

Students' Perception of Agriculture in Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions: The Implication on Enrollment for the Programmes in Abia State

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ABSTRACT

It examines the place of perception of the students about agriculture in the making of their career choices in agricultural field. The study was guided by four research questions. The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. The population for the study consists of four secondary schools in Arochukwu local government area with a total population of 500 students while the sample consists of 120 respondents. The data obtained were subjected to statistical analysis using measurement of central tendencies (simple means and frequency distribution) tables. The findings showed that students in secondary schools have very poor perception of population of agriculture and this has to a great extent affected their interest, aptitude and attitude in the subject. It is recommended among others that guidance counseling services particularly in the area of career choice in agriculture should be posted in all the secondary schools to assist the students and expose them to the numerous occupations in agriculture as this will give the real picture of agriculture.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

One of the broad objectives of Nigerian Education adopted by the 1967 National Curriculum Conference was the “inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival if individuals and the society at large. The conference recognized the fact that vocational studies, in which agricultural science is a branch, play a major role in the achievement of the above stated objective. Vocation, according to Maya in Nwamuo (2003) is one's chief gainful pursuit or occupation by which an individual's social and economic conditions are determined. On the other hand, Agricultural Science as noted by Ogieva (2003) is a deliberate attempt by man to cultivate crops, rear animals, caring for them, for the benefit he will get from doing so. Iheji, Ifeanyi and Olaitan (2010) note that agricultural education is a skill oriented training. According to them, the philosophy of Agricultural Education Programmes of Colleges of Education is tied with the national philosophy of agriculture for self reliance based on the provision of teachers endowed with introduction of a balanced approach between principles and practices of agriculture for academic and endeavor. To this effect, Ogbonnaya (2006) notes that the teaching of agricultural science in both secondary schools and tertiary institutions aimed at producing citizens with skills, competencies and reasoned judgment to effectively live and contribute positively and meaningfully to the economic development of Nigeria.

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Nwankwo (2009). However, agricultural science is being taught in the various levels of education today. This is because there is need for full participation in food production by all citizens of this country, and will equally help the students cope with the present unemployment problems of the country. These levels include; primary school level, where the subject is mostly taught on demonstration basis with the sole aim of acquainting the pupils with the knowledge of the primary source of food for man. The secondary level is yet another level in which agricultural science is taught at two different dimensions. At junior secondary level, it is mostly taught on the theoretical and practical basis with the aim of creating the right background skills, knowledge and attitude in the students for self esteem and evaluation. While at the senior secondary level, it is taught for three good years. At this level, the students are taught and given the various professional opportunities which abound in agriculture which can be further pursued in tertiary institutions. Such as listed in Akinyosoye (1999) include; agricultural engineering, agricultural banking, agricultural biotechnology, agricultural marketing and teaching profession. Furthermore, agriculture at Tertiary levels of Education such as Colleges of Education and University has the sole aim of producing individuals or graduates with the right generic skills and professional attitudes needed for self employment taught as a vocational course and at professional levels.

The increasing awareness of the importance of agricultural education has driven various regimes in government and educators to embark on several review of agricultural curriculum at both secondary and tertiary institutions and as well provided policies and incentives towards motivating young ones (secondary school students in particular) to study and engage in agricultural activities and programmes. Unfortunately, to Olowa (2007) in spite of the various efforts by government and other stakeholders, it has been widely known and reported that agriculture in schools has been a failure. This can be proved by the 3 years enrollment data obtained from the Head of Department of Agriculture in Abia State College of Education (Technical), Arochukwu. The data revealed that in year 2009 about 500 students were admitted into the college but only 14 students enrolled in agricultural department; in the year 2010 about 600 students got admitted but only 7 students enrolled for agriculture and 2011 up to 650 students were admitted into the school and only 5 students enrolled for agricultural science education programme. The reasons for the above statements according to Olowa (2007) can be attributed to various variables such as students' interest in the subject, students' performance in the subject and background of the students.

