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THE PERCEPTION OF AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT IN AGRIBUSINESS: A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITY FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Graduate job placement has become a major challenge facing developing countries including Ghana. This has pushed some policy makers to advocate for the training of graduates who are skill oriented to go into self-employment ventures. University for Development Studies (UDS) is one of such Institutions in Ghana mandated to train self-employed graduates. This paper therefore examines the perception of UDS students in Ghana towards seeking self-employment in agribusiness sector. Structured questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument for this study. Students' perception regarding the prospects of agribusiness as a self-employment avenue was measured on a five point Likert Scale. The study found that students interviewed generally agreed that agribusiness has a high potential for self-employment and that there is high prospects of its success in Ghana. However, students generally were undecided with regards to the easiness of self-employment creation in agribusinesses. More than half (54.8%) of the 192 students interviewed do not prefer agribusiness as an avenue for self-employment after graduation. Investment in self-employment of agriculture graduates is likely to fail if proper sensitisation is not made to motivate agricultural science graduates to go into agribusiness. The paper also recommends a review of self-employment policies to capture the interest of agriculture graduates because the current packages are not attractive to them.

KEYWORDS

Perception, job preference, Agribusiness, students, Self-employment, Ghana.

INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the fact that the service and industry sectors have in recent time overtaken agriculture as the leading contributor to Ghana's GDP, agriculture still remains a key to solving the unemployment problem and the overall development of the economy (MoFA, 2010). The agricultural sector employs directly about 50.6% of the Ghanaian workforce and accounted for 2,639 million dollars of the country's export earnings in 2010, and directly or indirectly supports about 80% of the total population economically, through farming, distribution of farm products and provision of other related services (ISSER, 2012). However, according to MOFA (2012), agriculture in Ghana is predominantly practised on smallholder and family-operated farms using rudimentary Technology. Smallholder farmers (approximately 2.74 million) produce about 80% of Ghana's total agricultural output.

As such the Government of Ghana blue print on agriculture as captured in the Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy (FASDEP I & II), Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS I & II), Medium Term Agricultural Sector Investment Plan (METASIP) for 2011 – 2015 and the recent Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA) all identified the modernization of agriculture and encouraging the youth to go into agriculture as a means for solving the unemployment and food security problems in the country and ensuring general prosperity of the population. In line with these policies, government through Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Youth and Employment Ministries and other relevant agencies have implemented several programmes and projects such as the Youth in Agriculture Programme, the Block Farming Programme, the Agriculture Services Sub-sector Investment Programme (AgSSIP), the National Service in Agriculture among others. All aimed at encouraging and involving the youth in farming and agribusiness related enterprise.

Despite the implementation of these laudable policies, programmes and projects, MoFA, (2007) review of the implementation of Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy (FASDEP) observed that, there is an aging farmer population yet the sector is unable to attract the youth. It also identified high illiteracy among producers which hindered the need for facilitating their access to information on modern technologies, approaches and opportunities. As such the success of Ghana drive to modernize agriculture and encourage commercial farming and large scale production of agricultural commodities cannot be realised if the quality human resource of the youth, especially graduates from agricultural faculties and colleges is not harnessed.

The current phenomenon of increasing global unemployment, especially among the youth, has increasingly made the promotion of self-employment to gain popularity around the world. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) figures which are corroborated by the 2005 World Youth Report, the youth unemployment in the world has been increasing since 1993, moving from 11.7 per cent in 1993 to a record high of 14.4 per cent (88 million) in 2003.

The problem of youth unemployment in Ghana had engaged the attention of stakeholders for some time now. A closer examination of youth unemployment in the country revealed an alarming situation of rising joblessness amongst graduates of tertiary institutions. Furthermore, the universities in the country continued to turn out teeming masses of graduates without a matching increase in employment opportunities. Owusu-Ansah *et al*, (2012) cited Joy FM online report in which Professor Aryeetey revealed that the extent of joblessness and under-employment is evident because a huge number of the youth are found in the street selling things nobody will buy. It is reported that as many as 50% of graduates from Ghanaian universities and polytechnics will not find jobs for two years after

their national service, and 20% of them will not find jobs for three years (Aryeetey, 2011; as cited in Owusu-Ansah *et al.*, 2012). The statistics of Ghana unemployment rate is relatively high compared to the global unemployment rate of 6.1% (Asante, 2011; as cited also in Owusu-Ansah *et al.*, 2012).

