lecturers.

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The study was conducted in Nigerian Universities. Six universities comprising one university each from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria was randomly selected for the study. The study has a population of 86 agricultural education lecturers in the sampled universities. Out of the 86 lecturers, 41 lecturers were purposively sampled which consisted of agricultural education lecturers with five years or less of work experience. Data was collected from the participants with the use of focus group discussion. The focus group discussion took place in the various universities. Data was collected on the spot through focus group discussion. The researchers jotted down the points suggested by the participants of the focus group discussion. An audio recording was also done with the permission of the participants. Data collected were analyzed qualitatively. Points which were suggested by a majority of the participants formed part of the findings of the study. The researcher used the points raised to make inference.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were briefed about the research aims, kept informed at all stages and were offered anonymity. A consent form was signed between researcher and the each participant about the use of the data in terms of how its analysis would be reported and disseminated. In order to ensure that the participants are not known, the name of the universities where the study was carried was not mentioned.

Results

The results of the study were organized into four sub headings based on the research questions. The themes that emanated from the discussions with the participants were as follows;



The Academic Activities Undertaken by Young Agricultural Education Lecturers for their Senior Colleagues

Most of the participants reported that they do the marking for their senior colleagues. It seemed to be a general consensus that older colleagues very rarely marked scripts. Many were also of the opinions that any activity that required farm work, they handled. This seemed understandable because farm work is very strenuous and would be difficult for elderly lecturers to handle. Many of the participants also reported that during lectures, they are present in the class observing their senior colleagues. One person was reported saying that, "although I think I have improved my teaching techniques by attending the classes my senior colleagues give to the students, I feel I have learnt enough to be able to do something else with my time". Many participants also reported that they did academic activities for their senior colleagues in their personal homes. The participants reported being part of research teams for preparing grants for their senior colleagues. One participant was quoted as saying that; "My Oga (Colloquial for master) is a real big man. We come together to put together a research grant which he rarely contributes to but eventually everything is packaged and sent in his name as the sole writer!! Anyway, I am learning through the process but I think it would be better if he contributes too or adds our names to the write up. If we are good enough to write, we should be good enough to partake in the projects when our works are chosen". A few reported being in charge of anything that involves ICT such as sending mails and setting up projectors.

The Non-Academic Activities Undertaken by Young Agricultural Education Lecturers for their Senior Colleagues

Many of the participants reported that they had numerous experiences of undertaking activities for senior colleagues which were not related to their academics. Many of the male respondents reported running errands such as paying in or withdrawing money at banks or taking cars to the mechanic for repairs. For the females, many of the participants reported going to markets on behalf of their senior colleagues. As one participant put it, "I don't even know where my job description ends. When I was employed, I thought it was majorly to lecture but it forms a minute part of my responsibility. I think I spend more time running errands for my superiors than lecturing!!!" Some participants noted that they had occasionally cleaned the offices or homes of their superiors when their cleaners skipped work for various reasons. Few participants reported that they farmed in the private gardens of their superiors.

Although one unifying thing most of them said was that at harvest, they got some of the produce. One person was quoted saying that, "in as much as I got some produce from the farm, I would rather not have farmed on his farm and used my time for more important things".

The Impact of Apprenticeship System on the Academic Life of Agricultural Education Lecturers in Universities

Many of the participants admitted to have improved in various aspects of academics since being mentored by a senior colleague. As one participant put it, "when I got this job, I only applied because of the lack of options. I never wanted to lecture as a career so things like lecturing and research seemed strange to me but I have really improved since I started working closely with my superior". Despite the fact many of them did agree to have improved, many of them lamented difficulty carrying out tasks pertaining to them. One of them stated that "I teach some of my Oga's courses, mark his scripts and handle his supervisees at the undergraduate level among numerous things I do for him. It makes. This makes it really difficult having time to carry out my own responsibilities". The lack of time to carry out their responsibilities seemed to be a sentiment shared by many participants. Another participant reported that he could be doing something for a senior colleague then another one calls for him to do something which unofficially, he is not allowed to reject. As one reported, "atimes I come to work by 7am which is before work hours and work all through till 6 pm yet I can not exactly say what I have achieved for myself. Many times I go home frustrated".

