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Willingness to Choose Agriculture as a Profession among Female Undergraduates in Selected Universities in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract
The study was carried out in some selected Universities in Osun State, Nigeria, to assess the willingness of female undergraduate students of agriculture to choose agriculture as a profession. A two-stage sampling procedure was used to select 120 female undergraduate students of agricultural disciplines in the selected Universities for the study. Primary data were collected with the aid of well-structured questionnaire. Data were described with the use of percentage, weighted mean and standard deviation, while Chi-square analytical procedure was conducted to make inferences. The results revealed that the mean age of the respondents was approximately 23.0 years, most of the respondents (97.5%) were single and majority (75.0%) got their income from parents. Willingness to choose poultry production as a profession ranked 1st (2.80) and about 62.5% of the respondents were at medium level of willingness. Insufficient capital (3.48) ranked 1st among all the perceived challenges militating against the choice of agriculture as a profession. The result of Chi-square analysis shows that there was significant association between willingness and age and reason for choice of course of study. The study concluded that there was medium level of willingness to choose agriculture profession among the respondents. The study recommends that grants, incentives and farm machinery be made available by the government and other agencies for female agriculture graduates who are willing to choose agriculture as a profession.

Key words: Willingness, Female, Undergraduates, Agriculture, Profession

Introduction

The role of the agricultural sector in the development of the global economy cannot be overstated. According to Njeru, Gichimu, Lopokoiyit and Mwangi (2015), most African farmers are between the ages of 55 and 70 years, and this set of individuals without doubt lack the necessary agility that farming requires. Therefore, they mostly rely on traditional practices (archaic farming system) which are characterized by poor productivity, low income, and invariably poor living standard. They added that, younger generation of today sees farming as a profession of the elderly, uneducated and poor rural people, thereby giving up their interest in the sector. However, the significance of young generation to the development of a nation cannot be underestimated. According to Ojebiyi, Ashimolowo, Odediran, Soetan, Aromiwura, and Adeoye (2015), young people do not want to live in the rural areas which serve as an agricultural center in Nigeria, but prefer to migrate to urban towns which have more economic benefits. This is because, agriculture does not pose good standards and supporting environment and as a result, young people have been frustrated and discouraged from engaging in agriculture-related businesses, (Ayanda, Olooto, Motunrayo, Abolaji, Yusuf and Subair, 2012). In addition, young people have lassitude for agriculture as they see it as sub-standard, inadequate and very problematic, due to the challenges that their participation in agricultural activities is impeded by lack of access to land, lack of recognition of agriculture by the government, an inconsistent policy implementation and non-involvement of young people in development planning (Ezebuiro, Ekwe, Mbanaso, Nwakor, Asumugha and Ewuziem, 2014).

Agriculture is a well-known profession in Nigeria and the country's largest employer of labor, although people often believe that it is an unprofessional and less profitable career for graduates in Nigeria. It is also assumed that agricultural science is more of a course of study for the less intelligent and privileged therefore a course of study by chance rather than by choice (Adegboye, 2015). Also, the idea that young farmers leaving schools are failures in life has affected students' perceptions of agriculture (Okiror and Otabong, 2015). According to Eneji, Mai-Lafia and Weiping (2013), a

significant proportion of Nigeria's population is made up of young people, who should be but are not industriously engaged in productive agricultural ventures that will lead to food adequacy in the country and increased foreign income from the export of excess agricultural products. The passion of an individual for a particular livelihood has a lot to do with the choice of the individual. Although, there are several factors that influence a student's decision to earn a living; these factors include family, passion, salary, and past experiences (Agumagu, Ifeanyi-Obi, and Agu, 2019). Other factors include the student's race and gender; these can greatly influence which domain a student can choose. Fizer (2013) identified that some occupations have higher percentages of a certain gender or race and added that another factor that plays a significant role in a student's decision on which field to invest their time (present and future) is the people or role models in their life. These role models can include a parent, teacher, or recent employer (Fizer, 2013).

