

Environmental features affecting the students' occupational success in agriculture vocational education centers of Iran

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ABSTRACT: The main purpose of this study is to identify environmental features affecting the students' occupational success in Iranian agriculture vocational education centers. The statistical population was 510 higher educated of agriculture vocational centers in central region of Iran and 145 people were selected through stratified sampling. The results showed that 61.4% of studied graduates entered by free quota in agriculture vocational education centers and the remained graduates entered by employment quota. Based on other results, there was positive and significant relationship between some of the environmental features with occupational success of graduates.

Keywords: Agriculture education, environmental features, Vocational education, Occupational success, Iran.

INTRODUCTION

Today due to issue of employment, attentions have focused on higher education in agriculture. However worthy efforts of higher agricultural education centers and universities to train specialized graduates should not be ignored, but focus on learning theoretical knowledge instead of vocational training, lack of attention to foster creativity and innovative ability of students, non-suitability of courses content with needs of job market, lack of practical courses, and lack of experienced and skillful teachers to teach practical courses are the main problems of this system. The situation shows the need to equip students at all levels in the education system with personal entrepreneurial capacities to deal with greater levels of uncertainty and complexity in both their work and personal life (Ravasi and Turati, 2005; Gibb, 2007). It cannot be achieved except with a focus on vocational education.

Vocational education is part of a social and economic context that evolves constantly in response to the major changes that have affected society in recent decades. The school system, in general, and the vocational education sector in particular have had to adapt to these changes, and teaching approaches have also been transformed. As a result, the content and process of vocational education teacher training programs must be modified to adapt to the changes that have occurred in society as a whole (MEQ, 2002).

Vocational education is important as it enriches a person for life and it provides the competences which are necessary in a democratic society. Societal and economic development depends on the strength of vocational education as it provides access to skills and entry routes into the labor market. For under-privileged and marginalized groups in particular, it can be an important route towards a better life (EI, 2009).

In several occupations employers want closer cooperation with vocational education and training providers so that they can influence the content of training to ensure that it is up to date and meets their needs. In some countries the mix of theory and practice in the content of training should be reviewed to ensure that it is more balanced in both vocational and non-vocational courses (Cedefop, 2012).

Wolf, (2011) does acknowledge that vocational education today includes, as it always has, courses and programs which teach important and valuable skills to a very high standard. It offers a direct route into higher education which has been followed by hundreds of thousands of young people; and prestigious apprenticeships which are massively over-subscribed.

Vocational education is offered at different levels of educational systems and in a variety of educational institutions. Chappel, (2003) makes this very clear, noting that in Australia VET (Vocational Education and Training) is provided by:

- educational institutions including schools, TAFE (Technical and Further Education) colleges, Adult and Community Education (ACE) and universities;
- public, private and non-government providers of education and training;
- industry, in-house and organization-specific training; and
- small business and private training consultants.

In the other hand, scholars believe that agriculture vocational education system is a kind of education planning by skillful instructors and specialists to train student interested in agricultural affairs (Mack Bannatyne and hall, 2003). In other research, Lindley, (1996) has noted that agriculture vocational educations could have an important role in empowerment of farmers, researchers, extension personnel, and all people whose occupations are related with agriculture and also distributors of agricultural products. Landkinen, (2000) has emphasized in his research that vocational training is considered as a investment in qualitative improvement of labor force, because this kind of education cause to create knowledge and skill in process of production.

Several issues have already been raised about the connection between vocational education and the labor market, a better understanding of this link remains necessary. In different countries, the transition from school to work is organized in different ways and related to different modes of production (EI, 2009).

Regarding to importance of students' occupational success, the role of agriculture vocational education system in training efficient students and the needs of agriculture sector to skillful and capable graduates, it was necessary to study the factors could be effective in students' occupational success. According to some studies (James and Holmes, 2012; Nokelainen et al., 2012; Dolphin and Lanning, 2011), a number of these factors are about learning environment and work environment. Therefore, environmental features should be investigated for a better understanding of the factors influencing occupational success. So the main goal of this study is to identify environmental features affecting the students' occupational success in agriculture vocational higher education centers of Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The results showed that 61.4% of studied graduates entered by free quota in agriculture vocational education centers and the remained graduates entered by employment quota. The average of their age was 28 years and its standard deviation was 9.34 which is indicative of high dispersal of interviewees age. Among graduates of free quota 78.8 percent were male and among graduates of employment quota 84 percent were male. Based on the findings, more than half of graduates are employed meanwhile 63.74 percent of free quota graduates are unemployed. Also, among total 88 occupied graduates more than half (57.14%) are working in public sector and only 6 persons (7.8%) are self-employed. In this study, students also were asked to report their work experience, interest in continuing education, Willingness to self-employment, and occupational success (table 1 and 2).

