

How Students Choose Careers: Understanding the Career Choices, Motivations and Problems of Agricultural Students in Anambra State, Nigeria

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Received: March 31, 2020

Accepted: May 13, 2020

Online Published: May 27, 2020

doi: 10.46281/aijssr.v5i3.583

URL: <https://doi.org/10.46281/aijssr.v5i3.583>

Abstract

The study accessed agricultural undergraduate students' reasons for choosing agriculture as a career, sources of their motivation, and problems encountered in their study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered on 100 respondents selected through simple random sampling process from two Faculties of Agriculture of two universities: Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU) and Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) both in the Anambra State of Nigeria. Some of the information provided by the respondents was verified through 4 in-depth interviews. Descriptive statistics such as percentage, frequency distributions, and Tables were used in analyzing the data. The result show that the majority of the students of COOU (48%) and NAU (44%) study agriculture through a constriction (admission offer outside their original career choice) and that the students' parents were their major source of motivation (64%). The result further reveals that financial constraints (48%), unfavorable government policy (24%), and poor teaching aids were the major problems of agricultural undergraduate students in the State. The study concludes that sustainable involvement of youths in agricultural development is a felt need which requires diversified motivation attention. The study recommends proactive measures such as intermittent rewards and scholarship awards to agricultural students, early stimulation of student's interest in agriculture, formulation of suitable agricultural policy and provision of adequate teaching facilities and aids to agricultural students by the Universities Management and their Visitors, Nongovernmental Organizations in agriculture and Philanthropists.

Keywords: Agriculture, Career Choice, Motivation, Policy, Agricultural Development.

I. Introduction

There are many professional areas in life from which the youths can choose to learn for their livelihoods and they include Agriculture, teaching, Medicine, building, law, engineering, piloting, marketing, banking, and entertainment. Among all career choices, agriculture is unique for three major reasons. First, it appears to be the first profession. This is because there is evidence that the Maker of the universe (God) is an agriculturist (Bible Society of Nigeria (BSN, 2012a, p. 4) and that farming was done in the early time of man (BSN, 2012b, p.14). Second, activities that constitute agriculture are according to Colman (1987) intertwined with corporate conglomerates and those of different government tiers such as the nations, states, and local governments.



Finally, it is nature friendly and all human beings in all professional areas benefit from it through different ways which include food consumption, employments, and raw materials utilization.

In consideration of the reasons, agriculture ought to be given priority attention in policy decisions in all countries' government tiers. In agriculture, as in other professions, there are different areas of specialization and they include fishery and aquaculture, agronomy, agricultural economics, agricultural extension and rural development, agricultural ecology, horticulture, and forestry. Regretfully, so many students lack knowledge of these agricultural areas of specialization (Gardner, 1991). On students' low enrolment in agriculture, forestry and wildlife, Umeh et al. (2020) opined that it is due to their lack of knowledge or mental picture of the job opportunities in agriculture careers. This suggests that the youths need to be adequately informed earlier enough on different agricultural areas to help them in their career choices. This is very important because the agriculture sector provides very large and unlimited opportunities for the youths particularly in this time of increasing unemployment Umeh et al. (2020).

Agriculture according to (Colman, 1987) is the science and art of farming. It is the mainstay of the Nigerian economy and employs over 70% of the country's population (Nwosu, 2015). The youths are part of the country's working population. Development of agriculture through the involvement of the youths was found to boost agricultural production, create employment opportunities, and increase food security (Nwosu, 2015). This is important especially in this unprecedented time of climate change problems and now that the population of the country is reported to be increasing while its food supply is decreasing (Nwosu, 2015). Unfortunately, the youths expected to be actively involved in agricultural development are reported to recently show poor attitudes to agriculture (Anyanwu and Agwu, 2015; Nwosu, 2015). The reasons noted for the youth's poor attitude or apathy to agriculture inter alia include the use of no mechanized farm tools (Kanu and Nwachukwu, 2015), lack of rewards, and encouragement (Nwosu, 2015). The poor attitude of the youths to agriculture is reported to be a source of concern and challenge to the development of the agricultural sector (Nwosu, 2015). It is predicted in Nwosu (2015) that if the problem is not tackled, agriculture will be left in the hands of the aged population in future with the attendant consequences which include poverty and food security problems, suggesting the need for policy measures to ensure that the prediction does not become a reality.

