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Factors influencing career change among agricultural education graduates

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Abstract

The growing trend of agricultural education graduates leaving the teaching profession poses a major challenge to sustaining quality education and agricultural development. Despite the essential role agricultural educators play in promoting food security and rural innovation, little empirical research has examined the underlying factors prompting these graduates to change careers. This study investigated the motivations behind career transitions among agricultural education graduates and explored strategies to retain them within the teaching profession. Guided by the Teacher Attrition Theory and Holland's Congruence Theory, the research adopted a multimethod phenomenological design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions involving 35 postgraduate agricultural education graduates who had left teaching. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and emerging themes. Findings revealed that career changes were influenced by both external factors, such as low remuneration, limited advancement opportunities, and unsupportive work environments, and internal factors, including personality incongruence and lack of fulfillment. Graduates often sought alternative careers aligned with their interests, values, and long-term goals. The study concludes that reducing attrition among agricultural educators requires improving working conditions, enhancing professional development, and aligning training programs with individual motivations and career aspirations. These measures can strengthen teacher retention and ensure the continued growth of agricultural education.

Keywords: agricultural education; career change; career retention; teacher attrition; theoretical framework

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study is primarily guided by the Teacher Attrition Theory developed by Grissmer and Kirby (1987). The theory focuses on the voluntary and involuntary factors that influence teachers to leave the profession. Voluntary factors include dissatisfaction with salary, burnout, lack of career advancement opportunities, and desire for better working environments. Involuntary factors, on the other hand, involve circumstances beyond the teacher's control, such as retrenchments, inability to secure a permanent position, or family relocation. Grissmer and Kirby (1987) also describe a U-shaped attrition pattern across a teacher's career: teachers are more likely to leave during the early stages of their careers, less likely during the middle years, and more likely again as they approach retirement. This framework is highly relevant to the current study, as it explains why many agricultural education graduates leave teaching shortly after entering the profession.

Supporting this primary theory, the study also draws on Holland's (1997) Congruence Theory, which emphasizes the importance of matching an individual's personality with their work environment. According to Holland (1997), individuals seek environments where they can use their skills and values comfortably. A mismatch between a person's personality and their work environment often leads to dissatisfaction, stress, and ultimately career change (Bhargava, 2023). Many agricultural education graduates may initially choose teaching due to societal expectations or limited career options, but later realize that the teaching environment does not align with their personal interests, abilities, or long-term goals.

Combining the Teacher Attrition Theory and Holland's (1997) Congruence Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding career shifts among agricultural education graduates. While the Teacher Attrition Theory identifies structural and systemic factors pushing graduates out of teaching, Holland's (1997) Congruence Theory explains the deeper, personal motivations related to individual satisfaction and professional identity. Together, these theories suggest that both external conditions and internal alignments must be addressed to retain graduates in the teaching profession. Understanding these theoretical perspectives is crucial for developing effective strategies to reduce career changes among agricultural education graduates. Interventions must not only improve working conditions and salaries but also ensure that training programs align closely with graduates' personalities and aspirations (Udeogu, 2024). Without addressing both the external and internal factors influencing career change, agricultural education may continue to face challenges in retaining skilled educators essential for the sector's growth (Liu et al., 2024; Roy, 2023).

