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Assessment of occupational aspirations of ug agriculture students in public and private universities of Punjab

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Abstract

Every individual in their life has certain goals and aspirations they want to achieve. In order to understand these goals and aspirations, the present study was conducted with an objective to assess the level of occupational aspiration of agriculture students studying in public and private universities of Punjab. In total, 200 undergraduate agriculture students, 100 each from both selected universities, with an equal representation of male and female respondents. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview schedule. The findings of the study revealed that a large proportion of respondents in both PAU (72.00%) and GKU (62.00%) fell under the age category of 21–22 years. In PAU, majority of respondents belonged to the General category (74.00%), whereas in GKU, the highest proportion of respondents (41.00%) belonged to the OBC category. With respect to birth order, almost half of the respondents in PAU were first-born, while in GKU, more than half (54.00%) of the respondents were second-born children in their family. The large proportion of respondents in PAU (63.00%) and majority in GKU (94.00%) were hostellers. Regarding academic performance, majority of the respondents from PAU (72.00%) secured an OCPA in the range of 7–8, whereas more than half of the respondents (57.00%) from GKU secured an OCPA above 8.00. A large majority of the respondents from both PAU (83.33%) and GKU (83.33%) exhibited high aspirations towards taking up family farming, followed by preparation for competitive examinations among PAU (66.67%) and GKU (80.00%) respondents. Overall there was no significant difference between the occupational aspiration of agriculture students of public and private universities of Punjab. The findings further revealed that caste, gender, family type and residence type showed significant associations with level of occupational aspiration. In addition, age, birth order, year of degree, OCPA and family income demonstrated significant relationships with level of occupational aspiration. Therefore, it is suggested that universities should provide adequate field exposure, practical training and experiential learning opportunities to enhance students' practical knowledge and confidence.

Keywords: Aspiration, agriculture students, public university and private university, undergraduate students

1. Introduction

Agriculture has remained the backbone of the Indian economy since ancient times and continues to play a vital role in ensuring food security, employment generation and rural development. India accounts for nearly one-sixth of the world's population and emerged as the most populous country in the world in 2023. The population of India was estimated to be about 1.43 billion and a substantial proportion of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture and allied sectors for their livelihood (GOI 2024) ^[4]. Agriculture contributes significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country and provides employment to a large section of the workforce (O'Neill 2024) ^[10]. According to the Economic Survey of India, agriculture and allied sectors continue to play a crucial role in sustaining rural livelihoods and ensuring national food security (GOI 2025) ^[5]. Agricultural development has also been recognized as one of the most effective approaches for reducing poverty, unemployment and food insecurity.

Aspiration refers to an individual's desire or ambition to achieve specific goals in life and reflects the hopes,

expectations and future-oriented objectives that guide behaviour and decision-making (Sharma *et al* 2022) ^[13]. It implies a strong desire to achieve something along with efforts made towards attaining the set goals. Aspirations help individuals plan their future and establish long-term objectives related to education, income, occupation, marriage and health (Bernard and Taffesse 2012) ^[2]. Occupational aspirations refer to an individual's desired career goals and are influenced by self-concept, perceived opportunities, interests and ambitions (Sharma *et al* 2022) ^[13]. These aspirations play an important role in shaping future lifestyle, career choices and employment decisions after education. During their academic journey, students encounter various career-related questions from themselves, parents, teachers and peers while trying to fulfil their aspirations. Understanding occupational aspirations is important for aligning educational programmes with career outcomes and industry needs (Niranjan *et al* 2018) ^[9]. Occupational aspirations are connected to how people express their choices or ambitions for their careers and eventually, the decisions people make regarding their vocation (Rojewski 2005) ^[12].

2. Objectives

To assess the occupational aspirations of agriculture students in public and private universities of Punjab.

3. Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted in two universities i.e. one public and one private university of Punjab. Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana (PAU) representing the public university and Guru Kashi University, Bathinda (GKU) representing the private university offering B.Sc. (Hons.) agriculture 4 year program affiliated by ICAR, New Delhi. The study comprised undergraduate agriculture students enrolled in the third and fourth years, with an equal representation of male and female respondents. A total sample of 200 students was selected, comprising 100 students from each university through random sampling. The study focused on assessing the level of occupational aspiration of agriculture students in public and private

universities of Punjab. Relevant statements were developed to measure the level of occupational aspiration of the respondents. Statements were categorized in Higher Education in India (HEI), Higher Education in Abroad (HEA), Job in Agriculture sector (JIA), Job in Non-Agriculture sector (JINA), Own Start-up (OS), Taking up Family Business (TFB), Taking up Family Farming (TFF) and Preparation for Competitive Examinations (PCE). Data were collected through a semi structured interview schedule using a three-point continuum scale agree, neutral and disagree, with scores of 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The collected data were compiled, tabulated and analysed by using statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and t-test to obtain meaningful interpretation of the results.

