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Student entrepreneurship as a catalyst for gender-inclusive and climate-resilient agricultural innovation

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Abstract

The recognition of student entrepreneurship as a significant method for the development of climate-resilient and sustainable agricultural systems is gaining momentum. In this research, the focus is on the gender aspects of the matter and their impact on sustainability of agri-enterprises, and it deals with the examination of the patterns of the undergraduate agriculture students' entrepreneurial perceptions and aspirations. A survey study was done with a total of 426 students that were first- and final-year B.Sc. (Hons.) Agriculture from four colleges that are part of the University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur. A structured questionnaire was used to assess the students' aspirations in the following four areas—educational, career, entrepreneurial, and self-reliance. Furthermore, the students were divided into two groups according to gender, and the differences were analysed applying Chi-square and Mann-Whitney U tests. The findings indicate that both male and female students have the same moderate level of entrepreneurial and career aspirations, nevertheless, the females are slightly better off in terms of their total and self-reliance aspirations. Even though the main challenges that were identified are financial risk, competition, and market uncertainty, the technical and managerial competencies and the enterprise awareness were acknowledged as quite limited. The implications of the study are that the agricultural universities should use gender-responsive, behaviourally informed entrepreneurship education and policy interventions, in order to capture the youth's potential for the sustainable agricultural transformation.

Keywords: Student entrepreneurship, gender, aspiration, climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable Agri-enterprises

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has been recognized as an essential force driving economic growth, innovation, and job creation, especially in developing countries like India. In the agricultural sector, entrepreneurship is a key factor in overcoming difficulties caused by climate change, unsteady markets, and low profits from farming. Lately, discussions regarding policies have begun to highlight more and more the impact of young people's agriculture-related startups in such areas as the development of eco-friendly, inclusive, and long-lasting agriculture systems. The term 'entrepreneurship' is usually defined as the ability to find a business opportunity, gather the required resources, and take some risks to a certain extent in order to generate profit and create other social values. In agriculture, this goes further to cover environmental care, community resilience, and innovations throughout the entire value chain. Consequently, institutions offering agriculture as a major are in a very good position to train their students in possessing the necessary entrepreneurial qualities and skills, since these students will be the future of the industry.

Student entrepreneurship is of great importance in the context of climate change, as younger graduates are more likely to adopt innovative, technology-driven, and sustainable methods. Still, the level of involvement in entrepreneurship depends on the individual's aspirations, his or her perception of risks, the exposure to institutions, and the influence of society, for instance, the social norms dictating gender roles. It is crucial to know these patterns of aspirations in order to come up with effective educational and policy interventions. Therefore, this research paper analyses students' perceptions and aspirations regarding entrepreneurship in the agriculture sector with a particular focus on gender differences and their significance for eco-friendly and climate-resilient agriculture firms.

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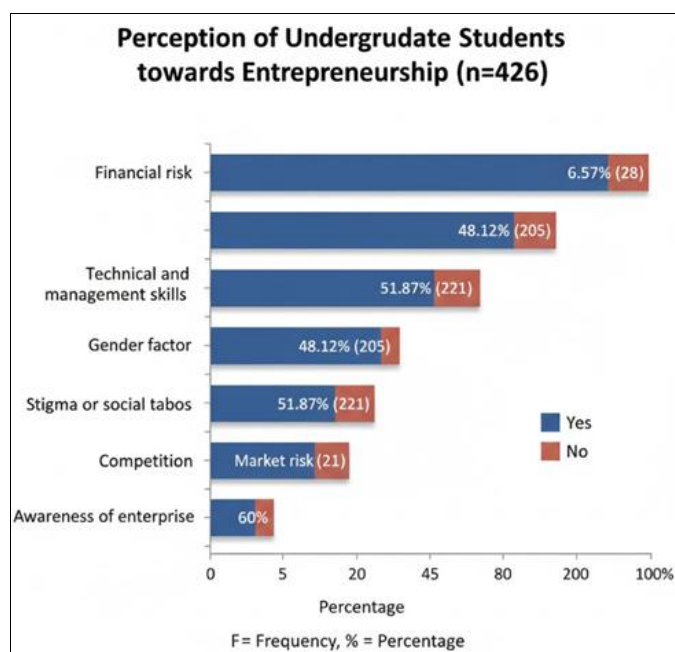
2. Materials and Methods

The research took place in the years 2021-22 and involved students in the first and last years of the B.Sc. (Hons.) Agriculture course at four affiliated colleges of the University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur—College of Agriculture, Raichur; College of Agriculture, Bheemerayangudi; College of Agriculture, Kalaburagi; and College of Agricultural Engineering, Raichur. Random sampling was the method used to choose the participants, and the final number was 426 students. A pre-tested structured questionnaire that was distributed through Google Forms was the main instrument for collecting data. The instrument depicted students' views on entrepreneurship-related challenges and ascertained the level of aspirations in four areas: education, career, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance. For summarizing perceptions and aspiration levels, descriptive statistics were applied, and for determining gender associations, Chi-square tests were used while Mann-Whitney U tests were performed for assessing the difference in aspiration scores between male and female students.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Perception of Entrepreneurship among Students