In any case, whatever the reason may be, one must always remember that perception could be strong force on interest. Meanwhile, perception according to Hornby (1998) is the ability to see, hear or understand things; a deeper natural understanding and awareness than is usual; a way of seeing, understanding or interpreting something. Hence one's idea of a thing influences one's interest in that thing and the interest of one in a particular thing determines one's force of motivation and extent to which one will pursue that thing. Motivation is the psychological feature that arouses an organism to action towards desired goal directed behaviours. In other words, students who are motivated are more likely to engage in the task willingly as well as work to improve their skills, which will

increase their skills and capability. Nevertheless, no amount of motivation can be fruitful if a proper regard, belief and understanding of a thing are not in place. Vocational and Technical Education today is suffering because of some misconception. To buttress this, Nwamuo (2003) notes that the fact that there were no formal requirements for entry into specific vocation and that parents gave their handicapped children for trade in various traditional vocations made people regard Vocational and Technical Vocational Education (TVE) as “education for the non-do-wells, for people with low intelligence, for the mentally retarded, physically handicapped, socially maladjusted and under-achievers”. This however, has affected the enrollment of students into Technical Vocational Education (TVE) in Tertiary institutions. One may likely say that, since agriculture is one of programmes, then, it is suffering this fate as well been disadvantaged by wrong perceptions.

Students’ Awareness of Career in Agriculture

Ajayi (1997) reviews that most students in the country are shortsighted about various opportunities that exist in the field of agriculture. Peasant farming which dominate agricultural career in our local communities exhaust much physical labour in farm operations. Hence, students should be motivated as much as possible to develop choice interest in choosing career in agriculture. Ijioma (1999) suggests that Nigeria as a developing nation requires both low and high level of manpower before she can achieve her desired objective in her development plan. He further concluded that one avenue through which she can achieve this is by laying hands on students in our secondary education and acquainting them on career in agriculture. Bryan (1999) states that all those who work with the students in agricultural science should recognize the need of helping them to understand their own potentials which will enable them to set career and life goals. Hence, if the students are helped they can identify those careers in agriculture and enter them readily.

Chauhan (2000) explains that a living society is a dynamic one in that it continues to change. It is therefore, very important that appropriate and respective attitude towards agriculture opportunities be instilled in the students so that they develop right perceptive, attitude and interest towards it. Molar (1981) states that in the context of modern agriculture, for one to be a successful farmer, there is the need for basic education, at least of a primary school level. Better still, if he is a secondary school students’. This will enable him to be aware of various opportunities that are related to agriculture and be a good co-operator of other agencies in his area. He went further to state that occupational expectations of an individuals are products of personal interest, ability and values as moderated by more or less accurate assessment of external limiting environment. Thus, the expectation to choose a career in agriculture is likely to be forested by personal experiences with agricultural life style and socialization to farm work role. Osuala (1987) enumerates some objectives that can make the students aware of the various professions in agriculture. Among them are: exposing them to the vast store knowledge for anyone contemplating on commercial agriculture; educating the students of the tremendous opportunities in agricultural business; helping them to realize that agriculture is still the only national reliable source of income; informing them about the security on job and self employment opportunity awaiting them in

the field of agriculture. Studies on the relationship between socio-economic status and occupational choice have shown that students of lower socio-economic conditions are exposed to people of low status who cannot inspire them choose high vocations. This in essence makes them aware of less number of vocations. Furthermore, Chauhan (2000) also discovers that rural adolescents do not have opportunities of coming into contact with people of high vocation who can guide, inspire and provided proper information to them. Agusiobe (1989) suggests that the teachers could gradually help the students to become aware of their personal needs which they are seeking to meet. This, he noted, can be achieved through the study of their occupational choice and desire putting into account their perception, interest, abilities as well as the employment opportunities when they are thinking of they will do for a living. In this light, students can be taught where and who to get facts and what to be aware of in the field of agriculture as a career.

