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Perceived Causes of Low Female Students' Enrolment in Tertiary Agricultural Science Programme in Imo State Nigeria

By

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Abstract

Several reasons are adduced by students for not choosing agriculture as a course of study. No wonder the faculty of Agriculture of many higher institutions have few students in comparison with other courses. This study seeks specifically to unravel the causes of low enrolment in Agricultural Science Programme by female students in tertiary schools in Imo State Nigeria. It investigates the persons behind female students' choice of agriculture as a course of study and the motivation female students should have to study agriculture. A total of 150 female tertiary agricultural science students randomly selected from 5 higher institutions in Imo State was used for the study. Data obtained were analyzed using percentages and mean. It was revealed that parents (93.3%), fellow students (91.3%), brother/sister (85.3%), and even Agric teacher (86.6%) play veritable part in female students choice of agriculture. They encourage and even discourage their own from reading agriculture. The causes of low female students enrolment in agriculture includes, lack of interest (M=3.51), lack of finance to purchase farm equipment (M=3.24), time consuming (M=2.70), parents' disagreement (M=3.25), people disregard it (M=3.26), difficult to study (M=3.05), only people from poor home study it (M=3.51), high risk (M=3.88), makes one dirty (M=2.60) among other reasons. However, the following motivating roles of agriculture should be known to the students – people won't survive without agriculture (M=3.15), agriculture is a means of livelihood (M=2.60), important source of raw materials for industries(M=2.71), provide skills in crop production (M=2.61), and equips them with animal production skills (M=3.50). However, these motivating roles could not attract them to agriculture. There should be proper sensitization of students in our secondary schools on the great benefits and importance of agriculture.

Keyword: Agriculture, tertiary institution, female students, enrolment, occupation.

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Introduction

Despite the discovery of petroleum, agriculture continues to be the backbone and core of the Nigerian economy. This is because, despite the fact that crude oil has surpassed all other sources of export revenue for the nation, the majority of people are still employed in agriculture, with virtually every household having some connection to farming. The sector provides a considerable portion of most people's income, particularly in rural areas, but production barriers have severely hampered the sector's success (Innocent – Ene *et al.*, 2021). The sector however has not kept up with technological trends, perhaps as a result of issues like poor technologies, limited adoption of research findings, the land tenure system, inadequate storage facilities, poor irrigation systems, poor roads to markets, an overreliance on rainfed agriculture, low productivity due to poor planting materials, low f

ertilizer application, societal attitudes toward agriculture, and a weak agricultural extension system. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (2019), Nigeria has lost out on annual export prospects for commodities like groundnuts, cotton, cocoa, and palm oil totaling an estimated USD 10 billion. According to FAO (2019), Nigeria is both one of Africa's top producers of rice and the continent's top consumer of the grain.

In the past, successive governments have made an effort to reform the agricultural industry with the main goal of making Nigeria self-sufficient in food production, according to Okeke (2007). Government has implemented several agricultural initiatives throughout the years to promote the industry, including Operation Feed the Nation, the Green Revolution, and Agricultural Development Projects, among others. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was established by the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida at the time to inspire youth and the gen

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eral Nigerian population to embrace the spirit of independence. Nigeria, however, has not yet reached that level of food dependence and sufficiency. As a result, the sector has consistently failed to fulfill its responsibility for contributing to national growth (Onwualu, 2012). Utilizing the excellent prospects in food production is necessary to eradicate unemployment and build agro-allied industries and end food importation. To achieve the above, government decided to introduce the teaching of Agriculture in schools at all levels. This is called Agricultural Education.

