

ATTITUDE OF STUDENTS TOWARDS THE STUDY OF AGRICULTURE IN UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, NIGERIA.

¹Dr. David N. Dumbiri, ²Amos, E. Enahoro & ³Vivian O. Idusogie

Department of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Benin.

Abstract

This paper looked at the attitude of students towards the study of agriculture in University of Benin. The main purpose of the study is to assess students' attitude towards the study of agriculture in university. Four specific purposes and four research questions guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 506 which consist of students of agriculture at the University of Benin, 105 students comprising 15 students in each of the seven departments offering agriculture related courses namely; Crop Science, Animal Science, Forestry & Wildlife, Agriculture Economics and Extension, Fisheries, Soil Science as well as Agriculture Education option of the Department of Vocational & Technical Education were sampled randomly. A 20 items structured questionnaire was used for data collection; this was validated by three experts two in the Department of Vocational and Technical Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation at University of Benin. Cronbach alpha was used in deciding the reliability of the instrument and this yielded a coefficient of 0.68. The data collected was analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that students' attitude towards agriculture are not very encouraging, most students see agriculture as not having good image in the society, they also agreed that agriculture is not accorded same pride of place like Medicine, Law and Engineering among others. In conclusion, the poor image of those involved in agriculture should be change and agriculture should be given its pride of place through massive investment in the area by all stakeholders. It was therefore recommended that graduates of agriculture should be encouraged by granting them soft loans to practice; professionals should raise awareness on career opportunity in agriculture and modern/mechanized equipment should be provided for study and practice of agriculture.

Keywords: *Agriculture, Student's attitude, Food Security*

Introduction

Agriculture is the backbone of human existence. For any civilization to prosper, agriculture has to be healthy and sustainable. Agriculture was the key development in the rise of sedentary civilization, whereby farming of domesticated species created food surpluses that nurtured the development of civilization. Agriculture remains an important sector of the Nigerian economy. It contributes to national development, ensures food security and provides bulk employment to Nigerians. Agriculture is a major source of raw materials for various industries in Nigeria and it generates revenue for the government and income for

individuals, especially in the rural areas. According to Okorie (2001), the history of agricultural careers is synonymous with man's effort to survive in his environment. He emphasized further that agricultural careers provide man with basic necessities of life- food, shelter, and clothing. The crucial role of agriculture in the development on Nigeria is not in doubt. Hence agriculture is taught as a subject and as a course of study in primary and secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions respectively.

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Agriculture can be seen as a science, an art and industry, a business, a profession and an occupation because it prepares an individual to be proficient in it before making a career out of it, (Egbe, 2003). Before the discovery of Oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri oilfield in Ogbi Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria, on Sunday 15th January 1956, Nigeria was purely an agrarian economy endowed with sufficient human and natural resources that made agriculture occupy an enviable position in the economy, (Frynas, 1999). For this reason, there can be no meaningful discussion of the economic life of Nigeria without a critical look at the crucial role agriculture plays in its economic development. A deeper look at the history of Nigeria and the history of man reveals that man's effort to survive in his environment has been closely associated with agricultural activities, jobs and careers.

The world population has increased from 2.5 billion in 1950 to 3.7 billion in 1970, 5 billion in October 1987 and 6.7 billion in 2010 (World

dispositions towards agriculture, (Bassey, Ime, and Shirley, 2012). Students' apathy towards Agricultural Science as a course of study seems to be a source of worry. Students see Agricultural Science as a burdensome subject, because of their believe that Agricultural Science students may end up being farmers, and they do not see farming as an interesting activity, (Adejoh, Edoka&Shaiibu 2016). This has been influenced with the psychological and sociological effect of being called a farmer, this attitude is been passed from the older generation to the youth. This accounts for the reason while majority of secondary agriculture students hold a slightly positive attitude towards agriculture, (Onuekusi & Ijeoma 2008).