Figure 1
Teacher attrition theory

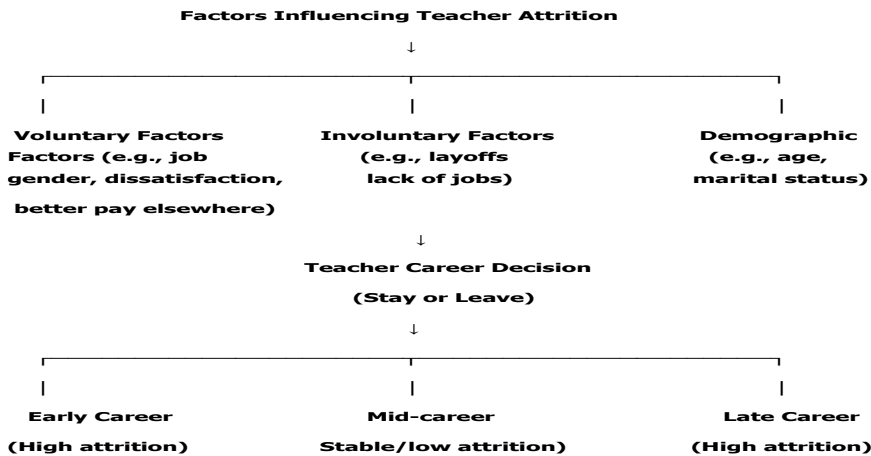


Figure 1 presents the Teacher Attrition Theory developed by Grissmer and Kirby (1987), which explains the factors influencing teachers' decisions to stay in or leave the teaching profession.

Agricultural education programmes, particularly those preparing graduates for teaching roles in secondary schools, are essential for fostering innovation and addressing agricultural challenges. It equips future generations with the skills needed for sustainable farming, food security, and rural development. Yet, a concerning trend has emerged: many agricultural education graduates (teachers) are increasingly abandoning the teaching profession [changing career] and seeking alternative careers. This trend poses a threat to agriculture, which is a cornerstone of global economies, particularly in developing countries such as *XXX country*, where it provides vital food, fiber, and employment opportunities. It also significantly contributes to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and sustains livelihoods in countries with developing economies (World Bank, 2023).

The concept of a career extends beyond holding a job; it encompasses the broader professional trajectory individuals envision for their lives. In this context, career change refers to significant transitions from one professional field to another, often requiring the acquisition of new skills and training. In today's dynamic and rapidly changing world, career changes have become increasingly common across various professional sectors, including education. Agricultural education graduates, whose shift in careers not only disrupts the educational system but also has broader implications for community development and agricultural advancement. Career transitions among these graduates have raised concerns about the quality of agricultural education, the retention of experienced teachers, and the future of agricultural development in countries like *XXX*, where agriculture remains a crucial component of the economy. Career change has become common among agricultural education graduates, whose movement away from teaching threatens the educational system, undermines community agricultural development, and raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of the agricultural sector itself. The concept of career change, distinguished from job change, involves a significant transition to a different professional field, often requiring new skills and training (Blau, 2000).

Agricultural education graduates, trained primarily to teach agriculture in secondary schools, are increasingly pursuing alternative careers, often motivated by dissatisfaction with the teaching profession and the allure of more lucrative or fulfilling opportunities elsewhere. Career changes can occur voluntarily, driven by personal aspirations, better working conditions, or financial incentives, or involuntarily, resulting from job loss or structural changes in the employment sector (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). For agricultural education graduates, voluntary career changes are often influenced by low salaries, low job status, limited opportunities for advancement, high stress levels, and unsupportive administrative environments within the teaching profession (Adedapo et al., 2014; Porter & Umbach, 2006; Knight, 2000). Personal factors, including the desire for professional growth, reduced stress, and greater job satisfaction, also play significant roles (Yunita et al., 2023; Brown & Uehara, 1999). Ikuemonisan et al., (2022) reported that many agriculture students were dissatisfied with their training, citing inadequate preparation for the realities of agricultural work.

1.1. Purpose of study

These factors contribute to growing dissatisfaction and drive many to seek alternative careers in fields such as agricultural economics, management, and extension services. Despite the critical nature of this issue, no research has been conducted to document and analyze the specific factors driving agricultural education graduates to abandon teaching careers. This study seeks to fill that gap by investigating the motivations behind career changes among agricultural education graduates and identifying strategies that could help retain them within the discipline.

The research questions of the study are:

1. What careers are chosen by agricultural education graduates involved in career change?
2. What are the factors influencing the change of career among agricultural education graduates?
3. How do the agricultural education graduates feel post-career change?
4. How can the change of career in agricultural education graduates be reduced?

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

This study was a Multimethod approach employing a phenomenological qualitative research design. A combination of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions was used in data collection. These two data collection methods were ideal as they allowed participants to freely express their views while enabling the researcher to probe for deeper information.