Moreover, it is amazing to note that graduates who have studied different aspects of agriculture such as agricultural economics, agricultural extension, crop production, animal production, soil science, etc. are currently looking for rare white-collar jobs in banking, oil and gas. Thus, abandoning what they have spent many years studying in Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges, while people without special education in agriculture do well in different agricultural enterprises (Ojebiyi *et al*., 2015). According to Ayanda *et al.* (2012), graduates of these institutions who have studied agriculture are expected to develop a passion for agriculture and serve as an active workforce that will replace the elderly population, thereby improving agricultural productivity. According to Leavy and Smith, (2010), many youth (skilled and unskilled) do not choose or prefer to earn a living in the agricultural sector, especially as "farmers". This however, had led to increase in unemployment rate of youth in the country.

Also, in a report by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2011), on average, women make up 43% of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, ranging from 20% in Latin America to 50% in East and Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. According to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, women account for 75% of the farming population in Nigeria, working as farm managers, and suppliers of labour (Sahel, 2014). According to Palacios-Lopez, Christiaensen and Kilic (2017) cited in Ibitunde, Ajayi, Bamiwuye and Sulaiman (2021), the number of women engaged in agriculture as a percentage of the economically active population in the South of Nigeria is roughly equal to that of men, with women constituting 51% of the agricultural labor force. However, like other sectors, women and girls in agriculture face challenges related to access to land, productive resources, education, financial services and information. Observing that agriculture has been a major source of livelihood for the rural poor and employs up to 83% of "women" as primary food producers (Okiror and Otabong, 2015), the place of women in the sector cannot be over-emphasized. Therefore, the study assessed the willingness of female undergraduate students of agriculture students in selected Universities in Osun State to choose agriculture profession.

Specific objectives of the study were to;

i. describe the socio-economic characteristics of female undergraduate agriculture students in selected Universities in Osun State;
ii. assess the respondents' willingness to choose agriculture profession; and
iii. examine the respondents' perceived challenges against their willingness to choose agriculture profession.

Hypothesis of the study

H01: There is no significant relationship between the respondents' socio-economic characteristics and their willingness to choose agriculture profession.

Methodology

Study area

The study was carried out in Osun State, Nigeria. Osun State was created on Tuesday, 27th August 1991, from the old Oyo State. It is bounded in the north by Kwara State and partly by Ekiti State and Ondo State in the east, in the south by Ogun State and in the west by Oyo State. It has an area of approximately 9,026 square kilometers and a population of 3,416,959 (1,734,149 males and 1,682,810 females) (NBS, 2011). The Universities selected for the study were Osun State University, College of Agriculture, Ejigbo campus and Faculty of Agriculture, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, both in Osun State.

Population of the study

All registered female students in the College/Faculty of Agriculture of the selected Universities formed the study population.

Sampling techniques

The study utilized a two-stage sampling procedure. In the first stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select the 300, 400 and 500 level female undergraduate agriculture students of the selected institutions based on the fact that the students would have gained a lot of experience as prospective agripreneuers based on the duration of stay on campus. A list of these students was obtained from the faculty offices of the two institutions. There were 52, 64 and 32 female students in the 300, 400 and 500 levels respectively in Osun State University, College of Agriculture, Ejigbo, Osun State. Also; there were 338, 116 and 90 female students in the 300, 400 and 500 levels respectively in Faculty of Agriculture, Obafemi Awolowo University. In the second stage, a proportionate sample of 17.3% of the total population of the 300, 400, and 500 levels of female undergraduate agriculture students were selected. In other words, 9, 11, and 6 female students were selected from 300, 400 and 500 levels respectively in Osun State University, College of Agriculture, Ejigbo, Osun State. Also, 58, 20 and 16 female students were selected from 300, 400 and

500 levels respectively in Faculty of Agriculture, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. This selection gave a total of 120 respondents.

Measurement of variables

The dependent variable of the study was willingness to choose agriculture profession by female agricultural students. This was measured by the respondents' willingness to take on specific areas of farming as a means of livelihood. A list of 13 specific areas of farming was presented to the respondents to rate on a four-point Likert-type rating scale of 1, 2, 3, and 4, of "not willing", "willing", "very willing" and "strongly willing" respectively, specific areas of agriculture whose weighted means measure up to approximately 2.0, that is, "willing" were used as a benchmark for willingness in the specific area of agriculture. In addition, the respondents' perceived challenges to their willingness to choose agriculture as a profession was measured on a five-point Likert-type rating scale of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for "not at all a challenge", "minor challenge", "moderate challenge", "serious challenge" and "very serious challenge." Indicators of perceived challenges whose weighted means measure up to approximately 2.0, that is "minor challenge" were used as a benchmark for perceived challenges to choosing agriculture profession.