Agriculture has a strong hold in the economy for without it, a country will always depend on foreign countries to feed its population. The potential contribution of agriculture to economic growth has been an on-going subject of much controversy among development economist and several authors argued that

www.cetvetar.unn.edu.ng

cetvetar.unn@unn.edu.ng

Bank, 2011). Many nations of the world suffer from famine as food distribution and production fail to meet the demands of their increasing populations. There is need to educate and teach agriculture to the younger generation in order to contribute to food production and distribution. Despite the great impacts of agriculture to the economy of Nigeria, it has been discovered that only few students apply to study agriculture related courses in the University. Student's decisions to pursue agriculture as a field of study or career and their involvement and success therein may be predictable by investigating students'

growth in the over-all economy depends on the development of the agricultural sector (Gollin, 2002). The growth in the agricultural sector could be a catalyst for national output through its effect on rural incomes and provision of resources for transformation into an industrialized economy. (Thirtle 2003).

In view of the strong importance of agriculture, various governments in Nigeria, military and civilian alike have been making efforts at improving agriculture as shown by various programmes that have been initiated, such as

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the Green Revolution, and the Fourth National Development Plan in 1980 - an agricultural policy by the Shehu Shagari administration, Operation Feed the Nation in 1976 by Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, the current agricultural transformation agenda (ATA) etc. Following a necessity of having a sound agricultural sector to meet the demands of the people, the government decided to make agricultural occupations into courses of study in higher institutions of learning. This is to ensure that the country has competent hands to run the agricultural sector in such a way that the country becomes largely independent in meeting the food requirements of her citizens, able to generate foreign exchange through agriculture and have food security. It can therefore be agreed that the economic factors of any nation to a large extent shapes students' attitude towards the study of a particular course- in this case, agricultural science, (Baliyan 2015). The enrolment of students to study agriculture related courses have not been encouraging in Nigeria's bid to achieve self-sufficiency in food production; this development has cumulatively led to very few students taking up agriculture as a profession.

A review of the statistics of students' enrolment application into the University of Benin in the 2015/2016, 2014/2015 and 2013/2014 academic session from the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) indicates that student's enrolment into agriculture related courses has been comparatively low compared to other branches of study. For 2013/2014 as shown below Agricultural Education

(76), Agricultural Economics (161), Animal Science (60), Fisheries (17), Forestry and Wildlife (9), Soil Science (11), Accounting (5913), Economics and Statistics (1997), Medicine and

Surgery (7934), Pharmacy (4094), Mechanical Engineering (2834), Political Science and Public Administration (2117), Banking and Finance (1933), Business Administration (5962), Petroleum Engineering (3018). For 2014/2015 as shown below Agricultural Education

(79), Agricultural Economics (196), Animal Science (61), Fisheries (13), Forestry and Wildlife (5), Soil Science (10), Accounting (5047), Economics and Statistics (2014), Medicine and Surgery (12,314), Pharmacy (3097), Mechanical Engineering (2731), Political Science and Public Administration (2608), Banking and Finance (1571), Business Administration (4450), Petroleum Engineering (2830). For 2015/2016 as shown below Agricultural Education

(56), Agricultural Economics (96), Animal Science (57), Fisheries (10), Forestry and Wildlife (5), Soil Science (8), Accounting (4009), Economics and Statistics (1478), Medicine and Surgery (10201), Pharmacy (2688), Mechanical Engineering (1995), Political Science and Public Administration (1809), Banking and Finance (1250), Business Administration (3227), Petroleum Engineering (1735) (JAMB, 2016). The implication of this is that if this decline in agricultural enrolment continues, it might lead to a waste of effort by the government and the university in trying to put in place policies that will boost agricultural growth and sustenance.

This constant rapid decline in the agriculture enrolment has also affected agriculture despite the important role it plays in the economy; this has prompted successive government regimes to give it some measures of attention. It is recorded that more than 80 percent of Nigeria's estimated population of 53 million in 1963 engaged in subsistence agriculture, while 85 percent of foreign exchange earnings came from export of large quantities of agricultural

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products. Unfortunately, however, in spite of the tremendous role agriculture played in the national economy, less attention is being offered it from society, which is made noticeable by the present condition of the agricultural sector in Nigeria. The current level of enrolment of student in agriculture and the apathy calls for concern amongst stakeholders and if the trend continues, it will have a drastic effect on the society, the economy as well as the nation at large. Hence the need to find out the attitude of students towards the study of agriculture in the university.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess student's attitude towards the study of agriculture in university. Specifically, the study seeks to determine the

following;

1. the influence of the family on student's attitude towards agriculture
2. the influence of the society on students' attitudes towards studying agriculture
3. the effect of the economy on the attitude of students in studying agriculture
4. the effect of lack of appropriate learning facilities as a hindrance to the study of agriculture in the university.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the influence of the family on student's attitude towards the study of agriculture?
2. How does the society influence student's attitude towards the study of agriculture?
3. Does the economy have an influence on student's attitude towards agriculture?

