

Original Research Article

An online study on career aspirations of post-graduate students at Assam Agricultural University

ABSTRACT

The rapid increase in population over the past decade has resulted in an urgent need for research and development to address pressing issues such as hunger, food insecurity, nutritional security, etc. However, we can see a variation in the pattern of students opting for higher education nowadays; most students want to settle down with a government job. There can be many reasons behind this change in pattern. It was decided to conduct a pilot study to investigate such shifts in career aspirations among post-graduate students at the Assam Agricultural University in Jorhat. It also tried to find out some perceived problems they face in achieving their goals.

Keywords: Higher education, Aspiration, Post-graduates, Agriculture, Student, Assam, Online

1. INTRODUCTION

Aspiration can be defined as something that one hopes to achieve [1]. A definite aspiration gives a student clear vision of the future which usually determines the level of preparedness of the student to face various challenges. According to a definition career aspiration can be defined as the choice of a job or profession for which one undergoes specific education and training over a period of time and scale-up his/ her competencies in terms of knowledge and skills required for a particular job [2]. "For the upcoming generation starved of open spaces and clean air, career in agricultural education would give them a chance ~~to not only address the world's pressing issues of population growth and food and nutritional security, it is one field that simultaneously gives you opportunity~~ to work with nature and technology along with addressing pressing issues of population growth and food and nutritional security" [3]. Agricultural sector has been playing a vital role in not only providing food to the billions but also employment. "In 2019, 42.6 percent of the workforce in India were employed in agriculture" [4]. These conditions give many career opportunities to the agricultural post-

graduate students in order to contribute towards Research and Development sector. According to literature due to its professional and career potential perceived by the youth, agricultural education is almost the next choice of those science students who fail to get admission to courses like medicine and engineering [2]. In order to motivate the students to carry out their higher education many opportunities have been given viz., various national and international scholarships by [Indian Council of Agriculture Research \(ICAR\)](#) and other organizations, option of opting research assistant post and join an on-going project in [State Agricultural University \(SAU\)](#) or a chance to go on educational foreign tour conducted by National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP) to learn their way of practicing agriculture. Despite maximum efforts there exist a variation in pattern of students going for higher education [5]. These variations could exist for several reasons some of them could be, agriculture being students' last resort due to which their ~~irre's~~ lack of interest on the subject. ~~Further, such students because of which right~~ after getting a degree, ~~they student~~ try to settle down with a government job rather than going for higher education ~~which could be influenced by constraints such as or there could be~~ financial ~~constraints~~ or lack of family support [6].

In order to know the career aspirations of PG students of [Assam Agricultural University \(AAU\)](#), a pilot study was carried out with researchable questions viz., why students are not appearing for exams like NET (National Eligibility Test), SRF (Senior Research Fellowship) etc? What are the different career aspirations of the students? what is their level of preparation for the career that they are aspiring? What are the different problems they are facing in achieving their aspirations? Based on these researchable questions, few objectives were formulated in order to carry out the study, viz., 1. Demographic profile of post graduate students, 2. To describe the aspiration status of post graduate students of AAU, 3. To collect the perceived problems faced by PG students in fulfilling their aspiration. Suitable methodology was followed to fulfil the mentioned objectives and accordingly conclusion was drawn from the results that were found.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present pilot study was conducted on the post-graduate students (2020 batch) of Assam Agricultural University ([AAU](#)), Jorhat during COVID-19 ~~these 2020 batch batch~~ pandemic. ~~This 2020 batch batch~~ was chosen purposively as this batch is about to complete their research work and are on the verge of deciding or already have decided their future plans. There are more than 150 scholars conducting their research in different departments. Data collection was done through online mode. A questionnaire was prepared and ~~sent to the distributed among the~~ students through google forms. ~~Among them~~ 50 responses were recorded ~~from the student respondents~~ and analyzed through ~~frequency and percentage appropriate tables and pie charts~~.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE STUDENTS

Table 1 shows that majority of the student respondents ~~were are~~ female (60%) and rest of them ~~were are~~ male (40%). ~~Further, also,~~ most of them belong to Assam (80%) and the rest come from other parts of India (20%).

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Particulars		Frequency	percentage
Gender	Female	30	60
	Male	20	40
State	Assam	42	84
	Other	8	16

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF ASPIRATION STATUS OF POST GRADUATE STUDENTS OF AAU

As per second objective of the study, after general discussion and observation made top five aspirations were put up ~~in the option~~ for the student respondents to choose, namely, 1. Pursue higher education i.e., PhD, 2. To become scientist in ICAR institute, 3. To secure assistant professor position in state agricultural university, 4. To secure government job, 5. To study abroad.