Students' Occupational Aspiration in Agriculture

Ohaji (2009) finds in his study in Anambra State that most school leavers left the village after their education because they wanted jobs outside the field of agriculture. He also observed that most people of the state would prefer agriculture to be occupation set aside for the men and boys or those who do not receive secondary education. Furthermore, he found out that the only belief agriculture to be the important for the provision of food for immediate consumption and raw materials for the local industries. Hence, they show a limited awareness of the numerous importance of agriculture and for this reason he found out that most young people shunned farming. As to negative attitudes of the students' towards career in agriculture, Ohaji (2009) gives two reasons; the first is personality and psychological complexes. The other is low income generated by agriculture in the state and Nigeria in general. He further, discovered that the educational system was partially responsible for the lack of interest in farming.

Ijiomah (1999) finds in his study that the youths (students) surveyed detested agriculture and regarded it as an unattractive occupation. According to him, the reason for this attitude was that farming involved tilling of soils to grow crops with such peasant tools as hoes and cutlasses. Also, the students did not regard their agricultural studies as a preparation for immediate employment after school. Osuala (1998) points out that students' assiduously seek education with the intention of enjoying a better life than which the traditional sector can provide. Once educated, the youth become reluctant to stay in the traditional sector to work as peasant farmers. According to Osuala (1998), it make the educated youth drift from the rural to the urban area in search of a more modern way of life and jobs in the industrial sectors. Ajakaiye (1997) observes that agriculture is the most economic activity in the rural areas in Nigeria. Young people living school there do not want job they want in industries located in the cities. In his opinion, Okorie (1999) observed that the reasons why many students' in secondary schools tend to develop a negative deficiency in agricultural education. He concluded that apparent growth in interest and aspiration of agriculture would come about only when there is real effort by the government to improve agriculture. Abdulahi (2004) states that there was the tendency for professions as agriculture,

teaching and veterinary medicines that are more valid and crucial to the nation. He also pointed that the vocation aspiration of the secondary school students' in Nigeria have tended to be limited to a few well known highly rewarded professions like law, engineering, medicine etc. Okorie (1999) notes that prior to Nigeria civil war, which ended in 1970; students' in secondary schools as well as unemployed youths were aspiring about choosing a career in agriculture. But in recent times, this to lack interest appears to be absent. Okorie (1999) also attributes this to lack of interest in agricultural occupation on the side of students. Among the factors are: (a) the failure of some students' to rightly conceptualize the essence of studying agricultural science in secondary schools; (b) absence of direction from the government and secondary school teachers; (c) absence of emphasis on the importance of agriculture on the economic development and (d) lack of recognition of the farmers' and those preparing to take career in agriculture.

Some students feel that being a good farmer does not require further agricultural training in tertiary institutions since there is little or no gainful remuneration from their long years of farming. Hence, many teachers are hesitant to encourage their students' to undertake a career in agriculture. Base on this, Osuala (1998) points out that for an individual to aspire to choose in agriculture, he needs to be exposed to situation where he can: (a) develop an understanding of an appreciation for career opportunities in agriculture; (b) and develop vocational competencies needed by individual preparing to engage in agricultural occupation.

Factors Affecting career Choice in agriculture

Generally, the choice of occupation in Nigeria is traditionally influenced by parents, friends, teachers and at times scholarship award. Supporting this, Osuala (1998) notes that in Nigeria many students are lured into certain professions/occupations through the advice of the parents and friends. These people often choose an occupation of their interest and attitude. He added that other students are attracted to some occupation by the white collar illusion and rumors of high salaries. Agusiobe (1989) states that parental idea more than any other factors influences students in choice of occupation supporting this statement, Kalu (2009) notes that parents are the most socializing agent of the child; this is because the child learns first from the parents before joining other peer groups. This, he said is based on the extent to which the parents encourage the aspiration formed by the children.

