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ADMINISTRATORS' ASSESSMENT OF THE PROVISIONS OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION FOR SUCCESS OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE BUSINESS OWNERS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

The provision of cooperative education, without doubt, is a major determinant for the success of agricultural cooperative business especially in developing countries like Nigeria, where cooperatives are used as a strategy in the development process. This study is aimed at assessing the provision of cooperative education among agricultural cooperative business owners for success of their business in Anambra State. 50 cooperative administrators were purposively sampled from the Management Committees of Agricultural Cooperative Business and District Cooperative Officers (DCO's) in the twenty one local government areas of Anambra State for the study. Two research questions guided the study. Data were collected with structured questionnaire which was analyzed using percentages and mean scores. The findings of the study revealed low provision of cooperative education by the government and the cooperatives themselves. The findings also revealed bare provisions by non-governmental and international bodies. It was recommended among others that government and non-governmental bodies that provide financial support to agricultural cooperative business in Nigeria should set aside some percentage of the funds provided for education of the cooperative members. This is to ensure effective use of such funds.

Introduction

Agricultural business has remained the major occupation of the Nigerian populace especially in the rural areas, accounting for 70 percent of the total working population (National Planning Commission, NPC 2004). In a bid to boost the contributions of this sector, the government has made concerted efforts through the institution of plans and programme that encourage the formation of agricultural cooperatives among farmers.

Agricultural co-operative business is a collective enterprise, jointly owned by farmers who pooled resources together to enjoy the economics of scale. Onwuchekwa (1993) informed that the members of these cooperatives own their own individual enterprise but established a collective enterprise to enable them have easier access to such inputs as credits, equipment, agro-chemicals, improved seeds and animal varieties etc. necessary for large scale production and marketing. Okoli (2008) identified the different types of agricultural co-operatives found in Nigeria as agricultural input supply cooperatives, agricultural produce cooperatives, producer credit cooperatives etc. This business could be operated as single or multipurpose cooperative with members as owners and promoters of the business.

Agricultural cooperatives are being used as major development strategies by the

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Nigerian government; such include the Medium Term Sector Strategy (MTSS) that was used for the development of agriculture and the rural sector of the economy. The Federal Cooperative Department was charged with the task of promoting cooperative societies in the areas of rural infrastructural development, agro-output and produce marketing, tractor hire service and preservation, processing and storage of fruits, fishery, livestock and diary products (Agbo, 2012). Other programmes include the restructuring and recapitalization of NACRDB to Bank of Agriculture (BOA) in 2010. This Bank was jointly instituted by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Federal Ministry of Finance for specialized Micro and Macro-financing of Cooperative societies in agriculture and interwoven/allied economics (NACRDB, n.d).

Despite these laudable programmes, Nigeria is yet to achieve an appreciable increase in the area of food production and foreign exchange generation (NPC, 2007). Onwuchekwa (1993) observed that established government cooperative developmental strategies often end prematurely due to poor knowledge of members regarding the principles and practices of cooperative organizations. Nweze (2000) confirmed that the use of agricultural cooperatives in the implementation of rural and credit programmes led to the premature death of true and functional cooperatives. Most of the cooperative members, mainly rural dwellers are not literate enough. They are unable to establish a difference between cooperative and other types of business. They also lack the managerial, technical, marketing and psycho-social skills required for the success of their business (Okoli, 2011). Education of these cooperative members therefore becomes absolutely imperative.

Provision of cooperative education refers to knowledge, skills, ideas and attitudes that are being imparted on the agricultural cooperative owners.; also the information provided to the general public on the nature and benefits of cooperation. In cooperative education, like other business education programmes; information on knowledge are facts, skills are ability or application of the facts to achieve desirable objectives of a practice. This also goes with problem solving abilities and attitudes which is the manner of acting that shows inward thoughts and feelings (Okwuanso & Nwazor, 2000). These are provided to agricultural cooperative business owners in the form of learning experiences necessary for members understanding of their cooperatives as a socio-economic entity. It also acquaints them of their individuals and collective responsibilities in the business. Outside the formal educational arrangements, cooperative education is organized through such media as in general meetings, member council, cooperative seminars and conferences, study circles and member day's arrangement (Okoli & Obidiegwu, 2012). These are been provided by cooperative agencies who are individuals, groups, corporate bodies and institutions concerned with the training and development of human resources, for the purpose of increasing the quality and dissemination of cooperative education. These include; secondary cooperatives, apex cooperative organizations, National cooperative federations as Cooperative Federation of Nigeria (CFN), ICA, government ministries in developing countries, institutions of higher learning, UNESCO, Food and Agricultural Organization

(FAO) etc (Okoli & Obidiegwu, 2012).