Data collection and data analyses

The data were collected with the use of well-structured and validated questionnaire and were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation while Chi-square analysis was conducted to make inferences.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Results in Table 1 show that the mean age of the respondents was approximately 23.02±2.864 years. This implies that the respondents were young and this age is typical of undergraduates in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The young and productive age recorded by the female undergraduates would be useful as agricultural related enterprises may require active participation and being young may be of advantage. This finding agrees with the result of Ehien, Mohammed, Makinta, Bala, and Babaji (2020) that virtually all; 95% out of the total respondents sampled were within the age bracket of 18-35 years. The results further show that virtually all (97.5%) of the respondents were single, while very few (2.5%) were married. It can be deduced that the entire female undergraduate agriculture students of Universities in Osun State were single. This finding agrees with Ojebiyi *et al*. (2015) that most (83.9%) of the students sampled were single. The results further show that majority (72.5%) of the respondents were in 400 level, few (19.2%) were in 500 level, while very few (8.3%) were in 300 level. The higher percentage of the respondents in 400 level may have been caused by a high admission of female candidates into the selected Universities for agriculture related courses about three/four sessions ago. The results further reveal that majority (75.0%) of the respondents sourced their income from their parents, very few (4.2%) sourced their income through farming, 3.3% sourced their income from family and friends, 12.5% sourced their income themselves, and 5.0% from other sources. The results further reveal that majority (51.7%) of the respondents' reason for choosing their course of study was as a result of the course offered by the University. About 33.3% chose their course of study as a result of personal interest, very few (7.5%) as a result of parental influence and 6.7% as a result of influence of mentor while 0.8% as a result of peer group influence. This agreed with the findings of Ayanda *et al*. (2012) that external factors such as families, parents, and course offered by institution and guardians in particular, play a significant role in the occupational aspirations and career goal development of their children. The results further show that majority (60.0%) of the respondents had farming experience of between 1 and 2 years, few (24.2%) between 3 and 4 years, 10.0% had no experience and 5.8% had 5 years and above. The mean years of the farming experience was 1.99 years with standard deviation of 1.64 years. This finding agrees with the result of Adebo and Sekumade (2013) that majority (59.38%) of the respondents sampled had farming experience before admission into the University. The result also implies that experience in farming is expected to enhance the respondents' willingness to choose agriculture profession.

Willingness to choose agriculture profession

Results in Table 2 show that respondents' willingness to choose poultry production as a profession ranked 1st with a mean score of 2.80. This finding agrees with Ojebiyi *et al*., (2015) that the most (85.7%) of the respondents sampled were willing to venture into agriculture-related enterprises with livestock production enterprise (67.7%) being the most preferred enterprise. This was followed by respondents' willingness to choose agro processing and value addition as a profession (2.76) which ranked 2nd. Next was respondents' willingness to choose fish farming as a profession, (2.73) which ranked 3rd, this finding agrees with Agumagu *et al*. (2019) that the majority (73%) of the respondents sampled were willing to choose fish farming as a profession. Also, respondents' willingness to choose agricultural produce marketing as a profession (2.66) ranked 4th, willingness to choose rabbit farming as a profession (2.57) ranked 5th and others in that order. From measurement scale of 1, 2, 3, and 4, of "not willing", "willing", "very willing" and "strongly willing" respectively, specific areas of agriculture whose weighted means measure up to approximately 2.0, that is, "willing" were used as a benchmark for the willingness in the specific area of agriculture. This implies the respondents were willing to choose all the specific areas of agriculture as profession. It can be deduced from the result that female undergraduate agriculture students in selected Universities in Osun State had a positive view of agriculture as they chose various aspects of agriculture as a profession. These findings may serve as a suggestion point for policy makers.