Adeniyi (2012) opined that a commensurate number of self-reliant and independent graduates surely will be one of the major solutions to the teething unemployment ravaging the country, hence, agricultural education is essential in the development of the Nigerian economy. The introduction of agricultural science in Nigeria educational system from secondary to tertiary is welcomed as it helps learners acquire knowledge and skills in agriculture which will improve the quality and quantity of agricultural production with a view to better the living standard of the Nigerian citizens. Also, agricultural education is expected to harmonize the various policies and equip the learner with useful skills to enable him/her make a living out of agriculture

Agricultural education has advanced over time as a result of the advantages that come from farming. Agricultural education was defined by Egbule (2004) in Modebelu and Nwakpadolu (2013) as the process of instructing students in agricultural production and agricultural teaching methods. Additionally, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) defined agricultural education as a component of education that results in the learning of applied skills, practical abilities, and fundamental scientific knowledge in Makusidi (2016). It is further defined as instruction that directs students toward a certain career in society. It ensures national growth and development and assists in preparing and equipping students for a variety of agricultural jobs, including as crop cultivation, animal husbandry, and horticulture. Students who study agriculture benefit from exposure to practical skills acquisition, applied skills as well as scientific knowledge.

Agricultural education helps the learners to be exposed to real life experience through demonstrations, field trips, excursions, and classroom lectures. According to Amadi and Blessing (2016) it is a core vocational subject taught in all levels of education starting from the primary to the tertiary level of education. Agricultural education among all other factors is the way out to salvage the sector from its dwindling performance thereby improving the economy. Adequate agricultural education will address the challenges of food insecurity, poverty and unemployment. But for a functional agricultural education that would enhance effective training and development of the learners, there need to be qualified manpower, financial resources, enabling environment, and infrastructural development.

According to them, the philosophy of Agricultural Education Programmes at the tertiary level is tied with the national philosophy of agriculture for self reliance based on the

provision of teachers endowed with introduction of a balanced approach between principles and practices of agriculture for academic and endeavor. To this effect, Ogbonnaya (2006) notes that the teaching of agricultural science in both secondary schools and tertiary institutions aimed at producing citizens with skills, competencies and reasoned judgment to effectively live and contribute positively and meaningfully to the economic development of Nigeria.

Specifically, the objectives of Tertiary Agricultural Education should be to:

- i. Stimulate and sustain students interest in Agriculture
- ii. Impart functional knowledge and practical skills in agriculture to students
- iii. Prepare students for further studies in area of agriculture
- iv. Prepare students for occupation in Agriculture.

The increasing need for functional knowledge and skill for productive life shows that agricultural education can add values to the national development of any nation.

The goal of agricultural education is often to produce seasoned, talented labor that will shape and advance the global agriculture industry. According to Freddie (2004), the number of students choosing to major in agriculture has been declining over time. Additionally, there are fewer students studying agricultural education in Nigeria's postsecondary schools. Students' perceptions of agriculture as a laborintensive and socially underprivileged career are one factor contributing to this drop. But the industry of agriculture produces a variety of food and fiber to feed the world's expanding population. Agriculture is man's conscious effort to grow crops, raise animals, and care for them in order to feed the world's population. The teaching of agricultural education in tertiary institutions is aimed at producing citizens with skills, competencies and reasoned judgment to successfully live and add meaningfully to the economic growth of Nigeria. A high number of students who enroll will help achieve the lofty objectives above.

According to Massaquoi, Tarawally, Bangali, and Kandeh (2014), tertiary education institutions that offer agriculture programs serve the community through performing teaching, research, and service activities. By providing the right kind of manpower training and instilling the right values, tertiary education is intended to contribute to national development and foster the development of both the person and society. The institutional so works to help people improve their intellectual capacity so they can comprehend and appreciate their environment and help them learn useful skills that will give them the independence and productivity they need to contribute to society.

The federal government is aware of the crucial functions that agricultural education plays in tertiary institutions and how deeply ingrained they are in the policy of production and technological advancement. Through its educational program, agriculture plays a vital role in all facets of economic development, yet there are numerous difficulties that are insurmountable. The political system in Nigeria does not support outside policy pr

oposals, which is why agricultural education projects and programs have been abandoned.

