



A Comparative Assessment of Agricultural Students on Career Aspiration among Public and Private Universities

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Achievement motivation, ICT skills, entrepreneurship training and mass media exposure were significant predictors of overall career aspiration.
- Public university students reported significantly higher educational aspirations compared to private university students in the sampled institutions.
- Private university students reported significantly higher self-employment and social aspirations compared to public university students in the sampled institutions.
- Public and private university students differed significantly in selected dimensions of career aspiration.

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ABSTRACT

Career aspiration played a crucial role in developing human capital for the rapidly evolving economy. Despite the rapid expansion of agricultural education in India, limited empirical evidence exists on differences in career aspiration across institutional setting in agricultural higher education. The present study explored the institutional differences and other attributes on career aspiration of agricultural students in West Bengal. The present cross-sectional study compared five dimensions of career aspiration among 120 agricultural students from six purposively selected universities, with 20 students randomly selected from each institution. Data was collected through a structured personal interview method and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Z-test, correlation and multiple regression analysis. The findings highlighted significant differences between public and private university students in educational, self-employment and social aspiration dimensions, whereas job and economic aspirations did not differ significantly. Achievement motivation, ICT skills, information seeking behaviour, mass media exposure, and entrepreneurship training exposure were significantly associated with career aspiration across dimensions. Multiple regression analysis revealed that achievement motivation, ICT skills, mass media exposure and entrepreneurship training exposure significantly predicted career aspiration, explaining 54.2% of the variance. The findings suggested the need for institutional collaborations, entrepreneurship-oriented learning, and digital competencies to strengthen career aspiration.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Agricultural Education system has experienced a significant growth in the number of universities, with a total of 74

ICAR-accredited universities, and has been attracting about 28,000 undergraduate and 17,500 postgraduate students every year (Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 2024). There are four hundred

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private colleges across the country of which ICAR accredited private agricultural universities have grown from five in 2020–21 to 22 in 2024–25 (Press Information Bureau, 2025). The state of West Bengal is in the highest cluster of agricultural education enrollment, having 65 to 72 per cent of all students enrolled in agriculture disciplines at the state level (Kumar and Jain, 2022). The enrolment in Higher Education in India has grown from 3.42 crore in 2014–15 to 4.33 crore in 2021–22 (Ministry of Education, 2024). The academic (43.90%) and public-sector (35.04%) careers are preferred by the agricultural students, with only 1.18% preferring farming, which means the students are oriented towards white-collar jobs (Raju & Devarani, 2023). The present investigation is inspired by this contradiction that agriculture is a professional degree with hands-on training and practical experience, and yet, the graduates do not appear to be drawn towards traditional agrarian livelihoods. Educational qualification is a key determinant of occupational preferences, where higher education is associated with less farming interest (Chinchmalatpure & Tekale, 2019). West Bengal has seen an improvement in career-oriented competences among rural youth, with the support from the institutions (Ghosh et al., 2026). The institutional dimension has been gaining importance, with training exposure being linked to the development of entrepreneurship competency (Arunkumar et al., 2021; Ray et al., 2022) and psychological factors and institutional support being correlated to entrepreneurial intentions (Panigrahi et al., 2025; Kademani et al., 2026). Career preference formation is mediated by institutional environment and peer networks (Meinam et al., 2023). But most of the studies available are single institution studies (Ashokkumar et al., 2026). The relationship between public and private university affiliation with students' career aspirations is under-researched in West Bengal. The study aims to fill this gap and to compare the career aspirations of public and private agricultural university students of West Bengal in terms of five dimensions (educational, job, self-employment, social and economic) of career aspiration. Career aspiration is a multidimensional concept that encompasses future goals and expectations for education, employment, self-employment, social status and economic attainment (Gottfredson, 1981; Lent et al., 1994). It is different from career choice (a decisional outcome), career readiness (preparedness for transition) and perceived employability (self-assessed job acquisition capability). The study is based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994) that states that career aspirations are influenced by three factors: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and contextual supports. The study attempted to analyze association between selected socio-personal, psycho-communication and socio-economic variables and five dimensions of career aspiration; find out the significant predictors of overall career aspiration by using multiple regression; and compare five dimensions between public university students and private university students.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in six universities located across different districts of West Bengal during 2024–2025. Three public universities, namely Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya (Nadia), Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (Cooch Behar), and

