

## **Employers' Placement Expectations in Agricultural Graduates of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University**

**Sridevi Krishnaveni T.R.<sup>1\*</sup> and R. Arunachalam<sup>2</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT**

The study was designed to identify the factors fixed to be the parameter by the job providers during placements of agricultural graduates. Twelve parameters were identified for understanding the preference during recruitment of agricultural undergraduates and they were found to fall under dimensions like education, personality and socio economic traits. 34 active job providers in the field of agriculture were identified. A structured mailed questionnaire was prepared and used for the data collection. Results showed that the preferential behavior of job providers was highly diversified based on the nature of job and the job requirement. It was found that the degree of expectation as a whole was found to be low to medium to support underprivileged and struggling students. The job providers were not very rigid or over demanding in selecting an eligible candidate. The preference was given mostly to knowledge, skill and personality rather to socio, economic status.

**Keywords:** Agricultural undergraduates, Employer preference, Employer's expectations, Job provider's requirement, TNAU

### **INTRODUCTION**

Irrespective of the technological growth in this modern era, agriculture is one sector that still requires man power while it is replaced with machines and technologies in many other sectors. Agriculture is a potential occupation that has the capacity to absorb immense number of graduates. Meanwhile graduate employment has been a global concern for all higher education sectors (Mirakzadeh and Ghiasy, 2011). The student's enrollment in agricultural universities is found to be in increasing trends in the recent years. The statistical ratio of student's enrollment in agricultural universities versus other higher education is found to be across several developing countries like Iran, Ghana etc. However, there is a notable prevalence of unemployment among the agricultural graduates. The reasons for the unemployment status has

been reported to be insufficient recruitment in public sectors, unfavorable work environment in public sector and lack of harmony between university education and agricultural profession (Mirakzadeh and Ghiasy, 2011). The balance between employment and unemployment status must be kept minimal to maintain harmony and peace in the society (Qu, 2009; Ahmadpour, 2007). Employment status is often fixed to be a parameter of success of a person depicting their knowledge, skill, attitude, achievements and talent (Yorke and Knight, 2003). Agriculture being a largest occupation lends more job opportunities through secondary and tertiary sectors like processing or industrial sectors and sectors than through the primary sector. The rapid rise in population and the increasing students' enrollment into the higher educational institutes ultimately supplies a large number of agricultural graduates in the labour market, while the

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<sup>1</sup>Teaching Assistant, Institute of Agriculture, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Trichy, Kumulur-621712, Tamil Nadu

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Social Sciences, AC&RI, Vazhavachanur Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Thiruvannamalai-606753, Tamil Nadu

\*Corresponding author email id: srideviens@gmail.com

number of firms to absorb the graduates is increasing in a comparatively declining rate. Thus a vacuum has been created due to a strong internal competition. Most importantly the employer's expectations are highly diverse and situation oriented as the recruitment is influenced by several factors. Many organizations consider reputation of the educational institution (Anyanwu, 2000; Ahmadpour, 2007), proficiency in foreign language (Anonymous, 2007), computer literacy and IT skills (Mirzaei *et al.*, 2007), etc. Students' demographic and socio-economic status of life also plays an important role in recruitment process (Hemmati *et al.*, 2007). According to Mirakzadeh and Ghiasy (2011), it is found that the candidates with previous knowledge, skill and experience in the field of agriculture, better communication skills and moderate level of socio-economic status are more preferred by the job providers. The reason for taking up a study in the process of selection and recruitment are mismatch between the employer's needs and the qualification of the candidate, lack of exposure about the labour market, lack of career guidance, etc. (Anonymous, 2007). Thus attempt was made to explore the major parameters considered by the employers during placement of an agriculture graduate and to understand the employer's expectations, demands and needs on the candidates to be selected for their firm.

### METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the objectives of the study, the main campus of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore was purposively selected. The present study is aimed to come out with better strategies to improve the employment opportunities of the selected agricultural education system. The most related stakeholders here are the job providers. The university is regularly arranging job fairs every year and hence, a good percentage of the students are getting their placements even before completing their degree programme. Considering this fact a complete list of active job providers was obtained from the placement cell functioning under the Directorate of Students Welfare of this university. Further, other promising job providers were also identified through elaborate discussion with the senior scientists, experts, friends and through leading newspapers and employment magazines. Thus, finally a list of 122 active job providers