3.2.1 PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION

To pursue higher education (PhD), there are requirements like duration of PhD course is at least 3-5 years. For doing PhD in national level, ~~c~~candidate should qualify Senior Research Fellowship, for state level, one is required to qualify examinations conducted by SAU. Table 2 shows the status of the students who wants to pursue higher education i.e., PhD degree.

Majority of the students do not want to pursue PhD (54%), reason behind it is mostly because of having different career choices. Rest of the students who wants to pursue PhD, most of them have not given examinations like Senior Research Fellowship for experience purpose as they are either demotivated (13.6%), lack guidance (9.1%) or their level of preparation is not upto the mark.

Table 2: Status of the students who wants to pursue higher education i.e., PhD degree

Particulars	Responses	Statement	Percentage of students
Pursue higher education i.e, PhD.	50	No	54%
		Yes	46%
Gave SRF this year	49	No	93.9%
		Majority (zero preparation)	24.3%
Level of preparation (marked by themselves).	37	Minority (preparation worth 8 points)	2.7%
		Aiming for a job	38.6%
Reasons for not giving SRF exam.	44	Not interested in PhD degree	18.2%
		Different career choice	15.9%

Lack of guidance	13.6%
Lack of motivation	9.1%

3.2.2 TO BECOME SCIENTIST IN INDIAN COUNCIL OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (ICAR) INSTITUTE

To become a scientist in ICAR institute, there are points to be remembered, say, according ICAR guidelines, from 2022 onwards one needs to have a PhD degree in order to appear for Agriculture research services (A.R.S) exam, which is conducted by the Agricultural scientist's recruitment board (A.S.R.B). This exam consists of 3 stages viz., Prelims, Mains and Interview (Prelims is objective and Mains is descriptive). Once one has cleared this exam, he/she will be posted as an agriculture scientist in any of the central research institutes. Table 3 shows that the status of the students who wants to become scientists in ICAR institute. Majority of the students do not want become scientists in ICAR institute (54.2%), reason for this is students having different career choices especially having government job. Those of who wants to pursue this career, they are mostly underprepared, some haven't started (34.8%) and some are about to start (19.6%).

Table 3: Status of the students who wants to become scientists in ICAR institute

Particulars	Responses	Statements	Percentage of the students
Want to become scientists in ICAR institute.	48	No	54.2%
		Yes	45.8%
Going to give ARS	49	No	55.1%
		Yes	44.9%
Level of preparation	46	Not interested	39.1%
		Haven't started	34.8%
		About to start	19.6%

3.2.3 TO SECURE AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR POSITION IN A STATE AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

To secure assistant professor position in state agricultural university, there are some points to be remembered like having necessary bachelor's and master's degree in agricultural subjects, recently according to UGC regulations one must have a PhD degree to join as an assistant professor from 1st July 2021 but in the view of COVID 19 pandemic the date has been extended to 1st July 2023, also a candidate must clear NET (National Eligibility Test). Table 4 shows the status of students who wants to become assistant professor. Majority of the students do not want to become assistant professor in state agricultural university (40.8%), the reason could be students having other career aspirations. Those of who wants this career, most of them have not appeared for National Eligibility Test (92%) as it is one of

the requirements, the major reason for not appearing for NET was found to be students facing lack of motivation (38.5%).

Table 4: Status of students who wants to become assistant professor

Particulars	Respondents	Statements	Percentage of the students
Want to become assistant professor	49	No	40.8%
		Yes	32.7%
		Maybe	26.5%
Gave NET this year	50	No	92%
		Yes	8%
Reasons for not giving	39	Lack of motivation	38.5%
		Different career choice	35.9%
		Lack of guidance	17.9%
		Lack of awareness	17.9%

39 responses

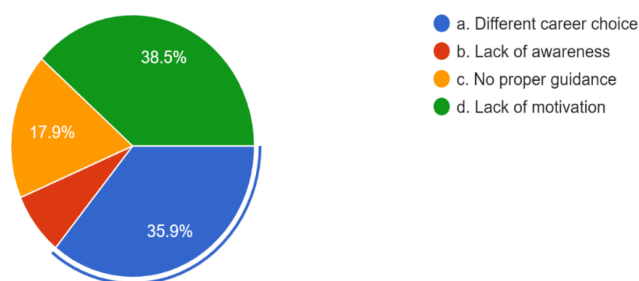


Fig 1: Reasons for not appearing for NET examination

3.2.4 TO SECURE A GOVERNMENT JOB

To secure government job, there are some important points to consider students need to prepare for concerned competitive examinations. Based on eligibility and score acquired, selection is carried out. There are various government job options for agriculture graduate or post-graduate. Indian forest services, Agriculture development officer, Staff selection commission, Institute of Banking Personnel Selection Specialist Officer, Food corporation of India, National bank for agricultural and rural development and many more. Table 5 shows the status of the students who want to secure a government job. Students have higher affinity of going for a government job rather than going for higher education, about 42 per cent of the total respondents have joined agriculture as they believed it provides more job opportunities compared to others and most of them want to have officer level job (80%).

