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Career aspirations of agricultural diploma students in Maharashtra

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Abstract

Understanding the career aspirations of diploma agriculture students is essential to align training programs with employment opportunities and sectoral requirements. The present study examined career aspirations of diploma agriculture students under State Agricultural Universities of Maharashtra using an ex-post-facto research design. A sample of 123 students was surveyed using a structured questionnaire based on the Career Aspiration Scale developed by O'Brien (1996). Aspirations were assessed across educational, achievement, and leadership dimensions. Findings revealed strong educational motivation, with most students aspiring for higher studies, continuous training, and skill upgradation. Achievement motivation was comparatively stronger, as students expressed a desire for excellence, recognition, and career advancement. Leadership aspirations were also evident, though relatively moderate. Career preference analysis showed a dominant inclination towards State Department of Agriculture services, followed by agribusiness and input dealership. The study highlights the importance of targeted career guidance and leadership development programs to support students' professional growth in the agricultural sector.

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

Introduction

Career aspirations form a cornerstone of students' educational engagement, occupational choices, and long-term professional trajectories. They shape perceptions of opportunities, goal-setting, and investments in skill development and career planning (Quaglia, 1989; Patton & Creed, 2007)^[11, 10]. Diploma-level agriculture education occupies a distinct niche in the agricultural training ecosystem. Unlike undergraduate or postgraduate programs, these courses emphasize practical skills to equip students for grassroots roles such as field assistants, extension facilitators, input dealers, progressive farmers, or agripreneurs. Most diploma students hail from rural backgrounds, with aspirations molded by socioeconomic factors, family pressures, job security, and institutional exposures (Dhakre, 2014; Gaikwad, 2011)^[3, 4]. Empirical observations reveal students often favor stable income and security, though some align pursuits with personal passions and visions (McGlynn, 2007)^[8].

O'Brien (1996)^[9] frames career aspiration as a multidimensional construct encompassing educational, achievement, and leadership dimensions. Educational aspirations denote desires for advanced learning and lifelong skill enhancement. Achievement aspirations reflect drives

for professional excellence, recognition, and impact. Leadership aspirations signal readiness to lead, manage teams, and steer organizational or sectoral change. This framework has proven effective in studies of agricultural students (Gregor & O'Brien, 2016; Arunachalam *et al*, 2020)^[5, 9, 2]. Among diploma and undergraduate cohorts, educational aspirations skew moderate, prioritizing short-term training and public-sector roles over advanced degrees (Jyothi, 2012; Kavitha, 2018)^[6, 7]. These trends underscore the necessity of isolating diploma students' aspirations from broader graduate data.

Although diploma agriculture programs are vital, few studies have probed their students' career aspirations through validated instruments. Such insights are crucial for curriculum design, counseling, and policies bolstering agricultural talent pipelines. Accordingly, this study investigates diploma agriculture students' career aspirations across O'Brien's (1996)^[9] educational, achievement, and leadership domains, offering evidence-based guidance for educators, administrators, and policymakers.

Objective

To study the career aspirations of diploma agricultural students

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 diploma 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) [9]. 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 123 diploma 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.

Garrett’s method of ranking was used in order to measure the career preferences for the students.

$$\text{Per cent position} = \frac{100 \times (Rij - 0.50)}{Nj}$$

Where,

Rij = Rank given for the i^{th} variable by j^{th} respondents

Nj = Number of variables ranked by j^{th} respondents

Results

The career aspirations 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 diploma 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
Educational aspirations						
1	“I plan to reach the highest level of education in my field”.	2 (1.63)	2 (1.63)	4 (3.25)	17 (13.82)	98 (79.67)
2	“I will pursue additional training in my occupational area of interest”.	0 (0.00)	3 (2.44)	1 (0.81)	21 (17.07)	98 (79.67)
3	“I will always be knowledgeable about recent advances in my field”.	0 (0.00)	2 (1.63)	2 (1.63)	23 (18.70)	96 (78.05)
4	“I know I will work to remain current regarding knowledge in my field”.	1 (0.81)	1 (0.81)	3 (2.44)	24 (19.51)	94 (76.42)
5	“I will attend conferences annually to advance my knowledge”.	1 (0.81)	3 (2.44)	3 (2.44)	23 (18.70)	93 (75.61)
6	“Even if not required, I would take continuing education courses to become more knowledgeable”.	0 (0.00)	3 (2.44)	4 (3.25)	29 (23.58)	87 (70.73)
7	“I would pursue an advanced education program to gain specialised knowledge in my field”.	1 (0.81)	2 (1.63)	6 (4.88)	35 (28.46)	79 (64.23)
8	“Every year, I will prioritize involvement in continuing education to advance my career”.	0 (0.00)	2 (1.63)	6 (4.88)	42 (34.15)	73 (59.35)
Achievement aspirations						
1	“I want to be among the very best in my field”.	0 (0.00)	1 (0.81)	1 (0.81)	33 (26.83)	88 (71.54)
2	“I want my work to have a lasting impact on my field”.	0 (0.00)	1 (0.81)	3 (2.44)	47 (38.21)	72 (58.54)
3	“I aspire to have my contributions at work recognized by my employer”.	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.81)	49 (39.84)	73 (59.35)
4	“Being outstanding at what I do at work is very important to me”.	1 (0.81)	1 (0.81)	2 (1.63)	52 (42.28)	67 (54.47)
5	“I know that I will be recognized for my accomplishments in my field”.	0 (0.00)	2 (1.63)	4 (3.25)	49 (39.84)	68 (55.28)
6	“Achieving in my career is not at all important to me”.	2 (1.63)	3 (2.44)	4 (3.25)	14 (11.38)	100 (81.30)
7	“I plan to obtain many promotions in my organization or business”.	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	5 (4.07)	51 (41.46)	67 (54.47)
8	“Being one of the best in my field is not important to me”.	4 (3.25)	4 (3.25)	6 (4.88)	13 (10.57)	96 (78.05)

