

Full Length Research Paper

A study on factors determining the choice of Agriculture professional career among the Students of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences in Ekiti State University, Nigeria

Abayomi A.A,*Eniola V.N and Etoade W.F

Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo State, Nigeria. E-mail: abayomi_1234@gmail.com.

Accepted 12 March, 2015

The study aimed at identifying the factors determining the choice of Agriculture professional career among the Students of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences in Ekiti State University, Nigeria. A total of 160 randomly selected respondents were utilized for the study, while a structured interview schedule was used to elicit information from them. Frequency counts and percentages, Likert scale, as well as, Probit model were used in data analysis. The respondent's ages ranged from 16 to 32 years with an average of 19.5 years. They belonged to all the religion in the country. Majority of the males were from farming families and had childhood homes in rural areas. Previous educational performance (mean = 2.53), career flexibility (mean 2.37), contacts/peer groups (mean = 2.35), work experience (mean = 2.28), personal interest and by chance (mean = 2.11 respectively) and self employment influence the choice of agriculture profession. Most of the respondents perceived agriculture as a stepping stone to other professions, a poor man's job and laborious. Barriers to continuing in the profession include, access to financial resources and land, fear of crop/livestock failure, unpredictable future and psychological problems. Probit model confirmed the significant relationship between previous educational performance, work experience, contacts and economy in the choice of agriculture as a course and profession among youths in the University. The study recommends early stimulation of students interest in agriculture, award of scholarship to agriculture students and provision of grants to graduates in agriculture who desire to embark on enterprises and tailoring school practical experiences towards commercial agriculture.

Key words: Agricultural profession, choice, experience, farm work.

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is an agrarian country which inherited an economy dominated by a robust agricultural sector at independence in income and foreign exchange earnings, and whose share in the Gross domestic product was 65.7% (Encyclopedia of the Nation, 2010). Despite the strategic importance of the sector, especially since 1970s, the role of the agricultural sector still remains significant to the economy, accounting for 35.6% of the

GDP compared to 33.65 and 31% from manufacturing and services, respectively (World Fact book, 2012).

Agriculture is the main economic activity in the rural sector of Nigeria but has suffered neglect from the demographic shifts which characterized the changes in the political structure of the federation as fueled by the huge revenues from crude oil exports (Onokerhoraye, 1978, Iwuagu, 2006, Akpan 2012). These have two

consequences. First is the depopulation of the rural sector as the virile and educated youths drift to the urban centers where numerous construction and capital investment projects offer more remunerative employment opportunities. This rural residents, which made up 80.7% of the population in 1963 reduced to 70.1, 53.0 and 51.6% in 1985, 2005, and 2012, respectively such that the estimated rural population growth is 1.1% compared to 4.0% urban population growth (World Bank, 2012). The sheer frenzy of this rural-urban drift has dislocated the productive capacity of the urban sector and broken the backbone of agriculture.

Second, the farmer population is ageing such that per capital productivity and output have declined. The effect of ageing could be a loss of at least 30% of the rural sector workforce over the next ten years (Bloom et al, 2011). Thus, despite the contribution to economic growth, there are skill and labour shortages in the sector which ensue from the youth's lack of interest in choosing agriculture as a professional career. The youths perceive agriculture as an exclusive activity of the rural sector whose lack of basic social infrastructure and amenities-electricity, pipe borne water, educational and health care institutes, motorable roads, financial institutions etc (World Bank, 2012) makes it unattractive to live in.

Certain factors influence career choice among youths. Ferry (2006) identified schooling as one of the cultural and socioeconomic factors affecting the choice of a career. Farming is considered a default career for villagers with little or no education in many third-world countries. Even in developed countries, youths in rural areas with limited access to higher education may simply choose to inherit the family farm, and continue to raise cattle, manage chicken coops or tend to the corn crops (Wilson, 2008).

