

PROVISION OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES FOR THE REHABILITATION OF PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED CHILDREN THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN NIGERIA

BY

**DR. N. E. MUNDI
SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY,
NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA,
PMB 80067, VICTORIA ISLAND, LAGOS, NIGERIA.**

ABSTRACT

Physically challenged children can be described as those certified by a specialist in any field of therapy as having one or more of the following disabilities: blindness, partial blindness, emotional disorder, deafness, partial hearing, physical handicap, speech defects, learning disability, social maladjustment, exceptionally gifted and mental retardation. Rehabilitation is a process that leads to the restoration of a person to his or her fullest physical, social, vocational and economic usefulness of which he or she is capable. Meaningful and effective rehabilitation of physically challenged children must end up with making them self-sustained. Through ODL system helps augment opportunities for education, ensures access, is cost effective and promotes a relevant, flexible and innovative system of education. Agriculture fulfills one of the basic necessities of life which is food. Rehabilitating children in agriculture can fulfill this thereby making them self-sustained and contributing member of the society. Agricultural extension is out-of-school system of education for farmers and their children to raise their standard of living by their own resources and providing them scientific knowledge to solve their problems (Williams 1998, 37-38). Agricultural extension performs the following roles through the ODL by providing linkage for physically challenged children's needs and problems to research institutes; obtain feedback from physically challenged children about new improved technology on agriculture, helping physically challenged children to help themselves, act as facilitators of agricultural production improvement programmes, planning and organizing

extension activities and willingness of physically challenged children to participate. The participation of physically challenged children will be highly needed because of their disability. Thus, this paper aims at discussing the food and nutrition crisis in Nigeria, their implications and establish the importance of enough food supply for the attainment of living standards; discussing the concepts of agric extension and ODL and their functions relevant to physically challenged children; and examining the prospects in the provision of Agric. Extension services for the rehabilitation of physically challenged children.

Keywords: Agriculture, Extension, Services, ODL, Physically Challenged, Children, Rehabilitation.

Introduction

It is generally agreed that in a democratic society, every member (the physically challenged children inclusive) has an inherent right to an opportunity to earn a living and to contribute to the development of the society of which the (physically challenged he/she children) is a member. The fulfillment of the inherent right is through education which has multiple effects of enhancing an individual ability to earn a living commensurate with his ability, talent and skill. This position is affirmed by the National Policy on Education (1981, 7-8), which states that “Government has already included that the gifted and as well as those with physical, mental and learning difficulties, must be provided for under the educational system”. This paper focuses on the provision of Agricultural Extension Services for the rehabilitation of the physically challenged children through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) because the need for self-determination, self-realization and self-actualization is more pronounced and desired by them.

Rehabilitation refers to intervention procedures that seek to restore someone to normal optimal functioning after injury or illness. Efforts at rehabilitation focus initially on those skills lost or impaired. In this respect, rehabilitation includes various physical, occupational and behavioral therapies that seek to restore lost functions. At the same time,

rehabilitation often includes effort to assist in personal, educational or vocational adjustment and development (Eliwa 2002, 18.20). These efforts are due to the fact that important part of a person's self esteem is tied to the ability to enable one to live an independent life, or at least a less dependent life.

Food and Nutrition Crisis in Nigeria

Nigeria is currently experiencing a state of a acute food crisis. There had been shortages of food due to distortions or deformities in the operations and management of the nation's economy. Prices of food stuff, fertilizer, energy and other commodities have increased or skyrocketed. This situation has two distinct implications. The first is the food problem and this emanates from the failure of food production to keep pace with national demand arising from higher rate of production growth. The second is the nutrition problem, which results from the qualitative inadequacy of undigested food in terms of energy and protein content and its consequential constraint of under nutrition, malnutrition, disease and abject poverty. Sufficient food to relieve hunger and maintain healthy bodies is thus a necessary pre-condition for the attainment of better standards of living and rising expectation under economic development and political independence.

The Concepts of Agricultural Extension and Open and Distance Learning

Agricultural Extension in Nigeria has a long history, which dates back to 1893. To a layman, extension simply means "something extended or projected". But to a professional the real meaning of extension must go deeper. Extension education is a voluntary out-of-school educational programme for children and adults. It employs the principles of teaching and learning that affect changes in the life of children, their parents and farmers. It is generally carried out in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect between agricultural extension workers and their clientele (farmers).

It is a two-way communication process in which the extension agent carries the information from research to the farmers and the farmers problems are brought back to research by the extension agents. Over the years, extension activities have been concentrated on the normal farmers, in fact the training received by extension agents does not equip them to relate with physically challenged children. With the government emphasizing equalization of opportunities for all categories of people regardless of their disability, efforts should be geared towards making physically challenged farmers including their children enjoy the services of extension agents.