4. Results

Table 4.1: Distribution of the respondents according to their personal profile n=200

Category	Public (PAU) (n ₁ =100)	Private (GKU) (n ₂ =100)	Total (n=200)
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
Age (years)			
19-20	15 (15.00)	21 (21.00)	36 (18.00)
21-22	72 (72.00)	62 (62.00)	134 (67.00)
>23	13 (13.00)	17 (17.00)	30 (15.00)
Caste			
General	74 (74.00)	35 (35.00)	109 (54.50)
OBC	9 (9.00)	41 (41.00)	50 (25.00)
SC	17 (17.00)	15 (15.00)	32 (16.00)
ST	0 (0.00)	9 (9.00)	9 (4.50)
Birth order			
1 st	47 (47.00)	46 (46.00)	93 (46.50)
2 nd	44 (44.00)	54 (54.00)	98 (49.00)
3 rd	5 (5.00)	0 (0.00)	5 (2.50)
4 th	4 (4.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (2.00)
Present residence			
Hosteller	63 (63.00)	94 (94.00)	157 (78.50)
Day Scholar	37 (37.00)	6 (6.00)	43 (21.50)
OCPA (out of 10)			
6-7	18 (18.00)	3 (3.00)	21 (10.50)
7-8	72 (72.00)	40 (40.00)	112 (56.00)
>8	10 (10.00)	57 (57.00)	67 (33.50)

4.1 Personal profile of the respondents

The data presented in Table 1 revealed that, in university-wise data, large majority of the respondents from both PAU (72.00%) and GKU (62.00%) belonged to age group of 21–22 years. Overall, among the total respondents, large proportion of the respondents (67.00%) belonged to age group 21–22 years. With regard to caste, large proportion of the respondents from PAU belonged to the General category (74.00%), in total while higher representation of the OBC category was observed in GKU (41.00%). Overall, the data revealed that, more than half of the respondents (54.50%) belonged to the General category. Further, the distribution of respondents according to birth order showed that 47.00 per cent respondents were first born in PAU, while in GKU more than half (54.00%) of the respondents were second

born in their families. Overall, nearly half of the respondents (49.00%) were second born. Regarding residence, large proportion of the respondents from PAU (63.00%) and large majority from GKU (94.00%) were residing in hostels. Overall, it was found that large proportion of the respondents (78.50%) were hostellers. The data regarding OCPA revealed that large proportion of the respondents in PAU (72.00%) secured OCPA in the range of 7–8, followed by 18.00 per cent in 6–7 range whereas only 10.00 per cent obtained above eight. In contrast, more than half of the respondents in GKU (57.00%) secured OCPA above eight, followed by 40.00 per cent in 7–8 and only 3.00 per cent were in the 6–7 range of OCPA. Overall, among the total respondents, more than half of the respondents (56.00%) secured OCPA in the range of 7–8.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their level of occupational aspiration n=200