Due to the implicit understanding that women may be the biggest driver of economic growth if given equal opportunity to men, it is crucial that they have access to the same education as men (Kinyanjui, 1999). By virtue of laws in Nigeria, which recognizes women as fully participating members of society, each female is entitled to all the rights, obligations, and privileges in every area of life. In Nigeria, women now have an equal opportunity to participate in any course, giving them access to any vocation of their choice (Kane, 2004; Hadley, 2010). Despite the fact that their constitution guarantees equality and that there are no legal restrictions on men and women participating equally, statistics reveal that women have not participated equally especially in school enrolment. Studies have shown that the percentage of female students pursuing science and technical stream including the field of Agriculture Science at the tertiary level is lagging compared to art stream. The percentage has not only decreased dramatically over the years, reaching fifty percent decline of the student enrolment in science and technical stream (Rashid et al., 2020). Several studies found that the lack of student persistence in agriculture is due to strong perception that agriculture study is perceived as not important area of study, suitable for elderly or people lives in rural areas. This also among the reasons many young generation migrate from agricultural live hoods and rural area to urban area that they assumed offers them with many other work options (Rashid et al., 2020). This is the case in almost every place, Nigeria inclusive. The study sought to know the causes of female students low enrolment in Agriculture science programmes in tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to :

- identify persons influencing female students choice of agriculture science in tertiary school;
- examine perceived reasons for low enrolment in tertiary agriculture education programme;
- determine motivating roles of agriculture that should move female students to study agriculture.

Methodology

Imo State is a [state](#) in the [South-east zone](#) of [Nigeria](#), bordered to the north by [Anambra State](#), [Rivers State](#) to the east and south, and [Abia State](#) to the west. It takes its name from the [Imo River](#) which flows along the state's eastern border. The state capital is [Owerri](#) and its state nickname is the "Eastern Heartland. Of the [36 states](#), Imo is the [third smallest in area](#) but is [fourteenth most populous](#) with an estimated population of over 6,347,078 million in 2022 projected from the 2006 census figure (Nigeria Informer, 2022). Geographically, the state is divided between the [Niger Delta swamp forests](#) in the far east and the drier [Cross-Niger transition forests](#) in the rest of the state. There are several notable institutions of higher learning in the State such as: Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Federal University of Technology Owerri; Imo State University, Owerri; Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo; Alvan Ikoku College of Education.

These were selected for the study because they offer agriculture since inception. Random sampling technique was employed to select 150 female students doing agriculture. From FUTO, we selected 70 female students, IMSU 30 students, POLYNEK 25 students, IMOPOLY 10 students, ALVAN 15 students. The two main sources of data collection used in this research were the primary data and the secondary data. The primary data was collected from the field survey, using questionnaires. The secondary data were collected from books, reports, journals, existing literature review, information from library etc. Basically, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. This involves the use of percentages and frequency counts, presented in bar forms for objective 1. While objectives 2 and 3 were analyzed using a 4-point likert type scale of strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed to examine perceived reasons for low enrolment in agriculture and motivating roles of agriculture. The responses were assigned weight of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively and added to give 10 divided by 4 to give a mean of 2.50. A mean score of 2.50 and above indicated reasons for low enrolment and motivating roles, while a mean score lower than 2.50 indicated no reason for enrolment and not a motivating role of agriculture.

This is mathematically represented as

$$\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$$

Results and Discussion

Persons influencing Female Students Enrolment in Agriculture

The decision to study agriculture or not does not depend entirely on one person. Figure 1 showed that several individuals are involved in either encouraging or discouraging one. Parents (93.3%) are the main people in influencing agricultural science enrolment. Most parents do not want their ward, to read agriculture, based on their misconception of it. Fellow students (91.3%) also influence their friends. Some may want them to read the course they are reading or paint a bad picture of a particular course to draw one away. Brother/sisters (85.3%), friends (64.4%), Agric teachers (86.6%) are all influencers of what one wants to read. While the brother/sisters may want their younger one to be called engineer, doctors, lawyers etc, the Agric science teacher will encourage one to take up the study of agriculture. It was observed that most students interviewed did not apply to read agriculture in the first place. They were offered such admission by university on supplementary basis.

