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Participation, Motivations, and Perceived Constraints in School-Based Agricultural Education Programs

Adejumoke Bosede Ale
Department of Agricultural Education, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria
Corresponding email: aleab@afued.edu.ng

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Abstract: *School-based agricultural education fosters early interest, practical skills, and career pathways in agriculture. This study examined pupils' socio-economic characteristics, participation in agricultural club activities, motivations, and perceived constraints. A descriptive survey design was used to collect data from 120 primary school pupils through structured questionnaires, and results were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. Findings revealed meaningful participation in crop production, exhibitions, and produce marketing. Engagement was driven by personal interest, strong academic performance in agricultural subjects, and influence from teachers, parents, and peers. However, participation was constrained by inadequate funding, insufficient resources, limited teacher competence, restricted practical opportunities, shortage of farmland, and low parental motivation. The study concludes that despite positive engagement; structural limitations hinder effective agricultural education. Strengthening institutional support, practical learning environments, and teacher capacity is essential to sustain youth engagement in agriculture.*
Keywords: agricultural education, pupils' participation, agricultural clubs, youth engagement

INTRODUCTION

Young people are the future of farming, yet many education systems struggle to turn school-level agricultural experiences into lasting interest and viable career pathways. In many contexts, pupils show genuine curiosity and strong classroom performance in agricultural subjects, but that interest is often weakened by limited resources, weak practical opportunities, and insufficient institutional support (Giwu et al., 2024; Geza et al., 2021). School agricultural clubs, school farms, exhibitions, and supervised practicals are intended to bridge classroom theory and real farming. When well-designed and resourced, these experiential activities increase competence, spark entrepreneurial thinking, and can improve farm productivity and household welfare when youth participate in broader farming programs (Coleman et al., 2024; Daudu et al., 2023). This study therefore examines pupils' socio-educational profile, motivations and barriers to club participation, and the nature of school agricultural activities, to identify realistic, school-level strategies that make agricultural learning meaningful and sustainable for young learners.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and informed by a livelihoods/participation perspective. ELT (Dewey → Kolb; applied in contemporary agricultural education) posits that learning is a cyclical process of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualisation and active experimentation; in school agriculture this translates into well-planned, supervised farm projects, field trips, exhibitions and supervised agricultural experiences that convert "doing" into durable learning (Coleman et al., 2024; Knobloch & Smith, 2024). ELT helps explain why pupils who regularly engage in practical, supervised agricultural tasks report higher competence, confidence and subject interest.

Complementing ELT, the sustainable livelihoods / participation lens highlights how structural factors, access to land, funding, extension, teacher competence and family support , shape whether youth can transform school experience into livelihood opportunities (Geza et al., 2021). Empirical evidence also shows that youth participation in farming programs is associated with better farm productivity and household welfare outcomes, emphasising that school-level interventions can have ripple effects beyond the classroom if they link learners to resources and local value-chain opportunities (Daudu et al., 2023; Giwu et al., 2024). Together, these frameworks explain both the micro (learning processes inside the school) and macro (resource, policy and market) determinants of pupils' agricultural engagement.

Statement of the Problem

Agricultural education at the basic school level is designed to build early interest, practical skills, and future career pathways in agriculture through clubs, school farms, and hands-on activities. However, the effectiveness of these programs is often limited by inadequate funding, insufficient resources, lack of competent teachers, limited practical facilities, and restricted access to farmland. Pupils' participation is further influenced by personal interest, parental support, peer influence, and perceptions of agriculture as a viable and rewarding career.

Despite widespread implementation of school agricultural programs, there is limited empirical evidence on how these socio-economic, motivational, and institutional factors collectively shape pupils' participation and career orientation toward agriculture. Without such evidence, efforts to strengthen youth engagement in agriculture may be poorly targeted. This study therefore examines pupils' characteristics, participation patterns, motivations, and perceived constraints in school-based agricultural education.

The broad objective of this study was to assess the level of involvement of primary school pupils in young farmers' club in Ondo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

i. describe pupils' socio-demographic and school-based characteristics relevant to agricultural learning (gender, age, class level, household context, club membership).
ii. examine pupils' motivations for joining and barriers to participating in school agricultural clubs.

iii. profile the types and frequency of school agricultural activities (e.g., exhibitions, field trips, crop and livestock projects, sale of produce).
iv. identify institutional and community constraints that limit effective experiential agricultural learning.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine pupils' socio-economic characteristics and their involvement in school-based agricultural activities. The study was conducted in selected public primary schools within the study area where agricultural education activities were structured and Young Farmers' Clubs were operational, providing an appropriate context for assessing children engagement in agriculture.