Level of willingness to choose the agriculture profession

Results in Table 3 show that majority (62.5%) of the respondents were at medium level of willingness, few (20.0%) were at high level of willingness while few (17.5%) were at low level of willingness. This result implies that the female undergraduate agriculture students had a considerable level of willingness to choose the agriculture profession in each of the specific areas of agriculture in the study area. This finding agrees with the findings of Fawole and Ozkan (2019) that majority (68.3%) of the respondents sampled was willing to participate in agriculture.

Perceived challenges to choosing agriculture profession

Results in Table 4 show that insufficient capital (3.48) ranked 1st, this was followed by inadequate storage facilities, 3.32) 2nd, lack of access to tractors and farm inputs, (3.15) 3rd, inadequate credit facilities (3.11) 4th, land tenure problem (3.05) 5th and others in that order. Indicators of perceived challenges whose weighted means measure up to approximately 2.0, that is "minor challenge" were used as a benchmark for perceived challenges to choosing agriculture profession. This shows that all the listed indicators of perceived challenges were identified by the respondents. The results agree with the finding of Agumagu *et al*. (2017) that major perceived challenges of making agriculture a profession include inaccessibility of land, high cost of farm machinery and insufficient initial capital. This implies that any intervention that would be applied to enhance the willingness of female undergraduate agriculture students to choosing agriculture profession in the study area should be applied to solve the identified perceived challenges in ascending order.

Relationship between the respondents' socio-economic characteristics and their willingness to choose agriculture profession

Results in Table 5 show significant association between age (χ^2=15.058, p≤ 0.05) and willingness, and reason for choice of course of study (χ^2=18.930, p≤ 0.05) and willingness, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Age had a significant association with willingness to choose agriculture profession. This implies that willingness to choose agriculture profession varies among respondents with various age groups sampled for the study. This result might also be because about 65.8% of the respondents as observed from the study were between the ages of 22-25 years. This implies that the higher the number of female undergraduate agriculture students between the ages of 22-25 years, the higher the likelihood of willingness to choose agriculture profession. Reason for choice of course of study also had a significant association with willingness to choose agriculture profession. This implies that willingness to choose agriculture profession varies among respondents with various reasons for choice of course of study sampled. This result might also be due to the fact that a little above average (51.7%) of the respondents' reason for choice of their course of study was as a result of the course offered by the University. This implies that the higher the number of female students offered agricultural courses by the University, the higher the likelihood of willingness to choose agriculture profession.

Conclusion

Results show that majority of the respondents were at the medium level of willingness to choose agriculture profession. The study therefore recommends that grants, incentives and farm machinery should be made available by the government and other agencies for female agriculture graduates who are willing to choose the agriculture profession.

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Table 1: Distribution of the respondents according to their socio-economic characteristics (n=120)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean ± SD
Age			
18-21	30	25.0	
22-25	79	65.8	
26-29	9	7.5	
30 years and above	2	1.7	23.02±2.864
Marital status			
Single	117	97.5	
Married	3	2.5	
Level			
300	10	8.3	
400	87	72.5	
500	23	19.2	
Primary source of income			
Parent	90	75.0	
Farming	5	4.2	
Family and friends	4	3.3	
Self	15	12.5	
Others	6	5.0	
Reasons for choice of course of study			
Parental influence	9	7.5	
Personal interest	40	33.3	
Peer group influence	1	0.8	
Influence of mentor	8	6.7	
Course offered by the University	62	51.7	
Farming experience (years)			
No farm experience	12	10	
1- 2 years	72	60.0	
3-4 years	29	24.2	
≥ 5 years	7	5.8	1.99±1.64

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 2: Willingness to choose agriculture as a profession

