

Original Research Article

A pilot study on career aspirations of post-graduate students at Assam Agricultural University

ABSTRACT

The study was conducted during COVID-19 pandemic through online mode to determine aspiration status of post-graduate students (2020 batch) of Assam Agricultural University and to identify their perceived problems. A sample 50 respondents was selected using simple random sampling technique. Data collected via questionnaire were analyzed through frequency and percentage method. Results showed that despite the students aspiring to pursue higher education, majority of them had higher affinity towards getting a government officer level job. Further, they were underprepared for various competitive examinations. Their major perceived problem was lack of guidance. Thus, this pilot study suggests a broader study on much larger sample. Further, career counseling should be provided to the students so that they can decide and select a better career for themselves.

Keywords: Online, Career Aspiration, Post-graduates, Students, Agriculture, University

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 chance 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 [5]. In order to motivate the students to carry out their higher education many opportunities have been given viz., national and international scholarships by Indian Council of Agricultural 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 [6]. These variations could exist for several reasons some of them could be, agriculture being students’ last resort due to which they lack of interest on the subject. Further, such students after getting a degree, they try to settle down with government job rather than going for higher education which could influenced by constraints such as financial constraints or lack of family support [7].

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?

2. METHODOLOGY

The present pilot study was conducted on the post-graduate students (2020 batch) of Assam Agricultural University (AAU), Jorhat during COVID-19 pandemic. This batch was chosen purposively as this batch is about to complete its research work and is on the verge of deciding or already have decided their future plans. There are more than 150 scholars conducting their research in different departments. A sample of 50 respondents was selected by using simple random sampling technique. Data collection was done through circulation of questionnaire. Their responses were recorded and analyzed through frequency and percentage.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE STUDENTS

Table 1 shows that majority of the student respondents were female (60%) and rest of them were male (40%). Further, most of them belonged to Assam (80%) and the rest came from other parts of India (20%). Niketha *et al.* [8] have also observed in their study that girl students seeking admission in agriculture has been increasing in recent years.

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

3.2.1 PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION

Table 2 shows the status of the students aspiring to pursue higher education i.e., PhD degree. Majority of the students wanted to pursue PhD degree (54%) and the rest of the students did not want to pursue PhD degree (46%). Table 3 shows the reasons students have not appeared for Senior Research Fellowship examinations which is a requirement to get a PhD seat. Majority of them are aiming for a job (38.6%). In an almost similar study, [Roach and Sauermann \[9\]](#) have observed that even though maximum of students start the PhD interested in an academic research career, over time 55% of all students remain interested while 25% lose interest entirely.

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

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage of students
Yes	27	54
No	23	46
Total response	50	100

Table 3: Reasons for not giving Senior Research Fellowship (SRF) Examination

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage of students
Aiming for a different job	17	38.6
No interest for PhD degree	8	18.2
Different career choice	7	15.9
Lack of guidance	6	13.6
Lack of motivation	4	9.1
Hindrance from family	1	2.3
Lack of awareness	1	2.3
Total response	44	100

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

Table 4 shows status of the students aspiring to become scientists in ICAR institute. Majority of the students did not want become scientists in ICAR institute (54.2%), reason for this is students having different career choices. Those of who wanted to pursue this career, they are mostly underprepared, some haven't started (34.8%) and some are about to start (19.6%). On contrary to result, Das and Chowdhury [9] found in their study that majority of the students (30%) aspired to be ARS performers.

Table 4: Status of the students aspiring to become scientists in ICAR institute

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
willing	22	45.8
Not willing	26	54.2
Total response	48	100

Table 5: Preparation for Agriculture Research Scientist (ARS) examination

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Not interested	18	39.1
Haven't started	16	34.8
About to start	9	19.6
A year of preparation	2	4.3
More than a year of preparation	1	2.2
Total response	46	100

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

Table 6 shows the status of students aspiring to become assistant professor. Majority of the students did not want to become assistant professor in SAU (40.8%), the reason could be students having other career aspirations. Those of who wanted this career, most of them did not appear for National Eligibility Test (NET), Table 7 shows the major reason being students lacking motivation (38.5%). Supporting the result, Niranjana, Kiresur and Anbukhani [10] found in their study that within service sector most preferred career option was civil service.

Table 6: Status of the students aspiring to secure an assistant professor position in SAU

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	16	32.7
No	20	40.8

Maybe	13	26.5
Total response	49	100

Table 7: Reasons for not giving National Eligibility test (NET) examination

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of motivation	15	38.5
Different career choice	14	35.9
No proper guidance	7	17.9
Lack of awareness	3	7.7
Total responses	39	100

3.2.4 TO SECURE A GOVERNMENT JOB

Table 8 shows reasons students chose agriculture as career option. Students had higher affinity of going for a government job rather than going for higher education, about 42 per cent of the total respondents chose agriculture as they believed it provides more job opportunities compared to others. Table 9 shows most of them wanted to have officer level job (80%). Supporting the result, [Mridula et al. \[11\]](#) have found in their study that majority of the students (62%) remarks that job of an agricultural officer is a good option.

Table 8: Reason for choosing Agriculture as a discipline

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Provides many job opportunities compared to others	21	42
Agriculture is convenient as compared to engineering and medical	10	20
Likeness for the subject	9	18
Desire for parents or teachers or relatives	8	16
Provides various avenues for specialization as scientist	2	4
Total	50	100

Table 9: Level of government job

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Officer level	40	80
Any level	10	20
Total	50	100

3.2.5 TO STUDY ABROAD

Table 10 shows the status of the students aspiring to study abroad. Majority of the students were willing to study abroad (60%) and the rest were unwilling (40%). It was because most of them felt secured in their own country (52.2%), some had financial constraints at home (26.1%), some were unaware of the various programs which facilitate abroad studies (13%) and some had discouragement from family's side (8.7%). Supporting the results, Turcan and Pirgaru [12] have found in their study that majority of the students of developing countries are excited and motivated to pursue their higher education and the socio-economic developments towards the international University.

Table 10: Status of students willing to study abroad

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	30	60
No	20	40
Total	50	100

3.3 PERCEIVED PROBLEMS FACED BY PG STUDENTS IN FULFILLING THEIR ASPIRATION

Table 11 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%). Jyothi and Anjanappa [13] have found in their study that lack of career information is the major reason preventing respondent's aspiration.

Table 11: Distribution of students facing these problems

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage of students
Lack of guidance	34	68%
Lack of motivation	12	24%
Financial constraints	4	8%

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 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 SAUs are either lacking motivation, guidance or/and have less preparedness for the exams.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Appropriate interventions are needed on both individual and collective level to make environment conducive for learning and growth. Career counseling of the students should start from the bachelor's degree itself, they should be asked analytical questions about their wants and needs, and 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 AAU to organize at least one special workshop on higher education opportunities every year.

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