2.1. Participants

The target population was the agricultural program for the post-graduate graduates (N=35) who graduated from the master's degree program at a University from 2000 to 2018 and changed their careers. Snowball sampling was used to reach the participants of the study. This sampling method helped locate the participants of the study. The researchers started by reaching the graduates they knew changed their careers. Then, the participants were used to identify other graduates (n=35) who changed careers.

2.2. Data collection instrument

The research instruments [interview guide and facilitator's guide] were developed guided by the research questions of the study. Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was ensured by debriefing the participants about the study before data collection. Transferability was established through a documentation of the qualitative procedures followed and the development of a thorough study database. Also, the findings of the study were reported by thick-rich descriptions. Furthermore, the unique voice of the participants was at the core of the research process as participants were quoted verbatim. Dependability was ensured through the researcher checking transcripts to make sure that they were free from any mistake; no drift in the definition of codes; and by writing memos about the codes and their definitions. To address conformability, the researcher devised rules that describe category properties and that were ultimately used to justify the inclusion of each data bit that remains assigned to the category, as well as to provide a basis for later tests of replicability.

During the data collection, appointments were made with the participants before the interview and focus group discussion through phone calls. The participants for the interview were asked to suggest the date, time, and place, while participants for the focus group discussion were informed of the proposed date, time, and place. During the interviews, the researcher would read the questions to the participants and transcribe as they were responding to the interview questions. On the other hand, during the focus group discussion, the primary researcher was the facilitator. Interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, and discussions were audio-recorded and supplemented with note-taking to ensure comprehensive data capture. The focus group discussions lasted about one and a half hours and were also recorded.

2.3. Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations were ensured by addressing issues related to informed consent, confidentiality, privacy and autonomy, and risk of harm. Informed consent was ensured by complete disclosure about the study, such as purpose, benefits, duration, methods, and possible risks of the study. Before the interview or focus group was conducted, the participants who were willing to participate were requested to carefully read, fill and sign a consent form. Confidentiality was addressed by concealing the identity of the participants and collective reporting of the findings. Privacy and autonomy were ensured by avoiding encroachment on confidential information. Risk was minimized by asking probing questions only enough to collect data and complete the study. Also, sensitive questions were avoided during the interview.

2.4. Data analysis

Data generated from the study were analyzed using thematic analysis. Themes and categories were identified, and similar themes were collapsed. Also, quotes were used to substantiate the themes.

3. RESULTS

The findings were presented using themes based on the research question of the study.

3.1. What careers are chosen by agricultural education graduates involved in career change?

Table 1 presents the careers to which agricultural education graduates changed. The findings of the study revealed that a majority of the participants from both the interview (n=15, 60%) and focus group discussion (n=8, 80%) changed to Applied Economics and Management. The findings confirm the statistics released by Almario (2021), which reported that agricultural economics and agricultural production are among the top ten majors with the highest employment rate (98%) in the United States and 70% in XXX country. Therefore, this means that the majority of individuals changing careers are most likely to choose a career in agricultural economics or agricultural production.

Table 1
Career choices by participants

Career	Interview		FGD	
	f	%	f	%
Applied Economics and Management	15	60	8	80
Agriculture Extension	1	4	0	0
Land Use and Management	2	8	0	0
Honors in Mathematics	2	8	1	10
Community Development	2	8	1	10
Sustainable Agriculture	3	12	0	0
Total	25	100	10	100

3.2. What are the factors influencing the change of career among agricultural education graduates?

The findings from both the interview and the focus group revealed that the factors influencing the change of career among agricultural education graduates can either be positive or negative. The positive factor for the career is realizing a lifelong dream, while the negative factors are that the teaching career is stressful; teachers are paid low salaries; less advancement opportunities in the teaching profession, and unconducive working conditions.

