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GENDER ASSESSMENT OF CHOOSING A CAREER IN AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NSUKKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA) OF ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The study assessed the influence of gender in choosing a course in agriculture among secondary school students in Nsukka LGA of Enugu State.180 students offering agricultural science were randomly selected from six secondary schools in the study area. A well-structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from them. Frequency counts, percentages and Likert measurement scale were used for data analysis. The respondents whose age ranged from 13 to 25 years belonged to all the religion in Nigeria. Although the respondents grew up in rural areas and also have some farming experience, most of them were not willing to choose agriculture as a career. While some students had a positive perception towards agriculture, others didn't. The perception of the male students differ from that of the female students but not significantly. Parental influence, peer influence, students' academic performance, self-employment and parental background had a high influence on both the male and female students' willingness to choose agriculture as a career. The study recommended parents and teachers' stimulation of students' interest in agriculture, provision of scholarship to agricultural students, employment and grants to agricultural graduates.
Keywords: Genders, Career, Agricultural Science, Perception and Factor

Introduction

The role and place of agriculture in the economy of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. This is because agriculture helps to boast the exchange, provision of raw materials for industries, food for the teaming population, employment opportunities and income for the farmers. Despite the strategic significance of the agricultural sector to the nation's economy, the sector has suffered neglect fueled by the discovery of crude oil and the huge revenue accruable from it. (Akpan, 2012).

Adebo and Sokumade (2013) opined that this scenario has two capital consequences. First is the population reduction of the rural sector, which is the center of production of food and other agricultural products due to rural-urban drift of capable and energetic youths. Secondly is the reduction of agricultural productivity and output as a result of the ageing status of the resident rural farmers. Despite the buoyant contribution of Agriculture to the economic development of the nation, it is still evident that there is skill and labour shortage in the sector. Adebo et al (2013) attributes this scenario to the lack of interests of the youths in choosing agriculture as a vocation and course of study.

Youths' perception concerning agricultural vocation is disadvantageous. They view agriculture as a vocation exclusively reserved for the poor, uneducated, the

inferiors, the never-do-wells and rural residents. Furthermore, the lack of basic social amenities such as good roads, pipe borne water, electricity, hospitals and banks etc in the rural areas make the agricultural industry unattractive to them.

Without any contradiction agriculture still remains the largest employer of labour in the country. In the words of Obayelu and Fadele (2019), the industry engages approximately 70% of the nation's population, mostly dominated by aged rural men, women, children and insignificant number of active adults and youths planning their ways to urban cities in search of vocations distanced from agriculture.

Various studies in choice of career amongst the male and female gender have shown that the male and female folk have different perceptions, interest and attitudes towards the study of agriculture. According to Darko, Yuan, Opoku Ansah, Liu and Ansah (2016), more females enroll to study various courses such as education, arts and humanities in post secondary (tertiary) institutions more than the males. On the contrary, more males study engineering and natural sciences. However, the enrolment status of both the male and female gender into the course of agriculture remains uncertain. This is so as they see agricultural practice as inferior, unfulfilling and laborious (Adebo et al, Abdulsalam, Aromolaran and Ajiegbe, 2008). Buttressing on this, Darko et al (2016) referring to the study conducted by the Female education in Mathematics, Science and Technology in Africa (FEMSA), more girls study Home Economics while woodwork, metalwork and Technical Drawing were preferred by the male folk. From the study, agriculture was studied by both the male and female gender but the female were always under represented and this imbalanced trend continues to tertiary level. To balance this inequality in females' full participation in agricultural development, squire (2003) concluded that a holistic and integrated approach is needed including gender equality to access educational opportunities, training programmes, bank loans, agricultural subsidies and land ownership.

Humans, generally speaking, have this impression that gender have a lot to do with respect to career choice. Buttressing this fact, some subjects (courses) have consciously or unconsciously been classified as belonging exclusively for males or females. According to the findings of Darko et al (2016), male students perform better than female students in agricultural science class. However, it is believed that if both the male and female gender are trained, there will be a positive blending as we see male involvement in home economics, food and nutrition related courses. This will produce a positive stride on food safety and food security threats.

Several authors, including Obayelu and Fedele (2019) and Apantaku (2004), present several constraints identified as reasons for the unattractiveness of the agricultural profession to the youths. These include inadequate agricultural learning facilities in most secondary schools including lack of agricultural laboratories, lack of school farms, use of crude farming tools on school farms, little or no motivation for studying agriculture and inadequate knowledge about the prospects of agriculture. According to Apantaku (2004) most high school students do not want to pursue agriculture as a career rather they prefer to study non-agricultural courses. In support of this, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2007) asserts that they only accept to study agriculture when they are unable to undertake alternative courses of study. Hence, agriculture is seen to them as a

last resort. To some, agricultural profession is seen as inferior, unfulfilling and laborious which leads one to becoming a farmer and living in a rural area (Johnson et al 2015).

