

Perception of Agriculture by Students of Tertiary Institution in Nigeria

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Abstract: An investigation was conducted into the problems militating against student's enrolment in agricultural studies at the university level in Nigeria. Students in the Schools of Engineering, Agriculture, Science and Science Education, and Environmental studies were used. The research involved structural questionnaires and interviews. In all, a total of 4,852 students were used for the work. The results showed that only 15% of the students whose parents had farming background or were farmers read to the university level. About 82% of the respondents agreed that agriculture has something to offer if well developed in the country. They see agriculture, at its present form, as not being a prestigious profession. Also, 94% of the respondents agreed that the money being spent on agriculture is not a waste. The notion that students with weak passes in West African School Certificate Examination/Senior School Certificate Examination (WASCE/SSCE) results took to agriculture was rebuffed. However, they call for proper guidance and counseling before a career choice is made in the tertiary institutions. It was concluded that children from farm families should be empowered to pursue agricultural career up to the university level. This work shows that student still hold positive perceptions of agriculture in spite of its low enrolment in the tertiary institutions in the country.

Key words: Perception, agriculture, students, tertiary institution, enrolment, respondents

INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems facing developing countries today, is the production of sufficient food and fibre, for their large population. So the greatest challenge facing these countries is how to eliminate hunger. Food production is therefore very important in the economies of the developing countries. Agriculture provides the means of increasing food and fibre production. One vital way through which to achieve this aim, is the involvement of the young citizens of each nation early in life. Unfortunately, today many students look down on agriculture, even despising it, resulting in non-challant attitude to agriculture.

Consequently, students' enrolment into Faculties and Schools of Agriculture has been on decrease in recent time. One thing that has become worrisome is the fact that the children of professional agriculturists, those who teach agriculture in higher institutions now opted for courses or careers other than agriculture.

It is our thinking that an understanding of students perception of agriculture and factors responsible for the choice of other disciplines like architecture, mathematics, computer science, geology, engineering and other fields of human endeavour besides agriculture could assist in designing a genuine programme that will attract youths and encourage more students towards agricultural

production. Until the factors responsible for the reluctance of most Nigerian youths to enter into agricultural profession are clearly identified and courageously tackled, agricultural development efforts will continue to end in futility and the masses will continue to suffer in abject poverty and the hard earned foreign exchange will continue to be spent on food importation. In order to ameliorate these precarious situations this research was designed to look into the perception of agriculture by the students of tertiary institutions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study involved 4,852 students at four schools in Federal University of Technology, Minna, Nigeria. Random sampling technique was used to select the participants for the study. A total of 120 students participated in the filling of the questionnaire while other students were involved in oral evidence or interviews. Half of the numbers of students were males and half were female students (1:1). All the students that collected, filled and returned their completed questionnaires were degree students.

A two-part structured questionnaire was designed based on the previous studies and researchers experience to gather pertinent information from the respondents. Part

one of the questionnaire centered on personal data which include age, gender, religion, current course of study and parents' occupation. Such questions gave information on the respondents background and the extent to which this background influences respondents choice of career.

Part two of the questionnaire revolved around:

- Students perception of the agricultural profession. The respondents were required to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree to each of the statements made regarding their personal views on agricultural profession using a variable scale.
- Importance of agriculture to the national economy. In this part, respondents were required to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statements made regarding the importance of agriculture in national economy using a variable scale.

The researchers administered the questionnaires to the respondents in all the four schools in the University. The respondents were informed of the purpose of the work, how to complete the questionnaires and assured that their confidence will not be betrayed.

Data collection: When the questionnaires were returned, they were carefully examined and the questionnaires of the males were separated from those of the female respondents. The questionnaires were sorted out on the basis of parents occupation and on school basis. For this reason the questionnaires of respondents whose parents were farmers were separated from the questionnaires of those whose parents were into other occupations. Records of each of these groups were taken and kept for data analysis.

In part two of the questionnaire perceptions of the respondents were determined with regards to the levels in the variable scale chosen as shown below.

- SA = Strongly Agree
- A = Agree
- U = Undecided/no opinion
- D = Disagree
- S = Strongly Disagree

Based on the answer chosen for each question, the proportion or the percentage of the respondents who chose such an answer was found relative to the total number of questionnaires completed and returned.

Data analysis: Data generated from both the interview and part two of the questionnaires were subjected to

analysis of variance after data transformation was done using Arc Sin Transformation for percentage data (Gomez and Gomez, 1984). Mean separation was carried out where there were significant differences (Duncan, 1955). The data analysis results were carefully interpreted to arrive at the appropriate answers.