Palli Shiksha Bhawan, Visva-Bharati (Birbhum) as well as three private universities, namely Brainware University (Kolkata), The Neotia University (South 24 Parganas), and Seacom Skills University (Birbhum district) were selected using purposive sampling. Public university selection was confined to only three universities present in the state. The private universities selection was based on ICAR accreditation or affiliation and a minimum of five years of operation of their agricultural departments. The target population comprised all the agricultural students of the 4th year B.Sc. (Agriculture Honors) programme at the selected universities for the academic year 2024–2025. The fourth-year students were selected as respondents as they were on the verge of completing their degree programme and had developed relatively stable career aspirations. Simple random sampling using Fisher and Yates (1963) random number table was employed to select 20 students from each university. A total sample of 120 respondents was obtained from the procedure. Career aspiration was measured through the pre-structured scale of Gaikwad (2011) with slight modifications. The modified scale was assessed for content validity by a panel of subject experts from agricultural extension, educational psychology, and career counselling, who evaluated each item for relevance and clarity. Items were retained based on expert consensus. The scale was subsequently pilot tested on 20 respondents outside the study region and demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.72$). The overall dependent variable in regression was the composite score of the career aspiration scale, which was the mean of all scale items. Established indicators were used to measure 17 predictor variables. A pre-tested structured interview schedule was used to gather the data and analyzed through frequency and percentage distributions. Bivariate correlation analysis was used to identify the relationship between the independent and dependent variable with the help of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r). A two-sample Z-test compared mean differences between groups, justified by equal sample sizes ($n = 60$ each) exceeding 30. To find the key determinant influencing career aspiration as well as R^2 coefficient of determination, multiple linear regression analysis was performed. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% and 1% levels, as appropriate. Standardized beta coefficients (β) were used to compare the relative contribution of predictors.

RESULTS

Correlates of career aspiration

Pearson's correlation showing the relationship between selected independent variables and different dimensions of career aspirations is presented in Figure 1. None of the socio-personal attributes of the respondents, namely age, caste, residential area, family type and participation in co-curricular activities, established a significant relationship with any dimension of career aspiration. Only the academic variable, Academic performance ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$) measured through CGPA, reported significant positive association with educational aspiration.

The psycho-communication variables, such as achievement motivation, information seeking behaviour, ICT skills, mass media exposure and entrepreneurship training were found to be the

Figure 1. Heatmap of correlations between predictors and career aspiration dimensions

Independent Variables	Dimensions of Career Aspirations (r)				
	Educational Aspiration	Job Aspiration	Self-Employment Aspiration	Social Aspiration	Economic Aspiration
Age	0.08	-0.05	-0.12	0.03	0.06
Caste	0.02	-0.13	-0.15	0.00	0.04
Residential Area	0.10	0.05	0.04	-0.14	-0.01
Family Type	-0.02	-0.09	-0.05	0.01	0.09
CGPA	0.22*	0.18	0.02	0.08	0.11
Co- curricular Activities	-0.04	-0.04	0.13	-0.09	0.10
Father's Education	0.16	0.12	0.06	0.08	0.07
Mother's Education	0.14	0.09	0.04	0.11	0.09
Family Income	0.08	0.06	0.19*	0.12	0.21*
Material Possession	0.19*	0.14	0.26**	0.15	0.22*
Land Holding	0.12	0.05	0.31**	0.08	0.18*
Information Seeking Behaviour	0.31**	0.28*	0.35**	0.22*	0.26*
Mass Media Exposure	0.24*	0.19	0.22*	0.33**	0.29*
Achievement Motivation	0.42**	0.38**	0.51**	0.45**	0.39**
Entrepreneurship Training provided by university	0.15	-0.22*	0.48**	0.18	0.24*
ICT Skills developed by university	0.35**	0.31**	0.28*	0.26*	0.33**
Library Exposure provided by university	0.23*	0.11	0.08	0.14	0.05

