

ATTITUDE OF AGRICULTURAL PROFESSIONALS TOWARDS THEIR WARDS TAKING AGRICULTURE AS A CAREER IN KWARA STATE, NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the attitude of agricultural professionals towards their children or people under their care taking agriculture and agricultural extension as a career in Kwara State, Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from one hundred and eighty respondents. The findings revealed that the mean age of the agricultural professionals was 39 years. Majority (76.1%) were males, married (86.1%) with about an average of 5 wards each under their custody. Majority of the professionals were observed to have a negative and unfavourable attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career. Logistical regression modelling of determinants of agricultural professionals' attitudes towards their wards taking agriculture as a career revealed that characteristics of professionals that were more likely to have a positive attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career include high numbers of wards, higher educational qualification and more years of experience in the agricultural profession. The study recommends an urgent need for agricultural professionals to rise up to the task of ensuring increased participation of youths especially beginning with their wards in taking up a career in agriculture and agricultural extension.

Keywords: Agricultural Professionals, attitude, career, agricultural extension.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is essential in the economic development and poverty alleviation drive of many countries and it is an important sector of the Nigerian economy with a high potential for employment generation, food security and poverty alleviation (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011). However, this potential has remained largely untapped, thus resulting in the dwindling performance of the agricultural sector (Adekunle, 2013:5). Over the years, a reduction in skill and labour shortages has been plaguing the sector partially as a result of the attitude of youths' to agriculture (Ibitoye, 2011:1685).

Youths have been said to have a strong apathy to taking agriculture as a career (Adekunle, Olorunfemi, Adesiji, Oladipo, Matanmi, & Malomo, 2015:131) leading to the depletion of

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the professional labour force in the sector and a recipe for perpetual food insecurity in the country (Ayanda, Yusuf & Salawu, 2013:26). This observable trend poses a great concern for the future of agriculture and food production in Nigeria.

Given the current economic realities in Nigeria in terms of oil price downturn, high unemployment rate and the necessity to ensure food security for all, there is the need to produce more agriculture professionals that will leverage on the enormous potential the sector has to offer in providing a more sustainable solution to the economic problem of the country. Adedapo, Sawant, Kobba & Bhise (2014:14) opined that early intervention in a child's career plays essential role in the choice of a career.

Certain factors influence career choice among children and youths among which parental influence have been said to be a very important factor influencing the career choice of children and youths (Adebo & Sekunmade, 2013:252; Adedapo *et al.*, 2014:14; Adekunle *et al.*, 2015:132). In Nigeria, the general observable trend is that parents who are doctors, nurses, lawyers, politicians, members of the armed forces and so on want their children to take up similar careers. In view of this, the general assumption would have been that successful agricultural professionals would be at the front burner in encouraging their children to take after their careers and leverage on the enormous potential the agricultural profession has to offer; however, this seems not to be the case (Adebo & Sekunmade, 2013:250).

Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the current attitude of successful agricultural professionals who are parents/guardians in order to determine their perspective to their wards taking agriculture as a career so as to give insight and recommendations that will be focused towards ensuring that these great influencers of youths' career choice properly play their role in orienting, motivating and educating wards around them to leverage on the many career prospects in the agricultural sector. To this end, the study specifically sought to describe the socio-economic characteristics of the agricultural professionals in the study area, determine their involvement in the career choice of their wards, examine the attitude of the agricultural professionals towards their wards taking agriculture as a career and determine the factors influencing their attitude.

Wards: in this study refers to the children or people under the protection or care of an agricultural professional

Agricultural Professionals: refers to parents/guardians who have chosen agriculture as a career and means of livelihood e.g. agricultural lecturers, extension agents and so on.

Attitude: this refers to the dispositions and perceptions of agricultural professionals resulting in their actions and inactions as regards their wards taking agriculture as a career.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kwara State, Nigeria. The State lies between latitude $7^{\circ}15'$ and $6^{\circ}18'$ N of the equator. It has a population of about 2.37 million people (National Population Commission, 2006). The state shares boundaries with Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Kogi, Ekiti and Niger States. The major economic activity of the people is agriculture.

The research design that was adopted in the study is descriptive and quantitative which as stated by Bless & Higson-Smith (2000:40) is a study concerned with the beliefs and attitudes that are held. The population for this study comprises all agricultural professionals in the

Data collection was carried out with the aid of a face validated structured questionnaire that was pre-tested with a reliability coefficient of 0.89. A two-stage sampling technique was employed in the selection of the respondents. First, a purposive selection of the two major tertiary institutions, two MDAs and four research institutes was carried out which was then followed by a random selection of thirty (30) agricultural professionals in each of these selected organizations which was an average of about thirty per cent of the agricultural professionals in these institutions. This gave a total sample size of one hundred and eighty (180) respondents.