RESULTS

The results indicate that all the respondents are within 21-32 years of age. The questionnaires showed that only 15% of the respondents' parents are into agricultural profession, only 5% of the respondents from School of Agricultural and Agricultural Technology (SAAT) indicated that their parents are farmers. It therefore means that very view children of the Nigerian farmers are pursuing university education. This result is in agreement with the report of McCracken *et al.* (1985) who reported that students in vocational agriculture in Florida, are not all children of full time farmers. They showed that a bigger number of students were either part-time farmers or non-farmers. This is however contrary to Arrington (1985) who reported that 71.7% of students in vocational agriculture were from families who were into farming as occupation. In contrast to this report Jipp (1994) reported that 72.5% of Iowa High School vocational agriculture seniors had lived 16 years on the farm while 8.10% had no farm experience. Truants and Jerkins (1979) however reported that many students' career choices seemed to reflect their parents' socio-economic backgrounds. This is in agreement with this research.

The results presented in Table 1 shows that most respondents disagreed with the notion that agriculture has nothing to offer as a profession, majority (82.00%) however agreed that agriculture is not a prestigious profession. This is in agreement with Owuananam (1975) who reported work on occupational prestige in West Africa. This is also in line with the findings of Mallory and Sommer (1972), Chimawaza and Obanya (1989).

While the majority of the respondents agreed that life is meaningless without agriculture as Ononogbo (1995) did they equally expressed an overwhelming fear for the risks involved in agriculture. About 50% of the males and 30% of the females expressed the fear. Generally, there is no major difference in the answers given by the male and female respondents as shown in Table 1.

Majority of the respondents (99%) disagreed with the idea that the money spent on agricultural training is a waste. About 66% of them agreed on the importance of agricultural studies and 97.00% said that the establishment of the Universities of Agriculture is a right step in the right direction (Table 2). However, 54% of the

Table 1: Male and female respondents perception of agriculture's

	Entire population (%)			Male (%)			Female (%)		
	A	U	D	A	U	D	A	U	D
Compared to other field agriculture has nothing to offer.	2.0 ^d	-	98.0 ^a	1.0 ^d	-	58.0 ^b	1.0 ^d	-	40.0 ^c
Agriculture is not a prestigious profession	13.0 ^c	5.0 ^{cd}	82.0 ^a	7.0 ^{cd}	2.0 ^d	42.0 ^b	6.0 ^{cd}	3.0 ^{cd}	40.0 ^b
Without agriculture life is meaningless	82.0 ^a	6.0 ^c	12.0 ^f	40.0 ^b	2.0 ^{cd}	5.0 ^{cd}	42.0 ^b	4.0 ^{cd}	7.0 ^{cd}
Risks of agriculture are overwhelming.	85.0 ^a	-	15.0 ^e	50.0 ^b	-	5.0 ^d	30.0 ^{bc}	-	10.0 ^d

Values denoted by the same alphabet in the same row are not significantly different (p>0.05)

Table 2: Respondents view on the importance of agriculture

	Entire population (%)			Male (%)			Female (%)		
	A	U	D	A	U	D	A	U	D
Money spent on agriculture is a waste	1.0 ^c	-	99.0 ^a	-	-	50.0 ^b	1.0 ^c	-	49.0 ^b
Make agriculture compulsory in all academic institutions	54.0 ^a	16.0 ^c	30.0 ^b	30.0 ^b	10.0 ^c	14.0 ^c	4.0 ^b	6.0 ^d	16.0 ^c
Establishing universities of agriculture is a right step	97.0 ^a	2.0 ^c	1.0 ^f	47.0 ^b	1.0 ^c	1.0 ^c	50 ^b	-	1.0 ^c
Agriculture is an important field of study	66.0 ^a	18.0 ^c	16.0 ^e	36.0 ^b	10.0 ^{cd}	7.0 ^d	30.0 ^d	8 ^{cd}	9.0 ^{cd}

Values denoted by the same alphabets in the same row were not significantly different (p>0.05)

Table 3: Respondents view on the contribution of agriculture to national economy

	Entire population (%)			Male (%)			Female (%)		
	A	U	D	A	U	D	A	U	D
A nation with weak agricultural base is funerable	70.0 ^a	11.0 ^{cd}	19.0 ^e	30.0 ^b	4.0 ^d	10.0 ^{cd}	40.0 ^b	11.0 ^c	9.0 ^{cd}
Government should give priority attention to agriculture	93.0 ^a	4.0 ^c	3.0 ^f	43.0 ^b	1.0 ^c	2.0 ^c	50.0 ^b	3.0 ^c	51 ^b
Part of the budget on agriculture should be taken to other sectors of the economy	3.0 ^c	3.0 ^c	94.0 ^a	15.0 ^c	2.0 ^c	44.0 ^b	1.5 ^c	1.0 ^c	50.0 ^b

Values with the same letters in the same row were not significantly different (p>0.05)

respondents agreed that agriculture, as a course, should be made compulsory in all institutions of learning, at least for the first one or two years. This is in agreement with Shadara (1992). Similar opinions were expressed both by the males and females on the importance of agriculture. Mallory and Sommer (1972) also reported that students were motivated to choose a career in agriculture because of its various contributions to the society.