Governments over the years have been saddled with the mounting challenge of finding lasting and effective solution to the unemployment problems affecting the teaming unemployed university graduates being chained out from the various tertiary institutions annually. There are records of high levels of graduate and non-graduate youth unemployment rates standing as high as 20% (World Factbook, 2008). The country stand to gain by harnessing this critical mass of its human resources, especially so, after the state had spent its scarce resources in providing university education in various disciplines for these unemployed graduates.

Inculcating entrepreneurship intention and capability among university graduates and facilitating them through the establishment of enabling environment for self-employment enterprise creation had been noted as the effective and lasting solution to graduate unemployment problem in the country. Several initiatives in this direction such as the Youth in Agriculture, youth training and entrepreneurial development under the 'Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency' (GYEEDA) of the former National Youth Employment Programme' (NYEP), Local Enterprises and Skills Development Programme (LESDEP) among others have been implemented with the aim of developing the entrepreneurial skills of the youth and promoting self-employment in the country.

However, the critical question that always arises is how the youth, especially graduates from the tertiary institutions, perceive self-employment as an employment opportunity for them. Since people act based on their perception (Barraclough *et al.* (2009); Lowden *et al.* (2011) and Highfliers (2012)), it is important to examine the perception of university graduates towards self-employment so as to be able to obtain empirical information to guide employment policy formulation, skills training and entrepreneurial development. This paper therefore analyses the perception held by the 2012/2013 final year agricultural students of the University for Development Studies, Nyankpala campus towards creating self-employment in agribusiness upon completion which is part of the mandate for establishing of the university.

The mandate of the University for Development Studies established in May 1992 by PNDC Law 279, was to "blend the academic work with practical and community engagement in order to provide constructive and meaningful interaction between the academia and the larger society for the total development of Northern Ghana, in particular, and Ghana as whole". The faculty of agriculture being the first faculty of the University began academic work in September, 1993 with its thirty-nine (39) pioneering students. Effah, (1998) observed that "the UDS was borne out of the new thinking in higher education which emphasizes the need for universities to play a more active role in addressing problems of the society, particularly in the rural areas". The university has since conducted its teaching; research and community out-reach programmes in line with its mandate. Is exactly two decades now after the first faculty of the University started academic work in agriculture.

This study was deemed important because, individuals behave in a given manner based not on the way their external environment actually is but, rather, on what they see or believe it to be. The nation may spend huge resources and efforts to get the youth into agriculture, however, in spite of these expenditures, if the youth believes that agriculture is lousy, for instance, they will behave accordingly.

METHODOLOGY

STUDY AREA

The study was conducted at the Nyankpala Campus of the University for Development Studies (UDS). The University whose mission is 'to be a Home of World Class Pro-Poor Scholarship' was established by PNDC Law 279 in May 1992 to 'blend the academic work with that of the community engagement through community out-reach in order to facilitate the total development of Northern Ghana, in particular, and Ghana as whole'. The UDS was borne out of the new thinking in higher education and research which emphasizes the need for universities to play a more active role in addressing problems of the society, particularly in the rural areas (Effah, 1998).

SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

The study population consists of all level 400 students of 2012/2013 academic year of the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Agribusiness and Communication Sciences of the Nyankpala campus of the University for Development Studies. About 60% of the 521 final year students of the two faculties comprising of 72 agribusiness and 449 agricultural technology students were initially targeted for the study. Thus the initial sample size being targeted was 313 comprising 43 agribusiness students and 270 agricultural technology students. As such 313 structured questionnaires were sent to respondents selected through a lottery method of simple random sampling techniques. However, 292 questionnaires representing 93% of the targeted sample size were received and found to be usable. As such the sample size used for this study was 292 comprising of 42 agribusiness students and 250 agricultural technology students.

The structured questionnaire used as a data collection instrument for this study comprised of two sections. Section A was used to obtain data on demographic characteristics of respondents such as age, sex, place of domicile and parental background, while section B was used to elicit information on students' perception towards the prospects of self-employment in agribusiness and students job preference after graduation.

In measuring students' perception towards the prospects of self-employment in agribusiness, students were asked to score their agreements with regard to certain statements constructed to elicit their response on a five point Likert Scale as 'Strongly Disagreed' (SD) = - 2; 'Disagreed' (D) = -1; 'Undecided' (U) = 0; 'Agreed' (A) = 1 and 'Strongly Agreed' (SA) = 2. This approach of measuring perception was used by Ayanda, *et al.* (2012) in measuring students' perception of Kwara State University towards farming. Also, Olorunfoba, (2008) in assessing agricultural Students' Perceptions of Farm Practical Year Programme at University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria used four point Likert scale in measuring students' perception

The data obtained were entered into SPSS and analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, means, standard deviations with t-test used to test for significant difference at 5% level of significance. The results were then presented in tables