Level of occupational aspiration*	Public (PAU)	Private (GKU)	t-value
	f (%)	f (%)	
Higher education in India	(n ₁ =51)	(n ₂ =61)	1.37 ^{NS}
Low (5-8)	1 (1.96)	0 (0.00)	
Medium (9-12)	19 (37.25)	28 (45.90)	
High (13-15)	31 (60.78)	33 (54.10)	
Mean ± SD	6.43 ± 6.50	7.67 ± 6.30	
Higher education abroad	(n ₁ =35)	(n ₂ =35)	0.22 ^{NS}
Low (7-12)	3 (8.57)	0 (0.00)	
Medium (13-18)	21 (60.00)	14 (40.00)	
High (19-21)	11 (31.43)	21 (60.00)	
Mean ± SD	15.57 ± 4.83	15.26 ± 9.09	
Job in agriculture sector	(n ₁ =51)	(n ₂ =78)	0.77 ^{NS}
Low (6-10)	6 (11.76)	1 (1.28)	
Medium (11-15)	22 (43.14)	39 (50.00)	
High (16-18)	23 (45.10)	38 (48.72)	
Mean ± SD	14.67 ± 3.20	15.05 ± 2.43	
Job in non-agriculture sector	(n ₁ =24)	(n ₂ =32)	2.77**
Low (6-10)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	
Medium (11-15)	17 (65.38)	15 (46.88)	
High (16-18)	7 (26.92)	17 (53.14)	
Mean ± SD	14.63 ± 2.14	15.91 ± 1.30	
Own start-up	(n ₁ =33)	(n ₂ =26)	0.89 ^{NS}
Low (7-12)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	
Medium (13-18)	16 (48.48)	14 (53.85)	
High (19-21)	17 (51.52)	12 (46.15)	
Mean ± SD	14.42 ± 6.9	15.88 ± 5.38	
Take up family business (other than farming)	(n ₁ =5)	(n ₂ =12)	0.80 ^{NS}
Low (5-8)	0 (0.00)	2 (16.67)	
Medium (9-12)	2 (40.00)	1 (8.33)	
High (13-15)	3 (60.00)	9 (75.00)	
Mean ± SD	11.20 ± 5.85	12.75 ± 2.30	
Take up family farming	(n ₁ =12)	(n ₂ =30)	1.66 ^{NS}
Low (9-15)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	
Medium (16-21)	2 (16.67)	5 (16.67)	
High (22-27)	10 (83.33)	25 (83.33)	
Mean ± SD	24.67 ± 2.46	21.30 ± 6.78	
Preparation of competitive exams	(n ₁ =45)	(n ₂ =50)	0.67 ^{NS}
Low (5-8)	1 (2.22)	0 (0.00)	
Medium (9-12)	14 (31.11)	10 (20.00)	
High (13-15)	30 (66.67)	40 (80.00)	
Mean ± SD	13.02 ± 2.47	13.34 ± 2.10	

Mean score range (1-3), * significant at 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$) and NS = non-significant

*Multiple response

4.2 Level of occupational aspiration of the respondents

Level of occupational aspiration was determined with the help of the class interval which was obtained by subtracting the possible maximum and possible minimum score into low, medium and high level categories.

The data presented in Table 2 revealed that large proportion of the respondents from PAU (60.78%) and more than half of the respondents from GKU (54.10%) had high level of occupational aspirations for pursuing higher education in India, whereas only 1.96 per cent of the respondents from PAU had low level of occupational aspirations and none of the respondents from GKU fell under this category. Further, no significant difference was observed between respondents of PAU and GKU regarding aspirations for higher education in India. With regard to higher education abroad, large proportion of the respondents from PAU (60.00%) had medium level of occupational aspirations, whereas large proportion of the respondents from GKU (60.00%) had high

level of occupational aspirations. Comparatively fewer respondents from PAU (8.57%) had low level of occupational aspirations, while none of the respondents from GKU belonged to this category. No significant difference was observed between respondents of PAU and GKU regarding aspirations for higher education abroad. Regarding jobs in the agricultural sector, 45.10 percent of the respondents from PAU and 48.72 per cent respondents from GKU had high level of occupational aspirations, whereas comparatively fewer respondents from PAU (11.76%) and GKU (1.28%) had low level of occupational aspirations. No significant difference was observed between respondents of PAU and GKU regarding aspirations for jobs in the agricultural sector. With regard to jobs in the non-agricultural sector, large proportion of the respondents from PAU (65.38%) had medium level of occupational aspirations, whereas more than half of the respondents from GKU (53.14%) had high level of occupational aspirations.

None of the respondents from either university had low aspirations for job in non-agriculture sector. A significant difference was observed between respondents of PAU and GKU regarding aspirations for jobs in the non-agricultural sector. The findings regarding starting their own start-up revealed that more than half of the respondents from PAU (51.52%) had high level of occupational aspirations, whereas more than half of the respondents from GKU (53.85%) had medium level of occupational aspirations. None of the respondents from either university had low level of occupational aspirations for the same. Further, no significant difference was observed between respondents of PAU and GKU regarding aspirations for starting their own start-up. The findings regarding taking up family business revealed that a large proportion of the respondents from PAU (60.00%) and GKU (75.00%) had high level of occupational aspirations, whereas none of the respondents from PAU and only 16.67 per cent of the respondents from GKU had low level of occupational aspirations. No significant difference was observed between respondents of PAU and GKU regarding aspirations for taking up family business. The data regarding aspirations for taking up family farming revealed that majority of the respondents from both PAU (83.33%) and GKU (83.33%) had high level of occupational aspirations, whereas none of the respondents from either university had low level of occupational aspirations. Further, no significant difference was observed