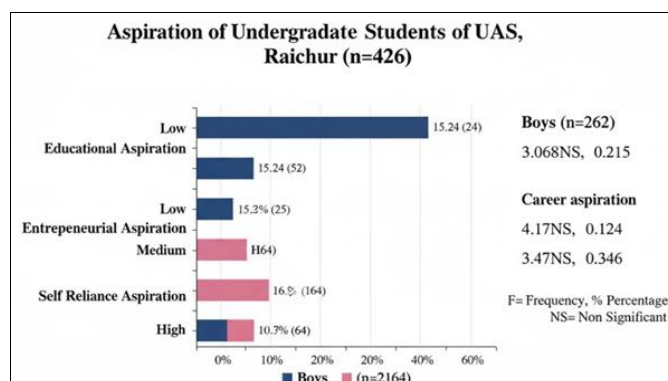
Most of the students exhibited a very good understanding of the financial risk, market competition, and market uncertainty that come along with entrepreneurship, thus, giving a realistic evaluation of the entrepreneurial environment. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents were in the dark regarding technical and managerial competencies, social stigma, gender-related barriers, and awareness of enterprise opportunities. These results show that students perceive external risks but internal capability gaps may limit their entrepreneurial intent, hence the need for skill-oriented training in agricultural education.



3.2 Aspiration Levels across Domains

Both male and female students, in all four aspiration domains, usually displayed medium levels of aspiration. The educational and career aspirations were quite evenly distributed among the sexes, which is a sign of increasing expectations in terms of employment among agricultural graduates. The same was true

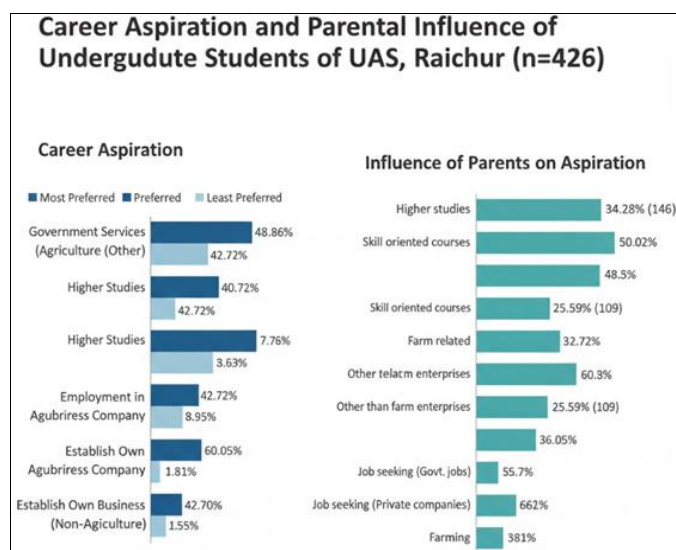
for entrepreneurial aspiration that remained at a moderate level, which means there is a cautious interest in starting a business. Interestingly, female students had higher overall and self-reliance aspirations than males, which could be interpreted as a sign of increased confidence and independence among women in agricultural education.



The lack of significant gender differences across the various areas of aspiration implies that there is a gradual move towards equal treatment of both sexes in farm education at the college level. The current findings are in consonance with previous studies that pointed out that institutional backing, exposure, and inclusive learning conditions tend to scale down the disparities based on gender in the areas of career and business entrepreneurship ambitions.

3.3 Career Preferences and Parental Influence

Government jobs were at the top of the list among the preferred career options, followed by employment in agribusiness firms and setting up one's own business. The parental support strongly favoured government jobs and higher education, which reflects the socio-cultural preference for stability, income security, and social prestige. The limited parental encouragement for farming or entrepreneurship indicates the continuing perception of agriculture as a high-risk occupation, which may discourage students' entrepreneurial aspirations even when the institution provides a favourable exposure.



4. Policy and Extension Implications

The results emphasize how important it is for agricultural

universities and policymakers to use a behaviour-sensitive approach in developing entrepreneurship. The curriculum reforms should not only include the usual lectures and theoretical learning but also introduce students to real businesses and develop their practical skills to make them feel competent. Gender-responsive interventions like mentoring, incubation support, and financing for female students are indispensable in converting high self-reliance aspirations into entrepreneurial activity. Besides, unifying university-based entrepreneurship programs with the national ones on Agri-startups and climate-smart agriculture can lead to more involved youth in the process of sustainable agricultural transformation.

5. Conclusion

The research highlights that the undergraduate students of agriculture displayed average entrepreneurial aspirations, where females took the lead in their dependency and overall aspirations. The risks linked to entrepreneurial ventures were acknowledged by the students but low technical and managerial confidence continued to be a major barrier. The findings point to the need for universities to adopt gender-sensitive, skill-based, and sustainability-centered entrepreneurship education in cultivating youth as movement for climate-resilient and inclusive agricultural development.

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