Several studies conducted on the choice of Nigerian youths especially senior secondary school students in choosing agriculture as a course such as that of Obayelu et al (2019), Nwankwo (2015), Ogunremi *et al* (2012), Chima and Sobere (2011) found low level of willingness to study agriculture by the respondents. However, there is paucity of information as it relates to the willingness of senior secondary school students in Nsukka Local Government Area in choosing agriculture as a career. Since a significant turning point in a youth's life is connected to the career choice he/she makes, it is needful therefore, to ask some pertinent questions which form the following research questions:

Research Questions

i. What are the background and socio-economic characteristics of the students?
ii. What are the career choice of the senior secondary school students in the study area?
iii. What are the perception of senior secondary school students towards Agricultural profession?
iv. What are the factors that can stimulate or influence students' willingness to choose agriculture as a career?

Research Method

The study was carried out in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. Six secondary schools made up of three public and three private secondary schools in the Local Government Area (LGA) were randomly selected. From each selected school thirty senior secondary school students comprising fifteen (15) males and fifteen (15) females offering agricultural science were randomly selected. This gave a total sample size of 180 students (90 males and 90 females) from the six secondary school used for the study.

A well-structured` questionnaire was used to collect data for the research. The questionnaire comprised close-ended items were respondents were asked to respond to items measuring their perception about agriculture and their willingness to study agriculture with a four-point likert type scale made up of the following responses: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA). Information was collected on the socio-economic characteristics of the students, their career choice, their perception about agriculture and their willingness to study agriculture. The data collected were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 16.0). Frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations were used to summarize and analyze the data.

Results and Discussion

Gender Background and socio-economic characteristics of students

Data in Table 1 shows that the age of the respondents ranged from 13 to 25 they attend both public and private schools located mostly in the rural areas (34.33% and 29.85%) respectively. They cut across the three religious groups in the country with the largest proportion (47.76% and 44.78%) being Christians. Occupationally, their parents are farmers, civil servants, traders and artisans. Most of the respondents, males and females (55.22% and 59.70%) respectively lived in the rural areas in their childhood stage and grew up having farming experience (59.70% and 49.25%) respectively. The implication of this finding is that most of the male and female

students had a positive disposition about agriculture, though at different levels.

Career Choice of Senior Male/ Female Secondary School Students

In Table 2, the choice of career of the senior male and female secondary school students were determined. The table shows that a higher proportion of both the male and female students (30% and 50%) respectively were not willing to choose agriculture as a career. More than half of the students, males and females want to study medicines (56%) while, 34% desire to study law and go into business respectively. This business desire could be connected to the habitual instinct of trading prevalent in the South Eastern part of the country.

The influence on career choice of students shows that four factors are contributory to their choosing a career. These include, prestige (44%), parents (34%), financial prospects of the career (34%) and passion (33%). The table also showed that exposure had a minimal influence on their choice of career. This implies that the students prefer studying courses that are societally respected and has strong financial benefits.

Students Perception towards Agricultural Profession

Table 4 shows the perception of students (i.e male and female) towards agricultural profession. The data indicates that some students have a positive perception towards the profession of agriculture while others don't. Close to three quarter of the students have a positive disposition about agriculture as a profession. It can also be said from the result in table 4 that the perception of the male students towards agricultural profession does not have a significant difference from that of the female students. For instance, they both agreed that Agriculture is not a very lucrative profession (male 2.5, female 2.6), Agriculture is laborious (2.8 and 3.0), Agriculture will grant the family/ nation food security (male, 2.9, female 3.0), and studying agriculture will enhance national development (male 2.9, female 3.3). However, some difference exists in the mean scores obtained in some perception variables. This includes; agriculture has unpredictable seasons (males 2.3, female 2.6), only frustrated, unemployed and unsuccessful youths practice agriculture (male 2.6, female, 2.1); agricultural profession is a good source of employment (male 2.2, female 3.2) and Agricultural profession will make you dwell in the rural areas alone (male, 2.5, female 2.2). This means that to some extent male students have a different view about agricultural science from the female students. This suggests that agricultural science curriculum should be improved on at the secondary school level so as to expose and capture the conception and view of both the male and female students to tally with respect to the nature, act, art, science and vocation of agriculture. This is very important because having a fairly good perception of agriculture will encourage enrollment and employment in the agricultural sector. This will equally influence their perception, attitude and choice towards pursuing higher degree in the field of agriculture. This is in line with the report of Ogunremi et al (2012) who asserts that students' willingness to study agriculture and its related courses is dependent on the level of perception of students about the course of study.