Data was collected on the socio-economic characteristics of the agricultural professionals, their involvement in the career choice of their wards and their attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career. These variables were measured as follows.

Attitude of the Agricultural Professionals: Respondents were presented with fifteen attitudinal statements about taking agriculture as a career measured on a 5 point Likert scale of strongly disagree (5), disagree (4), undecided (3), agree (2) and disagree (1). The total attitudinal score was then generated for each respondent with 15 points being the least score and 75 being the maximum score possible. The attitudinal scores were then grouped into 15-45 (negative attitude) and 46-75 (positive attitude). Thus the respondents were categorized as exhibiting the corresponding attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career depending on the interval they belong to. Logistical regression modelling of determinants of agricultural professional attitude was then estimated to examine factors determining the attitude of the agricultural professionals towards their wards taking agriculture as a career. The logistic regression model is in the form of the ratio of natural logarithm of the probability of having a positive attitude to the probability of having a negative attitude (i.e. log odds ratio), can thus be given as:

$$\text{Ln} \left[\frac{\pi}{1 - \pi} \right] = \beta^1 X + \epsilon$$

Where π is the conditional probability of an agricultural professional having a positive attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career, X is a vector of hypothesized explanatory variables which will include age, gender, marital status, educational level, number of wards, area of specialization and years of experience, β is a vector of unknown parameters to be estimated and ϵ is independently and normally distributed random error term.

Involvement in Career Choice: Respondents were asked whether they are involved in the career choice of their wards. This was measured as Yes (2) and No (1).

Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, means score and ranks while logistic regression was used as an inferential statistics to identify the determinants of the agricultural professional attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Findings from table 1 revealed that the mean age of the agricultural professionals is 39 years. This implies that majority of the respondents are agile, active and matured enough to give the necessary mentorship and have the needed influence on the career choice of children and wards around them. Table 1 further showed that majority (76.1%) of the respondents were males while just few (23.9%) were females. This shows the current gender imbalance in terms of professionals in agricultural firms and research institutes in the study area.

Majority (86.1%) of the respondents were also married. It is a general opinion that married people usually have more family responsibilities such as having dependents to take care of and therefore revealing that majority of the respondents will have wards under them they are expected mentor and influence. Also from Table 1, the mean number of wards per respondents is 5 thus buttressing the fact that most of them have family responsibilities to attend to and wards to mentor in the area of career choice.

Table 1 further showed that majority (92.8%) of the respondents had Higher National Diploma (HND) and above level of educational qualification. This reveals that most of them are well educated and can be classified as successful professional who are expected to be well placed and positioned in their agricultural profession thus making them qualified to be influential mentors that wards and youths can aspire to be like.

Table 1 revealed that the respondents cut across different areas of specialty in the agricultural profession thus giving their ward enough agricultural career options to look forward to and to select from if they choose to take up a career in the agricultural profession.

From table 1, the mean years of experience of the respondents is 9 years thus conferring on them the ability to be able to give accurate experiential advice on issues relating to taking up a career in any aspect of agriculture.

Table 1: Distribution of the socio-economic characteristics of the Agricultural Professionals

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Age			
≤ 40	106	58.9	39 years
41 – 60	70	38.9	
60 and above	4	2.2	
Gender			
Male	137	76.1	
Female	43	23.9	
Marital Status			
Single	25	13.9	
Married	155	86.1	
No of Children/Ward			
1-4	130	72.2	5 wards
5-8	47	26.1	
9 and above	3	1.7	
Educational Level			
Secondary Sch. Certificate	1	0.6	
Certificate of Agriculture	4	2.2	
OND	8	4.4	
HND	63	35.0	
B.Sc.	43	23.9	
M.Sc.	31	17.2	
Ph.D.	30	16.7	
Area of Specialization			
Crop	28	15.6	
Animal	25	13.9	
Agric. Engineering	28	15.6	
Fishery	11	6.1	
Forestry	6	3.3	
Economics	23	12.8	
Extension	47	26.1	
Horticulture	12	6.7	
Years of Experience			
1-10	134	74.4	9 years
11-20	33	18.3	
21-30	10	5.6	
> 30	3	1.7	

Source: Field Survey, 2016

N = 180

3.2 Involvement of agricultural professionals in wards' career choice

Table 2 shows the involvement of parents in their child's career. Majority (79.4%) of the agricultural professionals were involved in the career of their wards while very few (20.6%) indicated to have not been involved in the career choice of their ward. This is in agreement with Owoyele & Toyobo (2008:585) who reported that parental involvement is a major contributor to choice of career among children and youths. Also parental norms, values,

interactions involvement and expectations play important roles in the career choice of children (Jacobs, Chhin & Bleeker, 2006:399; Simpson, 2003:450; Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000).

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents on their ward career choice

Involvement in Child	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	143	79.4
No	37	20.6
Total	180	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2016.