between respondents of PAU and GKU regarding aspirations for taking up family farming. The data regarding preparation for competitive examinations revealed that a large proportion of the respondents from PAU (66.67%) and GKU (80.00%) had high level of occupational aspirations, whereas only 2.22 per cent of the respondents from PAU and none of the respondents from GKU had low level of occupational aspirations. Further, no significant difference was observed between respondents of PAU and GKU with respect to preparation for competitive examinations.

Table 3: Difference in means of occupational aspiration levels of respondents of public (PAU) and private (GKU) universities of Punjab

Occupational aspirations	Public (PAU)	Private (GKU)	t-value
Mean $\pm$ SD	14.33 $\pm$ 5.11	14.65 $\pm$ 3.82	-0.14 ^{NS}

4.3 Difference in means of occupational aspiration levels of respondents of public (PAU) and private (GKU) universities of Punjab

The data presented in Table 3 revealed that the respondents from public university (PAU) recorded a mean occupational aspiration score of 14.33 $\pm$ 5.11, whereas the mean score of respondents from private university (GKU) 14.65 $\pm$ 3.82. Further, the calculated t-value (-0.14) there is no significant difference between the level of occupational aspiration of respondents of Public and Private universities of Punjab.

Table 4: Relationship between the personal profile of respondent and their level of occupational aspiration n=200

Variable	r-values							
	HEI	HEA	JIA	JINA	OS	TFB	TFF	PCE
Age	0.004 ^{NS}	0.11 ^{NS}	0.10 ^{NS}	0.16 [*]	-0.30 ^{**}	0.07 ^{NS}	-0.11 ^{NS}	0.11 ^{NS}
Birth order	-0.80 ^{**}	-0.005 ^{NS}	0.09 ^{NS}	-0.10 ^{NS}	-0.09 ^{NS}	-0.49 ^{**}	0.20 ^{**}	-0.001 ^{NS}
Year of degree	0.07 ^{NS}	-0.12 ^{NS}	0.83 ^{**}	0.13 ^{NS}	-0.18 [*]	-0.17 [*]	-0.001 ^{NS}	-0.03 ^{NS}
OCPA	0.12 ^{NS}	-0.07 ^{NS}	-0.004 ^{NS}	0.19 ^{**}	0.06 ^{NS}	0.58 ^{**}	0.53 ^{**}	-0.11 ^{NS}
Family Income	-0.07 ^{NS}	0.05 ^{NS}	-0.15 [*]	-0.05 ^{NS}	-0.10 ^{NS}	-0.29 ^{**}	0.20 ^{**}	-0.15 [*]

**Correlation significant at 1% level of significance ($p < 0.01$), * Significant at 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$) and NS= not significant (2-tailed)

4.4 Relationship between the personal profile of respondent and their level of occupational aspirations

The results presented in Table 4 revealed that age had a statistically significant positive correlation with job in non-agriculture sector ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$) and a significant negative correlation with starting own start-up ($r = -0.30$, $p < 0.01$). Birth order showed a significant highly negative correlation with higher education in India ($r = -0.80$, $p < 0.01$) and family business ($r = -0.49$, $p < 0.01$), whereas a significant positive correlation was observed with family farming ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$). Year of degree had a statistically significant positive correlation with job in agriculture sector

($r = 0.83$, $p < 0.01$), whereas significant negative correlations were observed with starting own start-up ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.05$) and family business ($r = -0.17$, $p < 0.05$). OCPA had a statistically significant positive correlation with non-agriculture jobs ($r = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$), family business ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$) and family farming ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.01$). Family income had a significant negative correlation with agricultural jobs ($r = -0.15$, $p < 0.05$), family business ($r = -0.29$, $p < 0.01$) and preparation for competitive examinations ($r = -0.15$, $p < 0.05$), whereas a significant positive correlation was observed with family farming ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 5: Association between profile of respondents and their level of occupational aspiration n=200