4. How does lack of appropriate learning facilities hinders the study of agriculture in the university?

Methodology

The research design used is the descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey research design is used to describe characteristics of a population or/and phenomenon being studied. It was adopted because it seeks to collect and analyse data from only a few representative respondents of undergraduate students from all levels drawn from the Faculties of Agriculture and Education which will be generalized to the general active population of all students studying related courses in the University of Benin.

The population for the study was all Full-time final year students in the Faculty of Agriculture, and the Full-time final year Agriculture Education Students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. The total population was 506 students comprising of 491 from the Faculty of Agriculture, with a breakdown as follows; Animal Science- 115, Crop Science- 85, Soil Science 71, Agricultural Economics and Extension- 103, Fisheries- 55, Forestry & Wildlife- 62 and 15 Agriculture Education students from the department of Vocational & Technical Education in the Faculty of Education. A total of one 105 respondents were sampled, comprising of 15 students each of the seven departments listed above. The simple random and deliberate sampling technique was adopted; this method provided each member of the population with the equal opportunity of being selected. The research instrument used for collecting data for this study is the questionnaire, titled: Students Attitude Towards the Study of Agriculture in the University

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Questionnaire (SATSOAQ). The questionnaire contains twenty (20) items formulated with respect to 4 research questions raised to elicit information on student's disposition towards

another University that is in the state, but not part of the population. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, this yielded a reliability coefficient

research questions. The mean (\bar{x}) rating of 2.50 was used for decision point, such that any item with mean influence on student's attitude towards agriculture value less than ($<$) 2.50 was regarded as No], while items with mean (\bar{x}) value equal to or above ($>$) 2.50 was regarded as Yes]

Table 1: Mean rating of final year students of Agriculture in the Faculties of Agriculture and Education on the influence of family on students disposition towards agriculture.

<u>S/N</u>	<u>ITEM STATEMENT</u>	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>\bar{X}</u>	<u>S.D</u>	<u>REMARK</u>
1	Is your family involved in some form of agriculture? Are	25	42	22	16	2.72	0.99	Yes No
2	your parents averse to agriculture as a course of study in the university?	6	28	52	19	2.20	0.80	Yes
3	Do your parents mind agriculture as a course in the university?	22	60	20	3	2.96	0.71	Yes
4	You did not apply to study agriculture in the university? Does	69	19	6	11	3.39	0.99	No
5	your family encourage you to take up agriculture as a career?	17	34	35	19	2.46	0.97	

the study of agriculture in the University. The item statement on the questionnaire has a four-point rating scale instrument of; strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), the response options has value of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The respondents made judgement upon the statement by ticking (v) in any of these scales.

The questionnaire was face validated by three lecturers of agriculture, one in the faculty of agriculture and two in the Vocational and Technical Education Department of the faculty of education. To determine the reliability of the instrument, the drafted copies of the instrument were administered to 20 students, 10 students each from the Faculties of Education and Agriculture respectively in

of 0.68.

The questionnaire was administered to respondents by the researcher with the help of three (3) research assistants that were briefed. The instrument for the research was retrieved from the respondents at the spot. The data collected was analysed with mean and standard deviation as instrument for answering the Data from Table 1 revealed that item 1 had a mean of 2.72 showing that their families were involved in some form of agriculture; item 2 had a mean of 2.20 which mean that their parents were not averse to agriculture as a course. Item 3 with a mean of 2.96

proved that parents do not mind if their ward studied agriculture as a course. Item 4 with a mean of 3.39 equally revealed that most of the

students never applied to study agriculture, while Item 5 with a mean of 2.46 proved that parents did not encouraged them to pick agriculture as a career. The standard deviation ranged from 0.71 to 0.99 showing that the respondents are not very far from each other in their responses. This added credence to the mean.