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS

Agricultural Students of Nyankpala campus of the University for Development Studies surveyed for this study were generally young with a mean age of about 23 years old (SD = 3.69), whilst the oldest being 35years old and the youngest was 21years old. Majority (88.7%) of the 292 final years (level 400) students interviewed were 30 years old or younger. Also, most of the students (69.7%) were male with more than half of them (58.9%) coming from urban areas. Majority of the students interviewed (89.4%) were single whilst only 10.6% were married. This finding is similar to Ayanda, *et al.* (2012) which established that agricultural students of Kwara State University, Nigeria were adolescent with mean age of 19.6 years and majority (80.25%) residing in in urban centers.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (Years):		
21 – 30 years	259	88.7
Above 30 years	33	11.3
Mean Age = 23.13 years (N = 292; std deviation = 3.69; Range = 21 - 35 years)		
Sex :		
Male	204	69.9
Female	88	30.1
Total	292	100.0
Status Of Current Place Of Resident:		
Rural	120	41.1
Urban	172	58.9
Total	292	100.0
Marital Status of Students		
Single	261	89.4
Married	31	10.6
Total	292	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2013

BACKGROUND OF STUDENTS PARENTS/GUARDIAN

The educational and occupational background of students parents or guardians were assessed and the results shown in the Table 2. As indicated in the Table 2, about 41.4% of the students surveyed indicated that their fathers or guardians have tertiary education with a little over half of them (53.4%) saying their mothers have no formal educational background.

With regard to the occupational background of respondents' parents or guardians, the survey results (Table 2) revealed that about 24.7% and 38% of respondents' fathers and mothers respectively engaged in agriculture as their main source of livelihood. However, students indicated that only 13.3% and 31% of their fathers and mothers respectively engaged in other self-employed enterprises apart from agriculture as their main occupation. Also about 36.3% and 25.7% of respondents interviewed said their fathers were employed in the Civil/Public Service and Private Sector respectively as their main occupation. However, only 16.1% and 14.4% of the students interviewed, mentioned that their mothers were employed in the Civil/public Service and Private Sector respectively.

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF BACKGROUND OF STUDENTS PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Father's/Guardians' Level of Education		
No Formal Education	48	16.4
Completed Secondary Education	123	42.1
Completed Tertiary Education	121	41.4
Total	292	100.0
Mother's/Guardian's Level of Education		
No Formal Education	156	53.4
Completed Basic Education	58	19.9
Completed Secondary Education	42	14.4
Completed Tertiary Education	36	12.3
Total	292	100.0
Father's/Guardian's Main Occupation		
Self-employed in Agriculture	72	24.7
Self-employed in other Enterprise	39	13.3
Employed in Civil/Public Sector	106	36.3
Employed in Private Sector	75	25.7
Total	292	100.0
Mother's/Guardian's Main Occupation		
Self-employed in Agriculture	111	38.0
Self-employed in other Enterprise	92	31.5
Employed in Civil/Public Sector	47	16.1
Employed in Private Sector	42	14.4
Total	292	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2013

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION REGARDING PROSPECTS OF AGRIBUSINESS

Table 3 is the distribution of the mean scores of students' perception regarding the prospects of agribusiness as a future self-employment avenue upon completion on five point Likert Scale. As shown in the Table, students generally agreed strongly with the statements that 'agribusiness has a high potential for self-employment in Ghana' with a mean score of 1.59 (SD = 0.55; t = 50.5; P<0.05), 'many Ghanaians have made a lot of fortunes from agriculture' as it was rated 1.48 (SD = 0.70; t = 36.16; P<0.05) and 'Agribusiness have a high prospects of success in Ghana' with a mean score of 1.66 (SD = 0.51; t = 55.51; P<0.05). Thus respondents have a positive perception about the potential of agribusiness as an opportunity for self-employment and that there are high prospects of success in agricultural enterprises. Also with a mean score of 1.3 (SD = 0.76; t = 29.66; P<0.05) students interviewed agreed that there is a lot of untapped potential in agricultural sector in Ghana and respondents also merely agreed (with a mean score of 0.9; SD = 0.60; t = 25.49; P<0.05) that agricultural related enterprises are very lucrative. In addition, students generally agreed with a score of 1.10 (SD = 1.06; t = 17.72; P<0.05) that agriculture in their perception is 'a business and not a way of life.