3.2.1. A teaching career is stressful

The participants of the study reported that they changed careers because the teaching profession is a stressful profession. Teachers have marking such as students' assignments, projects, and practical reports, which they also take home to mark at night, on weekends, and holidays. In addition, teachers have to fill registers, scheme books, and lesson planning. The participants also submitted that the stress is also caused by the negative attitude of students towards education. Students nowadays do not value education; they just do it for the sake of their parents or guardians. Student's discipline is another one. It is very difficult and stressful to discipline students, especially after the introduction of positive discipline to schools by the government. One of the participants in the focus group discussion stated that: *"The teaching career is a frustrating career full of paperwork, and in this profession one works during working hours and after working hours, on weekends and holidays, and ends up not having time for your family. Also, this career is stressful because individual effort is measured by the performance of students, yet students these days do not see the value of education. They just do it for the sake of their parents"*.

Moreover, some participants pointed to the source of stress in the teaching profession as the inability of school administration to provide support. For instance, some school administrators purchase agricultural equipment for practical activities and projects very late. At times, animals would be without feed for weeks. In the same vein, the participants complained about an overcrowded classroom. Such an environment has a negative repercussion for student discipline and class management. Consequently, effective teaching and learning cannot be realized. This makes classroom management difficult and results in ineffective teaching and learning. Lastly, Agricultural

educators have to monitor students' projects even in their spare time, which means no or less time to spend with their families.

The study highlights that teaching is stressful due to excessive paperwork, lesson planning, and overcrowded classrooms, as noted by Yunita et al., (2023). Similarly, Brown and Uehara (1999) found that agriculture educators experience burnout from high expectations and a lack of resources, impacting their effectiveness. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) confirmed that individuals often transition to less stressful careers later in life compared to their initial teaching roles. The findings also confirm the Teacher Attrition Theory, as high stress levels caused by heavy workloads, student indiscipline, and administrative demands contribute to voluntary teacher attrition early in their careers.

3.2.2. Low salary pays

The findings of the study revealed that low remuneration of teachers was another factor that influenced the change of career. Participants revealed that salaries received in the education sector were less motivating than compared in the private sector. In the private sector, employees get allowances such as medical aid, car allowance, house allowance, bonuses, and commuting allowance, which the public sector does not offer. Participants further stated that the salary for the teachers does not match the work done by teachers. The participants mentioned that with such low salaries, they cannot fully support their families and therefore, are left with no other option than to change careers. One participant was quoted saying, *"Poor remuneration of teachers is on top of the list of factors which influenced me to change career. With the salary I was getting as a teacher, I could not fully support my family. I am from an extended family, and there are many dependents. Failing to support pains me, yet I am employed"*.

Lukhele (1989) shares the same sentiments as the participants of the study. Lukhele stated that, as much as agricultural education graduates love to work with children, enjoy long vacations, and want to contribute to society and the development of the country, they do not stay long in the profession. The researcher highlighted that inadequate salary is among the factors that drive agriculture educators out of the teaching profession. Findings of the study are also in line with Keynes (1991), who found that many agricultural education graduates do not see teaching as an attractive career, and there are many careers that pay better than the teaching profession. Dissatisfaction with low salaries, as highlighted in the Teacher Attrition Theory, drives teachers to voluntarily leave the profession in search of better-paying jobs with more financial benefits.

3.2.3. Limited career advancement opportunities in teaching

Advancement opportunities were also mentioned on many occasions as another factor that influences participants to change careers. The participants noted that once one becomes a head of department, deputy head teacher, then a head teacher, that's the end. Also, the promotion criteria are not clear; an individual in this career is promoted based on seniority, not merit. In the private sector, there is a wide range of advancement opportunities and many careers to choose from. In the education sector, even after completing a master's degree, an individual is still a teacher, while in the private sector, people who upgrade themselves are recognized and promoted to more challenging work. One participant stated, *"In the teaching profession, chances of climbing the ladder are very slim. It is normal in this profession to work as a teacher for the rest of your working life. Whereas in the private sector, chances of getting a promotion are high, as there is a wide range of advancement opportunities. Teachers, like any other employees, want to be promoted to higher positions."*

The findings of the study are in line with Yunita et al., (2023), who stated that the change of career among agricultural education graduates is influenced by the limited advancement opportunities in the education sector. The researcher further mentioned that the education sector has fewer career options as compared to the private sector. These findings concur with what was found by Knight (2000), who stated that the change of career among agricultural education graduates was influenced by the fact that there are inadequate advancement opportunities in the teaching profession as compared to the private sector. The lack of clear and merit-based promotion

pathways, consistent with the Teacher Attrition Theory, discourages career growth, prompting teachers to exit the profession.