C	Leadership aspirations	0 (0.00)	3 (2.44)	2 (1.63)	8 (6.50)	110 (89.43)
1	“I hope to become a leader in my career field”.	0 (0.00)	3 (2.44)	2 (1.63)	8 (6.50)	110 (89.43)
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”.	2 (1.63)	66 (53.66)	50 (40.65)	2 (1.63)	3 (2.44)
3	“Becoming a leader in my job is not at all important to me”.	2 (1.63)	5 (4.07)	5 (4.07)	9 (7.32)	102 (82.93)
4	“When I am established in my career, I would like to manage other employees”.	1 (0.81)	3 (2.44)	4 (3.25)	29 (23.58)	86 (69.92)
5	“I want to have responsibility for the future direction of my organization or business”.	0 (0.00)	2 (1.63)	1 (0.81)	43 (34.96)	77 (62.60)
6	“Attaining leadership status in my career is not that important to me”.	4 (3.25)	3 (2.44)	6 (4.88)	10 (8.13)	100 (81.30)
7	“I hope to move up to a leadership position in my organization or business”.	0 (0.00)	3 (2.44)	5 (4.07)	62 (50.41)	53 (43.09)
8	“I plan to rise to the top leadership position of my organization or business”.	1 (0.81)	1 (0.81)	4 (3.25)	63 (51.22)	53 (43.09)

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

A. Educational Aspirations

The majority of students demonstrated high educational ambitions. Nearly 79.67 per cent planned to achieve the highest level of education in their field and the same proportion pursued additional training relevant to their career interests. A considerable 78.05 per cent consistently kept themselves updated with recent developments in their area of study, while 76.42 per cent made efforts to stay current in their profession. About 75.61 per cent attended conferences each year to enhance their knowledge base. Even when not compulsory, 70.73 per cent chose to participate in continuing education courses for deeper understanding. Additionally, 64.23 per cent explored advanced programs to gain specialized expertise and 59.35 per cent prioritized continuing education annually to further their professional development.

B. Achievement Aspirations

Students also exhibited strong aspirations for achievement in their careers. Around 71.54 per cent hoped to be among the best in their field, while 58.54 per cent aimed to leave a lasting impact on their profession. Recognition was equally valued, with 59.35 per cent desiring employer acknowledgment for their contributions and 55.28 per cent

believing they would be recognized for their accomplishments. Over half, 54.47 per cent, considered outstanding performance at work very important and the same percentage aspired to receive several promotions during their careers. A significant 81.30 per cent rejected the notion that career success was unimportant, affirming the value they attached to achievement. Interestingly, although some responses suggested mixed views, 78.05 per cent expressed a strong desire to excel in their field.

C. Leadership Aspirations

Leadership goals were also prominent among the students. A large majority, 89.43 per cent, aspired to become leaders in their respective areas. Despite this, 53.66 per cent admitted that initially, they had not focused on securing promotional leadership roles, though 40.65 per cent showed openness to such opportunities. Still, 82.93 per cent disagreed with the idea that becoming a leader was unimportant, demonstrating their keen interest in leadership. Approximately 69.92 per cent expressed a desire to manage employees as they gained experience, while 62.60 per cent wished to take responsibility for guiding the future direction of their organizations. Similarly, 81.30 per cent rejected the belief that achieving leadership status was insignificant. More than half, 50.41 per cent, aspired to advance into leadership positions and 43.09 per cent specifically aimed for top leadership roles within their profession.

Table 2: Distribution of diploma agriculture students according to their career preferences

Sr.no	Career options	Diploma (n=123)	
		Percentage rank	Rank
1	State Department of Agriculture/Maharashtra Agriculture services	63.43	I
2	Agri-entrepreneurship/ Agribusiness	62.76	II
3	Agri Input dealership	62.21	III
4	Farm journalism	62.11	IV
5	Corporate sector	61.81	V
6	Co-operative sector	61.42	VI
7	Farming/ Agriculture	60.59	VII
8	Business	59.98	VIII
9	Entrepreneurship	57.78	IX
10	Government undertakings	56.31	X
11	Job in Non- Government Organizations	53.47	XI

The findings presented in Table 2 illustrate the distribution of diploma agriculture students based on their career

preferences. The data clearly indicate that the majority of students demonstrated a strong inclination toward

employment in the State Department of Agriculture or Maharashtra Agriculture Services, which attained the highest preference ranking (63.43 per cent). This dominant choice reflects the perception among students that government service offers a secure and prestigious career pathway, characterized by job stability, societal recognition, and opportunities for professional advancement.

Conclusion

The study concludes that diploma agriculture students exhibit medium to high levels of career aspiration, with stronger achievement aspirations compared to educational and leadership aspirations. Most students aspire for stable employment, particularly in government and allied agricultural sectors, while fewer students show interest in leadership or higher academic pursuits.

The findings highlight the need for career counseling, entrepreneurship development programs, and leadership training tailored specifically for diploma agriculture students. Strengthening institutional support and exposure to diverse career opportunities can help enhance students' confidence and aspiration levels, enabling them to contribute effectively to agricultural development.

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