The target population comprised all upper primary school pupils enrolled in schools offering agricultural education activities in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. A multistage sampling procedure was adopted. First, schools with functional agricultural programs were purposively selected. Thereafter, pupils were selected using simple random sampling to ensure equal representation. A total of 120 respondents constituted the study sample.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed specifically for the study. The instrument contained close-ended items organized into sections covering socio-economic characteristics (gender, class level, household size, and School Agricultural Club membership) and participation in agricultural activities. The use of close-ended questions enhanced clarity, uniformity of responses, and ease of quantitative analysis. Yes, and No responses were used because of the age of the respondents. To ensure instrument quality, face and content validity were established through expert review by specialists in agricultural education and extension. Their input improved item clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Reliability was determined through a pilot test conducted among pupils outside the study sample, and internal consistency was confirmed using

Cronbach's alpha, which yielded an acceptable reliability coefficient of 0.7. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from relevant school authorities before data collection. Questionnaires were administered in person by the researcher with the assistance of class teachers to ensure proper guidance and a high response rate. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained. Data were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequency counts and percentages were used to summarize respondents' socio-economic characteristics. while inferential statistics, including chi-square and regression analysis, were employed to examine relationships between socio-economic variables and agricultural participation. All statistical tests were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

The socio-economic profile of respondents indicates patterns relevant to youth engagement in agricultural learning. Females constituted the majority (58.3%), suggesting strong participation of girls in school-based agricultural activities. Gender is widely recognized as an important socio-demographic factor influencing participation and engagement in agriculture, highlighting the need for inclusive and gender-responsive educational strategies that ensure equitable opportunities for both boys and girls.

Most respondents were 11 years old (55.0%), with a mean age of 11.6 years, indicating early adolescent learners. Engagement at this developmental stage is important for nurturing agricultural skills, interest, and long-term participation when supported by structured learning environments. Early exposure to agricultural programs has been linked to sustained youth involvement and capacity development in the sector.

Household size was predominantly moderate (4–6 members; 41.7%), suggesting family contexts that may support shared responsibilities and provide labour contributions for agriculture-related tasks. Family socio-economic characteristics are known to influence youth participation patterns and engagement in agricultural activities.

Membership in the Young Farmers' Club was reported by 40.8% of respondents, indicating moderate exposure to organized agricultural learning platforms. Participation in youth agricultural clubs has been shown to enhance students' agricultural learning outcomes, practical skills, academic performance in agriculture, and career interest. Organized agricultural groups therefore serve as important platforms for experiential learning and sustained youth engagement in agriculture. Overall, the socio-economic characteristics reflect a predominantly female, early-adolescent pupil population from moderately sized households with moderate participation in organized agricultural clubs, conditions that are generally supportive of agricultural learning and youth engagement.

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Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean
Gender			
Male	50	41.7	
Female	70	58.3	
Ages			
12 &above	31	25.8	
11	66	55.0	
10	23	19.7	**11.6**
Household size			
1	24	20.0	
2-3	28	23.3	
4-6	50	41.7	
>6	18	15.0	
Are you a member of young farmers' club?			
Yes	49	40.8	
No	71	59.2	

Factors Responsible for Joining Young Farmers Clubs

The distribution of reasons for joining the Agricultural Club shows that intrinsic interest in farming (55.1%) and strength in agriculture as a subject (44.9%) are the primary motivators for membership. This aligns with broader evidence that youth engagement in agricultural activities is often driven by intrinsic motivations such as passion for farming and aspirations toward self-reliance and innovation (Mdoda, 2025). Intrinsic interest and positive attitudes toward farming encourage engagement, reflecting how personal motivations shape youth participation.

For pupils who are not members, the most prominent barrier was the inadequate number of agriculture teachers (31.0%)**,** indicating structural challenges within the school system that limit club participation. Research on school-based Young Farmers' Clubs in Kenya has shown that insufficient participation in these clubs can be linked with negative academic outcomes and attitudes toward agriculture, underscoring how support structures (like teacher capacity and time allocation) influence engagement (Muok et al., 2025).