Resources availability especially land and access to credit facilities may influence the choice of agriculture as a career. The influence of peer groups is also an important factor in choosing a professional career (McVicar, 1996; Esters and Bowen, 2004; Azubuike, 2011). Early intervention in a child's career plays a significant role in the choice of a career. One of the key factors that influence a girl's career choice is opportunity, and this is closely tied to social class and the economic circumstances of her parent. Key events in a girl's life often appear to influence career choice. A prolonged period of illness, for example, might mean that a girl spends a lot of time in the company of nurses and doctors at a formative time in her life. This can lead to a fascination with the work they do, and can make the child want to become a nurse or doctor when she grows up.

Children's family background and home experiences are found to exert powerful influences over educational career (McVicar, 1996, Hammond et al., 2007, Faulkner, 2009). In Nigeria, parents who are doctors, nurses, lawyers, politicians, members of the armed forces etc, want their children to take up their careers but this is not so in the agricultural profession. The farmers wish their children to

become professionals in other fields (law, medicine, accounting, and engineering) other than agriculture, in view of the arduous way of life and suffering they experienced. Thus, students enrollment into the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences is one of the least in Nigerian Universities. For example, the admission quota in Ekiti State University is 220 which is hardly filled, whereas a department in the Faculty of Management sciences admitted more than 1000 students in a particular year. Thus, despite the huge prospects in the agricultural profession, it is still rated poor among the Nigerian populace. Since the foremost turning point in youth's lives involves the career choice they make, there is the need to ask some pertinent questions: Should we allow the trend to continue? What are the factors influencing career choice in agriculture? What aspects of the profession are the youths interested in? Are they willing to stay on the profession? If not, what can we do to encourage youths to pursue and stay in agricultural profession? What are the projected barriers to achieving youth's goals as an agricultural profession? How do we sustain the agricultural profession to secure a future for the nation? These are the questions that the study seeks to find answers to in the choice of Agricultural profession as a career among youths in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria in the year 2012. The University is located at the capital city of Ekiti State- Ado Ekiti and is owned by the Ekiti State Government. Ekiti State is one of the six states in South/West zone of Nigeria. Apart from the state capital, few communities such as Ikere, Omuo, Ikole can be regarded as towns. In other word, most of the communities are rural, while a large proportion of the indigenes depend solely on agriculture for their sustenance. The farmers in the state specialize in the production of food crops such as yam, cassava, maize, rice and cash crop such as cocoa, kolanut etc. In terms of geographical location, the state share boundary with Kogi, Kwara, Ondo and Osun states.

A random sampling technique was used in selecting 160 respondents from students of the Faculty of Agricultural sciences utilized for the study. A structured pre-tested interview schedule was designed and used to elicit information from the respondents on their demographic characteristics, factors influencing their choice of agriculture as a career and the possibility of staying on the job after completing the course of study. Frequency counts, percentages, as well as, Probit regression model were used in data analysis.

Probit Model

This was employed to ascertain the probability relationship between respondents' career choice of Agricultural profession and their socio- economic characteristics. The explicit Probit regression model used is specified as follows:

$$\Pr (Y_i = 1) = f(\beta_i X_i) + e_i$$

Where; Y is a dichotomous dependent variable which can assume the value of 0 or 1. It measured the choice of agricultural profession

Table 1. Description and measurement of the study variable.

Variable	Description	Measurement
X _i	Age of respondent	Years
X ₂	Parents influence	Dichotomous: Yes, 1; No, 0
X ₃	Education performance	Credit in science courses 1; Fail in science courses, 0
X ₄	Work experience	Have worked on farm before, 1; Have not, 0
X ₅	Gender	Dichotomous: Male, 1; Female, 0
X ₆	Contacts	Have contacts with agric professionals, 1; No contact, 0
X ₇	Media	motivated to study agric via media, 1; Not via media, 0
X ₈	Economy	Agriculture as vital to improve economy, 1; Not vital 0

of the respondents. The dependent variable (Y) takes the value '1' for choice of career in agriculture and '0' otherwise. $X_i = n \times k$ matrix of explanatory/independent variables, $\beta_i = k \times 1$ vector of parameters /coefficients to be estimated, $e_i =$ error term Table 1 shows the description and measurement of the explanatory variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Data in Table 2 shows that the respondents' age ranged from 16 to 32 years with a mean of 19.5 years; they cut across all religious practices within the country but with the largest proportion (61.25%) being Christian. There were more male respondents (55.0%), 70% of the respondents lived in rural areas, in their childhoods, 61.25% were from farm families and most (59.38%) of them had farming experience before admission into the University. With these characteristics, they are expected to develop in agricultural professions.