In Nigeria, parents, friends, teachers, and even receiving a scholarship have all been known to have an impact on a person's decision regarding their career. Osuala (1998) made the observation that many students in Nigeria are persuaded to pursue particular careers by the recommendations of their parents and friends, which lends credence to this. These folks frequently select a profession that matches their interests and attitudes. He continued by saying that the mirage of the white collar and reports of great income draw other students to certain professions. In support of Agusiobe's (1989) assertion that parental influ

ence override all other criteria in determining a student's career choice

Parents are a child's primary source of socialization, according to Kalu (2009); this is because a youngster learns from them before joining other peer groups. According to him, this depends on how much the parents support the aspirations their children develop. According to Nneji (1978), occupation interest had the biggest impact on students' career aspirations. When choosing a career, students gave their passion in the field serious consideration. According to Agusiobe (1989), perception of a subject has an impact on students' interest in that subject area, which has a big impact on their decision to pursue a particular vocation. Students have demonstrated a significant lack of curiosity.

Some students feel that being a good farmer does not require further agricultural training in tertiary institutions since there is little or no gainful remuneration from their long years of farming. Hence, many teachers are hesitant to encourage their students' to undertake a career in agriculture. Based on this, Osuala (1998) points out that for an individual to aspire to choose in agriculture, he needs to be exposed to a situation where he can: (a) develop an understanding of an appreciation for career opportunities in agriculture; (b) and develop vocational competencies needed by individuals preparing to engage in agricultural occupation.

Furthermore, Chauhan (2000) also discovers that rural adolescents do not have opportunities of coming into contact with people of high vocation who can guide, inspire and provide proper information to them. They therefore take anything that they want to hear from anyone without scrutiny. Agusiobe (1989) suggests that the teachers could gradually help the students to become aware of their personal needs which they are seeking to meet. This, he noted, can be achieved through the study of their occupational choice and desire putting into account their perception, interest, abilities as well as the employment opportunities when they are thinking of they will do for a living. In this light, students can be taught where and who to get facts and what to be aware of in the field of agriculture as a career

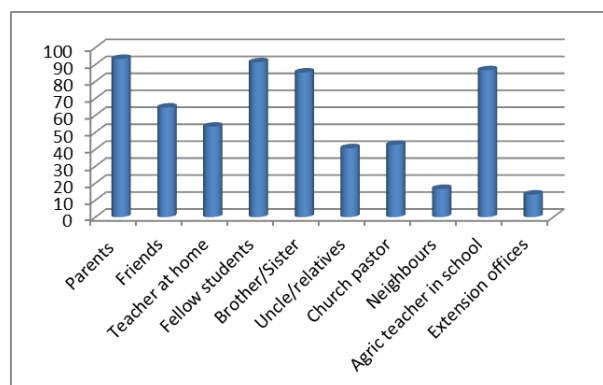


Figure 1: Persons influencing Female Students Enrolment in Agriculture

Reasons for Low Agricultural Science enrolment by Female Students

There are so many reasons for low enrolment in agriculture at the tertiary level. These reasons are presented in table 1 to include lack of interest in the subject (M=3.51), lack of finance to purchase equipment/ materials (M=3.24), lack of proper guidance and counselling for students (M=3.41), the subject is time consuming (M=2.70), the study of agriculture is strenuous (M=2.74), only males should study agriculture (M=3.40), parents discourage children from studying agriculture (M=3.25), this is true as parents have not changed their perception of whom a farmer is.

Other reasons are lack of knowledge of career opportunities in agriculture (M=3.01), knowledge they say is power. A knowledgeable person is fully aware of what he/she is doing, defends it and finds satisfaction from doing it. People disregard those who read agriculture (M=3.26), because they are not called big names so common in the society. Too many practicals are involved (M=2.91), there are better subjects to study (M=2.86), agriculture is difficult to study (M=3.85), only people from poor homes study agriculture (M=3.51), there is no glamour in Agric profession (M=3.58), and risk involved is too high (M=3.46). These are misconceptions drawing people away from the study of agriculture and till now, these misconceptions are still making ugly heads towards discouraging youths from taking a career in agriculture.