The finding of Nwosu (2015) suggests that one of the best ways to reverse the situation and attract youths to agriculture is through motivation and carefully selected kinds of intermittent (regular intervals) rewards. This is because (Deci et al., 1999) in a meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation made it clear that rewards can be used as a technique of control. The youths referred above are people who are between the age of 15 and 35 years. Within this age range are undergraduate students of agriculture. In support, Schunk (1991) reported that research to identify suitable indexes of academic motivation is justified and warranted. He added that not much has been written on how to help students develop interest. This appears to be more glaring in the study of agriculture in the current Nigerian and global glut in the oil sector. In this, Umeh et al. (2020) were of the view that such issues and incentives that influence agricultural career choice and preferences among the youths need investigation. The problem is that the major reasons why students choose agriculture as their career have not been adequately documented and the ways by which they are currently being motivated or rewarded as a technique to direct the youths to agriculture in the study area require investigation from different perspectives. This study is designed to contribute to filling the existing research gap on agricultural students' motivation and rewards.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in the Anambra State of Nigeria. Anambra State is one of the states of Southeast Nigeria. The state situates between latitude $5^{\circ} 38' 1''N$ to $6^{\circ} 47' 1''N$ and longitude $6^{\circ} 36' 1''E$ to $7^{\circ} 21' 1''E$. The state is at the northern side bounded by Kogi State, in the South by Imo State, in the east by Enugu State and at the west by River Niger and Delta State. The State has twenty-one local government areas (LGA), four agricultural zones, and assembly markets in its cities, village and town communities, a State University named Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU) and a Federal University called Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU). The main campus of NAU is located in Awka agricultural zone of the state while COOU is a multi-campus university with campuses located at Igbariam in Anambra Agricultural zone, Uli in Onitsha agricultural zone and Awka in Awka agricultural zone. While the NAU Teaching Hospital (NAUTH) is located at Nnewi which is in Aguata agricultural zone, the COOU Teaching Hospital (COOUTH) is located at Awka in Awka agricultural zone.

The COOU Faculty of agriculture is located at some sections of Igbariam Farm Settlement (IFS) which is in the Anambra Agricultural zone (AAZ). The AAZ shares a common boundary with Delta State on the West, Uzo Uwani LGA of Enugu State on the North, Ezeagu LGA of Enugu State, and Igbola LGA of Benue State on the South (Enibe, 2019). The zone has a population of about 469,959 distributed in four Local Government Areas (LGAs) named Oyi, Anambra East, Anambra West, and Ayamelum (Enibe, 2019). The zone has four extension blocks and 45 Circles. Anambra River (Omambala) is in AAZ and it flows into the River Niger. The climate of this zone is suitable for the production of many crops which include yam, rice, cassava, maize, cocoyam, and potatoes (Enibe, 2019). Productions of these crops are the major farming activities of the inhabitants of the zone. Hence, the zone is commonly seen as the food basket of Anambra State. This may be why the defunct Eastern



Nigeria regional government of Michael Okpala located a farm settlement in the zone (at Igbariam). The off-farm income sources of the inhabitants of the zone include general services, teaching, and petty trading.

Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were sourced from Books, proceedings, and journal articles. Primary data were purposively collected in 2018 from first, second, third, fourth, and final year undergraduate students of Agriculture in the aforementioned two universities. The universities were purposively selected because they are the only two currently functional public universities in the state. From each of the two universities, 10 students were selected from each of their 5 levels through a simple random sampling process and interviewed using questionnaires. This gave a subtotal of 50 students from each of the universities and a total of 100 respondents from the two universities. Some of the information accessed was verified through four (4) in-depth interviews.

Respondents were asked to reveal the reasons why they chose to study agriculture. The options offered the respondents in the questionnaire include Parents' professional background/advice, their interest in agriculture, work experience in agriculture before admission offer, peer group influence, aim for self-employment in agriculture after graduation, scholarship opportunity to study agriculture, offered admission to study agriculture outside their original career choice (constriction) and government policy/incentives. On motivation, the students were requested to reveal their agricultural study motivation sources. The motivation source options offered include: parent influence/motivation, Motivation/gifts from relatives and friends, Government policy/incentive or rewards, scholarship offer, Non-Governmental Organization sponsorship/offer, Ministry of agriculture, the offer of the agricultural book by philanthropists or other private individuals.