Functions of Agricultural Extension

Agricultural extension performs three major functions, which are:

1. To get the farmers into a frame of mind and attitude conducive to acceptance or adoption of technological change. This function is achieved by educating the farmers on the newly developed technology and to convince them of the viability of the new technology in agriculture. The physically challenged children can also be educated on new improved technology.
2. To disseminate to the farmers the results of research and to carry the farmer's problem back to the research system for solution. In order to perform this function properly, effective communication must exist between the research institute, the extension agent and the farmers. This also calls for adequate knowledge in technical matters related to agriculture and be skillful in the art of communication. For the extension agent to communicate effectively with the physically challenged children, he will need the assistance or support of a special education teacher or receive on the job training in special education.
3. To help farmers make wise decision in farm management. Extension is a significant tool in assisting the farmers to develop proficiency in the management of his farm. The physically challenged children

should be assisted to operate in a modern commercial economy where prices and factors of production play major roles; otherwise the advantages of combining these two important factors to make wise decision will escape them.

The Concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

Open Learning or Open Education refers to the flexibility of and access to instruction by the distance education mode in order to ensure that the broad availability of education opportunities reach many segments of the population as possible. Openness implies access to education with disregard to age, previous level of academic achievements and other factors which normally create artificial barriers to education as a life-long encouragement by an individual in a democratic environment. Open Learning provides awareness to education or Learning in ways most appropriate, efficient and effective to the individual learner and the material being studied.

Distance Learning is a way or mode of providing education on non-residential basis to learners who are home based and in most cases, fulltime workers. Distance Learning or Distance Education include all teaching methods, the interactive as well as pre-based self-instructional materials. The basic aim of distance learning is to increase access to education.

Open and Distance Learning simply means the “Openness” of the teaching learning process which allows students to operate with a degree of autonomy and self-direction despite the “apartness” or “physical separation” of the teacher and the learner resulting in the lack of eye contact. It gives opportunity to ambitious and gifted but under privileged people who are denied the opportunity of deriving education through the usual channels. It takes care of individuals, discontent with their socio-economic strata who try to change the strata in the face of many difficulties (Otta 2003, 36). Open and Distance Learning according to Clark 2004, 27-28) is a way of providing opportunities that are characteristic by the separation of teacher and learner in time and place; it is a learning system

that is certified in some way by an instruction or agency; it involves the use of a variety of media, including print and electronic; it is a two-way communication that allows the learners and the teachers to interact with the possibility of occasional face-to-face meeting and it involves specialized division of labor in the production and delivery of courses.

Open Learning or Open Education system has emerged as a viable alternative not only for providing support to academic programme at different levels of education in general educative source to reach also proved to be an effective course to reach the un-reached including children with disabilities (Varma 2003, 81-82).

The need for going in for Open Learning system for physically Challenged Children arises because these children could not be adjusted in the formal education system due to their special needs.

Today one of the outstanding contributions of Open and Distance Learning refers to the innovations in software packages that address to the special needs. This has widened access to many educational facilities from which they remained deprived for long.

The multidimensional teaching-learning methodology of ODL exposes the learners to a variety of learning resources. These facilitate reducing the unusual divide between advantaged and disadvantaged groups of learners.

The Importance of Open and Distance Learning

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems or programmes have the following benefits:

- Open and Distance Learning raises the literacy level of the population incrementally so that the goals of Education for All (EFA) shall be met on schedule.

- It enhances community ownership and participation in the management and provision of education at all levels nation wide, especially through community resource study centers.
- By adopting distance learning methods, the learners can be made to tackle their studies at their own individual pace and in the comfort of their home environment. By so doing, the spirit of self-reliance and self-dependence can be more readily generated and fostered via Distance Learning Systems (DLS).
- Students of (DLS), by studying at home, can keep their jobs as well as their families. They can become more settled in their careers while using their spare time to improve their qualifications; no risk of being unemployed since they do not have to withdraw their services when undertaking further studies.
- ODLS provide the opportunities and facilities for life-long education for all those who can still learn. As the students (that is adult workers or retirees) are not under any serious pressure to finish their courses within specific periods, since they have to work and learn or retire and learn, at the same time.
- ODL can more readily afford them the opportunities to be more academically a live and active. As conventional universities are not normally fashioned to cope with life-long educational needs of senior citizens and retirees and as distance education is specifically designed for long-life education, the needs to keep distance educational institutions open can not be overstressed.

Provision of Agricultural Extension Services for the Rehabilitation of Physically Challenged Children through ODL in Nigeria

For the Physically Challenged Children to benefit from new technology in agriculture through Open and Distance Learning, the following roles are expected to be performed by Agricultural Extension:

- They are to provide innovations to Physically Challenged Children. These are achieved by making them aware and understand new ideas. There are several and varied extension education methods at

the disposal of the extension agent for creating awareness. Mass contact method (radio, Television, Bulletins, Leaflets etc.) is used generally to create awareness. Any of the above mentioned methods can be utilized for the Physically Challenged Children depending on their disability via ODL.