3.2.4. Unconducive working conditions

Participants from both the interview and focus group mentioned that the unconducive working condition faced by agricultural education graduates was another factor that drives educators out of the teaching profession. The participants revealed that the unconducive working condition was created by the government and administrators in schools. The government has introduced unfavorable policies such as: allowing not more than 5-10 % failing rate in schools, inability to implement the 1:40 teacher-student ratio, heavy workload for teachers, and a reluctant move towards the use of technology in the teaching profession. The government is insisting that the number of pupils to repeat a class should not exceed 10%. This is destroying the education in the country, as pupils do not focus and fully commit themselves to education, as they know that at the end of the year, a majority of them will be promoted to the next class. Introduction of positive discipline, which discourages the use of corporal punishment for students, results in poor performance of students in schools. Students come late to school, do not do their homework's and also absent themselves for no valid reason. The impact of positive discipline is less than that of corporal punishment. Another issue is that the government is paying for most of the students as they are Orphan and Vulnerable Children. However, the government does not receive such funds on time but releases them very late, leaving the school with no funds to run and no equipment. Teachers have so much work as they are not getting refresher courses and workshops. They are not getting study leaves, nor are they accommodated by the school, teaching other subjects such as Maths and Science subjects, among other things. Furthermore, the participants also felt that the profession is not challenging, as one is doing the same thing repeatedly every year. One participant said, *"Unsupportive teachers and school administrators make working conditions unconducive. It pains me to keep begging my head teacher for agricultural equipment. Sometimes animals went for days without food. Working resources are not provided in time; yet, the expectations are high."*

Yunita et al., (2023) and Brown and Uehara (1999) concluded that the burden of paperwork in the teaching profession, including extensive class preparation, record-keeping, and a lack of resources, creates an unconducive working environment. Bostjancic & Petrovčič (2019) echo the study participants' views, noting that reduced job satisfaction can trigger a change in careers. This aligns with Blau (2000), who suggested that a decline in job satisfaction leads to intentions to switch careers. However, the study's findings contrast with Carless and Arnup (2011), who found that job satisfaction does not significantly influence the decision to change careers. The findings of the study confirm the Teacher Attrition Theory, as poor working environments, including unreasonable policies and inadequate resources, align with voluntary attrition factors that make teachers seek more supportive and professional workplaces.

3.2.5. Realizing lifelong dream

Realizing a lifelong dream was another factor mentioned by the participants. The majority of the respondents reported that they changed careers because their interest was initially not in education but in other disciplines, such as Economics. One participant stated that he had an interest in starting his own businesses and employing other people and which will help develop the economy of the country. A participant registered that he enrolled for agricultural education due to an influence from family members and high school teachers, on the basis of job security. One participant said: *"To be self-employed is my long life dream and therefore changing career and enrolling for Applied Economics and Management is the first step to achieving my long life dream."* The findings of this study were in line with what was found by Berg et al., (2010), who found that individuals are not just looking for financial reward in a career but are pursuing their individual dream. Similar sentiments were shared by McGlynn (2014) that interest in the field and pursuing one's dream were among the factors associated with a change of career among agricultural education graduates. As explained by Holland's (1997) Congruence Theory, a mismatch between personal aspirations and the teaching environment leads individuals to leave teaching and pursue careers that better fit their personalities and long-term goals.

3.3. How do the agricultural education graduates feel post-career change?

The agricultural education graduates had mixed feelings post-career change. Some of the participants had no regrets about changing careers, while others regretted the decision to change careers.

3.3.1. No regrets for changing career

Generally, most of the graduates do not regret changing careers as they perceive a new career as one that will improve their lives and the lives of their future generations. A majority of the participants from both the interview and the focus group discussion were grateful for the decision they took to change careers. *"I am not feeling sorry for changing my career because I have a good salary, medical aid, and bonus where I am employed,"* said one participant. Most participants do not regret changing careers, as explained by Holland's Congruence Theory, their new professions align better with their personalities, values, and life aspirations, offering greater satisfaction and balance. According to the Trait and Factor, their decision to switch careers reflects a natural, well-informed process of matching personal interests with more rewarding career opportunities.