Correlation Coefficient (r)

-0.60	-0.40	-0.20	0.00	0.20	0.40	0.60
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** $p < 0.01$ (Significant at 1% level), * $p < 0.05$ (Significant at 5% level)

significant correlates across several dimensions. Achievement motivation recorded a highly significant positive relationship across all five dimensions, showing the strongest relationship with self-employment aspiration ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$). Information seeking behaviour reported significant and positive association with all five dimensions, with the strongest relationship being with the self-employment aspiration ($r = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$) followed by educational aspiration ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$). ICT skills developed by the university also showed a significant positive correlation with all five dimensions. Mass media exposure was found to have significant relationship with educational, self-employment, social and economic aspiration. Entrepreneurship training provided by the university portrayed a unique pattern where it was positively related to self-employment aspiration ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$) and economic aspiration ($r = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$) but negatively related to job aspiration ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.05$).

Socio-economic indicators, namely family income, material possession and land holding, reported positive association with self-employment and economic aspiration but largely failed to influence educational, job and social aspiration. Library exposure showed a

modest significant relationship with educational aspiration ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$).

Predictors of career aspiration

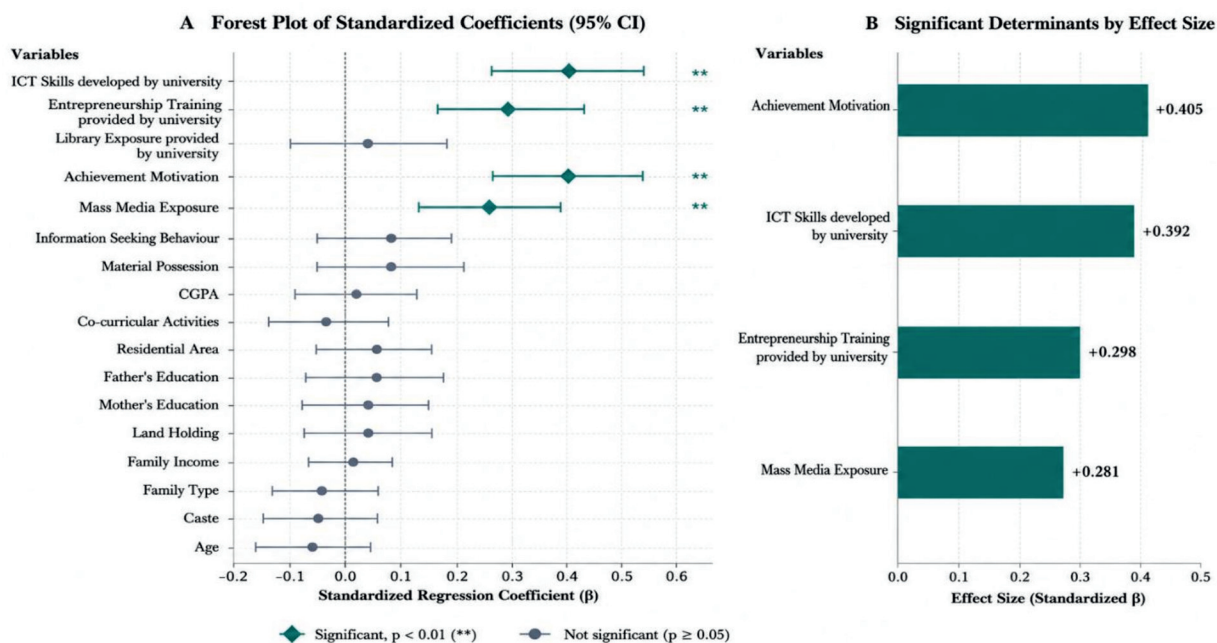
The results of multiple regression model highlighting the factors influencing career aspirations among agricultural students is outlined in Table 1, explained 54.2 per cent of the total variance in career aspiration ($R^2 = 0.542$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.466$; $p < 0.001$). Among the seventeen predictors included in the model, mass media exposure ($\beta = 0.281$), achievement motivation ($\beta = 0.405$), entrepreneurship training provided by the university ($\beta = 0.298$) and ICT skills developed by the university ($\beta = 0.392$), were found to be significant independent predictors influencing career aspiration at the 1% level of significance. Achievement motivation being the strongest predictor, followed by ICT skills, entrepreneurship training and mass media exposure in the order.