Nneji (1978) finds that out that interest in occupation had the strongest influence on the students in their career aspiration. Students considered their interest in their career as a prime factor in their choice of career. Agusiobe (1989) further states that perception of a subject affects the student's interest in that subject area and this has a significant relationship with the choice of occupation of the students. Students have shown that there has been considerable lack of interest in agriculture among the students and educational students were very reluctant to associate themselves in farming. Chauhan (2000) says occupational attractiveness adolescent have to make their vocational choice by the prestige, income and social recognition. For example, boys and girls show interest in profession like teaching, medicine, business, executive post, law and engineering. Supporting this, Okorie (2001) states that students have been observed to choose occupations base on their

glamour or because people engage in those occupations are held in high esteem in the society without considering their abilities to fit into the occupations and the financial backing to train such occupations. According to Okorie (1999) most students pursue career in which they may not have interest. In such a situation, continuity and progress are seriously affected and the workers performance is hampered. Hence there is need to guide and direct students towards capitalizing on their interest, aptitude and intrinsic intelligence together with belief to highest possible degree so that they will be satisfied workers.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

This survey was carried out in secondary schools in Arochukwu local government areas of Abia State. It was based on this background that the researcher tries to examine the ways in which students in secondary schools perceive agriculture and the implication on enrollment for the program in tertiary institutions of high learning. The local government is made of four broad towns which include Arochukwu, Ututu, Ihechiowa and Abam. Arochukwu has the second largest number of secondary schools in the Ohafia Educational Zone, Abia State. The population of the study consists of the senior secondary schools students. The estimated population was 500 students in the secondary schools. The selected schools were Mary Slessor secondary school, Arochukwu, Girls secondary school, Ututu, Achara secondary school, Ihechiowa and Abam high school, Abam.

The study sample comprises of 30 students' from each of the four selected secondary schools giving a total sample size of 120 respondents. A systematic random sampling technique was adopted in the selected of the sample. This was to ensure that every member of the largest population is given equal opportunity and to enable generalization of results. The instrument used for data collection for this study was questionnaires. The questionnaires were made up of 25 items which was classified into two parts. Part one was the personal information of the respondent while part two was the main questionnaires. Copies of the questionnaires were administered directly to the chosen sample for the study. Other strategies include group discussion to share experiences of students in a group and personal observation to verify the correctness of the information that occurred repeatedly from various sources. Data was analyzed using statistical mean. A mean score of 3.5 and above indicates agreement to a stated questionnaire item while a mean score below 3.5 indicates disagreement to a stated questionnaire item.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the table 1, the respondents had displayed their perception and belief about agriculture. This is shown by their mean responses of (3.7, 2.8, 2.4, 1.95, 2.2, 2.5, 3.7, 3.4, 3.5 and 2.9) respectively. A greater no of the students showed negative perception of agriculture. This is evidenced by the mean responses of 2.8, 2.4, 1.9, 2.2, 2.5 and 2.9 in item 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 respectively. A casual look at the mean responses of the students for item 11, 12, 13 and 14 shows that the evidently shown by the mean responses of 2.5, 1.9, 2.3 and 2.4 respectively.

The students' perception affect their interest in agricultural Programmes. It is obvious that if one has a good perception of a thing, he will develop an interest in knowing more about that particular thing. A casual look at the mean responses of the students to the following questionnaire items showed that students' perception of agriculture has really hampered their interest in the subject. The responses are as follows:

1. Agriculture is an interesting subject, so one will enroll for a programme in it in tertiary institution and excel (2.5).
2. Farming creates a good and easy means of livelihood, so one will choose it as a career (1.9).
3. Agriculture is a lucrative course with good job opportunities, so one will choose as a career in tertiary institution (2.3)
4. Most of my friends always talk good about agriculture, so I like to be in the field (2.4).