Again, they believed that study of agriculture makes one dirty (M=2.60), no wonder they fear removing their fixed finger nails, eye lashes and other cosmetic apparels they wear. They believe that studying agriculture will keep one always working in the farm (M=2.81), agriculture jobs are not well paid (M=2.86), and learning agriculture is for those who want to become farmers only (M=2.74). With the above reasons embedded in the minds of students, especially females, who may not want a drudgery in life. They may not try a career in agriculture unless a change of mind happens.

The above rhymes with Ohaji (2009), who found out that in Anambra State most school leavers left the village after their education because they wanted jobs outside the field of agriculture. He also observed that most people of the state would prefer agriculture to be an occupation set aside for the men and boys or those who do not receive secondary education. Furthermore, he found out that the only belief in agriculture to be the important for the provision of food for immediate consumption and raw materials for the local industries. Hence, they show a limited awareness of the numerous importance of agriculture and for this reason he found out that most young people shunned farming. As to the negative attitudes of the students' towards a career in agriculture, Ohaji (2009) gives two reasons; the first is personality and psychological complexes. The other is low income generated by agriculture in the state and Nigeria in general. He further discovered that the educational system was partially responsible for the lack of interest in farming.

Ijiomah (1999) finds in his study that the youths (students) surveyed detests agriculture and regarded it as an unattractive occupation. According to him, the reason for this attitude was that farming involved tilling of soils to grow crops with such peasant tools as hoes and cutlasses. Also, the students did not regard their agricultural studies as a preparation for immediate employment after school.

Table 1: Reasons for Low Enrolment in Tertiary Agriculture Science Programme

Reasons for low enrolment	Mean	SD
Lack of interest in the subject	3.51	0.67
Lack of finance to purchase equipment/materials	3.24	0.89
Lack of guidance and consulting for students	3.41	0.56
The subject is time consuming	2.70	0.62
The study of agriculture is strenuous	2.74	0.74
Only males should study agriculture	3.40	0.61
Parents discourage children from studying agriculture	3.25	0.95
Ignorance of the benefits of agriculture	3.55	0.82
Lack of knowledge of career opportunities in agriculture	3.01	0.59
People disregard those who read the subject	3.26	0.87
Too many practicals are involved	2.91	1.02
There are better subjects to study	2.86	0.97
Agriculture is difficult to study	3.05	1.03
Only people from poor homes study the subject	3.51	1.02
There is no glamour in agriculture profession	3.58	1.05
Risks in agriculture are very high	3.46	0.72
The study of agriculture makes one dirty	2.60	0.85
Agriculture means only working in the farm	2.81	0.96
Learning agriculture is for those who want to farmers	2.74	0.58
Agricultural jobs are not well paid	2.86	1.04

Accepted mean = 2.50

Motivating Roles of Agriculture that the students should know

Aside lack of interest in agriculture leading to low enrolment by female students, there are roles of agriculture that the

female students should know. These roles will motivate the students to develop interest in agriculture as a career and encourage others to join. Table 2 showed that there are 18 motivating roles of agriculture. Out of these 18 motivating roles, only 6 motivating roles have mean score of 2.50 and above. These include, people cannot survive without agriculture (M=3.15), agriculture occupation provides adequate means of livelihood (M=2.60), important source of raw materials for building industries (M=2.71), equips one with crop production skills (M=2.61), equips one with animal production skills (M=3.50) and equips one with processing skills (M=2.84). About 12 motivating statements have mean less than 2.50. These includes occupational growth are easily attained in agriculture (M=1.01), agricultural occupation leads to high social status (M=1.71), farming creates several career opportunities (M=1.68), prepares one for farm management positions (M=1.04), equips one learn packaging of products (M=1.57), equips one with storage/sales ability (M=1.07), skills to test the soil (M=1.60), environmental management skills (M=1.74), knowledge of flood and erosion control mechanism (M=1.04) and great knowledge of forest products (M=1.69). The implication is that the students are ignorant of these all-important roles of agricultural science programme. This may be the reason why Agric. Science do not enjoy high enrolment in the tertiary institutions in Imo state, Nigeria as they are not aware of the numerous job opportunities in Agriculture.