Perception of agricultural profession

Data in Figure 1 shows that most (48.3%) of the respondents, perceived agriculture as a stepping stone to other careers. About 28.13% perceived it as a poor man's job; 18.75% saw it as being laborious, 13.75% perceived it as being lucrative while 9.37% has the notion that the profession requires a enormous capital outlay. Thus, most of the students admitted to study agriculture, have a negative perception of the profession. This might result from the practice of agriculture in Nigeria, where over 75% of the rural populace are farmers, yet most of them are food insecure and characterized by abject poverty, malnutrition and diseases and the over dependence of the nation on food importation. There is the need to change the orientation of youth towards agricultural profession.

Who/what influenced the choice of agricultural career

Data on whom and what had most influence on the

choice of agriculture as a profession are presented in Table 3. Contacts made by the respondents had the greatest influence on their choice of agriculture as a career, this was followed by previous educational performance (48.75%), work experience and career flexibility (47.50% respectively), by chance (38.75%), personal influence and self employment (28.12% respectively), media (25%) and career guidance (21.25%). Parents background (9.37%) and mentor's influence (6.25%) recorded the least influential factors. It could be said that the choice of agricultural profession by most students in the faculty of agricultural sciences of Ekiti State University is greatly influenced by contacts made by the students while deciding what course/ profession to pursue in life, previous educational performance, career flexibility and work experiences. Efforts were made to check the level of influence each of the factors had on the choice of career.

The variables were subjected to a 3 point scale of strong influence (3 points), some influence (2 points) and no influence (1 point). Variables with the largest means have considerably influenced career choice and those with less than two have no influence on career choice. Data in Table 4 shows that seven variables influenced the career choice. Previous educational performance (mean = 2.53), career flexibility (mean 2.37), contacts (mean = 2.35), Work experienced (mean = 2.28), Personal interest and by chance (mean = 2.11 respectively) and self employment (mean = 2.06). Previous educational experience occupied the first position because the Harmonized Tertiary Educational Institution Matriculation Board (HTEIMB) brochure stipulates the compulsory courses requiring credit pass in the Secondary School Certificate Examination as English, Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology or Agricultural Science, Economics and physics. Unfortunately, these admission requirements are the same for preferred courses in Engineering and the core sciences. The influence of career flexibility might be a result of the prospects of job creation in agricultural profession, especially in relation to self employment. Prospective graduates in agriculture can venture into any field in agriculture after graduation for self employment and employment of others, in line with one of the objectives of the National Policy on

Table 2. Socio economic characteristics of the respondents.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15-20years	48	30
21-25years	69	43.13
26-30years	37	23.12
>above 30 years	06	3.75
Sex		
Male	88	55.0
Female	72	45.0
Religion		
Christianity	98	61.25
Muslim,	46	28.75
African traditional religion	16	10.00
Location of childhood home		
Rural areas	112	70.0
Urban/ cities	48	30.0
Present course of study		
Agric economics and extension services	30	18.75
Animal production and health	30	18.75
Crop, soil and Environmental sciences	30	18.75
Fishery	20	12.50
Forestry and wild life	10	6.25
Fathers occupation		
Farming		
Civil service	98	61.25
Law	26	16.25
Medical practitioner	05	3.13
Engineering	03	1.87
Teaching	28	17.50
Mothers occupation		
Farming	75	46.88
Teaching	40	25.0
Trading	15	9.37
Civil services	30	18.75
Farming experience before entering into the university		
Yes		
No	95	59.38
	65	40.62

Education (FME, 2004), that, the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences, both mental and physical should be the 'equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the nation'. Also, one of the goals and objectives of Vocational and Technical Education is to provide technical knowledge

and vocational skill for the citizens to be innovative and self-reliant (FME, 2004). The influence of contacts or peer groups on career choice agrees with the findings of Jones and Larke (2001), Esters and Bowen (2004), Outley (2008) and Azubuike (2011) in the roles of the peer group in career choice of youths in any vocation.