was identified. A semi-structured questionnaire seeking the required information, was sent to all identified job providers through e-mail. Only 34 job providers furnished the information after repeated reminders, which have been considered for analysis. Exploratory research design was employed for this study. Every job provider respondents were asked to record their preference against twelve dimensions like gender, campus studied, OGPA, language knowledge, rural-urban background of the expected employee, socio-economic status, work experience, material possession, physical appearance, relocating preference, communication & interpersonal relationship and their activity in extra-curricular activity. These items were identified and developed based on the previous studies and discussion with promising job providers, senior scientists, educationalists, placement officers, university administrators and extensionists. Item wise percentage analysis was done for the meaningful interpretation of the results.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The recorded preferences of the selected job providers against ten dimensions like gender, campus studied, OGPA, language proficiency, rural-urban background of the employee, socio-economic status, work experience, material possession, physical appearance and their involvement in extra-curricular activities are given in Table 1, which depicts that half of the respondents (50.00%) had no specific preference towards the campus in which the students have completed their courses. Almost an equal proportion of the respondents (47.06%) have reported in favor of students educated at government or constituent campuses. Only a trifling percentage of respondents (02.94%) expressed their willingness to recruit the students completed at private or affiliated campuses of TNAU.

About two fourth of the respondents (47.10%) pointed out that they always give prime importance for the Overall Grade Point Average (OGPA) secured by the graduates, followed by about two fifth (38.20%) gave occasional importance. Little more than ten percent of the respondents (14.70%) stated that they normally don't give importance for the OGPA. With regard to the rural-urban background of the agricultural graduates, majority

**Table 1: Employers Placement Expectations on Agricultural Graduates of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (n = 34)**

S.No.	Preference dimensions	Categories	Number	Percentage
1.	Preference towards campus	No preference	17	50.00
		Govt./ constituent campus	16	47.06
		Private/ affiliated campus	01	02.94
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>
2.	Weightage given to academic OGPA	Always	16	47.10
		Sometimes	13	38.20
		Never	05	14.70
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>
3.	Preference given to rural- urban background	No preference	19	55.88
		Rural	15	44.12
		Urban	00	00.00
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>
4.	Preference given to gender	No preference	19	55.88
		Male	14	41.18
		Female	01	02.94
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>
5.	Preference given to work experience	Fresher	15	44.12
		1 yr	03	08.81
		2 yrs	09	26.47
		3 yrs	05	14.70
		>3 yrs	02	05.90
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>
6.	Preference based on material possession	No preference	22	64.71
		Motor cycle	07	20.58
		Both motor cycle and laptop	05	14.71
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>
7.	Level of importance given for physical appearance	Lesser importance	08	23.53
		Medium importance	20	58.82
		Higher importance	06	17.65
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>
8.	Degree of importance given for socio-economic status	No preference	20	58.82
		Low	09	26.47
		Medium	04	11.77
		High	01	02.94
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>
9.	Preference given for language	English	03	08.82
		Local language	01	02.94
		Both	30	88.24
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 1 contd...*

S.No.	Preference dimensions	Categories	Number	Percentage
10.	Degree of importance given for extracurricular activities	Always	06	17.65
		Sometimes	22	64.70
		Never	06	17.65
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>
11.	Relocating preference	No preference	01	02.94
		Native to job location	03	08.82
		Non- native candidate willing to relocate	30	88.24
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>
12.	Preference based on communication and interpersonal skills	Yes	26	76.47
		No	08	23.53
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>

of the respondents (55.88%) stated that they normally don't give preferences to their rural-urban background. Slightly greater than two fifth of the respondents (44.12%) preferred graduates with rural background. Specific preference towards urban based graduates was not reported. About 56 per cent of the respondents stressed that they don't have any gender bias in recruitment. About forty percentage of the respondents (41.18%) preferred male graduates for their organizations, whereas, only 02.94 per cent of the respondents preferred women candidates over men for their organization.

Less than fifty percent of the respondents expressed that they have no bias between fresher and experienced person. Slightly greater than one fourth of the respondents (26.47%) emphasized their preference towards 2 years of work experience for recruitment, followed by three years (14.70%), one year (08.81%) and more than three years (05.90%) of working experience. Majority of the respondents (64.71%) pointed out that they don't have any preference with respect to the material possession of the graduates. About one fifth of the respondents (20.58%) preferred the applicants with minimum of a motor cycle. About fifteen percentage of the respondents (14.71%) reported that they want their employees to be possessed with a motor cycle and a laptop. Almost sixty percentage of the respondents were found to give moderate importance for the physical appearance of the candidates. Little less than one fourth of the respondents (23.53%) stated that they were not concerned about the

physical appearance, followed by 17.65 per cent with more concern towards physical appearance. Their preference towards physical appearance included; neat dressing habit, well groomed, enthusiastic and very active personality. Similarly, 58.82 per cent of the respondents did not have any preferences towards the socio-economic status of the candidates, whereas, 26.47 per cent of the respondents preferred graduates from lower socio-economic status, followed by medium (11.77%) and higher levels (02.94%) of socio-economic status.