They were further requested to reveal their problems in their agricultural study. The problems examined were: Financial constraints, unfavorable government policy, insufficient farming skills, poor industrial experience, maltreatment of lecturers, and sexual harassment by lecturers, poor agricultural teaching aids, and psychology of being called a farmer after graduation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Reasons Why Students Choose to Study Agriculture

Table I shows that the major reason why students of COOU choose to study agriculture was because they: were constricted to study agriculture (48%), an interest in agriculture (32%) and because they aim to be self-employed in agriculture (20%).

Similarly, result from NAU, showed that 44% of the respondents took to study agriculture through admission constriction, 24% had an interest in agriculture, 16% applied to study agriculture because they saw it as a professional course and had the aim to be self-employed in the sector in the future while 16% were advised to study agriculture by their parents.

The implication of the result is that majority of the agricultural students in the study area were constricted to study agriculture. This suggests that personal factors or intrinsic motivation might not have influenced the agricultural careers the students were constricted to pursue. The result also indicates that the students might not have considered agriculture as an essential discipline and may wish to abandon such studies for other career options if given the opportunity. The result further reveals that, the agricultural students were not encouraged to study agriculture through the offer of scholarship, incentives, or policy decisions. A considerable proportion of the respondents (24%) indicate that they were not aware of the career opportunities that exist in agricultural sector. The result of encouragement agrees with Nwosu (2015) who noted that one of the reasons for poor attitudinal orientation of youths in agriculture is lack of encouragement to uptake it as an occupational career. The result further agrees with Gardner (1991) who reported that students are not aware of the wide number of technical and professional opportunities that exist in agriculture. The result also agrees with Umeh et al. (2020) who is an aforementioned orientation speech opined that students lack knowledge or mental picture of the job opportunities in agriculture careers. The result suggests the need to design an outreach program to expose current and potential agricultural students to career opportunities in the agricultural sector. This is needful because, Kanu and Nwachukwu (2015) reported that investment in youths is a simple, graceful, stylish, and pleasingly solution to overcome human problems that need urgent attention. They further explained that it helps to reduce hunger, rural-urban migration problems, increase farmer population in their active age, and facilitate sustainable agricultural production.

Table I. Distribution of respondent according to their reasons for choosing to study agriculture

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
COOU		
Interest in agriculture	16	32
Aim to be self-employed	10	20
Offered admission to study agriculture	24	48
Total	50	100
NAU		
Parent background/advice	8	16
Interest in agriculture	12	24



Aim to be self-employed	8	16
Offered admission to study agriculture	22	44
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey, 2018.

3.2 Ways Students of Agriculture Were Motivated

Table 2 showed that the major ways through which COOU and NAU agricultural students were respectively motivated were through their parents (70% and 64%) and relatives. The result further reveals that a greater proportion of the COOU agricultural students receive motivation from parents than in NAU. The result is understandable because COOU is a State-owned University with higher tuition fees and where many of their parents are likely to be geographically closer to the students with more frequent visits and motivation opportunities. NAU on the contrary is a Federal government university with a lower tuition fees were parents were likely to be more geographically further away from the students with lower number of visits to the students in each of the semesters.

The result shows that the agricultural students had little or no motivation/rewards and support of the government, industries, Non-Governmental organizations, and philanthropists. This suggests that the government and other aforementioned stakeholders are yet to appropriately invest in agricultural human resources development that will help to condition agriculture for sustainable development. In consideration of the later, Oduhie and Okoro (2015) reported that attracting and retaining youths in agriculture is critical for agricultural production. Retaining youths in agriculture is a felt need because they have strong apathy toward the profession which requires various additional human development efforts to reverse. Regarding youth apathy toward agriculture, Anyanwu and Agwu (2015) argued that the majority of the youths have strong apathy toward it irrespective of their desirable qualities that can promote the sector. In reiteration, such agricultural human development efforts to reverse youth's apathy toward agriculture may be in the form of intermittent rewards and incentives. This is because a large body of developmental data shows that intermittently rewarded behavior persists even after their removal (Deci, 1971). The information suggests that intermittent rewards are one of the good ways to sustain the youths in agriculture and prevent its abandonment to the older population in the future as revealed by Nwosu (2015).

Table 2. Distribution of respondent according to their motivation sources

Motivation ways	Frequency	Percentage
COOU		
Parent influence/motivation	35	70
Relatives Motivation/gifts	15	30
Total	50	100
UNIZIK		
Parent influence/motivation	32	64
Relatives Motivation/gifts	18	36
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey, 2018.