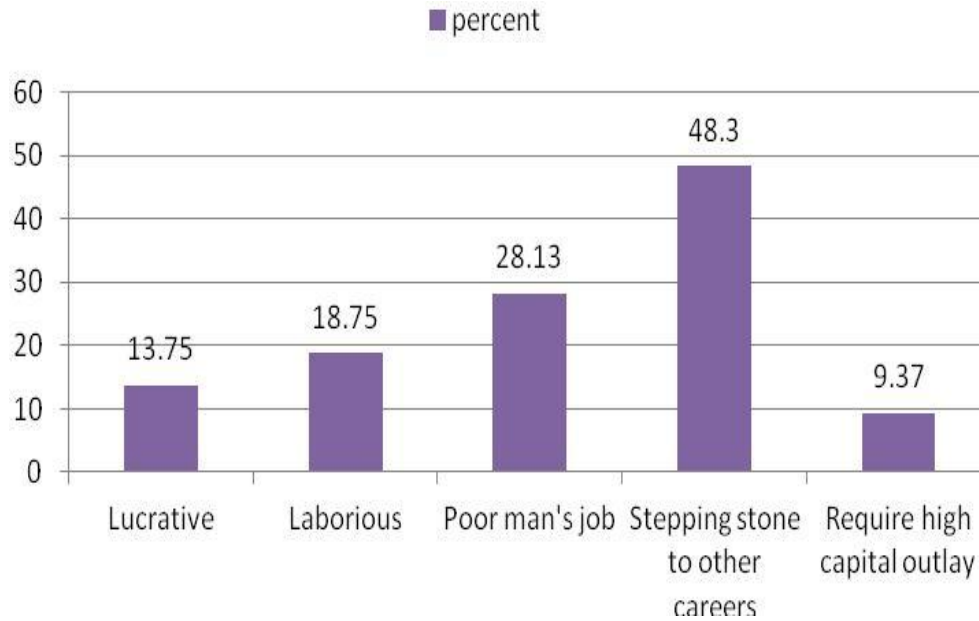


Figure 1. Perception of agricultural profession.

Table 3. Who/what influenced choice of agricultural career.

Who/what influenced choice of agricultural career	Frequency	Percentages
Parents background	15	9.37
Mentor's influence	10	6.25
Personal interest	45	28.12
Work experience	76	47.50
By chance	62	38.75
Career guidance	34	21.25
Contacts	88	55.00
Previous educational performance	78	48.75
Media	40	25.0
Gender	28	17.50
Career flexibility	76	47.50
Self employment	45	28.12
School attended	20	12.50

The significance of work experience and personal interest might result from the knowledge already acquired in agriculture and the prospects envisioned for increased livelihood in the profession

The entry into the profession by chance occurs as students in a desperate attempt to gain admission into the University would pick courses to which they have better advantage of being admitted, especially, when they do not meet the cut-off point for the preferred courses.

The influence of parents' background in career choice is contrary to observations that parents are strong factors determining the choice of career of their children Esters and Bowen (2004), Ferry (2006), and Azuibike (2011). Also, career guidance has no influence in a reflection of

the poor number of guidance and counselors in the secondary schools and their limited roles.

Estimates of the probit regression model

Previous educational experience, work experience, contacts/ peer groups, and economy were significant in influencing the career choice of agricultural profession of the respondents (Table 5). This validates the findings under whom and what influenced the choice of agricultural profession as discussed previously in perception of agricultural profession and Who/what influenced the choice of agricultural career. Before

Table 4. The level of influence each of the factors had on the choice of career.