Assessment as used in this study entails finding out from the cooperative administrators, the learning experiences being provided to the agricultural cooperative members, the agencies involved and the level of cooperative education provided for member active participation and entrepreneurial skills acquisition. Cooperative administrators as seen in agricultural cooperative business are persons charged with the responsibility of management of the business at both primary and secondary levels. These cooperative administrators are members of the management committees as the president, secretary, financial secretary and the treasurer. Others are the Managers who are hired employees that are charged with the responsibility of day to day management of the business operations. Also, the District Cooperative Officers, (DCO's) who are government employees that are charged with the monitoring and supervision of cooperatives at the local government levels. These administrators are in a better position to account for the provision of cooperative education to agricultural cooperatives members within their managerial capacities and areas of operation.

It is against this background that this study was conceived to determine the agents involved in the provision of cooperative education among agricultural cooperative business owners in Anambra State and the level of cooperative learning experiences provided for members active participation and entrepreneurial skill acquisition to ensure success of their business in the State.

Provision of Cooperative Education for Success of Agricultural Cooperative Business in Nigeria

Cooperative education is provided to agricultural cooperative business owners through formal and non-formal education arrangements. Ogwo and Oranu (2006) opined that formal education is hierarchically structured, graded educational system that runs through primary school to university; also general academic with specialized programmes done in institutions for full time professional training. Formal cooperative education is usually found in monotechnics (cooperative colleges), polytechnics and universities in Nigeria. These institutions award diplomas and degrees in cooperative studies, management and education (Programme handbooks; Cooperative Economics and Management, n.d; Business education programme, Nnamdi Azikwe University Awka, 2011). Members and workers in agricultural cooperative business could be sent to these institutions for short term courses in cooperative education.

Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) defined non- formal education as all forms of functional education given to youths and adults outside the formal schools system, such as functional literacy, remedial and continuing education programmes. Over 80 percent of training provided to agricultural cooperative business owners is done through the non-formal education arrangement.

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Objectives of cooperative education as noted by Chandy (2013) include:

1. Building and sustaining the faith of cooperative members on their organization, not only as a business but as a movement.
2. Development of right attitudes, understand and knowledge among members to establish the spirit of self help and self-reliance in their cooperatives for solving common problems.
3. Development of good leadership qualities among the management team.
4. Development of right skills and abilities among members for effective individual participation and contributions towards achieving the cooperative objectives.
5. Development of technical skills among members to compete effectively for survival of their enterprises.

Cooperative education provides members with relevant entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and abilities for active membership, effective business management and credit usage. It also equips cooperative members and their workers the abilities necessary to move in pace with the technological changes and demands of their environment.

Learning experiences provided in agricultural cooperative business include; cooperative ideologies, principles and practices; cooperative management, principles, and practices of book keeping, modern agricultural practices and technology, modern food processing and storage practices, modern marketing practices, cooperative field administration, agricultural insurance, cooperative legislation, auditing and entrepreneurship (Okoli & Obidiegwu, 2012).

Theoretical Underpinning

The justification of this study is substantiated by andragogy, adult learning theory of MalColm Knowles in 1970 and constructivism associated with the works of John Dewey, David Kolb and Vugotsky, a social constructivist.

Knowles in 1970 pioneered andragogy (the art and science of helping adults learn) and asserted that it is the best method in facilitating learning among adults because of its values; as a process that is problem solving and collaborative. In andragogy, the instructors act as facilitators in the transmission of knowledge and skills as learners are engaged in active participation. Equality between the learner and the facilitator is emphasized (Knowles, 2000). Knowles identified six adult learning principles which are; that adults are internally motivated and self-directed, they bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences, they are globally oriented, relevance oriented; adults are practical and like to be respected. These principles are being adopted in cooperative education where the recipients are seen as adult learners. This implies that agricultural cooperative business owners as adult learners, must participate in discussions to based on their socio-economic life experiences. Learning experiences are also planned based on the learners' areas of interest and common problems.

Vugotsky (1934-1996), a social constructivist, acknowledged the role being played by the socio-cultural factors in the learning process. Vugotsky noted that learning in competent adults is influenced by their life experiences; hence prior knowledge must be taken cognizance of (Learning Theories, n.d). Constructivism theory of learning is highly applied in cooperative education of agricultural cooperative business owners in order to establish relation between prior knowledge and current one for effective learning.

