

Developing a Conceptual model of SEED Careers App Impact Addressing Barriers to Retention in FANHS College and Workforce Development

Abstract

Underrepresentation of minority groups in food, agriculture, natural resources, and human sciences (FANHS) careers remains a persistent issue, limiting diversity and innovation in the industry. Data indicate that agriculture degrees are disproportionately awarded to White students, with Hispanic, Black, and Native American students receiving significantly fewer degrees (DataUSA, 2022). Research suggests that financial support, experiential learning, and outreach can improve minority student retention and career success in FANHS (Myers & Myers, 2020; McAlexander et al., 2022). In response, the USDA's NextGen program awarded an \$18.1 million grant to Tennessee State University (TSU) to support underserved students through scholarships, internships, and career resources, including the development of the Students Exploring Employment and Development (SEED) mobile application. This study evaluates the effectiveness of the SEED app in addressing barriers to FANHS career retention among minority students at TSU. The app provides tailored career resources, including internships, scholarships, industry events, and educational materials, designed to enhance accessibility and engagement. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this research investigates how behavioral intentions, social belonging, and perceived support influence student retention and career aspirations in FANHS. A qualitative case study approach, incorporating focus groups and semi-structured interviews, will be employed to assess user experiences, app usability, and the app's impact on students' career outlook. Thematic analysis using NVivo software will identify key factors influencing app engagement and perceived effectiveness. Findings will inform future interventions for supporting underrepresented students in FANHS and optimizing digital career development tools. By integrating theoretical insights with empirical evidence, this study aims to contribute to strategies that promote diversity and inclusion within the agricultural workforce.