Generally, students were undecided with regard to the statements that "it is easy to create self-employment in agribusiness" with a mean score of 0.31 (SD = 0.1; t = 5.39; P<0.05) and 'government policies favour agriculture enterprise creation' which has a mean score of 0.49 (SD = 1.26; t = 6.62; P<0.05). This implies that notwithstanding government policies captured in the Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy (FASDEP I & II), Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS I & II), Medium Term Agricultural Sector Investment Plan (METASIP) for 2011 – 2015 and Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA), students generally are yet to be convinced that these policies favour agribusiness enterprise creation. Not even the implementation of programmes and projects such as the Youth in Agriculture Programme, the Block Farming Programme, the Agriculture Services Sub-sector Investment Programme (AgSSIP), the

National Service in Agriculture among others are convincing enough for students to perceive government policies as favourable for them to established agricultural enterprise after graduation.

TABLE 3: PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS REGARDING THE PROSPECTS OF AGRIBUSINESS

Statements	Mean	SD	t	Df	Sign.
It is easy to create self-employment in agribusiness	0.31	0.1	5.39	291	0.00
Agricultural related enterprises are very lucrative	0.90	0.60	25.49	291	0.00
Agribusiness has a high potential for self-employment in Ghana	1.59	0.55	50.50	291	0.00
Many Ghanaians have made a lot of fortunes from Agriculture	1.48	0.70	36.16	291	0.00
Agribusiness have a high prospects of success in Ghana	1.66	0.51	55.51	291	0.00
Agriculture In Ghana has a lot of untapped potential	1.3	0.76	29.66	291	0.00
Government policies favour agriculture enterprise creation	0.49	1.26	6.62	291	0.00
Agriculture is a less risk business enterprise in Ghana	-0.41	1.10	-6.42	291	0.00
Agriculture is a business and not a way of life	1.10	1.06	17.72	291	0.00

Source: Field Survey, 2013: Likert Scale: 2 = Strongly Agree; 1 = Agree; 0 = Undecided; -1 = Disagree; -2 = Strongly Disagree; SD = Standard Deviation

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION REGARDING THEIR COMPETENT IN AGRICULTURE

After four years of studying agriculture and agribusiness in the University, students' perception regarding their competency in agriculture and its relation to their view regarding engaging in self-employment in agribusiness and other agricultural related enterprises were sought and the results of its analysis presented in Table 4. Strangely, students generally were undecided regarding whether they made the right choice by studying agriculture or agribusiness. Students mean score regarding the statement 'I made the right choice by pursuing agriculture or agribusiness' was 0.19 (SD = 0.80; t = 4.11; P<0.05). The findings agreed with Ayanda, *et al*, (2012) that agricultural students of Kwara state university are not sure whether they made the best choice by studying a degree in agriculture. However, students interviewed, generally agreed with the four rated statements that 'Agribusiness enterprise befits my status as a university graduate' which had a mean score of 0.69 (SD = 1.02; t = 11.56; P<0.05), 'UDS Curriculum had equipped me to be successful in agribusiness' with a mean score of 1.26 (SD = 0.80; t = 26.88; P<0.05), 'UDS Third Trimester Field Practical (TTFP) offered me a valuable experience to engage in agribusiness' which was scored 1.0 (SD = 0.92; t = 18.66; P<0.05) and 'I have the requisite technical knowledge to be a successful agribusiness entrepreneur' with a mean score of 1.27 (SD = 1.33; t = 16.27; P<0.05). Also Oloruntoba, (2008) found that students perceived practical training as contributing not only to their academic performance but also their competency level in agricultural which is very important in agribusiness enterprise creation.

TABLE 4: STUDENTS' PERCEPTION REGARDING THEIR COMPETENT IN AGRICULTURE

Statements	Mean	SD	t	df	p
I made the right choice by pursuing agriculture or agribusiness	0.19	0.80	4.11	291	0.00
Agribusiness enterprise befits my status as a university graduate	0.69	1.02	11.56	291	0.00
UDS Curriculum had equipped me to be successful in agribusiness	1.26	0.80	26.88	291	0.00
UDS TTFP offered me a valuable experience to engage in agribusiness	1.00	0.92	18.66	291	0.00
I have the requisite technical knowledge to be a successful agricultural entrepreneur	1.27	1.33	16.27	291	0.00

Source: Field Survey, 2013

STUDENTS JOB PREFERENCE AFTER GRADUATION

Students' job preference after graduation was measured on a three points Likert Scale as 'Not prefer at all', 'somewhat prefer' and 'most prefer' and the results of the analysis is presented in the Table 5. The job types were categorized as 'self-employed in agribusinesses', 'self-employed in others enterprises' (outside agriculture such as telecommunication, hostel and catering among others) and 'employed by Public/Private Sector' (those who want to be employed in either the public or the private sectors).