3.3.2. Regret changing career

A handful of the participants from both the interview and focus group regret changing careers for various reasons, such current job being very challenging, loss of job experience, loss of job security, and reduction in salary. The participants expressed frustration with their new jobs because it is challenging and give them sleepless nights as they lack the foundation. When they changed careers, they thought that they would get more time to spend with their families; but, it is not the case, as they are forced to work after working hours, on weekends, and sometimes on holidays to meet deadlines for submitting reports. Participants further mentioned that even though the salaries are higher than in their previous career but they do not get time to enjoy their salaries with their families. One participant was quoted saying, *"I regret changing careers because I thought in current career would be less challenging than compared to previous career. The current career is also challenging as an individual has to work on weekends and holidays to meet deadlines for submitting reports. Although there are allowances for working extra hours in the current career but there is no time to spend with your family"*.

Some participants of this study regretted the change in career as it meant a loss of years of working experience. It was considered a loss as the experience accumulated in their previous job was not considered for promotion in their current job. Also, participants registered that even though their current career was paying well and had a lot of allowances and other benefits as compared to their previous career, they regretted it because it came with a loss of job security as they were employed on a contract basis, renewable after 3 years. It would be worse if the contract is not renewed, as that would mean job loss and a job re-hunt. One participant was quoted saying: *"I regret changing career because now I am employed on a five-year contract basis, which is renewable. But renewing the contract depends on how the company is performing: meaning one day I can find myself on the streets looking for employment."* On another note, changing careers would not always result in an increased salary, but there are instances where others have had their salary reduced. One participant submitted that normally, when recruited in a new organization, an individual is remunerated at a lower scale as compared to their previous career. After completing the probation, the salary is likely to increase. The participants also mentioned that career displacement often led to substantial earnings losses. One participant was quoted saying: *"I changed career because I wanted better pay; but, I suffered in the first three months in my new career as my salary was slashed and I struggled to support my family, but later on things became normal."*

These findings of the study align with Sullivan and Crocitto (2007), who found that most individuals changing careers are between the ages of 35 and 44, a period when promotability increases. Consequently, agricultural education graduates who switch careers lose valuable years of experience, reducing their chances for promotion. However, this potential loss is often offset by higher salaries in their new careers. Similarly, Huang et al., (2013) distinguished job insecurity from job loss, explaining that those facing job insecurity remain employed but have uncertain job futures. Agricultural education graduates who change careers may regret their decision, as they

often find themselves in contract positions with uncertain longevity. Additionally, Wise and Millward (2005) noted that 70% of individuals who change careers experience a salary drop, which reflects the regrets of agricultural education graduates facing reduced salaries in their new roles. Nonetheless, this salary decrease is typically a temporary issue, as conditions stabilize after completing probationary periods.

3.4. How can the change of career by agricultural education graduates be reduced?

The participants felt that reducing change in career was not easy because even though some of the participants were teachers by calling, circumstances pushed them out of the teaching profession into the private sector. Similarly, some individuals joined the profession not by calling but had other motives, such as gaining employment and job security. Such individuals can quit easily for other available job opportunities or when things get tough in the teaching profession. However, the participants still suggested that strategies to retain agricultural education in the profession should be mainly directed to the government and school administrators. These strategies include: improving the remuneration of teachers, improving working conditions, and recognizing hard-working teachers.