Other barriers reported including lack of interest, lack of farmland, lack of parental support, lack of farming experience, and negative attitudes toward agricultural careers, reflect a combination of resource constraints and socio-cultural perceptions that affect youth engagement.

Additionally, positive perceptions of Young Farmers' Club membership are associated with enhanced agricultural exposure and career interest. For example, students in secondary schools perceive club participation as influential in enhancing interest and participation in agriculture,

which supports the argument that membership can shape motivational and career outcomes (Njenga et al., 2024).

Table 2: Reasons for Membership and Non-Membership in School Agricultural Clubs

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Why did you join the Agricultural Club in your School?		
Interest in farming	27	55.1
Agriculture is my best subject	22	44.9
Why are you not a member of Young Farmer Club?		
Inadequate number of agriculture teachers	22	31.0
Lack of interest in agriculture	11	15.5
Lack of support from parents	9	12.7
Lack of interest	5	7.0
Lack of farmland	11	15.5
Lack of farming experience	9	12.7
Negative attitude of pupils towards building a career in agriculture.	4	5.6

Source: Field survey, 2018

Activities of Young Farmers' Clubs in Primary schools

The results as shown in Table 3 revealed that pupils involved in agricultural clubs engage more frequently in crop production, agricultural exhibitions, and selling farm produce than in field trips and livestock activities. These patterns reflect how school agricultural programs vary in the types of experiential learning opportunities they provide. Participation in exhibitions, crop planting, and produce marketing indicates practical involvement that aligns with experiential learning principles, where students apply classroom knowledge to real agricultural contexts. Recent research into school-based agricultural education emphasizes the importance of hands-on, experiential activities, including supervised projects and real farming task, to strengthen student understanding and motivation (Banige, 2026).

Field trips, reported by only 40.8% of club members, are recognized in educational research as valuable opportunities to broaden students' exposure to diverse agricultural systems and real-world

practices. The relatively low participation in livestock raising (30.6%) may reflect resource constraints, training needs, or curricular priorities that focus more on crop than livestock enterprises. Research on students' agricultural knowledge demonstrates that exposure to practical environments increases understanding, particularly in areas where students have direct experience, such as crop and livestock production (Manning et al., 2025).

Regarding organizational engagement, only 28.6% of members reported paying dues, though most of these contributions were made monthly. Member contributions and structured participation are important for sustaining agricultural club activities and fostering leadership, responsibility, and ownership among youth. Studies of Young Farmers' Clubs indicate that participation enhances students' academic performance and practical engagement in agriculture (Muok et al., 2025).

Table 3: Activity Profile of School Agricultural Club Members

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Does your school go on agricultural exhibition?		
Yes	27	55.1
No	22	44.9
Do you go on field trips?		
Yes	20	40.8
No	29	59.2
Do you sell farm produce?		
Yes	27	55.1
No	22	44.9
Do you plant crops?		
Yes	28	57.1
No	21	42.9
Do you raise livestock?		
Yes	15	30.6
No	34	69.4
Do members of your Club pay dues?		
Yes	14	28.6
No	35	71.4
If yes, how often		
Once a week	14	28.6
Twice a month	09	18.4
Once a month	20	40.8
Once or twice a school	6	12.2

*Responses from only the 49 students involved in Agricultural clubs

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Factors influencing the involvement of primary school students in young farmers club

The results Table 4 show that academic performance, social influences, and perceptions of agriculture's economic value play important roles in shaping pupils' interest and career orientation. A clear majority (65.3%) of respondents reported high performance in agricultural subjects, suggesting that positive academic experiences may strengthen interest and confidence in agricultural learning. Research shows that higher academic engagement and perceived competence in subject areas like agriculture can increase the likelihood of students considering related career paths, underscoring the role of achievement and self-efficacy in shaping career orientations (Gervas, 2024).

Social support is also influential: more than half of respondents indicated that teachers (57.1%) and parents (65.3%) influenced their interest in agriculture, and an overwhelming majority (93.9%) acknowledged peer group influence. This aligns with findings from broader educational research showing that social influences, especially from teachers, parents, and peers , are significant in shaping students' attitudes and choices about careers, including those related to agriculture. For example, peer and parental influences have been shown to positively affect youth career decisions in agricultural contexts, although the direction and strength of influence can vary depending on social and cultural factors (Farooq et al., 2023).