Research Question 2: Are student's attitudes towards studying agriculture

Table 2: Mean rating of final year students of Agriculture in the Faculties of Agriculture and Education on the influence of social factors on students disposition towards agriculture

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	X	S.D	REMARK
6	Does the society accord much respect to agriculture?	7	13	59	26	2.00	0.80	No
7	Are more people delving into agriculture?	8	45	23	29	2.30	0.96	No
8	Does agriculture have a poor image in the Nigerian society?	40	41	17	7	3.09	0.89	Yes
9	Do students with agricultural background have a more favourable attitude towards agriculture?	38	40	22	5	3.06	0.88	Yes
10	Do you feel agriculture is not accorded the same recognition as compared to other Professions, such as Medicine, Engineering and Law?	88	16	0	1	3.82	0.45	Yes

influenced by societal factors?

Data from Table 2 revealed that in items 8, 9 and 10 with mean ratings of 3.09, 3.06, and 3.82 respectively, the respondents agreed that Agriculture has a poor image on the society and that students with agricultural background have a more favourable disposition towards agriculture, it was also agreed that agriculture is not accorded the same recognition as compared to other Professions, such as Medicine, Engineering and Law. In items 6 and 7 with mean ratings of 2.00 and 2.30 respectively, the respondents disagreed that the society accords much respect to agriculture and that more people are not delving into agriculture.

Research Question 3: Does Nigeria’s economic policies influences students’ attitude in studying agriculture?

Table 3: Mean rating of final year students of Agriculture in the Faculties of Agriculture and Education on the influence of Nigeria’s economic policies on students disposition towards agriculture.

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	X	S.D	REMARK
11	Does agriculture have an important role in the economic development of the nation?	86	18	1	0	3.80	0.42	Yes
12	Do you believe agriculture can make you financially stable in the future	80	22	3	0	3.73	0.50	Yes
13	Is it easy to become financially stable in agriculture within a few years?	43	44	15	3	3.20	0.79	Yes
14	Is the agricultural transformation agenda of the government yielding result?	21	67	11	6	2.98	0.73	Yes
15	Do you think Nigeria has gradually shifted her from other sector of the economy to agriculture?	47	35	17	6	3.17	0.90	Yes

Data from Table 3 showed that the respondents agreed to all the item statements. In item 11 with a mean value of 3.80, the respondents agreed that agriculture has an important role in the economic development of the nation. In item 12 and 13 with mean values of 3.73 and 3.20 respectively, the respondents believed that agriculture will make them financially stable in the future within a few years. In item 14 and 15 with mean values of 2.98 and 3.17 respectively, the respondents affirmed that Nigeria has gradually shifted her focus from other sectors of the economy to agriculture. They were however of

the opinion that nevertheless the image of Agriculture in Nigeria is improving. The standard deviation ranged from 0.42 to 0.90, these showed that the respondent are closely related in their responses and not far from the mean, this added credence to the mean.

Research Question 4: Does lack of appropriate learning facilities hinders the study of agriculture in the university?

Table 4: Mean rating of final year students of Agriculture in the Faculties of Agriculture and Education on the influence of appropriate learning facilities on students disposition towards agriculture.

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	X	S.D	REMARK
16	Does the University lack the appropriate teaching resources to teach agriculture?	51	34	20	0	3.29	0.77	Yes
17	Can appropriate practical activities on agriculture make the students more interested in the course?	70	30	5	0	3.61	0.58	Yes
18	Are students' well supervised and guided during practical activities?	8	39	43	15	2.38	0.82	No
19	Does the University meet the recommended teacher to student ratio during practical work of 1:20 as specified by the National Policy on Education?	3	16	33	53	1.70	0.83	No
20	Do you think students will be motivated to study the course when modern tools and machines are provided for practical?	56	44	4	1	3.48	0.62	Yes

Data from Table 4 showed that the respondents agreed on item 16,17 and 20 with mean values of 3.29, 3.61 and 3.48 respectively, affirming that the University lacks the appropriate teaching resources to teach agriculture, hence the students are not interested in the course because of lack of practical activities. They were also of the view that students are motivated to study the course when it is properly blended with adequate practical sessions using modern tools and machines. The respondents disagreed on items 18 and 19 indicated by mean values of 2.38 and 1.70 respectively. They were of the view that students are not well supervised and guided during practical activities adding that the Universities do not meet the recommended teacher to student ratio of 1:20 during practical work as specified by the National Policy on Education. The standard deviation ranged from 0.58 to 0.83 showing that the respondents are not very far from each other in their responses. This added credence to the mean.