Information seeking behaviour showed positive and significant relationship with all five dimensions, however, it failed to emerge as a significant predictor in multiple regression model. Socio-personal variables, such as CGPA, parental education and family

Table 1. Factors Influencing Career Aspirations among Agricultural Students

Independent Variables	Unstandardized <i>B</i>	Standard Error	Standardized β	<i>t</i> value	<i>p</i> -value	Significance
Age	-0.245	0.234	-0.062	“1.047	0.297	NS
Caste	-0.178	0.187	-0.054	“0.952	0.343	NS
Residential Area	0.198	0.176	0.061	1.125	0.263	NS
Family Type	-0.112	0.148	-0.034	“0.757	0.451	NS
CGPA	0.089	0.287	0.019	0.310	0.757	NS
Co-curricular Activities	-0.058	0.128	-0.029	“0.453	0.651	NS
Father's Education	0.134	0.156	0.057	0.859	0.392	NS
Mother's Education	0.098	0.134	0.043	0.731	0.466	NS
Family Income	0.004	0.015	0.010	0.267	0.790	NS
Material Possession	0.178	0.148	0.086	1.203	0.231	NS
Land Holding	0.089	0.128	0.043	0.695	0.489	NS
Information Seeking Behaviour	0.112	0.078	0.085	1.436	0.154	NS
Mass Media Exposure	0.268	0.067	0.281	4.000	<0.001	**
Achievement Motivation	0.398	0.065	0.405	6.123	<0.001	**
Entrepreneurship Training provided by university	0.245	0.054	0.298	4.537	<0.001	**
ICT Skills developed by university	0.328	0.051	0.392	6.431	<0.001	**
Library Exposure provided by university	0.124	0.167	0.051	0.743	0.459	NS

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.542$ | Adjusted $R^2 = 0.466$ | Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; NS = non-significant

**Figure 2.** Forest plot of standardized coefficients for career aspiration

income, similarly did not emerge as significant predictors of career aspiration.

Comparison between private and public university students

The comparative analysis between public and private university students shown in Table 2 revealed statistically significant differences in three of the five aspiration dimensions. Public university students reported significantly higher educational aspiration than private university students with a medium effect size ($d = 0.56$). Private university students reported significantly higher self-employment aspiration with a medium-size effect ($d = -0.74$), as well as higher social aspiration with small-size effect ($d =$

-0.44). No significant differences were observed between the two groups in terms of Job aspiration and Economic aspiration.