Statement of the Problem

Agricultural cooperative business in Nigeria, without doubt has acquired some importance as an institutional framework for development. In Anambra State, agricultural cooperatives have helped formers and non-farmers alike in collective production, marketing and utilization of farm products to meet their basic needs. Like other businesses they are established as a product of entrepreneurship and provide goods and services to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of their owners and the society at large.

Although agricultural cooperatives account for over 70 percent of total cooperatives in Anambra State (Berko, 2001) and with much government support through loans to boost performance these cooperatives have not made any appreciable achievement in the area of food production and foreign exchange earnings (NPC, 2007). Many of the agricultural cooperatives are not doing well as most of them become inactive after few years of operation (Ijere in Okoli 2008). This situation has been attributed to several factors resulting from poor management and technical skills such as non use of feasibility studies, excessive government control, dishonesty of the business employees, inability to get the right professionals to manage activities, poor member participation with lack of cooperative education topping the list (Okonkwor in Okoli, 2008). Onwuchekwa (1993) also observed that established government cooperative development strategies often end prematurely due to poor knowledge of members regarding the principles and practices of cooperative organizations.

It is this unsatisfactory state of affairs that raised worry in the mind of the researchers as to the quality of cooperative education given to members of agricultural cooperatives in the state? This investigation will provide possible solutions to existing problems of agricultural cooperative business owners and improve their participation and performance for greater success.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to assess the provision of cooperative education for the success of agricultural cooperative business owners in Anambra State. Specifically, this study determined

1. The cooperative agencies involved in the provision of cooperative education to agricultural cooperative business owners in Anambra State.
2. The extent of cooperative learning experiences provided to agricultural cooperative business owners for their business success in Anambra state.

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Research Questions

The following research questions guided the conduct of the study.

In the opinion of administrators of agricultural cooperative business in Anambra State:

1. What are the agencies involved in the provision of cooperative education to agricultural cooperative business owners?
2. To what extent is cooperative education provided to agricultural cooperative business owners adequate for their business success?

Method

The study was a descriptive survey conducted with 50 agricultural cooperative administrators that were purposively sampled from the management committees, cooperative managers and District Cooperative Officers (DCO's) in the 21 Local Government Areas in Anambra State.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Cronbach Coefficient Alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument and this was established at 0.74. Four research assistants were trained and used in the administration of the questionnaire. All the 50 distributed copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and found usable. The data collected were analyzed using percentages and mean ratings.

The responses obtained on the agencies identified in the provision of cooperative education were analyzed using percentages, to determine whether they are involved or not in the provision of cooperative education to the agricultural cooperative business owners in Anambra State. In taking decisions any agricultural cooperative agency with the respondents indication of involvement up the 30 percent and above were regarded as involved (IN) Agents with less than 30 percent as indicated by the administrators were regarded as not involved (NI).

Mean scores were used in the analysis of data relative to the second research question. A-5 point rating scale of Very Highly Provided (5 points), Highly Provided (4 points), Fairly Provided (3 points), Barely Provided (2 points), and Not Provided (1 point) was used and real limit of numbers as below was applied;

Very Highly Provided (VHP)	-	4.50 - 5.00
Highly provided (HP)	-	3.50 4.49
Fairly provided (FP)	-	2.50 3.49
Barely provided (BP)	-	1.50 2.49
Not provided (NP)	-	0.50 1.49

In taking decision after the analysis, items with mean scores that falls within the limits of numbers as provided above were regarded as very highly provided, highly provided, fairly provided, barely provided and not provided. This shows the extent of cooperative learning experiences provided to the agricultural cooperative owners.

Results

The results of this study are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Percentages of the Respondents' Indications of Cooperative Agencies Involved in the Provision of Cooperative Education to Agricultural Cooperative Owners

N = 50

S/N	Agencies	Number of Indications	Percentage %	Decision
1	Primary cooperatives	25	50	IN
2	Secondary cooperatives	2	4	NI
3	Apex cooperative agencies	0	0	NI
4	Government cooperative ministries	15	30	IN
5	Institutions of higher learning	0	0	NI
6	International bodies	0	0	NI

Data contained in table 1 show that out of the six agencies rated two were involved (IN) and four were not involved (NI). There was nil indication of provision by apex cooperative agencies, institutions of higher learning and international bodies.

