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Career aspirations, achievement motivation and leadership orientation among graduate agriculture students

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Abstract

Agricultural education plays a pivotal role in shaping the future workforce responsible for agricultural modernization, food security, and rural development. Understanding the career aspirations of agricultural students is therefore essential for aligning educational outcomes with sectoral needs. The present study examined the career aspirations of graduate (n = 342) agricultural students enrolled at Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri, with specific emphasis on educational, achievement, and leadership dimensions. An ex-post facto research design was adopted, and data were collected through a structured online questionnaire using standardized aspiration scales.

The findings revealed strong educational aspirations among students, with a majority expressing intentions to pursue the highest levels of education, engage in additional professional training, remain updated with recent advancements, and participate in academic conferences. Achievement aspirations were also prominent, as many respondents aspired to excel in their profession, seek recognition for their contributions, and strongly rejected the notion that career success is unimportant. Leadership aspirations were notably high, with a substantial proportion of students desiring leadership roles and top managerial positions, although a smaller segment showed hesitation toward actively pursuing leadership responsibilities.

Keywords: Career aspirations, educational aspiration, achievement aspiration, leadership aspiration

Introduction

Career aspirations play a vital role in shaping the academic, professional, and personal growth of students. For graduate agriculture students, career goals extend beyond immediate employment, encompassing educational advancement, professional achievement, and leadership responsibilities. Agriculture, as a dynamic and evolving discipline, demands individuals who are not only well-trained in technical expertise but also motivated to pursue lifelong learning and innovation. Understanding the aspirations of students in this field provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and institutions to design programs that align with students' ambitions and the demands of the agricultural sector.

The present study on the Career aspiration of graduate and post graduate agriculture students emphasizes three major dimensions: educational aspirations, achievement aspirations, and leadership aspirations. Educational aspirations highlight the students' commitment to higher education, additional training, and continuous learning to remain updated with advancements in agriculture. Achievement aspirations reflect their desire to excel in their chosen profession, gain recognition, and make meaningful contributions to the field. Leadership aspirations capture their intention to take up managerial and decision-making

roles, demonstrating readiness to guide the future of agricultural organizations. Career aspiration is a path that an individual wishes to follow in order to plan his/her future life and lifestyle. 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 scales up his/her competencies in terms of knowledge and skills required for a particular job. McGlynn (2007) ^[13] observed that most of the students are nowadays more concerned with the amount of money (Salary packages) they can earn. On the other hand, there are a few students in the society who pursue it as their dreams. Domenic and. According to Patton and Creed (2007) ^[15], the career aspirations of adolescents have been viewed as significant determinants of both short term educational and long-term career choices. Aspiration can be defined as "hope or ambition of achieving something". Agricultural education offers many opportunities to plan and choose a career to its recipients.

By analysing the perspectives of 342 graduates, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of how young professionals envision their future in the agricultural sector. The findings contribute to developing strategies that nurture these aspirations, thereby equipping students with the skills,

motivation, and leadership qualities needed to contribute effectively to both academia and industry.

Methodology

The “Ex-post-facto” research design was used for the study. This “Ex-post-facto” design was considered appropriate because the phenomenon has already occurred. It is the most systematic empirical study in which the researcher does not have direct control over dependent variables because their manifestations have already occurred. The study was conducted in the jurisdiction of State Agricultural Universities of Maharashtra, namely, Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth (MPKV), Rahuri.

The present study was conducted to analyse the career aspirations of graduate agriculture students with respect to educational, achievement, and leadership dimensions. A descriptive research design was employed to capture the perceptions and aspirations of the students in a structured manner.

Career aspiration. The original CAS was an 8-item scale to assess career aspiration (Including educational and leadership aspirations; O’Brien, 1996) ^[14]. Items on the original measure were rated on 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all true of me) to 5 (Very true of me).

A total of 342 graduate agriculture students were selected as respondents for the study. The data were collected using a well-structured questionnaire designed to measure career aspirations on different scales. The instrument included statements categorized under three key areas:

- 1. Educational Aspirations:** Items relating to higher studies, training, and continuous learning.
- 2. Achievement Aspirations:** Items concerning recognition, excellence, and professional success.
- 3. Leadership Aspirations:** Items measuring leadership roles, responsibilities, and management preferences.

The responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Not at all true of me” to “Very true of me.” The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and per centages, to understand the trends and priorities among the respondents.

Results and Discussion

The career aspirations were measured with 3 different dimensions. They are educational, achievement and leadership aspirations. The data about overall aspirations of the graduate students are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of students according to their career aspiration of graduate agriculture students