Discussions of findings

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The responses to research question 1 showed that the family is a major player in forming the attitude of students. Parents who have a positive outlook in agriculture and who have made financial success in different agricultural sectors will naturally rub off positively on their children. On the other hand, parents who are involved in subsistence farming may have children that view agriculture as a hard job meant only for those who had no other options.

It was also revealed that one of the major reasons causing students to develop a negative disposition towards agriculture is the perspective from which agriculture is viewed. For a long time, agriculture has been looked upon as a sector that is practiced by only the peasants of the society largely because of the highly subsistent nature of agriculture practiced in Nigeria. This wrong attitude is passed down to younger generations who then carry on this attitude. These findings agree with the study conducted by Abdullah and Sulaiman (2013) on the factors that influences the interest of youths in agricultural entrepreneurship. They found out that family support amongst others greatly influences the attitude of students towards the study of agriculture as well as shaping the interest of youth towards agricultural entrepreneurship.

Findings from research question 2 showed that the society does not accord much respect to agriculture, agriculture has a poor image in the society and that agriculture is not accorded much respect like Medicine, Law and Engineering. This is in line with Baliyan (2015) who conducted a study aimed at investigating the economic related factors underlying student's attitude towards agriculture as predictors of willingness to enrol in the subject by University students at Botswana College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, they discovered that the economic situation of any nation shapes the attitudes of students towards a particular course, that is majority of students tend to apply to study courses that has a relationship to the driving force of that particular economy. This also agrees with the study of Yadav (2016) on attitude of students toward agriculture as a profession, where it was found out that majority of students (64%) had neutral attitude towards agriculture as a profession, twenty four percent (24%) of the students have negative attitude towards agriculture as a profession, while only twelve percent (12%) of the students have positive attitude towards the study of agriculture as a profession. This was also in agreement with the findings of Adejoh, Edeka and Shaibu (2016) that carried out a study on the assessment of student's attitude towards agricultural science in secondary schools in Olamaboro Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. Their results revealed that the major areas of interest in agriculture among secondary school students include agricultural engineering (65%) and food science (56.7%). Only 2.5% of the respondents were interested in agricultural education as a career. It was recommended that career counselling in different schools should not relent in their efforts by giving proper orientation and awareness on

agriculture as a noble and wealth creating profession

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Findings from Research Question 3 clearly showed that Agriculture has an important role in the economic development of the nation, and that it is capable of making the youth financially stable in the future. It was also observed from the findings that the image of Agriculture in Nigeria is currently improving after years of neglect due to the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in 1956. This corroborates the findings of Gollin (2002) in his study on the relationship between agriculture and economic development. He concluded that agriculture is a major force and a prime mover in the economic development of any nation. Also, from this research, it was also revealed that lack of appropriate learning facilities hinders the study of agriculture in the university, because most Universities are deficient in the required facilities and environment required for field study practicum. Students are motivated to study the course when it is properly blended with adequate practical sessions with modern tools and machines among others. This synchronizes with a study carried out by Darko, Offei, Yuan and Liu (2015) on the challenges in the teaching and learning of Agricultural science in selected public senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. They concluded that frequent use of lecture method in teaching, large class size, inadequate teaching and learning materials, difficulty in planning field trips amongst others, has a negative effect in student's attitude towards the study of agricultural science in both secondary and tertiary institutions.

Conclusion

It is evident that students' attitude towards agriculture are not very encouraging. The poor image of persons involved in agriculture needs to be changed especially by the young graduates who are the ideal catalyst for change, Agriculture should be given its pride of place through massive investment by all stakeholders and graduates of agriculture should be encouraged by granting them soft loans to practice.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are recommended:

1. The government should focus on the impartation of the agri-business concept in order to create awareness in the students about the potential of agriculture for Job creation.
2. Career counsellors in schools (secondary and tertiary) should not relent in their efforts by giving proper orientation and awareness on agriculture as a noble and wealth creating profession
3. Funds should be made available to the University for the Purchase of modern farming implements such as tractor and other modernized equipment to enable the younger generation develop interest in the profession.

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