

Perception of Forestry as a Career Choice among Forestry Students in Nigeria

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Abstract

Forestry education at tertiary level has been structured in order to produce professional foresters with the overall goal of biodiversity management, sustainable forest management, creation and management of wood resources and interaction with forest dependent communities. This study was conducted to ascertain the perception of tertiary institution students on the choice of forestry as a career choice. A total of 254 copies of well-structured questionnaire were randomly administered to respondents and the data collected were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis of frequencies and percentages. The results of the study revealed that majority (63.7%) were male, single (89.4%) and aged 19-25 (68.5%). The findings also revealed that the students are well aware of what Forestry profession is and that this was learned through their teachers. It was further revealed that personal interest and admission challenges are the major reasons why students chose forestry as a career. The students were revealed to have an overall favorable and positive disposition towards forestry profession despite the challenges involved. Based on these findings, it is recommended that Government at all levels, individuals, public and private organizations and others should encourage the students and motivate them through scholarships, government interventions, public awareness and encouragement from professional bodies.

Keywords: Tertiary Institutions, Perception, Forestry, Career

Introduction

Forests and sustainable forest management are essential for human survival on our planet. Patrick Moore author of Green Spirit – Trees are the Answer says: “Forests provide a wealth of services and products to human society without which life as we know it would be impossible. Forests and forestry produces are our most renewable material resource, maintains habitat for thousands of species, removes carbon from the atmosphere and provides a wide range of consumer goods” Moore (2000). Many people do not understand the value of our forests and often view forestry as an anti- environmental industry. The business of forestry is a challenging one, given the current worldwide economic pressures. This may lead the public to believe that a career in the forestry sector is a thing of the past. There is concern that these continued false perceptions will result in a future shortage of skilled forest professional, thereby seriously endangering forest management in the future. Forestry as a

profession came to being almost 200 years ago (Daramola, 2010) having realized the importance of forests as resources for the existence of man. This posited forestry education system to incorporate learning, researching and training of professionals in the forestry sector. Generally, forestry education at tertiary level is structured to produce professional foresters. Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management (2018) stated that school leavers who selected forestry academic programs at universities were driven by the opportunity to work outdoors, their interest in managing biodiversity of natural environment, creating and managing wood resource and potential to interact and work with the forest-based communities. Against this background, the traditional forestry programs prepared the students with a strong foundation in a number of core academic disciplines, and subsequently trained them in the professional context for the forestry sector (APFNET 2018).

In many forest-rich nations, forestry education has remained with this traditional

model, usually introduced by the colonizing nations or having been emulated from other nations in the region, with the global change in forest cover and its role, the traditional forestry education model appears to be ill equipped to produce the necessary human capital to cope with the emanating challenges (Laurillard and Kennedy, 2017). Inevitably, forestry education is in transition all over the world, and under growing pressure to remain relevant as a professional career education. According to Lewark (2016) several reasons have are responsible for the problems faced by forestry education. Key reason is the reducing interest in forestry academic programs where school leavers prefers careers with high salary with promising achievement that are not attainable in forestry profession such as medicine, law engineering and information technology (Chima and Sobere, 2011). Arevalo *et al.*, (2012) observed that, despite the growing discontent, forestry programs in many parts of the world have not been restructured to meet market demands because forestry academic, teachers and trainers have not fully adopted to keep up with these changes. Lewark, (2016) reported that forestry graduate students from tropical countries have been unable and ill-equipped to fit with local stakeholders in technical and economic aspects, participatory approaches to forest resource use and respond effectively to global forestry paradigms. In Nigeria today, enrolment figures into forestry courses in Universities are dwindling yearly despite the large numbers of universities offering forestry and allied courses. Despite global advocacy for sustainable forests management, Nigeria still lacks adequate hands to tackle the contemporary conservation problems, and this could be linked to societal demand and lack of interest among youth to study forestry (Alao, 2010). The World Environmental Day celebrations themes of greening the planet through massive Tree Planting and preservation of our forests have not helped the situation due to shortage of manpower in the forestry sector to bring this idea to reality (Agrawal, *et al.*, 2013). Besides, public perception which is a factor of preference about the profession is worrisome and disturbing (Lewark, 2016). Interest for

