Journal of science, education and technology.
Volume 2 Number 1

Perception of Students on Agricultural Career: Focus on Secondary School Students in Minna Metropolis, Niger State, Nigeria.

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Abstract
The study assessed students' perception on agricultural profession, using secondary school students of Minna metropolis as the respondents. To achieve the study objectives, a total of 114 respondents were randomly selected from six schools. Structured questionnaire was used for data collection and the data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Likert scale and chi-square test. Result of the study indicates that 53.51% of the respondents were male while 46.49% were female; 37.72% were members of agricultural societies in their schools. Agricultural career was among the least preferred profession as indicated by only 4.39% of the respondents. Low preference for agriculture was attributed to parent's influence and negative opinion of society toward agriculture. In addition, most of the respondents did not have adequate knowledge on agricultural career prospect. With respect to the respondents attitude towards career in agriculture, 9.65% showed favourable attitude, 76.31% showed unfavourable attitude while14.04% were neutral. The chi-square result further revealed that parent's influence had significant relationship with respondents' career choice (X^2 =0.0001, P<0.05). Based on the findings, it was suggested that rigorous awareness campaigns should be undertaken on the need for parents to allow their children to make career choice according to their personal interest.

Introduction

The ultimate goal of every student is to have a befitting and successful career after graduation. Normally, as early as in primary school, student start to make career choice basically by observing and admiring others who could be their parents, relatives, teachers, neighbors or influential people in the society. At this stage, the choice made is dynamic such that the student wants to be a doctor today, a pilot tomorrow and a banker some other time. The only criteria used are the success and comfort of the person being admired .If the student's neighbour is a pilot who has a big house and a big car, he will want to be a pilot also .He knows little or nothing on what it takes to be a pilot. But by the time something unfortunate happens to the neighbour, the young student will not like to be a pilot any longer. Ginzberg (1972) described three stages of developing a career choice .They are: the fantasy, tentative and realistic period. The fantasy period lasts until about age 11, and at this period, children do not see a difference between what they would like to be and what they can be. The range of career aspiration at this stage reflects the child's awareness of many career options .It is influenced by the status or "glamour" associated with the people already in those careers. The tentative period occurs between the age of 12 and 17. Children who are adolescents begin to understand more about the aptitudes and training that a career requires. They also become aware of their own talents, values and goals that make some careers more attractive than other. Finally at the realistic period, people try to match personal talents and goals with the selection of a real career. This may also involve reflecting upon the current and future demand of the career being considered.

Several careers are open to student to choose from. They include: academics, agriculture, business, diplomacy, engineering, information and communication technology, law, marketing, medicine, music, politics, e.t.c. The major factor that determines the choice of students' career is the financial benefit involved. That is why most students, when asked, will want to be doctors, lawyers, politicians, bankers and the like. Only a few will consider a career in Agriculture. Therefore, it is imperative to generate empirical research information on the perception students have on Agricultural profession. This may likely lead to formidable policy foundation block for increasing the number of students willing to take up a career in Agriculture

in the country. The specific objectives of the study are to:

i. examine the socio-economic characteristics of students
ii. identify the student's career choice
iii. determine the students' perception of agriculture and
iv determine the attitude students have towards agricultural career.

Methodology

Data collection

The study was conducted in Minna metropolis, Niger state. Structured questionnaire were administered in six secondary schools selected at random made up of two private and four public schools, namely; New Horizons College, Mawo International School, Government Day Secondary School, Maitumbi Government Secondary School, Government Secondary School and Old Airport Government Girls Secondary School. A total of 114 students were randomly chosen from the six schools. The use of simple random sampling technique was to ensure un-biasness in data collection. All the student respondents were in SS3 .The reason for this is that students at that level are expected to have made up their minds to embark on a particular career. The statistical tools used in the data analysis were frequency distribution, percentages, likert scale and chi-square test.

Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics such as frequency and percentages were used in achieving objective one, two and three. In order to determine the attitude of. the students towards agricultural career (objective four), attitude statement were presented and rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Responses to positive statements were scored as strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1), while responses to negative statements were scored as strongly agree (1), agree (2), undecided (3), disagree (4) and strongly disagree (5). (Oladele, *et al* 1999).For the purpose of this study, 13 attitude statements were presented and scored according to responses. The total attitude score for each respondent was calculated. Each respondent can score a minimum of 13 and maximum of 65, the student's attitude score was grouped into three categories: favourable, undecided and unfavourable (Laogun, 1999).

Chi-square test was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to describe the degree of association between parent's influence and career choice of students. The result was tested at 0.05% level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows that 53.51 percent of the respondents were male while 46.49 percent were female. This indicates that there were more male students than female in the schools. Generally, male children are enrolled more in western education than female children especially in the northern part of the country. A long list of dominant factors have been identify for the low participation of girls in schools. These factors according to Williams (1987) are interwoven into religion, general bias and socio-cultural factors.

Parents' occupational analysis indicates that 60.53 percent of the respondents' parents were civil servants, 21.05 percent were farmers while 18.42 percent were of other learned professions. Parents are in position to impact meaningful information and experiences to their sons and daughters which can be relevant to their career aspiration. Many parents have acquired experience from their various occupational backgrounds.

The responses to membership in agricultural societies show that 37.72 percent of the respondents were members of agricultural societies in their schools while 62.28 percent were not. Membership in agricultural societies could influence the choice of agriculture as a career. This could also have fundamental implication on the performance of the students, as students who are members of agricultural societies stand a better chance of performing better than those who are not members.

Career Choice of Respondents

Result reveals that only 4.39% of the respondents were interested in agriculture as a career (Table 2). This is largely due to influence of parents and negative opinion of the society on agricultural career. Though, agriculture is a noble career which contributes to the development of individual, community and the country at large. But because of problem of nomenclature, most respondents revealed that agriculture is not worth being identified with in terms of personal introductions due to the general belief that it is synonymous with wretchedness. This psychological resistance emanates from the poor state of agriculture in the country which takes agriculture out of the top priorities of most people especially among the children and youths.

On the other hand 20.18%, 12.28% and 14.03% of the respondents wants to become medical doctors, accountants and politicians respectively. These fairly high percentages may not be unconnected with the general belief that these careers are money spinning professions.

Respondent's perception of Agriculture

Majority of the respondents (57.14%) in Table 3 reported that cultivation of crops and rearing of animals and fish is what they consider to mean agriculture while 26.62% of the respondents are of the view that agriculture includes processing and marketing of agricultural products. Furthermore, only 7.79% of the respondents were aware that conducting of research in agricultural research institutes is part of agricultural profession. From the above results, it can be deduced that majority of the respondents (57.14%) misconceived agriculture to mean production of crops and rearing of animals and fish only. According to Youdeowei et al (1986) the word agriculture is used for such a broad range of activities that is difficult to find a satisfactory definition for it. But in an attempt to define it, Wikipedia (2007) reported that modern agriculture extends beyond the traditional production of food for humans and animal feed. Other agricultural production goods include timber, fertilizers, animal hides and leather, industrial chemicals (starch, sugar, alcohol and resins), fibers (cotton, wool and silk), fuels (methane from biomass, ethanol, biodiesel), ornamental and nursery plants, tropical fish and birds for pet trade and both legal and illegal drugs (biopharmaceuticals, tobacco, marijuana, opium and cocaine). Therefore, lack of proper understanding of what agriculture means can discourage students from considering it as a career.

Attitude towards Agricultural career

Table 4 indicates that majority of the respondents (76.31%) have unfavourable attitude towards agricultural career. They considered agriculture as a strenuous, labourious and physically demanding discipline having slow returns on investment with little or no recognition from the society. Though only 4.39% of the respondents choice agriculture as a career (Table 2), the figure obtained for those with positive attitudes towards the career is higher (9.65%).This shows that if the respondents are adequately motivated, more could just as the others have positive opinion towards the profession.