Results of the analysis revealed that, notwithstanding their background as agriculturists, more than half (54.8%) of the 192 students interviewed do not prefer agribusiness at all, as an avenue for self-employment enterprise creation after graduation, with only 8.6% of them ranking self-employment in agribusiness as their most prefer job after graduation. With regard to students' preference in other areas of self-employment apart from agricultural related enterprise, about 54.1% and 31.8% ranked their preference as 'somewhat prefer' and 'most prefer' respectively.

The results also established that undergraduate students' preference of being employed in either the public or private sector after graduation is high in spite of the high graduation unemployment rate the country is currently experiencing. Out of the 292 students interviewed, as high as 61.3% of them ranked being employed in the either private or public sectors as their most preferred job type after graduation. This result is similar to that found by Ayanda, *et al*, (2012) in their study on Perception of agricultural students of Kwara State University on farming as future means of livelihood, where they found that majority (72.8%) of students interviewed disagreed that agriculture was prestigious enterprise while (61.7%) and (56.8%) preferred to work in banks and international organizations respectively.

TABLE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS JOB PREFERENCE

Job Type	Level of Preference						Total
	Not prefer at all		Somewhat prefer		Most prefer		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Self-employed in Agribusiness	160	54.8	107	36.6	25	8.6	292
Self-employed in others Enterprises	41	14.0	158	54.1	93	31.8	292
Employed by Public/Private Sector	85	29.1	28	9.6	179	61.3	292

Source: Field Survey, 2013

STUDENTS' PREFERENCE OF AGRIBUSINESS ENTERPRISES

The distribution of students' preference in the various agribusiness enterprises of the 132 students out of the 292 interviewed who preferred to be self-employed in agribusiness after graduation is shown in the Table 6. From the Table, about 31.8% preferred livestock and poultry production, while 24.2% preferred crop production as agribusiness enterprise as Self-employment enterprise. Also 17.4% of the 132 students who preferred self-employment in agribusiness wish to engage in agro-processing and agricultural marketing as their preferred enterprise upon graduation while only 8.3% preferred to engage in fishery and aquaculture as self-employment enterprise after graduation. Agro-forestry and tree crop production was preferred by 17(12.9%) respondents while 7 (5.3%) respondents also preferred bee keeping/snail/mushroom production as a self-employment enterprise.

TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS' PREFERENCE OF AGRIBUSINESS ENTERPRISES

Agribusiness Enterprise	Frequency	Percent (%)
Crop Farming	32	24.2
Livestock and Poultry Enterprise	42	31.8
Agro-forestry and Tree crops	17	12.9
Agro-processing and Agricultural marketing	23	17.4
Fishery and Aquaculture	11	8.3
Bee keeping/Snail/Mushroom Production	7	5.3
Total	132	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2013

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2012/2013 final year agricultural students of the University for Development Students surveyed for this study were generally young with a mean age of about 23 years old. After four years of studying agriculture and agribusiness in the University, strangely, students generally were undecided regarding whether they made the right choice by studying agriculture or agribusiness in the first place. Despite students' uncertainty regarding their choice of pursuing a degree in agriculture, the study found that they generally have a positive perception about the potential of agribusiness as an avenue for self-employed enterprise creation for them and that they see themselves succeeding in agricultural enterprises upon graduation. Also students interviewed perceived agricultural sector in Ghana as having a lot of untapped potential which they can exploit to establish themselves upon completion. Notwithstanding the positive perception students interviewed hold about the prospects of agribusiness as an avenue for self-employment after graduation, majority of them (54.8%) do not intend at all to engage in self-employed agribusiness enterprise upon graduation, instead they prefer to be employed either in the public or private sector. However, most of the remaining 45.2% of the 292 students interviewed who preferred to engage in self-employed agribusiness enterprise after graduation mentioned crop production, livestock and poultry production and agro-processing and marketing as their most preferred agribusiness enterprises. In spite of government policy of involving the youth in agriculture, students interviewed were generally undecided as to whether government policies favour agricultural enterprise creation. In order to convert the positive perception students hold about the prospects of agriculture as an avenue for self-employed enterprise development to a real desire and intention to engage in self-employed agribusiness enterprise after graduation. This paper therefore recommends the introduction of entrepreneurial and skills development courses as part of the curriculum of students studying agricultural technology and agribusiness. This will help train agricultural students on enterprise creation, management and development. Also the University must ensure the proper orientation of students to help shape their perceptions and appropriate attitude towards the prospects of agriculture as an avenue for job creation and their employability as agricultural technology and agribusiness students. This can be achieved through the improvement of the university's practical training and career guidance programmes in order to motivate students who are currently studying agriculture and arouse their interest in making career from agriculture.

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