Sr. No	Statements	Not at all true of me	A little true of me	Moderately true of me	Quite true of me	Very true of me
A	Educational aspirations					
1	“I plan to reach the highest level of education in my field”.	16 (4.68)	9 (2.63)	30 (8.77)	77 (22.51)	210 (61.40)
2	“I will pursue additional training in my occupational area of interest”.	6 (1.75)	16 (4.68)	20 (5.85)	113 (33.04)	187 (54.68)
3	“I will always be knowledgeable about recent advances in my field”.	11 (3.22)	15 (4.39)	32 (9.36)	110 (32.16)	174 (50.88)
4	“I know I will work to remain current regarding knowledge in my field”.	8 (2.34)	14 (4.09)	33 (9.65)	130 (38.01)	157 (45.91)
5	“I will attend conferences annually to advance my knowledge”.	12 (3.51)	17 (4.97)	30 (8.77)	130 (38.01)	153 (44.74)
6	“Even if not required, I would take continuing education courses to become more knowledgeable”.	9 (2.63)	23 (6.73)	33 (9.65)	158 (46.20)	119 (34.80)
7	“I would pursue an advanced education program to gain specialised knowledge in my field”.	10 (2.92)	16 (4.68)	26 (7.60)	157 (45.91)	133 (38.89)
8	“Every year, I will prioritize involvement in continuing education to advance my career”.	10 (2.92)	17 (4.97)	24 (7.02)	169 (49.42)	122 (35.67)
B	Achievement aspirations					
1	“I want to be among the very best in my field”.	11 (3.22)	10 (2.92)	22 (6.43)	109 (31.87)	190 (55.56)
2	“I want my work to have a lasting impact on my field”.	6 (1.75)	19 (5.56)	24 (7.02)	174 (50.88)	119 (34.80)
3	“I aspire to have my contributions at work recognized by my employer”.	9 (2.63)	14 (4.09)	32 (9.36)	184 (53.80)	103 (30.12)
4	“Being outstanding at what I do at work is very important to me”.	9 (2.63)	16 (4.68)	22 (6.43)	169 (49.42)	126 (36.84)
5	“I know that I will be recognized for my accomplishments in my field”.	12 (3.51)	14 (4.09)	35 (10.23)	170 (49.71)	111 (32.46)
6	“Achieving in my career is not at all important to me”.	35 (10.23)	27 (7.89)	28 (8.19)	46 (13.45)	206 (60.23)
7	“I plan to obtain many promotions in my organization or business”.	12 (3.51)	13 (3.80)	35 (10.23)	186 (54.39)	96 (28.07)
8	“Being one of the best in my field is not important to me”.	40 (11.70)	31 (9.06)	25 (7.31)	50 (14.62)	196 (57.31)
C	Leadership aspirations					
1	“I hope to become a leader in my career field”.	11 (3.22)	14 (4.09)	36 (10.53)	83 (24.27)	198 (57.89)

2	"I do not plan to devote energy to getting promoted to a leadership position in the organization or business in which I will be working".	37 (10.82)	118 (34.50)	82 (23.98)	36 (10.53)	69 (20.18)
3	"Becoming a leader in my job is not at all important to me".	37 (10.82)	36 (10.53)	28 (8.19)	49 (14.33)	192 (56.14)
4	"When I am established in my career, I would like to manage other employees".	11 (3.22)	12 (3.51)	37 (10.82)	171 (50.0)	111 (32.46)
5	"I want to have responsibility for the future direction of my organization or business".	13 (3.80)	17 (4.97)	32 (9.36)	186 (54.39)	94 (27.49)
6	"Attaining leadership status in my career is not that important to me".	43 (12.57)	36 (10.53)	27 (7.89)	41 (11.99)	195 (57.02)
7	"I hope to move up to a leadership position in my organization or business".	9 (2.63)	16 (4.68)	35 (10.23)	188 (54.97)	94 (27.49)
8	"I plan to rise to the top leadership position of my organization or business".	11 (3.22)	16 (4.68)	27 (7.89)	193 (56.43)	95 (27.78)

The career aspirations of the respondents were summarized in Table 1, which indicated that most graduate students in agriculture exhibited high levels of motivation.

A. Educational Aspirations

Most graduate agriculture students demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing their education and staying updated in their field. A significant majority (61.40%) planned to achieve the highest level of education in their area. Similarly, 54.68% pursued additional training related to their interests, while 50.88% kept themselves informed about recent developments and 45.91% actively worked to stay current with new knowledge. Additionally, 44.74% regularly attended conferences to enhance their understanding, and 46.20% took continuing education courses—even without formal requirements—to improve their skills. Approximately 38.89% pursued advanced programs for specialized knowledge, and 35.67% prioritized ongoing education each year to support career growth.

B. Achievement Aspirations

Most students showed a strong drive to succeed and make a professional impact. A large portion (55.56%) aimed to be among the best in their field, while 50.88% sought lasting effects from their work. Over half (53.80%) desired recognition of their contributions by employers, and 36.84% considered it very important to excel in their efforts. Furthermore, 49.71% expected recognition for their achievements, and 60.23% disagreed that career success was unimportant. More than half (54.39%) planned to obtain multiple promotions, and 57.31% disagreed that being among the best in their field was unimportant, underscoring their ambition.

C. Leadership Aspirations

Many students expressed a strong desire to assume leadership roles. A substantial proportion (57.89%) hoped to become leaders in their field, though 34.50% admitted they did not plan to exert effort toward securing such positions. However, 56.14% disagreed that becoming a leader was unimportant, and 50.0% expressed interest in managing others after establishing their careers. Additionally, 54.39% wished to take responsibility for their organization's future direction, 57.02% viewed leadership as important in their careers, 54.97% hoped to advance to leadership positions, and 56.43% planned to reach top leadership roles.

Conclusion

The study revealed that graduate agriculture students possessed high levels of career motivation across educational, achievement, and leadership dimensions. A significant proportion demonstrated strong educational aspirations, aspiring to the highest levels of education, additional training, and updates on field developments.

In terms of achievement aspirations, students sought to excel professionally, gain recognition for contributions, and secure multiple promotions for long-term growth and impact.

Leadership aspirations were also notable, with many aiming to lead, manage organizations, and shape future directions, though a minority showed reluctance to pursue such roles actively, indicating diverse perspectives.

Overall, graduate agriculture students proved highly ambitious and future-oriented. Their aspirations reflected commitments to personal growth, academic excellence, and professional leadership, positioning them to advance the agricultural sector. Institutions and policymakers were recommended to support these through tailored programs, mentorship, and leadership development.

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