Table 2: Respondents' Mean Rating of Cooperative Learning Experience Provided to Agricultural Cooperative Business owners in Anambra state

N = 50

S/N	Cooperative Learning Experiences	Mean	Decision
1	Management training for effective leadership among the management committee and cooperative managers	3.10	Fairly provided
2	Training on the practices of cooperatives laws and bye-laws	3.00	Fairly Provided
3	Training on feasibility studies and project management	2.00	Barely Provided
4	Training on principles and practices of cooperative for active member participation.	2.80	Fairly provided
5	Training on modern agricultural practices as in the use of hybrid seeds and animal varieties.	3.06	Fairly provided
6	Training on the use of modern farming equipment and machines.	0.56	Not Provided
7	Training on modern marketing practices for effective processing and sale of farm products.	1.98	Barely provided

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Data in Table 2 show that out of 7 cooperative learning experiences rated, four were fairly provided, two were barely provided and one not provided to the agricultural cooperative business owners. Surprisingly, none of the learning experiences was highly provided.

Discussion and Implications of the Study

The findings of this study revealed that such cooperative education agencies as primary societies and government ministries are involved in the provision of cooperative education to agricultural cooperative business owners in Anambra State. Among the agencies, primary cooperatives topped the list followed by government cooperative ministries. The secondary cooperatives had traces of minimal involvement. This finding is in line with the observations of Onwuchekwa (1993) that cooperative education among cooperatives in Anambra State is rarely provided, except in general meetings organized by the primary cooperatives. Apex cooperative agencies as Cooperative Federation of Nigeria (CFN), institutions of higher learning and international cooperative bodies do not provide cooperative education to these agricultural cooperative business owners as discovered by this study.

The findings of this study relative to the second research question also revealed that the owners of agricultural cooperative business is exposed to such learning experiences as: leadership training for effective management of cooperatives by the management committees and managers and training on modern agricultural practices in the use of hybreed seeds and animal varieties. Others are training on cooperative laws, bye-laws, and cooperative principles and practices for active member participation. These were all fairly provided as indicated by the findings of this study. Other cooperative learning experiences such as training on feasibility studies and project management and modern marketing practices for effective processing and sales of farm products were barely provided. Training on the use of modern farm equipment and machines was not provided. This finding is in line with Nweze (2000) discovery that poor literacy among agricultural cooperative members mainly rural dwellers led to the premature deaths of their cooperatives. They lack the management and technical skills required for business success.

The implications of these findings as in fair, bare and non-provision of cooperative education on basic human relationship, technical and managerial skills required for effective performance of agricultural business owners, their management committees and the managers could be the reason for incessant failures in their business. Their low ability to use modern farming equipment and machines, poor application of hybried seeds and seedlings, poor knowledge of feasibility studies and project management as well as poor usage of modern marketing practices for effective processing and sales of their farm products collectively will make the cooperatives not to achieve objectives. This would also give rise to low food production in the country and their inability to attract foreign exchange through exports. These findings confirm the federal government assertions that despite their efforts

through such programmes as FADAMA, NACRDB etc poverty had remained endemic and pervasive in the agricultural sector. NPC (2004) informed that the agricultural sectors is not performing to its optimal potential, especially in their, contributions to foreign exchange generation.

The findings of this study have implications for curriculum planners in cooperative and entrepreneurial education in institutions of higher learning towards the provision of adequate learning experiences to students in areas of non-formal education of agricultural cooperative business owners. Also, for government ministries who are responsible for cooperative education and other cooperative agencies to beef up their activities in the areas of cooperative education of agricultural cooperatives.

Conclusion

Conclusively, primary societies, and government cooperative ministries are involved in the provision of cooperative education to agricultural cooperative owners in Anambra State. Such other cooperative education agencies as apex cooperative bodies, international bodies and institutions of higher learning were not involved. Secondary cooperatives were minimally involved. Cooperative learning experiences necessary for management and technical skill acquisition among the agricultural cooperative owners were not provided for their business success.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusion of the study.

1. Institutions of higher learning that offer cooperative management and education programmes should include cooperatives and functional education in their curriculum. Issues regarding informal and non-formal education of the agricultural cooperatives should be addressed through this medium.
2. Anambra State government and other agencies that provide financial support to agricultural cooperatives should set aside some percentage of the fund for cooperative education of members of these agricultural cooperatives. This is to improve the knowledge of the agricultural cooperative business owners for effective use of the funds.
3. Research studies in cooperative education should be encouraged by institutions of higher learning and governments to improve the performance of agricultural cooperative businesses in Nigeria.
4. Institutions of higher learning should collaborate with state government cooperative ministries and agricultural cooperative businesses in the provision of cooperative education to members to ensure success of their businesses.

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