Willingness	Strongly willing	Very willing	Willing willing	Not willing	Mean	Rank
Willingness to choose poultry farming as a profession	51(42.5)	19(15.8)	25(20.8)	25(20.8)	2.80	1st
Willingness to choose agro-processing and value addition as a profession	45(37.5)	17(14.2)	42(35.0)	16(13.3)	2.76	2nd
Willingness to choose fish farming as a profession	40(33.3)	28(23.3)	32(26.7)	20(16.7)	2.73	3rd
Willingness to choose agricultural produce marketing as a profession	41(34.2)	16(13.3)	44(36.7)	19(15.8)	2.66	4th
Willingness to choose rabbit farming as a profession	35(29.2)	28(23.3)	27(22.5)	30(25.0)	2.57	5th
Willingness to choose horticulture as a profession	27(22.5)	28(23.3)	30(25.0)	35(29.2)	2.39	6th
Willingness to choose snail farming as a profession	33(27.5)	18(15.0)	31(25.8)	38(31.7)	2.38	7th
Willingness to choose arable crop farming as a profession	29(24.2)	20(16.7)	33(27.5)	38(31.7)	2.33	8th
Willingness to choose cash crop farming as a profession	20(16.7)	24(20.0)	45(37.5)	31(25.8)	2.28	9th
Willingness to choose sheep and goat farming as a profession	29(24.2)	21(17.5)	19(15.8)	51(42.5)	2.23	10th
Willingness to choose pig farming as a profession	22(18.3)	20(16.7)	19(15.8)	59(49.2)	2.04	11th
Willingness to choose bee keeping as a profession	22(18.3)	16(13.3)	26(21.7)	56(46.7)	2.03	12th
Willingness to choose cattle farming as a profession	21(17.5)	9(7.5)	26(21.7)	64(53.3)	1.89	13th

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 3: Level of willingness to choose agriculture profession (n=120)

Level of willingness	Values	Frequency	Percentage
High	≥39.0	24	20.0
Medium	Btw 24 and 38	75	62.5
Low	≤23	21	17.5
Total		120	100

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 4: Perceived challenges to choose agriculture profession

Perceived challenges	VSC	SEC	MOC	MIC	NAC	Mean	Rank
Insufficient initial capital	70(58.3)	42(35.0)	5(4.2)	1(0.8)	2(1.7)	3.48	1st
Inadequate storage facilities	58(48.3)	52(43.3)	4(3.3)	2(1.7)	4(3.3)	3.32	2nd
Lack of access to tractors and farm input	52(43.3)	47(39.2)	13(10.8)	3(2.5)	5(4.2)	3.15	3rd
Inadequate credit facilities	40(33.3)	61(50.8)	14(11.7)	2(1.7)	3(2.5)	3.11	4th
Land tenure problem	38(31.7)	64(53.3)	7(5.8)	8(6.7)	2(2.5)	3.05	5th
High cost of transport	36(30.0)	57(47.5)	19(15.8)	5(4.2)	3(2.5)	2.98	6th
Seasonality of agricultural produce and market access	37(30.8)	50(41.7)	15(12.5)	11(9.2)	7(5.8)	2.82	7th
Climate change	41(34.2)	43(35.8)	10(8.3)	19(15.8)	7(5.8)	2.77	8th
Fear of crop and livestock failure	31(25.8)	48(40.0)	17(14.2)	19(15.8)	5(4.2)	2.68	9th
Tedious nature of agriculture	29(24.2)	4(35.8)	19(15.8)	25(20.8)	4(3.3)	2.57	10th
Lack of employment in the agriculture sector	32(26.7)	37(30.8)	15(12.5)	29(24.2)	7(5.8)	2.48	11th
Poor remuneration in agricultural related jobs	24(20.0)	48(40.0)	17(14.2)	22(18.3)	9(7.5)	2.47	12th
Insufficient skill acquisition	22(18.3)	46(38.3)	16(13.3)	29(24.2)	7(5.8)	2.39	13th
Poor societal value of farmers/Psychology of being called a farmer	24(20.0)	37(30.8)	16(13.3)	32(26.7)	11(9.2)	2.26	14th

Source: Field survey, 2021

Very serious challenge=VSC, Serious challenge=SEC, Moderate challenge=MOC, Minor challenge = MIC and Not at all a challenge=NAC

Table 5: Chi-square analysis showing the association between the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and their willingness to choose agriculture profession

Variables	χ^2-value	p-value	Decision
Age	15.058	0.020*	Significant
Marital status	1.065	0.587	Not significant
Farm experience	2.206	0.698	Not significant
Reason for choice of course of study	18.930	0.015*	Significant
Primary source of income	9.349	0.314	Not significant

Source: Data analysis, 2021. *Significant at $p \leq 0.05$