4. Problems of Agricultural Students

Table 3 shows that the major problems of the students of agriculture in COOU were financial constraints (48%), unfavorable government policy (24%), insufficient farming skills (16%), and shame of being called a farmer after graduation (12%). In NAU, results showed that unfavorable government policy (24%), poor teaching aids in agriculture (24%), insufficient farming skills (20%), financial constraints (16%) and shame of being called a farmer after graduation (16%) were identified to be the major problems.

The result in Table 3 reveals that students of the COOU had more financial constraints than those of NAU. One of the possible reasons could be because school fees paid by COOU agricultural students per session were higher (N126, 000.00) than that of NAU. The differences in the tuition fees paid by agricultural students of the two institutions may be due to the differences in the monthly subventions they receive from their respective Visitors. This suggests that a significant increase in the monthly subvention given to COOU by Anambra State Government and having a considerable annual budget for the institution may help reduce school fee charges, reduce the students' financial constraints and get them motivated. In evidence, Umeh et al. (Union communication letter, February 27, 2020) revealed that "many of the excruciating problems and contentious issues faced by the academic staff, and indeed every staff of COOU revolve around poor funding of the University".

The results indicate that agricultural students can be highly motivated through favorable government policy decisions that will encourage different kinds of rewards and motivations. This indicates that agricultural students in the study area need the



money and can be motivated with it as well as with verbal and non-verbal reinforcements for more future positive returns to the economy through the sector. This will boost their morale and erase the perception of the uninformed public that the study of agriculture is not honorable, glamorous, and important. One of the respondents in an in-depth interview reveals that one of the reasons for aforesaid uninformed public perceptions is because they do observe agricultural students learn agricultural practices with rudimentary farm implements such as the hoes and machetes just like their ancestors. He suggested that the university managements or visitors should equip undergraduate agricultural students to practice agriculture with modern farm inputs such as modern farm machinery and hybrid inputs because they are being trained for contribution to agricultural development. In agreement, Kanu and Nwachukwu (2015) argued that the use of simple tools is one of the major constraints to agricultural production in Nigeria.

The result on policy reveals that the respondents faulted existing agricultural policy and that agriculture still needs re-oriented government attention and policies as Ajayi (2006) stated (p. 17). The result on-farm tools specifically agree with, Kanu and Nwachukwu (2015) who reported that the use of non-mechanized tools is discouraging factors that block youth preparedness and willingness to get involved in farming because of drudgeries, tedious and frustrating low income connected with rudimentary farming methods.

The result on motivation disagrees with Deci (1971) who found that when money is used as an external reward, intrinsic motivation tended to decrease. One of the reasons for the disagreement may be because hazards involved in different professions differ and some of them require external motivation. Another reason may be because what a person learns tends to affect his needs, mind, and its functions. In this study, agricultural students were the respondents who study the science and practice of farming which is naturally hazardous because it involves farm practices in natural and artificial environments, dealing with climatic conditions and or perishable plants and animals or their products and services. This is unlike Deci (1971) whose subjects were Psychology students who with limited hazards study human minds, its functions, and mental characteristics or attitude of a person. In support, Ezekwe (1973) in his X-ray of the inner life of men and God's White Paper revealed that "what a man learns is what he knows, and that he is, and that he lives and that is his personal world" (p.1).

Table 3. Distribution of the respondent according to problems

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
COOU		
Financial constraints	24	48
Unfavorable government policy	12	24
Insufficient farming skills	8	16
Psychology of being called a farmer after graduation	6	12
Total	50	100
UNIZIK		
Financial constraints	8	16
Unfavorable government policy	12	24
Insufficient farming skills	10	20
Poor teaching aids in agriculture	12	24
Psychology of being called a farmer after graduation	8	16
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey, 2018

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study showed that: the majority of agricultural students of COOU (48%) and NAU (44%) study agriculture via constriction, parents (64%) and relatives (36%) were their major source of motivation and that their major problems were finance (48%), poor teaching aids (24%) and unfavorable government policies (24%). The study concludes that sustainable involvement of youths in agricultural development is a felt need that requires diversified motivation attention.

The university visitors and management, NGOs, and philanthropists should provide agricultural students intermittent rewards; modern teaching aids such as well-equipped and functional audio-visual laboratories; tractors and other important equipment, for farm practices; suitable experimental farms and hybrid farm inputs. These will attract students to admirably learn and practice agriculture with interests and differentiate them from traditional farmers who experience drudgeries while producing with rudimentary farm tools.



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