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Table 1: Gender background and socio-economic characteristics of students

	Male				Femal			
Socioeconomic characteristics	**willin**	**Frequency (%)**	**Not**	**Frequency (%)**	**Willin**	**Frequency (%)**	**Not willing**	**Frequency (%)**
Age								
13-15	22	32.84	10	43.48	10	14.93	3	13.04
16-18	20	29.85	7	30.43	27	40.30	5	21.74
19.21	20	29.85	3	13.04	20	29.85	10	43.84
Above 22	5	7.46	3	13.04	10	14.93	5	21.74
Total	67	100	23	100	67	100	23	100
School type								
Public school	20	29.85	7	30.43	22	32.84	3	13.04
Private school	22	32.84	10	43.48	20	29.85	13	56.52
Rural areas	23	34.33	5	21.74	20	29.85	5	21.74
Urban areas	2	2.99	1	1.49	5	7.46	2	8.70
Total	67	100	23	100	67	100	23	100
Religion								
Christianity	32	47.76	10	43.48	30	44.78	3	13.04
Islamic	15	22.39	7	30.43	17	25.37	10	43.84
Traditional	20	29.85	6	26.09	20	29.85	10	43.84
Total	67	100	23	100	67	100	23	100
Father's occupation								
Farming	17	25.37	3	13.04	20	29.85	7	30.43
Civil servant	20	29.85	10	43.84	15	15.39	10	43.84
Trading	15	22.39	5	21.74	17	25.37	3	13.04
Artisan	15	22.39	5	21.74	15	15.39	3	13.04
Total	67	100	23	100	67	100	23	100
Place of stay during vacation								
Rural areas	40	59.70	7	30.43	50	74.63	16	69.66
Urban areas	27	40.30	16	69.66	17	25.37	7	30.43
Total	67	100	23	100	67	100	23	100
Location of childhood home								
Rural areas	37	55.22	10	43.84	40	59.70	11	47.82
Urban areas	30	44.78	13	56.52	27	40.30	12	52.17
Total	67	100	23	100	67	100	23	100
Mother's occupation								
Farming	20	29.85	10	43.84	22	32.84	8	34.78
Trading	15	22.39	3	13.04	20	29.85	8	34.78
Teaching	17	25.37	5	21.74	12	17.91	3	13.04
Artisan	15	22.39	5	21.74	13	19.40	3	13.04
Total	67	100	23	100	67	100	23	100
Farming experience								
Yes	40	59.70	3	13.04	33	49.25	12	52.17
No	27	40.30	20	86.96	34	50.75	11	47.83
Total	67	100	23	100	67	100	23	100

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Factors that can stimulate student's willingness to choose agriculture as a career

Data on the factors that can stimulate students' willingness to study agriculture are presented in table 5. All the factors presented had a positive influence on the students (i.e male and female willingness to choose agriculture as a career. Parental influence (2.78 and 2.72), peer influence (2.72 and 2.78), prestige for farming (2.72 and 2.78), self employment (2.61 and 2.72), personal interest in agriculture (2.89 and 2.78), parental background (2.67 and 2.78) and students academic performance in agriculture (2.67 and 2.61) had a high influence on both the male and female students willingness to choose agriculture as a career. This implies that the students themselves, their peers, parents and teachers are instrumental in stimulating students' willingness in choosing agriculture. This finding is in tandem with Adebo *et al* (2013) and Darko *et al* (2016) who said that the students themselves, their teachers and parents influence students' willingness in choosing agriculture as a career. The influence of self employment might be as a result of the prospect of job creation after graduation. This is in line with the goals and objectives of vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria which is to provide technical knowledge and vocational skills to students that will make them to be innovative and self reliant on graduation (FME, 2004). However, the finding that parents influence their children positively in their choice agriculture as a career in the study area is contrary to the findings of Darko et al (2015) who said that parents discourage their wards from pursuing agriculture as a career because they feel that it has no future.