Table 5: status of the students who want to secure a government job.

Particulars	Respondents	Statements	Percentage of the students
Prime reason to have chosen agriculture	50	As agriculture field gives many job opportunities than any other sector	42%
Level of government job desired.	50	Officer level	80%
		Any level	20%

50 responses

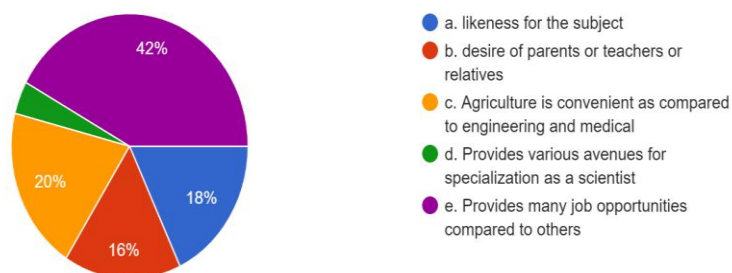


Fig 2: Reasons for joining agriculture as profession

3.2.5 TO STUDY ABROAD

In order to study abroad there are some points to be remembered like candidates need to take Graduate Record Examination General Test conducted by ETS (Educational testing service) as well as an English Language Proficiency Test like IELTS (International English language testing system) or TOEFL (Test of English as a foreign language) are needed to be taken, candidates need to send recommendation letters (including purpose of PhD and an essay based on that) to the institute they want to apply in. Those who are not self-funded should apply for international student scholarship provided by home-country or by the applied universities. Table 6 shows the status of the students who wants to study abroad. Majority of the students wants to study abroad (60%) and those of who do not want to or cannot study abroad (40%) is because most of them feel secured in their own home country (52.2%), some have financial constraints at home (26.1%), some are not aware of the various programs which facilitate abroad studies (13%) and some face discouragement from family's side (8.7%).

Table 6: Status of the students who wants to study abroad

Particulars	Responses	Statements	Percentage of the students
Wish to study abroad.	50	Yes	60%
		No	40%
Reasons for not wanting to study abroad.	23	Feeling of safety at home state/country	52.2%
		Financial constraints	26.1%
		Not aware of the programs	13%
		Discouragement from family	8.7%

3.3 PERCEIVED PROBLEMS FACED BY PG STUDENTS IN FULFILLING THEIR ASPIRATION

According to the third objective of the study, perceived problems found among the students are 1. Lack of guidance 2. Lack of motivation and 3. Financial constraints. Following is the distribution of students facing these problems. Table 7 shows the distribution of students facing these perceived problems. Majority of the students lack guidance (68%), some lack motivation (24%) and the rest have financial constraints (8%).

Table 7: Distribution of students facing these problems

Particulars	Responses	Statement	Percentage of students
Perceived problems	50	Lack of guidance	68%
		Lack of motivation	24%

Financial constraints	8%
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CONCLUSION

Students have higher affinity of going for a government job rather than going for higher education, percentage % of the students joining agriculture for liking the subject is way less than the percentage of% students joining agriculture to secure a government job. About 42 per cent of the total respondents have joined agriculture as they believed it provides more job opportunities compared to others, which is ultimately a good sign in short run but in the long run as there will be more and more crisis in food sector, meeting nutritional demand and ever-growing hunger due to rise in population, there will be dire need in the field of research and development to address these issues. Rest of those who have the aspirations to carry on with higher education (PhD) in India or in abroad or to become scientists, assistant professors in S.A.U.s are either lacking motivation, guidance or/and have less preparedness for the exams. Appropriate interventions are needed on both individual and collective level to make environment conducive for learning and growth. Career counselling of the students should start from the bachelor's degreeyears itself, they should be asked analytical questions about their wants and needs, accordingly they should be guided and encouraged in pursuing their aspirations. Identification of a proper path for a student at an early age can be very encouraging as it keeps one focused and determined. Many a times, students are confused and pursue their career under certain influence or impulse from peers which may not be a wise decision. The study suggests AU-A-U to organize at least one special workshop on higher education opportunities every year.

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