

**Poetic Inquiry in International Agricultural Education Research**

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### Introduction/Need for Research

Faculty involvement plays a critical role in shaping international agriculture research to achieve ongoing School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) curriculum internationalization efforts (Lamm et al., 2013). These efforts aim to meet the growing demand for training a globally competent workforce in U.S. classrooms. According to Linder (2018), while international agricultural education research has evolved to meet the emerging needs of global agri-food systems, the core focus remains highlighting the value of international perspectives. International perspectives are multifaceted and nuanced. Conner et al. (2017) illustrated this complexity by proposing 24 concepts, grouped into five broad categories, for integration into secondary SBAE to enhance curriculum internalization. Considering the multifaceted nature of international agriculture, research methods like poetic inquiry are necessary because of its inclination towards interdisciplinary scholarship. Poetic inquiry is a qualitative, art-based research method, usable at all stages of scholarly inquiry, from framing research questions to data collection, and analysis (van Rooyen, 2024). This research method presents many advantages including enhanced representation, nuance, accessibility, high-level thinking, and making sense of patterns (Hockett & Walter, 2024). The advantages of poetic inquiry can be leveraged to facilitate the translation of international agricultural research into SBAE curriculum globalization. In this poster, we focus on how we utilized poetic inquiry in international agricultural education research exploring Nigerian secondary agriculture students' perceptions of agriculture and their career interests within the industry.

### Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994) guided our study. It posits that individuals are shaped by their environment, and their environments are in turn shaped by social interactions within it. SCCT provided the lens through which we interpreted how students' sense of self-efficacy, goals, and expected outcomes impact their perception of agriculture and career interests. These components of SCCT were elicited from students through one to two-page reflective essays. The reflective essays were suitable because individuals "operate as thinkers of thoughts that serve determinative functions. They construct thoughts about future courses of action to suit ever-changing situations..." (Bandura, 1999, p.23). Using SCCT, we were able to make sense of the data in the examination of the environmental, cognitive, and affective factors shaping perceptions and determinative possibilities of agriculture-related career prospects among Nigerian secondary students enrolled in agriculture programs. SCCT has been used in agricultural education research to study students' perception of various agricultural education components like the attrition rate of male students in agriculture teacher training programs (Tummons et al., 2024) or students' transition from agriculture classrooms into careers in the agriculture industry (Shayo, 2020).

### Methodology

Four schools across four states representing North, South, East, and West of Nigeria were selected to participate in this study. Working with five teachers (two from one school in the Western region and one for each of the other three regions), a total of 107 students from both Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS) participated in this study. Participants were within the age range of 10 – 17 years and a total of 20 – 30 students from each school. Reflective essays were used to elicit data and understand participants' perceptions of agriculture and their career intentions within the industry. A writing prompt was provided to

teachers to facilitate and guide students through the writing of one to two pages of reflective essays describing what they think about the industry and if they could see themselves working in agriculture. Participation was voluntary and essays were completed outside of content delivery hours as homework. Student essays were anonymously submitted; however, age and grade level were provided by students who felt comfortable with doing so. Teachers collected, double-checked for all identifying details, scanned, and sent copies of the handwritten essays to the research team at Oregon State University. Participating teachers received a Naira equivalent of \$20 gift cards as compensation for their time. The research design and methods received IRB approval (HE-2024-1094). Data were collected between September to November 2024. Students' reflective essays were organized according to regions, and identification numbers were allocated to each essay. Essays were analyzed thematically and emerging themes informed the poems created in accordance with Miller's (2019) poetry composition process. The final poems are transcript or portraiture poems featuring direct quotes from essays (Faulkner & Watson, 2024).

### Results

Three main themes emerged, namely: *descriptions of agriculture, problems deflecting interests from agriculture, and degree of certainty as regards future career intentions in agriculture*. Poems were created to translate these themes into creative expressions of students' voices. Italicized excerpts from student essays were included in the poems. Drafts of the poems were shared with teachers and students as a form of member-checking. Students' reaction informed editing and re-writing of the final versions of the poems. The use of direct quotes and indigenous props in the poems such as proverbs included in students' essays helped to maintain the cultural contexts of students' reflections. We found a more nuanced understanding of agricultural apathy among Nigerian youths as this study delved into affective dimensions such as concerns about status, self-esteem, and societal respect for people in the agriculture workforce. Other concerns included the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) from entertainment and leisurely activities due to the demands of agriculture, as well as poor media representations of agriculture. We also found that unfavorable perception of agriculture increased through grade levels and opportunities to nurture positive perceptions about the industry would likely yield more positive results if it began early in junior secondary or elementary school. The poems will be accompanied by guided discussions and educational resources for use in agricultural education programs in Nigeria and other countries looking to share international perspectives of agriculture.

### Conclusion

Richardson (2003) argues that at the intersection of art, humanities, and scientific inquiry lies rich contextual data with a potential for profound positive outcomes. According to van Rooyen (2024), evidence from poetic inquiry can open up policy, practice, and intervention pathways. As a culturally-relevant methodology, poetic inquiry, offers a window into the world of minoritized people without distorting their cultural epistemologies (Davis, 2021). In international agricultural research, where the cultural essence should be maintained while providing contextually appropriate solutions, poetic inquiry, is a useful methodological tool.

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