- Provision of linkage. They are to provide linkage for Physically Challenged Children needs and problems to flow to the research institute. The special needs of the Physical Challenged Children must be well analyzed by extension agents and brought back to research. For example, the special needs of the blind will be different from that of the hearing impaired, the mentally retarded different from social maladjusted.
- Obtain feedback from Physically Challenged Children. They are to obtain feedback from Physically Challenged Children about the new improved technology in agriculture, as interests and peculiarities of the Physically Challenged must form the basis of any new technology to them. Feedback from the Physically Challenged Children on the adaptability, durability cost, etc to the researchers through the extension agents is very essential.
- Help Physically Challenged Children to help themselves. That is, extension should help them to help themselves. This is one of the philosophies of extension work which is based on working with the farmers and not for them in fulfilling this role; the extension agents should provide alternative solution to Physically Challenged Children problems. This will make them realize the resources at their disposal and leave the final decision to them.
- Facilitators of agricultural production programmes. They should act as facilitators of agricultural production improvement programmes. This may be achieved by trying to influence the definition of the problem objectives (goals) and strategies. The Physically Challenged Children should be helped to see the need to participate In any agricultural improvement programme, and what they stand to gain by participating in such programme.
- Provision of special education in extension services employs special tools e.g individualized teaching, Braille paper materials, specially

- trained teachers/facilitators. It is for the Physically Challenged Children and the gifted.
- The use or introduction of special education in Open and Distance Learning for the Physically Challenged Children in extension education or extension services emphasizes prevention. What makes extension education special and fit for the physically challenged children in ODL is the use of:
 - i. **Appropriate Facilities:** This relates to infrastructure that makes it easier for the exceptional learner in the learning situations. For example, a school compound with flat terrain, gentle rising entrance to door, wide corridors with hand rails, glass louvers etc. These reduce architectural barriers and enhance mobility (Ojo 1999,29).
 - ii. **Appropriate Materials:** E.g Braille writer for writing for the blind, hearing aid for the hearing impaired.
 - iii. **Special Methods:** E.g concretizing learning experiences, providing opportunities for independent study for gifted and physically challenged children etc.
 - iv. **Special Extension Teacher/Facilitator:** In addition to regular teacher training, he obtains specialized training to be able to teach physically challenged children.

The roles of agricultural extension agents call for the unique blend of skills and attitude. They must have the competence to understand and apply technical information related to their work as well as the ability to diagnose problems and come up with possible solutions especially those associated with physically challenged children. They should plan and organize extension activities and willingness to interact with others. The delivery systems that matter most in dealing with physically challenged children are the specialist who will help in assisting the extension agent in educating the physically challenged children, but for the physically challenged, input delivery is also inevitable.

Extension Agents Views of Physically Challenged Children through ODL

- The Physically Challenged Children should/must be viewed as possessing good mental capacity. They must be viewed as having the mental capacity to learn, think, reason, understand, remember, for get and judge.
- They should be viewed as emotional being that are capable of feeling various emotions which include: love, hatred, confidence, fear, resistance and acceptance. All people, whether physically challenged or not, experience those things which are expressions of attitude. Therefore, the extension agents must aim at changing these attitudes towards various aspects of agricultural production improvement programme.
- In addition, physically challenged children should be viewed as possessing great potentials, physical strength, stamina and practical skills.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Provision of agricultural extension services in the rehabilitation of the physically challenged children is a way of linking the physically challenged children with the research institutes, and making their problems and needs known to research institutes. This will help the researcher to tailor their research results towards solving some agricultural problems that are peculiar to the physically challenged children.

For the physically challenged children to have contact with extension activities and programmes, extension agents should be sent to rehabilitation centers for the physically challenged. Apart from the fact that extension agents would be there to educate the physically challenged children (with the help of specialist teachers) on the new improved technology in agriculture, the extension agents will have the privilege of interacting with them.

The following recommendations have been suggested for improvement.

Farm settlements can be created for the physically challenged children as we have for normal farmers, or better still integrated with the present day farm settlement. This will make it easier for the extension agents to make enough contact with them and close monitoring can be ascertained.

The research activities should include programmes for the physically challenged children through Open and Distance Learning.

Modification of various agricultural tools and implements should be done to suit the physically challenged children. The training of extension agents should equip them for dealing with the physically challenged children through ODL.

References

Clark, T. (2004); Attitude of Higher Education Faculty towards Distance Education: A National Survey. *American J. of Dist Ed.* 7 (2):27-28.

Eluwa, J. S, (2002); Toward a Reconceptualization of Distance Education. *India Journal of Open Learning* 10(2): 18 – 20.

National Policy on Education (1981); (3rd ed.). N.E.R.D Press, Lagos: 7–8.

Otta, P. (2003); Understanding Distance Education. In *Distance Education. New Perspectives.* Keith Harry Magnus John and Desmond Keengan (Eds). (London) Routhedff: 36.

Ojo, G. J. A. (1998); *The Nigerian Economy and Educational System, Nigeria,* Thomas Nelson Publisher Ltd: 29.

Verma, J. (2003); An Evaluation Study of Integrated Education for Disabled Children, National Council of Educational research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi: 81 – 82.

Williams, S. K. J. (1998); The role of Extension Services Strategies of Agricultural Development in the South West Nigeria, 6th Annual Conference at ARMTI: 37 – 38.