Relationship between parent's influence and career choice

As shown in Table 5, the influence of parents had significant relationship with the career choice of respondents (X^2= 0.0001, P< 0.05).This implies that parents do advice their children on the career to pursue. Ying et-al (1999) reported that career decision is a family matter in Asian culture, so the success of the child's career is a reflection of the family as a whole. In Nigeria, the situation may not be different. From past experiences, parents will be in better position to suggest to their children the career or range of careers to choose from.

Conclusion

The paper examined the perception of students towards agricultural career. From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that majority of the respondents are not interested in agriculture as a career due to parent's influence or negative perception of the society towards agriculture. Furthermore, most of the respondents did not have adequate knowledge on agricultural profession prospect. Also a greater percentage of the

ISSN 1596-9770

respondents have unfavourable attitude towards agricultural career because they view it as a strenuous profession with low or slow rate of income.

Recommendations

Government and various development agencies in agriculture could play a key role in changing the image of the profession. This could be done through workshops where other stakeholders in agricultural and educational sectors are invited to address the issue of negative perception by society and other problems peculiar to agricultural profession.

School authorities should make frantic efforts in creating awareness among parents on the need to allow their children to make career choice by themselves according to their personal interest and abilities. Parent's teachers' association meetings can provide an avenue for the enlightenment.

Another important area worthy of attention is the harnessing and packaging of necessary information on all aspect of agricultural career prospect, which should be made available on online information and communication technologies (ICTs). This is necessary for proper understanding of agricultural career prospect by the general public.

Finally, there is the need to emphasis on the provision of modern agricultural learning equipments. Presently, learning equipments in schools are supposedly provided by the government. Since government seems to be unable or unwilling to adequately provide modern learning equipments, schools should experiment with alternative approaches such as taking students to near by private farms with modern agricultural equipments. To facilitate this, students should be encouraged to join agricultural societies through which excursion or visit could be made for students to appreciate the beauty of agricultural profession.

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of respondents.

Socio-economic variables	Frequency	percentage
Sex		
Male	61	53.51
Female	53	46.49
Total	114	100.00
Parents' occupation		
Farmers	24	21.05
Civil servants	69	60.53
Others	21	18.42
Total	114	100.00
Membership in Agricultural society		
Yes	43	37.72
No	71	62.28
Total	114	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2007.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their career choice.

Career choice	Frequency	Percentage
Accounting	14	12.28
Agriculture	5	4.39
Architecture	6	5.26
Engineering	11	9.65
Law	10	8.77
Medicine	23	20.18
Military	7	6.14
Nursing	5	4.39
Pharmacy	6	5.26
Politics	16	14.03
Teaching	5	4.39
Others	6	5.26
Total	114	100.00

Source: field survey, 2007.

Table 3. Respondents' perception of Agricultural career.

Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Knowledge of agriculture: Cultivation of crops and rearing of livestock animals and fish.	88	57.14
Processing and marketing of agricultural products.	41	26.62
Conducting of Agricultural research.	12	7.79
Teaching of agriculture.	8	5.19
Extension service delivery.	5	3.25
*Multiple choice		

Source: Field survey, 2007.

Table 4.Distribution of respondents based on attitudes towards Agricultural profession.

Respondents' attitude score	Frequency	Percentage
13 – 30 (Unfavourable)	87	76.31
31 - 48 (Neutral)	16	14.04
49 – 66 (Favourable)	11	9.65
Total	114	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2007.

.Table 5. Chi-square result: Relationship between parent's influence and respondent's career choice.

	(X^2) Value	df	P-value	(X^2) tab.	Decision (0.05%)
Chi-square	89.836	12	0.0001	21.026	significant
Likelihood Ratio	85.188	12	0.0001		
Contingency coeff.	0.795				

Source: Computed from field survey, 2007.

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Original

April 2009
ISSN 1596-9770

and Reporting Published by Shanu Books Nigeria Ltd. 1 – 141pp.

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