Hence, this negation influence of the students perception of agriculture on their interest is in agreement with the 3 years enrolment data obtained from the Office of Head of Department (HOD) of School of Vocational Education in Abia State College of Education (Technical), Arochukwu, which revealed that in the year 2009, 500 students were admitted into the institution and only 14 enrolled for agricultural programme; in 2010, about 600 students were admitted and only 7 enrolled for agricultural programme; and in 2011, up to 650 students were admitted but only 5 enrolled for agricultural programme. The result is equally in agreement with Ijioma (1999) who notes in his study that the youths surveyed detested agriculture and regarded it as an uninteresting occupation. This is also in support of Agusiobe (1989) who notes that perception of a subject affects the students' interest in that subject area and this has a significant relationship with choice of occupation of the students. The students' perception of agriculture also affect their aptitude in agricultural programme. The respondents show that the students' perception of agriculture had little or no poor influence on their natural ability (aptitude) in the subject. This is seen in their mean responses to the following questionnaire items:

- a. I can do any form of agricultural work, so I want to choose agriculture as a career (4.0).
- b. Agriculture is tedious and meant for those with physical and mental skills, so I have all the potentials needed on agricultural vocation (3.7).
- c. Agricultural lessons are easy to understand, so one can take up any task in the field (3.8).
- d. I can handle all forms of farm tools and that makes agriculture attractive to me (3.6).

Hence, the above results means that the students' perception of agriculture does not affect their aptitude in any negative way rather it scares them away from the subject and its programmes. Thus, that the students have poor perception of agriculture does not mean that they do not have poor perception of agriculture does not mean that they do not have the required skills and ability in the field of agriculture. Rather, it means that they do not understand their potentials and that is why they choose career outside agriculture.

This is support of Okorie (1999) who notes that prior to Nigeria civil war, which ended in 1970; students in secondary schools as well as unemployed youths aspired choosing a career in agriculture. He further pointed out that this lack of interest in agricultural occupation is as a result of inadequate or lack of emphasis on the importance of agriculture (among others) on the economic development of the nation. On the question, does the students' perception of agriculture influence their attitude towards agricultural programme, the answers show that the respondents (students) have greater negative attitude towards agricultural programme based on their perception. This is seen in the mean response for the items 19(2.0), 20(2.9), 21(4.2), 22(3.2), 23(2.3) and 24(2.0) of the questionnaire respectively. However, this poor attitude of the students towards agricultural programme is in agreement. Ohaji (2009) noted that the reason why students migrate from rural areas which are the main centres of agricultural production to urban is because they have not been adequately motivated towards agriculture. In effect, when the students are meant to understand and see the various promising opportunities in agricultural field, they will not hesitate to join the chorus. Okorie (1999) notes that many students in secondary schools tend to develop a negative attitude towards agriculture. This is because of inherent deficiencies in agricultural education. Therefore, apparent growth in interest, attitude and aspiration of agriculture would come about only when there is real effort by the government to improve agriculture. This could be organized by the school in conjunction with ministry personnel, career guidance experts and resource persons in various field of agriculture to talk to them on the various career opportunities in agriculture. This will go a long way in helping reduce their bad perception of agriculture. From the study also, it has been found that students, due to their wrong perception of agriculture have low interest in the subject. This has made them not to enroll for the programme of agriculture in tertiary schools of the country. There is therefore, need for the government to put effort in agricultural programmes that are more modernized in nature especially in the rural areas. This is one way or the other could motivate the youth and hence arouse their interest in the subject and its programme.

Table 1: Mean of students' response on their perception/belief on agriculture as a subject.