Pupils' career choice orientation toward agriculture (53.1%) and their perception of the lucrativeness of agriculture (58.3%) further reflect how economic considerations and future opportunities shape career intentions. Research in agricultural education demonstrates that positive perceptions about the economic prospects and relevance of agriculture can encourage youth to view agricultural pathways as viable careers, especially when supported by positive learning experiences and social contexts (Shaibu et al., 2024).

The findings suggest that a combination of academic success, social encouragement, and perceptions of economic opportunity contributes to pupils' interest and orientation toward agriculture. These multi-dimensional influences reinforce the importance of supportive learning environments and positive messaging around agricultural careers to attract and retain youth engagement in the agricultural sector.

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Table 4: Factors Influencing Pupils' Interest and Career Orientation in Agriculture

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High performance in agricultural subject		
Yes	32	65.3
No	17	34.7
Teacher influence		
Yes	28	57.1
No	21	42.9
Parents' choice		
Yes	32	65.3
No	17	34.7
Peers group influence		
Yes	46	93.9
No	03	6.1
Career choice		
Yes	26	53.1
No	23	46.9
Level of lucrativeness of agriculture		
Yes	28	58.3
No	21	42.9

*Responses from only the 49 students involved in Agricultural clubs

Problems facing existing young farmers' club in primary schools

Table 5 presents pupils' perceptions of key constraints limiting effective participation in agricultural education. The most prominent challenge identified was lack of government funding (89.8%), indicating that systemic and institutional limitations are widely recognized as major barriers to effective agricultural learning. Insufficient funding often affects the availability of facilities, instructional materials, farm inputs, and program sustainability, thereby weakening the overall quality of school agricultural programs.

Closely related is the high proportion of respondents reporting inadequate agricultural resources (79.6%). Teacher-related constraints were also notable. Nearly two-thirds of pupils indicated a lack of competent Agricultural Science teachers (63.3%), while 61.2% reported lack of farm practical activities. Teacher competence and practical instruction are foundational to agricultural education, which relies heavily on demonstration, supervised practice, and hands-on learning. Inadequate instructional expertise and limited practical exposure reduce students' skill acquisition, engagement, and confidence in agricultural tasks.

Motivational and socio-environmental factors were similarly important. A majority reported lack of interest in agriculture (59.2%) and lack of parental motivation (59.2%), suggesting that both personal attitudes and family support influence participation. Parental encouragement plays a critical role in shaping pupils' educational engagement and career aspirations, while low interest may stem from limited exposure, weak learning experiences, or negative perceptions of agriculture.

Land-related constraints were also evident, with 55.1% citing lack of farmland as a barrier. Access to land is essential for school-based agricultural practice, especially for crop and livestock demonstrations. Without adequate farmland, opportunities for experiential learning and practical skill development are significantly constrained.

Table 5: Constraints Facing Young Farmers' Club

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
inadequate Agricultural resource		
Yes	39	79.6
No	10	20.4
Lack of competence Agricultural Science teacher		
Yes	31	63.3
No	18	36.7
Lack of farm practical		
Yes	30	61.2
No	19	38.8
Lack of interest in Agriculture		
Yes	29	59.2
No	20	40.8
Lack of farmland		
Yes	27	55.1
No	22	44.9
Lack of motivation by parents		
Yes	29	59.2
No	20	40.8
Lack of funding by government		
Yes	44	89.8
No	20	10.2

*Responses from only the 49 students involved in Agricultural clubs

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals that pupils demonstrate meaningful engagement in school-based agricultural activities, particularly in crop production, exhibitions, and produce marketing, with participation

largely driven by personal interest, positive academic performance, and strong influence from teachers, parents, and peers. These factors contribute to developing early interest and career orientation toward agriculture. However, participation is constrained by major institutional and socio-environmental challenges, notably inadequate government funding, insufficient agricultural resources, limited access to competent teachers, reduced practical learning opportunities, shortage of farmland, low parental motivation, and declining student interest. To enhance agricultural education outcomes, increased government investment, improved resource provision, strengthened teacher capacity, expanded experiential learning opportunities, better access to demonstration farmland, stronger parental and community support, and well-structured agricultural clubs are essential for sustaining youth engagement and developing future agricultural human capital.

Limitations of the Study

The study relied on pupils' self-reported responses, which may involve response bias. Findings are based on selected schools within one area, limiting generalizability. The cross-sectional design did not capture changes over time, and school conditions were not independently verified. In addition, perspectives of teachers, parents, and administrators were not included, which may limit the comprehensiveness of the findings.

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