Table 1. Demographic profile and personal characteristics of studied graduates

Variables	Percent of level				
	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
Interest in continuing education	8.28	5.52	26.21	31.03	28.96
Willingness to self-employment	5.52	8.96	19.31	24.14	42.07
Occupational success	10.34	24.83	29.56	26.90	8.28

Table 2. Distribution of studied graduates based on their work experience

Work experience	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Unemployed	57	39.31	---	---
5 years or less	35	24.14	39.77	39.77
6 – 10 years	11	7.59	12.50	52.27
11 – 15 years	12	8.28	13.64	65.91
16 – 20 years	20	13.79	22.73	88.64
21 years or more	10	6.90	11.36	100
Total	145	100	100	---

Mean=11.08 SD=8.14

According to the research goal, environmental features were ranked based of their impact on students' occupational success. The results showed that the highest ranks refer to Attitudes towards entrepreneurship (CV=24.25), Tendency to teamwork (CV=27.57), and Using innovative teaching methods (CV=32.52); and the lowest rank was for ability to political stability (CV=45.79), and participation in political structure (CV=51.79). The ranking of the environmental features from view of graduates were mentioned in table 3.

Table 3. Ranking of environmental features affecting the students' occupational success

Environmental features	Mean	SD	CV	Rank
Attitudes towards entrepreneurship	7.63	1.85	24.25	1
Tendency to teamwork	7.58	2.09	27.57	2
Using innovative teaching methods	7.01	2.28	32.52	3
Economic downturn	6.55	2.16	32.98	4
Computer and Internet access	7.00	2.35	33.57	5
Utilization of banking facilities	6.89	2.35	34.11	6
The unemployment rate	6.89	2.44	35.41	7
Instability and rapid change in rules	6.80	2.58	37.94	8
Social Security	6.82	2.60	38.12	9
Access to financial information	6.51	2.50	38.40	10
Entrepreneurial training ground	6.53	2.55	39.05	11
Ecological factors (air, water, soil)	6.41	2.53	39.47	12
Access to technology and technical knowledge	6.65	2.72	40.90	13
Economic and Tax Laws	6.29	2.59	41.18	14
Increasing competition in the market	6.75	2.81	41.63	15
Job Security	6.73	2.85	42.35	16
Political stability	6.42	2.94	45.79	17
Participation in political structure	5.58	2.89	51.79	18

In order to test the correlation between environmental features and graduates' occupational success, spearman correlation test was used. The results of correlation analysis are shown in the table 4. As the table shows only some of environmental features such as "attitudes towards entrepreneurship, tendency to teamwork, economic downturn, and so on" have positive and significant relationship with occupational success of graduates.

Table 4. Relationship between environmental features and graduates' occupational success

Environmental features	r	Sig.
Attitudes towards entrepreneurship	.338**	.001
Tendency to teamwork	.226*	.028
Using innovative teaching methods	0.189	.068
Economic downturn	.341**	.001
Computer and Internet access	.168	.106
Utilization of banking facilities	.245*	.017
The unemployment rate	.002	.983
Instability and rapid change in rules	.182	.079
Social Security	.086	.409
Access to financial information	.049	.636
Entrepreneurial training ground	.163	.116
Ecological factors (air, water, soil)	.119	.252
Access to technology and technical knowledge	.272**	.008
Economic and Tax Laws	.178	.087
Increasing competition in the market	.199	.054
Job Security	.249*	.016
Political stability	.278**	.007
Participation in political structure	.074	.481

** Significant in 0.01 level; * Significant in 0.05 level

CONCULSION

The results of the study showed that despite of high willingness to self-employment in graduates, there is lack of proportion of current courses in agriculture vocational education centers with job market. The results also show that the highest ranks refer to attitudes towards entrepreneurship, tendency to teamwork, and using innovative teaching methods.

The other consequences of this study were direct and significant correlation between graduates' occupational success with attitudes towards entrepreneurship, tendency to teamwork, economic downturn, and some other environmental features.

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