career and occupation values, abilities and many more differ according to individuals which can be attributed to life career choice (Nathaniel *et al.*, 2014). The attitude of a student towards a course of study influences the amount of content materials internalized and the acquisition of the appropriate skills for the subject (Ibitoye, 2011). Alao, (2010) however affirmed that, Nigerian youths are not exposed to the best practices of how to enhance career development, and in many schools, teachers do not even have access to current text books on forestry to guide the student properly (Chima and Sobere, 2011) which underscores the low interest of students in forestry as a career. (Nathaniel *et al.*, 2014). A number of studies in recent year have drawn attention to the declining state of professional forestry education both in developing and developed countries. Symptoms of this decline include a significant reduction in funding educational institutions, low enrolment of student's rates and the declining demand for forestry graduates (Nair, 2014). According to Daramola 2013, in the last two decades, declining students enrolment in forestry education especially at the technical level has emerged which is due to low investments in forestry education poor perception of forestry and poor job prospect etc. he clearly stated that the foremost of all factors guiding a choice of career is interest which is greatly influenced by fore knowledge of the course, popularity or public perception, professionalism and status of role models. However, it has been noticed that forestry is under represented in secondary school curriculum and teachers seldom mention it to students. The public awareness of the course is very low and also small to medium scale enterprise in forestry have not gained much popularity. According to Temu *et al*, 2001, the bulk of persons trained were involved in civil service. In short, opportunities and profile are changing and so must the curricular, the situation has changed drastically over the last few years with many graduate poured out into the streets with no jobs to do.

Against all these odds, there are some people who still choose forestry as a career or find themselves for different reasons in the profession. This study however aims at

looking into the mind set of students in forestry, the reason they chose the profession and the prospects they have in venturing into forestry.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Jos, New Bussa and Ibadan in Nigeria. Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria was used as the baseline for this study and three (3) of the four (4) Colleges under the Institute namely; Federal College of Forestry Ibadan, Federal College of Forestry Jos, and Federal College of Wildlife, New Bussa were used for the study. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used in selecting a total of 254 respondents for the study. There are four (4) colleges under the umbrella of Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria and the first stage involved the purposive selection of three (3) out of the four colleges based on their high Forestry student population which are Jos (170), New Bussa (147) and Ibadan (193). The second stage involved the random selection of well- structured questionnaire divided into four (4) sections which was used for data collection and the data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results and discussion

The study as presented in table 1 shows that the male students were about two-third of the total number of students sampled for this study. This can be as a result of the preconceived notion that forestry or the agricultural profession in general is a tedious field. The results also revealed that majority of the students were single and within the age range of 19-25. This age range is believed to be the youthful and prime years. Youths are believed to be the leaders of tomorrow and are naturally expected to take over the affairs of whatever society they belong to. Hence, any programmes that take cognizance of the youth will surely exhibit acceptability, continuity and sustainability. The study further revealed that a large number of the respondents are Christians (68.9%) with many of their parents within the age range of 51-60. From the results, it was shown that more than half of the respondents’ parents have tertiary education and this in large part can influence their ward’s career choice. The results also revealed that a

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Distribution characteristics	Frequency	%
1. Sex		
Male	171	67.3
Female	83	32.7
Total	254	100.0
2. Marital status		
Single	227	89.4
Married	26	10.2
Divorced	1	0.4
Total	254	100.0
3. Age		
12-18	22	8.7
19-25	174	68.5
26-32	52	20.5
33-40	6	2.4
Total	254	100.0
4. Religion		
Christianity	175	68.9
Islam	77	30.3
Traditional	2	0.8
Total	254	100.0
5. Parental Age		
40-50	62	24.4
51-60	114	44.9
61-70	59	23.2
71-80	13	5.1
>80	6	2.4
Total	254	100.0
6. Parental Education Level		
No formal education	36	14.2
Secondary education	68	26.8
Tertiary education	150	59.0
Total	254	100.0

Distribution characteristics	Frequency	%
7. Parental occupation		
Civil servant	155	61.0
Trading	58	22.8
Artisan	14	5.5
Clergy	10	3.9
Public servant	4	1.6
Accountant	6	2.4
Others	7	2.8
Total	254	100.0
8. Sponsorship		
Parents/ Guidance	209	82.3
Self	33	13.0
Scholarship	3	1.2
Spouse	2	0.8
Others	7	2.7
Total	254	100.0

large number of the parents are civil servants in one government parastatal or another and this is followed by trading, artisan, clergy and others. The parents' occupation could influence their wards' career choice and this in turn could influence how the students perceive forestry as a career choice in their future. A large number of the respondents revealed that their education is being sponsored by their parents and this is followed by self-sponsorship, scholarship and spousal sponsorship.

The results in table 2 above shows that almost all the respondents were aware of forestry as a profession and it was also revealed that their major sources of information on forestry were their teachers, parents, friends and the media. This could be as a result of the subjects being taught in their secondary school curriculum which introduced them early to forestry through their teachers. The low level of awareness through the media could be attributed to the fact that many of the students mostly use the media for fun and entertainment and not for educational content. It was further revealed that the major factors influencing their choice of forestry as a career are personal interest,

admission challenges and their parents. This result could be attributed to the contribution of the teachers in succeeding to create and build the interest of the students in forestry. They have been able to develop a passion for their chosen field of forestry in their early educational years.