The Impact of Apprenticeship System on the Personal Life of Agricultural Education Lecturers in Universities

Discussion with the participants revealed that the personal lives of the participants were highly affected by the apprenticeship system. Many of the participants revealed that their personal lives were negatively affected and this led them into rarely having time for themselves. Many reported that due to the excess activities that they are expected to partake in for themselves and their superiors, their homes seem to be another extension of the office. The few times they stay off work were to eat or sleep briefly. As one participant put it, "I am so busy right now that I rarely have any friends outside my work place. I spend time at home carrying out responsibilities that I should have done at work but work time was spent serving my superiors. It is frustrating that I have no time to socialize with anybody or even exercise. It drives me nuts!" Some



of the participants reported having less time for spiritual activities. "Maybe if I were not a lecturer, I would pray more" one said. A few of the lecturers especially the males agreed that due to excessive stress, they drank or smoked a lot to relax. As one participant put it, "If not for the drinks and cigarettes, I could maybe be mad by now".

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of the study on the academic activities undertaken by young agricultural education lecturers for their senior colleagues revealed that the younger lecturers marked scripts, taught courses, undertook practical classes for the senior ones, partook in grant writing as well as sending mails and setting up projectors. The findings showed that the junior colleagues were really involved in the academic lives of their senior colleagues and are bound to learn. The findings are in line with Mortari, Silva, Girelli and Ubbiali (2017) who found out that a common characteristic of apprenticeship programs is that they provide benefits to learners and experts alike. In this case, the system seems beneficial to the junior colleagues (learners) and the senior colleagues (experts). It is however sad that occasionally, younger colleagues who were involved in activities like writing grants are not rewarded for it.

The findings of the study on the non-academic activities undertaken by young agricultural education lecturers for their senior colleagues revealed that the younger colleagues run errands like undertaking bank activities, mechanical repairs on cars, market shopping. Occasionally, younger colleagues clean offices and even carry out farm work in private farms. However, some of those that carry out farm works agreed that they got some produce at harvest. Unfortunately, many of them didn't have the option of choosing to partake or not which should not be the case.

The findings of the study on the impact of apprenticeship system on the academic life of agricultural education lecturers in universities revealed that the system has a positive and negative effect on the lives of younger colleagues. Many of the participants admitted to have improved in various aspects of academics since being mentored by senior colleagues. Despite the fact many of them did agree to have improved, many of them lamented difficulty carrying out tasks pertaining to them. That is, their personal responsibilities are affected by inadequate time to concentrate on these activities.

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The findings of the study on the impact of apprenticeship system on the personal life of agricultural education lecturers in universities reveals that the personal lives of younger lecturers is negatively affected. Even their homes seem to have become an extension of work because of the numerous activities to be carried out for themselves and their superiors. The findings revealed that many do not exercise because of lack of time and involve in smoking and drinking as a way to cope with strenuous activities. Excessive use of intoxicants could be harmful to them in the medium/long term.

Conclusion

The study sought to ascertain the impact of apprenticeship system among agricultural education lecturers in universities. It is evident that a form of apprenticeship system exists in academic system among agricultural education lecturers. A symbiotic kind of apprenticeship system where senior colleagues and younger colleagues benefit from each other is desirable. However, it is evident that parasitic relationships also occur whereby the younger colleagues benefit nothing despite serving the older ones. It is therefore important that even though official documents are not signed, there should be consent from both parties to engage in such a system. That way, numerous ills inherent in the system would be eradicated.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Senior and younger agricultural education lecturers are encouraged to have a gentleman agreement before agreeing to partake in apprenticeship system. That way, the symbiotic form of apprenticeship in universities would be the norm.
2. Senior colleagues should ensure that the personal responsibilities of younger lecturers are considered before dishing out responsibilities to them. Non academic errands should be avoided at all cost because these are not part of the requirements of the job.
3. University management should organize orientation for their new staff so as to educate them on their rights and privileges. This would enable the younger lecturers know when their rights are infringed and what measures to take
4. Younger colleagues should be humble enough to learn from the experiences of the experienced colleagues. This would serve them well in the future



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