Following the above, Ajayi (1997) observed that most students in the country are short-sighted about various opportunities that exist in the field of agriculture. Peasant farming which dominate agricultural career in our local communities exhaust much physical labour in farm operations. Hence, students should be motivated as much as possible to develop choice interest in choosing career in agriculture. Ijioma (1999) suggests that Nigeria as a developing nation requires both low and high level of manpower before she can achieve her desired objective in her development plan. He further concluded that one avenue through which she can achieve this is by laying hands on students in our secondary education and acquainting them on career in agriculture.

According to Bryan (1999), everyone who works with agricultural science students should be aware of the necessity of assisting them in understanding their own potentials in order to enable them to develop career and life goals. Therefore, if the kids are given assistance, they may recognize these occupations in agriculture and easily enter them. Osuala (1998) lists a few goals that can introduce pupils to the many careers in agriculture. Among them are exposing students to the wealth of information available to anyone considering a career in commercial agriculture, educating them about the incredible opportunities in the agricultural industry, assisting them in realizing that agriculture is still the only consistent national source of income, and letting them know about the job security and self-employment opportunities that await them in the industry.

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This corroborates Okorie's (1999) observation that secondary school pupils as well as unemployed young people sought to choose an agricultural career before the Nigerian Civil War, which ended in 1970. The lack of focus on the significance of agriculture (among other things) for the economic development of the country, he continued, is the cause of this lack of interest in agricultural occupations. According to Ohaji (2009), students who are not sufficiently motivated to pursue agriculture move from rural areas, which are the primary hubs of agricultural production, to metropolitan areas. Students will be more likely to enroll when they are able to comprehend and recognize the many promising chances in the agriculture area. Okorie (1999) notes that many students in secondary schools tend to develop a negative attitude towards agriculture. This is because of inherent deficiencies in agricultural education.

Therefore, apparent growth in interest, attitude and aspiration of agriculture would come about only when there is real effort by the government to improve agriculture. This could be organized by the school in conjunction with ministry personnel, career guidance experts and resource persons in various field of agriculture to talk to them on the various career opportunities in agriculture. This will go a long way in helping reduce their bad perception of agriculture. From the study also, it has been found that students, due to their wrong perception of agriculture have low interest in the subject. This has made them not to enroll for the programme of agriculture in tertiary schools of the country. There is therefore, need for the government to put effort in agricultural programmes that are more modernized in nature especially in the rural areas.

Table 3: Motivating Roles of Agriculture Students Should Know

Motivating roles	Means	SD
People cannot survive without agriculture	3.15	0.67
Agriculture occupation provide adequate means of livelihood	2.60	0.54
Agriculture occupations are very prestigious	1.81	0.76
Occupational growth are easily attained in agriculture	1.01	0.89
Agricultural occupation leads to high social status	1.74	0.74
Those in agriculture are recognised and respected in society	1.58	0.62
Important source of raw materials for building industries	2.71	0.81
Farming creates several career opportunities	1.68	0.93
Agriculture equips one with crop production skills	2.61	0.64
It equips one with animal	3.50	0.59

production skills	0	
It prepares one for farm management positions	1.04	0.70
Agriculture equips one with processing skills	2.84	0.98
Equips one to learn packaging of products	1.57	1.03
Agriculture equips one with storage and sales ability	1.07	0.53
Agriculture equips one with skills to test/analyse soil	1.60	0.93
Equips one with environmental management skills	1.74	0.65
Students of agriculture learn flood/erosion control mechanisms	1.04	0.72
Offers one great knowledge of forest products	1.69	0.89

Accepted mean = 2.50

Conclusion

It is true that enrolment in agricultural science programme in tertiary schools is dwindling and low, especially among female students. The reasons are numerous and varied; parents, friends, fellow students, relatives among many others encourage or discourage their friends from reading agriculture. They believe that agriculture makes one dirty, difficult to study, course for old people, not a well paid job and many more. They lack knowledge of what agriculture is all about and are ignorant of its importance to the Nigerian economy. There should be public enlightenment campaign and sensitization of students on the benefits of agriculture study.

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