Table 2: The career choice of senior male/female secondary school students

Career ambition	Gender				Total	
	Male (Frequency)	Percentage	Female(Frequency)	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Medicine	27	30	23	26	50	56
Law	15	17	15	17	30	34
Teaching	8	9	12	13	20	21
Businessman	15	17	15	17	30	34
Preacher	5	6	5	6	10	12
Farmer	6	7	4	4	10	11
Engineering	8	9	7	8	15	17
Banking	3	4	7	8	10	12
Lab sci. Tech.	3	4	2	2	5	6
Total	90		90		180	

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Table 3: Influence of career choice of students in Agricultural Science

Purpose	Gender				Total	
	Male (Freq.)	Percentage	Female(Frequency)	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Passion	20	22	10	11	30	33
Aptitude	10	11	10	11	20	22
Prestige	20	22	20	22	40	44
Parents	15	17	15	17	30	34
Exposure	5	6	5	6	10	12
Financial	15	17	15	17	30	34
Colleagues	5	6	15	17	20	23
Total	90		90		180	

Table 4: Gender perception of students toward the Agricultural profession

	Male		Female		
Perception	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.	Pooled std dev
Agriculture as a profession is not a very lucrative profession	2.500	0.865	2.611	1.087	0.976
Agriculture is laborious	2.778	0.864	3.000	1.308	1.086
Agriculture profession has unpredictable seasons	2.278	0.646	2.611	0.424	0.535
Agriculture is for the less privileged/uneducated people	2.222	0.868	2.167	0.868	0.868
Only frustrated unemployed and unsuccessful youth practice agric	2.611	1.087	1.778	0.434	0.760
Agriculture profession is a good source of employment	2.167	0.868	3.222	2.195	1.532
Agriculture profession will grant my family/nation food security	2.889	0.864	3.056	2.196	1.530
Studying agric will enhance national development	2.889	1.085	3.278	1.973	1.529
Agriculture profession will help me earn a living	2.722	0.865	2.944	1.751	1.308
I know very little about prospects of agricultural profession	2.778	1.085	2.833	0.865	0.975
Agriculture profession will make you dwell in the rural areas alone	2.500	1.088	2.167	0.646	0.867
Agriculture profession is only about planting of crops and rearing of animals	2.544	0.867	2.667	1.753	1.310

Table 5: Factors that can influence choice of Agricultural Science as a career

Factors	Male		Female		
	X	Sd.	X	Sd.	Pooled Std. dev.
Parental background influence students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.6667	0.4226	2.7778	0.8638	0.6432
Students parental influence is a factor of students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.7778	0.6426	2.7222	0.6436	0.6431
School attended does not influence students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.5556	0.8652	2.7222	0.8645	0.8649
Environment can influence students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.7778	0.6426	2.3889	0.6436	0.6431
Teachers/Mentor influence i students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.7222	1.0854	2.5556	0.8652	0.9753
Peer group influence students willingness to choose Agric as a career	2.7222	1.0854	2.7778	0.8638	0.9746
Career guidance and counselling influence students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.5000	0.6455	2.8889	0.8638	0.7546
Prestige for farming is a factor of students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.7222	1.0854	2.7778	0.6426	0.8640
Excursion /Field trips influence students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.5000	0.4240	2.6111	0.4224	0.4232
Self-employment prospect influence students willingness to choose Agric as a career	2.6111	0.4240	2.7222	0.8645	0.6443
Academic performance in Agriculture influence students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.6667	0.6436	2.6111	0.6436	0.6436
Personal farm/Work experiment influence students willingness to choose Agric as a career	2.5556	0.6445	2.7222	0.4226	0.5335
Media, publications and adverts do not influence students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.5556	0.8652	2.5000	0.6436	0.7544
Food security/Economic benefit from Agriculture do not influence students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.3889	0.6445	2.0556	0.6484	0.6464
Personal interest in Agriculture can influence students willingness to choose Agriculture as a career	2.8889	0.882	2.7778	0.8638	0.6475

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was carried out to assess the influence of gender in choosing a course in agriculture among secondary school students in Nsukka Local Government area of Enugu State. Based on the study it could be concluded that a higher proportion of both the male and female students were not willing to

choose agriculture as a career. On their perception towards agricultural profession, it was deduced that some students have a positive perception towards agriculture while others don't. Also, the perception of the male students from that of the female students differ but not significantly. Hence, interest in choosing a career in agriculture does not depend on the gender of students.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

i. Considering the prospects of agriculture as a vocational subject, parents and teachers should play a key role of influencing students to choose career in agriculture.
ii. Teachers should increase their capacity, skill and competence in the subject area as it will help to increase and sustain the interest of students in choosing a course in agriculture.
iii. Agricultural science curriculum should be improved to meet up with the current trend in the sector. This will help to erase the negative mindsets people have about agriculture as a profession.
iv. Government of various levels should introduce programmes such as scholarship schemes, graduate employment, provision of loans, grants and subsidy to graduate students. This will attract and sustain the interest of the youths towards the study of agriculture.

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