Language proficiency with respect to both 'English' and local language was preferred by most of the respondents (88.24%). Only 8.82 per cent of the respondents stated that proficiency with 'English' alone is enough. Only a meager percentage (02.94%) preferred candidates with proficiency in local language alone. Majority of the respondents (64.70%) reported that they give importance for the extra-curricular performance occasionally. Only 17.65 per cent expressed that they ever considered extra-curricular performances. The same percentage of the respondents reported that they never considered this. Majority of the respondents (88.24%) preferred candidate willing to relocate themselves and with good communication and interpersonal skills (76.47%).

Based on the above findings it can be interpreted that majority of the job providers did not have any special preference towards the social attributes, except for academic performance. Government / constituent

campuses were preferred over affiliated / private campuses may be due to merit based admission process adopted by TNAU. Moreover, well-established laboratories and experience rich teachers were available in TNAU. Organizations recruiting graduates for research and extension require strong academic background. Whereas organizations like NGOs, finance or production and processing industries gave more importance to soft skills and interpersonal skills than academic merits. Extension and rural development activities, finance approval and marketing segments require maximum level of field work, hence, those job providers expressed their preferences towards male candidates and possession of a motor cycle. Because of digitalization and advancement with ICT considerable proportion of the respondents emphasized the candidates to have laptops. Job providers preferred to have experienced candidates to reduce their cost of investment and time involved in manpower training. They also had a perception that the rural background and the lower socio-economic status could possibly be oriented towards income and economic gains and hence, they may not quit their jobs so early and they preferred to recruit these candidates. As majority of the roles and responsibilities played by the agricultural graduates relate to bridge the gap between localities and the resources, it was highly preferred to possess proficiency in both official language (English) and local language (Tamil). As the extra- curricular activities have the potential to build creativity, soft skills and interpersonal skills, certain level of importance was also allotted. It could also be observed that majority of the respondents preferred graduates with science degree offered at TNAU particularly B.Sc. (Ag.). A small percentage of the respondents (11.80%) preferred students trained in either science or technical courses offered by TNAU. The results were found to be contradictory with the views expressed by Petersen *et al.* (2008) as the majority of organizational authority did not express a demographic preference as per their review. The findings disproves the results quoted by Kuhn *et al.* (2009) where results were based on the review of ads from a Chinese internet job board as a vast majority of the advertisements seek work expertise of one to three years, one in ten ads expressed gender preference and one in three ads emphasize physical attractiveness. The

study also derives support from the results of Ouraich *et al.* (2017), who explained that being male and higher academic performance leverage the probability of employment. He also reported about the desire of the job providers to hire university graduates over non- university campus students. As such the job providers were not very rigid or over demanding in selecting an eligible candidate. The preference was given mostly to knowledge, skill and personality rather to socio, economic status.

## CONCLUSION

The job providers felt that the candidates would be inducted to training and would be molded as per the requirement of the job. Thus majority of the job providers gave medium level of importance to the campus of education or the overall grade points secured by the graduates. Majority of the job providers feels that demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the graduates as less important in spite of their attitude and psychological traits. The students of this modern and digital era expect jobs to be more sophisticated and requires less physical labour, being an agricultural graduate and an entry level employee the employers expect them to perform more field oriented tasks but the societal exposure of the graduates teaches them to expect more techie work than field related works. The gender bias was not a problem with the employers, however the female agricultural graduates themselves hesitate to join jobs with private companies, banks or MNCs, as they are expected to travel a lot for either marketing or sales or farm visit purposes. The majority of the female graduates selected through campus or placement drives even decline to join because of peer and family decisions. This ultimately pushes the job providers to be more picky and biased in employee selection. Opting for field oriented, skill based, service oriented and labour intensive type education, the graduates should be prepared to face the society and field. Proper counseling, guidance and motivations should be given to the graduates during their educational phase at the college to meet out the demand of qualified agricultural graduates in the job market.

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