Variable	χ^2 -value							
	HEI	HEA	JIA	JINA	OS	TFB	TFF	PCE
Caste	42.07 ^{**}	35.79 ^{**}	52.83 ^{**}	25.88 ^{**}	37.10 ^{**}	28.85 ^{**}	44.62 ^{**}	29.56 ^{**}
Gender	15.00 ^{**}	11.42 ^{**}	12.41 ^{**}	7.42 ^{**}	10.67 ^{**}	5.64 [*]	10.53 ^{**}	8.73 ^{**}
Residence	4.69 [*]	6.77 ^{**}	3.60 ^{NS}	6.76 ^{**}	17.67 ^{**}	4.73 [*]	16.24 ^{**}	16.06 ^{**}
Family type	8.93 ^{**}	8.16 ^{**}	19.39 ^{**}	11.37 ^{**}	16.31 ^{**}	8.61 ^{**}	15.52 ^{**}	12.92 ^{**}

**Correlation significant at 1% level of significance ($p < 0.01$),

* Significant at 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$) and NS= not significant (2-tailed)

4.5 Association between profile of respondents and their level of occupational aspiration

The findings presented in Table 5 revealed that caste had a statistically significant association with all dimensions of occupational aspirations, namely higher education in India ($\chi^2 = 42.07$, $p < 0.01$), higher education abroad ($\chi^2 = 35.79$, $p < 0.01$), job in agriculture sector ($\chi^2 = 52.83$, $p < 0.01$), job in non-agriculture sector ($\chi^2 = 25.88$, $p < 0.01$), own start-up ($\chi^2 = 37.10$, $p < 0.01$), family business ($\chi^2 = 28.85$, $p < 0.01$), family farming ($\chi^2 = 44.62$, $p < 0.01$) and preparation for competitive examinations ($\chi^2 = 29.56$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, gender also exhibited a similar trend, where statistically significant association was observed in all dimensions of occupational aspirations except family business, which showed a significant association. Residence type had a significant association with higher education in India ($\chi^2 = 4.69$, $p < 0.05$), higher education abroad ($\chi^2 = 6.77$, $p < 0.01$), job in non-agriculture sector ($\chi^2 = 6.76$, $p < 0.01$), own start-up ($\chi^2 = 17.67$, $p < 0.01$), family business ($\chi^2 = 4.73$, $p < 0.05$), family farming ($\chi^2 = 16.24$, $p < 0.01$) and preparation for competitive examinations ($\chi^2 = 16.06$, $p < 0.01$). Likewise, family type also exhibited statistically significant association with all dimensions of occupational aspirations

5. Discussion

The findings of the study regarding personal profile of the respondents revealed that majority fall under the age group of 21-22 years. Public university i.e. PAU has a higher representation of General and SC category. The findings are in line with Rai (2016)^[11] and Mohapatra (2025)^[7]. On the other hand, in private university i.e. GKU, the proportion of OBC students were relatively higher, as majority of the students were from outside of Punjab in GKU such as from Kerala, Telangana and several southern states. Similar patterns were observed by Kumar (2017)^[6] and Arundhathi (2022)^[1]. The study revealed that majority of respondents from both PAU and GKU were residing in hostels. These findings are in consistent with finding of Rai (2016)^[11] and Nath (2022)^[8]. A majority of respondents preferred family farming due to inherited land resources and self-employment opportunities, highlighting the continued importance of agriculture for rural livelihoods as family influence the career decision. Similar findings were reported by Bora and Barman (2022)^[3]. Further respondents were aspired for preparation of competitive examinations after the completion of their graduation due to job security and stable income. Similar findings were reported by VinodKumar and Sharma (2021)^[14].

6. Conclusion

The present study examined the level of occupational aspirations of undergraduate agriculture students in public and private universities of Punjab offering B.Sc. (Hons.) Agriculture 4 year program affiliated by ICAR. The findings revealed that a majority of the respondents showed high aspirations towards taking up family farming and preparing for competitive examinations. Students also expressed interest in jobs in non-agriculture sector and taking family business reflecting changing career preferences among agriculture graduates. The study further revealed that socio-personal and academic variables such as caste, gender, family type, residence type, age, birth order, year of degree, OCPA and family income significantly influenced the level

of occupational aspiration of the respondents. Therefore, it is suggested that universities should provide adequate field exposure, practical training and experiential learning opportunities to enhance students' practical knowledge and confidence. It is also suggested that coaching facilities and guidance for competitive examinations should also be provided by all the agriculture university as it improve students' aspiration levels, career planning and employment opportunities.

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