S/No	Item Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	NF	N	X
1	Males are better to take agricultural occupations than their female counterparts.	62	12	2	34	10	442	120	3.7
2	Agricultural occupations generally provide adequate means of livelihood.	20	30	10	30	30	340	120	2.8
3	Agricultural occupation are prestigious	10	20	0	60	29	282	120	2.4
4	Occupational growth and success in life are easily attained in agricultural industry.	3	10	7	58	42	234	120	1.95
5	Being in agricultural occupation is an easy way to obtain high social status.	10	5	10	65	30	260	120	2.2
6	Those in agricultural occupations are usually recognized and respected in the society.	10	20	10	55	25	295	120	2.5
7	Agriculture is meant for the poor members of the society and is uninteresting subject.	62	12	2	34	10	442	120	3.7
8	One does not have to study agriculture in school before acquiring occupation in the field.	50	15	5	30	20	405	120	3.4
9	Agriculture is all about farming and rearing of animals.	60	5	0	50	5	425	120	3.5
10	Agriculture is important for its provision of food and raw materials for industries.	30	10	20	40	20	350	120	2.9

Table 2: Mean of students' response on ways in which students' perception of agriculture affects their interest in the subject

S/No	Item Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	NF	N	X
11	Agriculture is an interesting subject so one will enroll for a programme in it in tertiary institution and excel.	5	25	10	60	20	295	120	2.5
12	Farming creates a good and easy means of livelihood, someone will choose it as a career.	10	5	5	49	51	232	120	1.9
13	Agriculture is a lucrative course with good job opportunities. So one will choose it as a career in tertiary institution.	15	5	11	59	30	276	120	2.3
14	Most of my friends always talk good about agriculture. So I like to be in the field.	12	10	20	58	20	296	120	2.4

Table 3: Mean responses of students on ways students' perception affects aptitude in agricultural programmes

S/No	Item Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	NF	N	X
15	I can do any form of agricultural work, so I want to choose agriculture as a career.	50	45	5	15	5	480	120	4.7
16	Agriculture is tedious and meant for those with physical and mental skills. So I have all the potentials needed in agricultural vocation.	45	40	3	10	22	442	120	3.7
17	Agricultural lessons are easy to understand so one can take up any task in the field.	50	40	0	10	20	450	120	3.8

CONCLUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The students' in secondary schools in Arochukwu local government area have low and very poor perception of agriculture. The students showed dislike to farming occupation but claimed that they feel satisfied seeing crops and farm animals growing. The students' poor view of agriculture was shown to have exerted much influence on their in the subject. This in essence has prompted their low enrollment into agricultural programmes in tertiary institutions of the nation. The study also revealed that the student's wrong perception of agriculture had little or on their aptitude as greater number of them agreed. Therefore, the natural ability of the students in the field of agriculture is still there notwithstanding their wrong belief. It is hence believed that their wrong perception scare them away from agriculture. Finally, this study has revealed that the students displayed very poor attitude towards agricultural occupations as they believed that work in the field rarely provide adequate means of livelihood and upward social mobility. However, in the opinion of the researcher, this is an erroneous impression, as at one time in the history of Nigeria, both the nation and the people had survived from the proceeds of agricultural industry, therefore, this negative perception of agriculture needs to be changed in order to meet the demands of highly technological future and create food sufficiency in Nigeria. Based on the analysis of the data and findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i Guidance counseling services particularly in the area of career choice in agriculture should be posted in all the secondary schools to assist the students and expose them to the numerous occupations in agriculture as this will give the real picture of agriculture.

- i Mechanized agriculture should be introduced in schools. The greater emphasis should be laid on physical and manual labor in the school scare and discourages students from wishing to make farming a career.
- iii The practical agriculture carried out in the schools should be diversified so as to include many aspects of poultry, rabbitry, fishery and horticulture. This will widen the interest of the students in the career.
- iv The government should give interest-free loan to students of agriculture on graduation. This will go away in attracting many students in agricultural programs.
- v A mandatory field trip to Israel and other countries like Brazil, should be undertaken as a pre-condition for final year students in agricultural field thereby changing their negative belief about the subject.
- vi Finally, agriculture is regarded as a strategic and preferred sector for Nigeria economy. Therefore, it will not be asking for too much for the government to give preferential treatment to students of agriculture in the form of scholarship. This will go a long way to make them become much more interested in agricultural field.

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