Variable	Strong influence	Some influence	No influence	Total	Mean	Decision
Parents background	30	70	115	215	1.34	NI
Mentor's influence	135	70	90	295	1.84	NI
Personal interest	198	90	49	337	2.11	I
Work experience	240	90	35	365	2.28	I
By chance	198	92	48	338	2.11	I
Career guidance	150	70	75	295	1.84	NI
Contacts/ peer groups	264	80	32	376	2.35	I
Previous edu. performance	300	90	15	405	2.53	I
Media	36	120	88	244	1.53	NI
Gender	150	70	75	295	1.84	NI
Career flexibility	264	88	28	380	2.37	I
Self employment	195	80	55	330	2.06	I
School attended	90	50	105	245	1.53	NI

one can become a professional in agriculture, the previous educational experience is very important as agriculture is an applied science, hence basic knowledge of science courses are fundamental.

Barriers to continuing with agricultural profession

The major barriers envisaged by respondents in taking up agricultural profession are indicated in Table 6, these includes: crop failure (67.50%), financial constraints (59.37%), land problem (56.25%), seasonality of farm produce/ market access (55.0%), attitudinal problem/ psychology of being called a farmer (42.50%), unpredictable future (41.25%) and insufficient skill (21.87%). It could be said that the barriers to taking up agricultural profession by the respondents are attributed to the factors listed above, all of which have been the barriers to agricultural development of the nation from onset. Despite all the agricultural programmes launched by the

Federal Government of Nigeria, the main challenges of agricultural production has neither being reduce nor alleviated.

Conclusion

The study was carried out to identify the factors determining the choice of agricultural profession as a career among youths in higher institution of learning in Ekiti State Nigeria. A total of 160 respondents was randomly selected from students in the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti while a structured interview schedule was used in eliciting information from them. Frequency counts and percentages, Likert scale, as well as, Probit model were used in data analysis. The respondents were young with average age of 19.5 years and they cut across all religious practices within the country. They were mainly males and had childhood homes in rural areas and from farm families. Most of the respondents see agriculture as a stepping stone to other

careers while some perceived it as a poor man's job, laborious, 13.75% perceive it as not being lucrative. Seven variables influenced agricultural profession as the career choice. Previous educational performance (mean = 2.53), career flexibility (mean 2.37), contacts (mean = 2.35), work experience (mean = 2.28), personal interest and by chance (mean = 2.11 respectively). Probit regression analysis also confirmed that previous educational experience, work experience, and contacts/ peer groups significantly influenced the preference for agriculture as the career choice. The barriers to taking up agriculture as a life time profession are; fear of crop failure, financial problems, land availability, seasonality of agricultural produce/ market access and unpredictable future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The relevance of agriculture to the survival of Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. In order to

Table 5. Estimates of the probit regression model.

Variable	Coefficients	Standard deviation
AGE	0.332	0.132
PINFLU	0.621	0.308
EDUPERF	0.0359*	0.0611
WOKEXP	0.0392**	0.0815
GENDER	0.3282	0.1161
CONTACTS	0.0541*	0.2075
MEDIA	0.401	0.2042
ECONOMY	0.724*	0.187

*Significant 5%; **Significant at 1%.

Table 6. Barriers to continuing with agricultural profession.

Barriers to continuing with agricultural profession	Frequency	Percentages
Financial constraints	95	59.37
Land problem	90	56.25
Attitudinal problem/ psychology of being called a farmer	68	42.50
Fear of crop/ livestock failure	108	67.50
Insufficient skill acquisition	35	21.87
Seasonality of agricultural produce/ market access	88	55.0
Unpredictable future	66	41.25

secure a future for the nation, there is an urgent need to stimulate the interest of the youths in agriculture early in life through career guidance. Agriculture should be made compulsory at the primary and secondary levels, to inculcate the importance of the profession, and the spirit of farming in youths. Scholarships should be awarded to students who indicate interest in pursuing agricultural profession in tertiary institutions. Students should be encouraged to form Young Farmers association and be active in carrying out operations on various farming enterprises. Ethics and benefits of the associations should be made known to the students so as to tap the opportunities offered. The experiences gained in schools should be tailored towards commercial agriculture and students should be encouraged to go on excursion to commercial farms as this will serve as motivation and change their orientation. Grants should be provided to Agriculture graduates who want to embark on commercial agriculture shortly after graduation. Access to land by youth should be enhanced through government land acquisition and review of Land Use Decree of 1978. Students industrial work experience should be well structured and monitored to enhance skill acquisition.

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