3.4.1. Improve the remuneration of teachers

Participants from both semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions have a feeling that the change of career among agricultural education graduates can be greatly reduced if the government can improve the remuneration of teachers, benchmarking it with neighboring countries. The teachers are doing an important job; therefore, they deserve better pay. Teachers are behind the success of every individual. Participants felt that agriculture teachers should be given hardship allowances to compensate them for their hard work and extra responsibilities such as conducting practical activities, marking students' projects, and working extra hours – after school, weekends, and holidays. Participants also reported that the government should create a pay scale for teachers who have attained advanced certification, such as a Master's degree. One participant was quoted saying: *"I believe that the change of career among agricultural education graduates could be reduced by conducive remuneration of agriculture teachers. No agriculture teacher should get a net pay less than E15 000.00. Also, agricultural education graduates should be given allowances for making students' practical and projects"*. Another participant further mentioned that: *"Well remuneration of agricultural education graduates would encourage them to stay in the teaching profession. Agriculture teachers deserve an allowance referred to as a hardship allowance, which I think should be 15% of their gross pay"*.

These responses were in line with what was found by Gupta (2006), who stated that giving agricultural education graduates good salaries and paying them overtime allowances could retain them in the teaching profession. Work done by agricultural education graduates does not match their salary. Armstrong & Murlis (2007) further stated that paying agriculture educators allowances, such as overtime allowance and accommodation allowances, could retain them in the teaching profession. Kimaro (2015) shared the same sentiments that payment of performance allowances to educators who excel at national examinations could retain agriculture educators in the teaching profession. The findings of the study reaffirm the Teacher Attrition Theory. Improving teacher salaries and offering financial incentives like hardship allowances would address voluntary attrition by making the teaching profession more economically competitive and rewarding.

3.4.2. Improve working conditions

Improving the working conditions of teachers could also play a key role in reducing the change of career change. Some of the participants pointed out that it is not just money that drives them out of the teaching profession, but also the unconducive working conditions. The unconducive working conditions could be improved by the government and school administrators. For instance, the government should maintain a 1:40 teacher–student ratio in schools. Currently, the ratio is 1:70 in some schools. Overcrowded classrooms make teaching and learning difficult. The government should also provide refresher courses for teachers so that they are up-to-date with global trends and current information. The government should also pay for Orphan and vulnerable children

in time so that schools can purchase needed equipment on time. School administrators should involve teachers in decision-making in the schools and support the agriculture teachers by providing the necessary equipment and materials required for teaching and learning on time. Also, school administrators should give agriculture teachers reasonable loads per week and allow them to focus on teaching their major subject in schools instead of deploying them to teach other subjects such as Sciences and Mathematics. *"If the government of XXX country can maintain the 1:40 teacher-student ratio in schools, the change of career among agricultural education graduates could be reduced. The overcrowded classrooms make it impossible for the teachers to carry out their duties. These high numbers of students in classes increase the stress that comes with the teaching profession.* Said one participant.

The findings of the study also reveal the need for government support in the education sector, highlighting that allowing teachers to further their studies contributes to their happiness and sense of youthfulness. They also advocated for the construction of housing for teachers and stressed the importance of administrative support for agriculture teachers. The participants expressed frustration with the current treatment of teachers, urging administrators to avoid treating them like robots and instead foster a more supportive and encouraging environment. Another participant said: *"The government should allow teachers to go and further their studies. Learning makes an individual happy and feel young. The government should build houses for teachers. The administrators should be supportive of agriculture teachers and provide them with the needed facilities to carry out students' projects. Administrators should stop treating teachers like robots."*

The findings of the study concerning improving the working conditions as a strategy to retain agricultural education graduates in the teaching profession were in line with those by Freeland (2024), who revealed that building teachers' houses near schools would reduce the change of career among teachers. School administrators should provide support to agriculture teachers with the necessary equipment for projects and for conducting practical on time. Similarly, Mulkeen (2008) asserted that applying changes to deployment policy, such as allowing individuals to select schools closer to their homes, could also reduce the career change. Furthermore, Kimaro (2015) and Cheng et al., (2023) reported that the government should help educators on how to deal with stress caused by overcrowded classrooms and handling problems such as students' discipline. The findings of the study are in line with the Teacher Attrition Theory, enhancing working conditions, such as maintaining manageable class sizes, providing resources, and offering professional development, which would reduce dissatisfaction and prevent teachers from voluntarily leaving. Also, the advocacy for increasing government support through funding, opportunities for further study, housing, and administrative encouragement would create a more positive and stable environment, thereby lowering teacher turnover as reported in the findings of this study.