DISCUSSION

Information seeking behaviour was consistently associated with all five dimensions indicating that students who actively seek out career-related information through various sources tend to develop clearer and broader occupational goals. The study conducted by Chayal et al. (2023) found that the stream of study is significantly related to systematic information seeking behavior among undergraduates, but the study did not directly investigate career aspiration. In the present study, the link between information

Table 2: Comparison of Career Aspiration Dimensions among Agricultural Students of Public and Private Universities in West Bengal

Category	Public Mean $\pm$ SD	Private Mean $\pm$ SD	Z-Statistic	p-value	Significance	Cohen's d	Effect Size
Educational Aspirations	3.83 $\pm$ 1.06	3.17 $\pm$ 1.32	3.05	0.002	**	0.56	Medium
Job Aspirations	4.88 $\pm$ 1.74	4.33 $\pm$ 1.82	1.69	0.090	NS	0.31	Small
Self-Employment Aspirations	2.37 $\pm$ 1.73	3.98 $\pm$ 2.55	-4.06		**	-0.74	Medium
Social Aspirations	5.20 $\pm$ 1.45	5.80 $\pm$ 1.30	-2.38	0.017	*	-0.44	Small
Economic Aspirations	3.63 $\pm$ 0.97	3.73 $\pm$ 0.99	-0.55	0.577	NS	-0.10	Negligible

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; NS = non-significant

seeking behavior and career aspiration was investigated in relation to several dimensions of career aspiration among agricultural students.

The strong association of achievement motivation with self-employment aspiration provides empirical support for the classical proposition of McClelland (1961) that individuals with a high need for achievement consistently set challenging goals and seek out opportunities like entrepreneurship that offer autonomy and measurable success.

The exposure to mass media was related to most of the aspiration dimensions, except for job aspiration. Mass media exposure was operationalized as a composite variable in the present study, which included print, electronic and digital media, and the relative individual contribution of each of these were not examined. This trend indicates that media exposure could reach a wider audience of career paths related to entrepreneurship and social mobility than traditional career paths. All five dimensions were found to be uniformly related to ICT skills, which shows that ICT skills play an important role in facilitating the career orientation among agricultural students. Bairagi and Shahi (2026), also found a positive correlation between digital competence and career readiness in Indian university students, noting that digital employability readiness was positively associated with vocational attitude maturity.

The negative relationship between entrepreneurship training and job aspiration implies that there is a possibility that students who are trained in entrepreneurship may express lower intentions to seek employment. The same pattern was noticed in the case of students in the agricultural field who had received entrepreneurship education by Modak et al. (2018) and Patel and Chauhan (2023). They found that agricultural students exposed to entrepreneurship education shift from employment-seeking towards entrepreneurial pursuits. The finding is also consistent with recent extension study on the behavioral determinants of entrepreneurial orientation among rural enterprise operators (Sonu & Jha, 2025). However, due to the cross-sectional design, this association cannot be interpreted as a causal link from entrepreneurship training to a decrease in job aspiration; students who were less likely to aspire to jobs might have chosen to participate in entrepreneurship training or the relationship could be a two-way street.

The selective impact of socio-economic indicators, such as family income, material possession and land holding, on self-employment and economic aspiration but not on educational, job or social aspiration suggests that resource endowment primarily helps to build the risk-bearing capacity which is a component of the motivation to pursue an entrepreneurial career, rather than shaping academic or job-related goals.

Although information seeking behaviour shows bivariate correlations with other variables, the loss of significance in the regression model may be due to shared variance with the other variables. This independent contribution may have been modified by its association with ICT skills and mass media exposure, which are sources of information most used. The present study did not test formally whether information seeking behaviour mediated the effect of the use of ICT and mass media on career aspiration, which requires a longitudinal study or structural equation modelling. In a regression model of career choice behaviour, Reddy and Rani (2020) found a similar pattern in which some of the behavioral variables were dominated by the more general psycho-communicative variables. The significant role of achievement motivation and ICT skills, as well as entrepreneurship training and mass media exposure as significant predictors in the regression model indicate that these psychological factors and digital competence jointly drive the career aspiration of agricultural students more decisively than any single socio-personal or socio-economic attribute.