3.3 Attitude of agricultural professionals on wards taking agriculture as a career.

Table 3 reveals that less than half (39.4%) of the respondents' have positive attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career while majority (60.6%) of them would prefer their wards taking a career path in other areas aside agriculture. Their agreements with negative attitudinal statements such as "I will not like my ward to study agriculture" and "though studying agriculture may sound promising, I will still prefer my ward studying other popular courses" was still prevalent among the respondents. The implication of this is that most agricultural professionals who ought to be front burners in encouraging the influx of youths into the sector in order to produce a professional labour force which obviously should begin by positively influencing and mentoring their wards to take up agriculture as a profession after them are not positively disposed to doing so. This study therefore might give some insights into why the findings of Adekunle *et al.*, (2015:132) which revealed that a lot of youth have a strong apathy towards agriculture as a career is so. Most children and youths including that of agricultural professionals lack the parental motivations and encouragement they ought to have in taking agriculture as a career.

This does not pose a good omen to agricultural development in Nigeria. There needs to be a change in the way agricultural professionals themselves view, portray and influence the closest youths around them (i.e. their wards) towards taking agriculture as a career if the much improved participation in agriculture and production of sound, well-mentored and qualified man-power needed for the transformation of the agricultural sector is to be achieved.

Table 3: Attitude of respondents on ward taking agriculture as a career

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	71	39.4
Negative	109	60.6
Total	180	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2016

3.4 Factors determining agricultural professionals' attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career

Result of the logistic regression as presented in table 4 revealed that the coefficient of number of wards, educational level and years of experience were significant at 5 per cent level of significance implying that these factors significantly determine agricultural professionals likelihood to have a positive attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career. The

remaining variable coefficients such as age, gender, marital status, and area of specialization are not significant even at 10 per cent level of significance implying that these factors do not significantly affect agricultural professionals' likelihood to have a positive attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career.

Number of wards (3.267) has a positive and significant influence on agricultural professionals' likelihood to have a positive attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career implying that an increase in the number of wards tends to increase agricultural professionals likelihood to be positively disposed towards their wards taking agriculture as a career. Most of the agricultural professionals in the area have fairly large number of wards under their custody considering their mean of 5 wards per professional which might likely make it easier for them to influence and mentor one or two of their wards into taking agriculture as a career as opposed to those with less number of wards.

An increase in the educational level (2.351) of the agricultural professionals' increases their likelihood to having a positive attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career. Majority of the respondents who have higher levels of education will most likely be senior and successful professionals in the agricultural profession hence giving them the leverage and required motivation to be able to confidently mentor their wards to take after their chosen career

The years of experience (2.534) has a positive and significant relationship with the agricultural professionals' likelihood to have a positive attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career. An increase in the number of years of experience increases the agricultural professionals' likelihood to having a positive attitude. This relatively long time experience in the agricultural profession is supposed to confer on them the opportune exposure to the potentials in the agricultural sector thus placing them in the right position to be properly motivate and mentor their wards and youths around them in taking up agriculture as a career thereby leveraging on the enormous potential the sector has to offer. Thus the summary implication of the result from the logistic model revealed that the characteristics agricultural professionals that are likely to have a positive attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career include those with more number of wards, those with higher educational qualification and those with more years of experience in the agricultural profession.

Table 4: Logistic regression results indicating factors determining agricultural professionals' likelihood to have a positive attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career.

Factor	Regression co-efficient	Standard Error	T - value
Age X ₁	-2.234	0.548	0.212
Gender X ₂	0.786	0.761	0.466
Marital Status X ₃	-0.634	0.357	0.185
Number of wards X ₄	3.267*	1.144	0.004*
Educational level X ₅	2.351*	0.673	0.000*
Area of Specialization X ₆	0.291	0.344	0.626
Years of Experience X ₇	2.534*	0.754	0.003*
Model Chi-square	191.321		
-2 log likelihood for the model	54.421		
Overall case corrected predicted	93.4%		

*co-efficient significant at 5 per cent
 Source: Analysis of Field Survey Data

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that majority of the agricultural professionals were seen to have a negative attitude towards their wards taking agriculture as a career and this tends to lower their morale in providing the right parental influence, motivation and encouragement to their wards taking up a career in agriculture and agricultural extension. This has translated to lower participation of wards of agricultural professionals in an agricultural related career and thus depletion of the professional labour force in the sector.

The study therefore recommended an urgent need for agricultural professionals to rise up to the task of ensuring increased participation of youths in the agricultural sector through the creation of the right influence and motivation for them to take up a career in agriculture beginning with their wards. This will lead to the production of more agricultural professionals that have been properly mentored and can take the lead in getting Nigeria as a country back on track in the light of the current economic realities as regards oil prices thus leveraging on the enormous potential the sector has to offer in transforming the economy.

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