3.4.3. Recognize hard-working teachers

The findings of the study indicated that recognition of hard-working teachers could reduce the chance of career advancement among the graduates. If the efforts of hard-working teachers could be recognized by being promoted to other departments in the education sector could work as a motivation to stay in the teaching profession. Participants further mentioned that the government should change the promotion criteria, whereby individuals are promoted based on seniority, and promote individuals on merit. Also, agriculture teachers who excel in external examinations should be given a bonus to motivate them. One participant was quoted saying: *"Motivate, recognize, and reward hard-working teachers and promote them to other departments where they can face new challenges. New challenges make an individual learn new things and bring satisfaction. If an individual is satisfied will stay in that profession"* (Participant W).

The findings of the study were in line with those by Kimaro (2015), who mentioned that paying performance allowances to teachers who excel at national examinations would reduce the chance of career advancement. Kimaro (2015) further noted that giving a gift when a student obtains a Grade A in any subject would motivate teachers to stay in the teaching profession, and that would improve the quality of education. It motivates the teachers and should be taken as recognition of their hard work. Yunita et al., (2023) further stated that gaining recognition from staff, community, and administration is very important to educators to stay long in the teaching

profession. Consistent with both the Teacher Attrition Theory and Holland's Congruence Theory, recognizing and rewarding teacher excellence based on merit fosters a sense of achievement and personal alignment with professional goals, thereby increasing teacher retention.

4. CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, one can conclude that generally, most agricultural education graduates change careers to Economics and Management. The key factors influencing their career change were a combination of negative experiences, such as high stress levels in teaching, low salaries, limited career advancement opportunities, and unconducive working conditions, along with positive motivations such as the realization of lifelong dreams in other fields. Graduates have mixed emotions post-career change, with most not regretting their decision due to better prospects, while a few regretted the change because of job insecurity, loss of accumulated experience, and unexpected work pressures. The agricultural education graduates strongly believed that reducing career change among agricultural education graduates would require systemic improvements, particularly better remuneration, improved working conditions, and the recognition of hardworking teachers. The retention of the agricultural education graduates could be enhanced by benchmarking teacher salaries against neighboring countries, reducing class sizes, ensuring the timely provision of resources, allowing for professional development, and promoting teachers based on merit rather than seniority. Ultimately, the study highlights the urgent need for education policymakers and school administrators to address the structural challenges within the teaching profession to retain skilled and passionate agricultural educators.

The following recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusions of the study:

1. The Government should revise and improve the salary structure for agricultural education graduates to make it competitive with the private sector. Additional allowances such as hardship, housing, medical, and transport benefits should be introduced to motivate and retain teachers. Furthermore, salary scales should reflect qualifications, ensuring teachers with advanced degrees, like a Master's, are adequately compensated.
2. The appropriate government ministries, such as the Ministry of Education and Training and school administrators, should address the current unconducive working environment by implementing the 1:40 teacher-student ratios, providing timely access to agricultural teaching equipment, and ensuring that schools receive financial resources, especially for Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC) programs, without delay. Refresher courses, in-service training, and study leave opportunities should be made readily available to allow teachers to stay current with educational trends and innovations.
3. The Ministry of Education and Training should revise promotion policies to ensure career advancement is based on merit rather than solely on seniority. Recognizing outstanding agricultural educators through awards, promotions, and performance-based bonuses, especially for achievements such as exceptional student outcomes in external examinations, can serve as an incentive for teachers to stay committed to the profession.
4. School administration should adopt more supportive management styles, involving teachers in decision-making and treating them with dignity and respect. Providing accommodations for teachers, creating a supportive work culture, and ensuring reasonable teaching loads, where agricultural educators focus primarily on their specialized subject, will improve morale and job satisfaction.
5. Agricultural education programmes at tertiary institutions should include stronger career guidance services to ensure students choose teaching as a career by genuine interest rather than convenience or external pressure. Students pursuing agricultural education should engage in thorough career exploration and self-assessment before committing to the teaching profession, ensuring alignment

with their true interests and long-term goals. This initiative may help reduce the number of graduates who later feel compelled to change careers due to mismatched interests.

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