The results shown in Table 3 indicates that 94% of the respondents recognized the contribution that agriculture can make to the growth of national economy as they disagreed with the suggestions that the money spent on agricultural promotion and production should be transferred to other sectors of the economy. Majority of the respondents (93%) agreed that government should pay priority attention to agricultural production as 70% of them believe that a nation with weak agricultural production base is vulnerable to famine, poverty and malnutrition as is evidenced in most developing countries today. Similar observations were made by both male and female respondents.

Table 4 indicates how some respondents hold a negative perception of agriculture. About 72% of the respondents are of the opinion that students who study agriculture at the university in Nigeria have no adequate career guidance and counseling before entering for the course. This contradicts the findings of Bowen and Lee (1984) who found out at Mississippi State University that

the students chose their majors to prepare them for a specific career and live a desired life style. The desire to help others, a prior experience and a good income were other factors reported to have motivated the students to enroll in agriculture. In the same way Burnett and Venable (1986) reported factors that influenced students decisions to enroll in vocational agriculture to include interest in agricultural career (53%), recommendation by another student (13.4%), likeness for a vocational agriculture teacher (10.4%), recommendation by parents (5.54%), no other electives (4.6%), recommendation by guidance counselor (2.2%) and recommendation of teacher (1.3%). These factors show that the choice of agriculture as a course of study would not have been borne out of frustration and as a result of weak passes.

In Table 5, greater number of respondents disagreed with the idea that wise students study agriculture. This might be due to the fact that about 75% of the respondents were not involved in agricultural courses. However, 51% of them expressed the desire to allow their children to study agriculture. Significantly higher (p<0.05) male than female respondents expressed this view (58% male against 30% females). However, the respondents were sharply divided on whether if given a second chance they will study agriculture with equal number agreeing and disagreeing with the idea among both the male and female respondents. In spite of this, 76% of them agreed

Table 4: Negative perception of agriculture by the respondents

	Entire population (%)			Male (%)			Female (%)		
	A	U	D	A	U	D	A	U	D
People with no adequate career counseling study agriculture	4.0 ^b	4.0 ^c	92.0 ^a	3.0 ^c	2.0 ^c	4.0 ^c	1.0 ^c	2.0 ^c	47.0 ^b
People study agriculture out of frustration	12.0 ^{cd}	7.0 ^{cd}	81.0 ^a	7.0 ^{cd}	4.0 ^d	41.0 ^b	5.0 ^d	3.0 ^d	40.0 ^b
Students with weak O/L results study agriculture.	8.0 ^c	8.0 ^c	84.0 ^a	5.0 ^d	4.0 ^d	40.0 ^b	3.0 ^d	3.0 ^d	40.0 ^b

Values denoted by the same alphabets in the same row were not significantly different (p>0.05) O/L means Ordinary Level

Table 5: Positive perception of agriculture by respondents

	Entire population (%)			Male (%)			Female (%)		
	A	U	D	A	U	D	A	U	D
Wise students study Agriculture	23.0 ^c	5.0 ^d	72.0 ^a	15.0 ^c	4.0 ^d	33.0 ^b	8.0 ^d	1.0 ^e	39.0 ^b
One of my children will study agriculture	51.0 ^a	35.0 ^b	14.0 ^c	2.0 ^d	11.0 ^c	58.0 ^a	30.0 ^b	20.0 ^c	6.0 ^d
If I have a second chance I will study agriculture	35.0 ^a	30.0 ^a	35.0 ^a	20.0 ^b	15.0 ^b	18.0 ^b	15.0 ^b	15.0 ^b	7.0 ^b
People who study agriculture have bright future	76.0 ^a	15.0 ^c	19.0 ^c	36.0 ^b	8.0 ^d	10.0 ^d	40.0 ^b	7.0 ^d	9.0 ^d

Values with the same letters in the same row were not significantly different (p>0.05)

that those who study agriculture have a bright future. The sharp disagreement with the idea of picking up agriculture as a career if given a second chance is in line with the findings of Anyanwu (1979) and Okorie (1974) who respectively stated that farming is looked upon, by many, as an occupation for the poor people and that youths had no inclination to associate themselves with farming. The 76% agreement given for the bright future of students of agriculture is an indication that students still harbor a positive perception of agriculture.

CONCLUSION

Students of peasant farmers should be empowered to pursue a career in agriculture up to the university level. Since this work has shown that only about 5% of the respondents in agricultural study are from farm families. The results of this work show that students still harbor positive perceptions on agriculture and the impression that the youths did not see something attractive in agriculture has been keenly contested, if not refuted. Bright future awaits the few students who endeavour to study as a career.

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