Similarly, the non-significance of CGPA further corroborates Sebastian (2021) who found that the perceived employability of agricultural students was mostly influenced by their acquired skills and training experiences than by their socio-economic background and Agarwal and Saini (2021) who reported that socio-economic factors alone had less impact than skills-oriented and communicative factors on the career aspiration and employability perception of agricultural graduates of India. The negligible influence of socio-personal attributes such as age, caste, residential area and family type on the career aspiration suggests that the personal background of the respondents had a marginal influence on their career outlook (Iekang et al., 2016; Lekang et al., 2017; Sharma et al., 2022). These findings suggest that demographic characteristics alone are insufficient to explain students' career aspiration.

The differential pattern of aspiration between public and private university students could be attributed to the distinct institutional orientation of the universities. Public universities having predominantly research and academic-driven culture traditionally focus on higher studies, research and competitive examinations. Public university provide stronger research infrastructure with government funded support system, greater access to scholarships and closer linkages with national agricultural research organisations which plausibly explains the stronger educational aspiration reported among their students, as mentioned by Mishra et al. (2021) in a comparative study of the employment and career preferences of public- and private-sector-oriented agricultural students. On the other hand, many private universities have established entrepreneurship cells, experiential learning, industry collaborations, integrated incubation facilities and skill-based learning exposure into

their agricultural programmes, which appears to cultivate a higher self-employment and social aspiration among their students, as reported by Ashokkumar et al. (2026) and Sharma et al. (2022), who found comparatively higher entrepreneurial and social orientation among students exposed to skill-oriented agricultural curricula.

The absence of a significant difference between the two categories regarding job and economic aspiration indicates that agricultural students almost share equal expectations regarding stable employment and economic security irrespective of their institution affiliation. This is in line with the findings of Agarwal and Saini (2021) that employability aspiration among agricultural graduates in India is shaped more by macro-level labour market conditions in both sectors than by affiliation to the institution.

CONCLUSION

The study established that career aspiration of the agricultural students in West Bengal is more strongly associated with the psycho-communication factors like Achievement Motivation and ICT skills rather than the socio-economic or demographic factors. Clear Institutional Differences were exhibited between the universities where public university students reported stronger educational aspirations whereas private university students exhibited stronger self-employment and social aspiration. Strengthening students' mass media exposure and structured information-seeking skills through career guidance cells, introducing career visioning credit courses in university curriculum and internship exposure linked to Krishi Vigyan Kendras could further reinforce the psycho-communicative competencies. Cross institutional semester exchanges and integrated mentorship can also help drive the career aspirations by outlining the strengths of different institutes. Socio-digital campaigns and dedicated portals collaborating with regional media for better dissemination of information should be considered.

DECLARATIONS

Ethical consideration and consent to participate: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of social research. The Divisional review board, Agricultural Extension Division, of UBKV, Cooch Behar waived the ethical approval vide reference no. 195/26 and date 14 August 2026. All respondents participated voluntarily after receiving an explanation of the research objectives, the benefits of the research, and assurances of data confidentiality. The verbal consent of respondents was obtained, and their identity is kept confidential and is used only for academic purposes.

Conflict of interest: The authors have declared that no conflict of interest, financial or non-financial, exists that could affect the implementation, analysis, or reporting of the results of this research.

Data Availability statement: The data generated and analysed during the present study are not publicly available because they contain participant-level information and are subject to confidentiality and ethical considerations. The dataset is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request, subject to applicable institutional and ethical restrictions.

Authors' contribution: Atreyee Sarkar conducted the field investigation, data collection, statistical analysis. Litan Das supervised the study and contributed to research design and interpretation of results. Prabhat Kumar Pal, Sabita Mondal, Saumyadip Chakraborty, Swapnamay Ghosh, SK Mahabub Alam, Marimuthu Praveenkumar, Avirup Das, Dipankar Barai assisted in literature review, data interpretation, manuscript preparation and editing. All authors read and approved of the final manuscript.

Declaration of use of AI tools: During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly, an AI-based writing assistance tool, solely to check and improve grammar, spelling, and language clarity. No AI tool was used for data analysis, interpretation of results, generation of scientific content, or drawing of conclusions. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as necessary and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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