Table 2: Awareness of forestry as a career

Awareness of Forestry as a profession	Frequency	%
1. Have you heard of forestry before		
Yes	235	92.5
No	19	7.5
Total	254	100
2. Sources of information on forestry		
Source		
Teachers	170	66.9
Parents	34	13.4
Media	12	4.7
Friends	29	11.4
Others	9	3.5
Total	254	100
3. Factors influencing choice of forestry as a career		
Factors		
Admission challenges	97	38.2
Parents	16	6.4
Teachers	7	2.8
Personal interest	113	44.5
Financial constraint	15	5.9
Others	6	2.4
Total	254	100

The result from table 3 above shows that more than half of the students show a positive disposition towards forestry as a career choice in the future. It was revealed that forestry as a field is an interesting one and this could be as a result of the interaction with their lecturers in the field even though the practical aspect of it was viewed as too tedious. It was further

Table 3: Perception of forestry as a career among respondents

Statement	SA		A		U		D		SD		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Forestry as a field is very interesting	127	50.0	7	2.8	6	2.4	3	1.2	111	43.7	3.14
The practical work in forestry are too tedious	82	32.3	45	17.7	44	18.4	62	24.4	21	8.3	3.41
Forestry is too difficult to understand	42	16.5	29	11.4	42	17.5	91	35.8	50	19.7	2.69
Forestry involves too much practical compared to other courses	97	38.2	77	30.3	27	10.6	44	17.3	9	3.5	3.82
The lecturers tend to make the course look difficult	32	12.6	26	10.2	52	20.4	85	33.5	59	23.2	2.56
Tertiary institutions offering forestry as a course are not giving their best to equip the students	71	28.0	61	24.0	36	14.1	54	21.3	32	12.6	3.33
Forestry is not worth doing in future as it is not interesting	16	6.3	22	8.7	27	10.7	85	33.5	104	40.9	1.69
Forestry as a profession is not prestigious	44	17.3	20	7.9	50	19.6	78	30.7	62	24.4	2.63
Forestry is not encouraged in Nigerian society	47	18.5	59	23.2	68	26.8	8	3.1	72	28.3	3.00
Forestry practice is time consuming	74	29.1	27	10.6	48	18.8	65	25.6	40	15.7	3.12
Forestry does not give the opportunity for self-employment	34	13.4	17	6.7	28	11.0	77	30.3	98	38.6	2.26
Forestry graduates can only work in specified institutions in the society	84	33.1	39	15.4	38	14.9	51	20.1	42	16.5	3.28

revealed that forestry does not give room for self-employment and there are limited employment opportunities, this could however be solved by creating awareness and interest in the establishment of private forestry in the global scene.

The results as shown in table 4 revealed that the major factors motivating the respondents in their choice of forestry as a career path are environmental interest, prestige and profitability. Other factors included were conservation value, awareness and the medicinal value that our

Table 4: Motivating factors in choice of forestry as a career

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Profitability	51	20.1
Prestige	76	29.9
Awareness	10	5.1
Conservation value	18	7.1
Medicinal value	4	1.6
Environmental interest	82	32.5
Total	254	100

forests represent.

The results as presented in table 5 revealed that students can be motivated and encouraged to show more interest in the field of forestry through public awareness, scholarship from various organizations and government

Table 5: Motivational incentives

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Public awareness	53	20.9
Scholarship	134	46.7
Government interventions	57	22.4
Total	254	100

interventions.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study in its entirety was designed to assess the perception of tertiary institution students on forestry as a career choice in Nigeria. The tertiary institution students and the trainings they receive will be a decisive factor in their future professional endeavors. The future of forestry as a profession as in all other professions across board largely depends on the formal education process. Educators, governments as well as students must accept continued genuine criticism and strive to provide possible solutions to these shortcomings. The study concluded that students are very much aware of forestry as a profession and the major sources of information on forestry are their teachers and parents. Although more than half of the student cited personal interest as the

influential factor in their choice of forestry as a course of study, coming in close second is admission challenges which show that many of these students are just in this field because they had no other choice. There is therefore a need to build and nurture the interest of such students so as to further the development of forestry profession in Nigeria. The study also concluded that there is a positive perception of forestry as a career choice among the respondents and the major motivational factors in their choice are environmental interest and the prestige of the profession. The study however recommends public awareness, scholarship and government interventions as incentives to motivate students and in the general development of forestry education in Nigeria.

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