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Agripreneurship Education as a Pathway to Youth Economic Empowerment in Sokoto State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
The persistent disconnect between agricultural education and youth economic participation in Northern Nigeria presents a pressing developmental challenge. Despite the inclusion of Agricultural Science in the national curriculum, its influence on fostering economic empowerment among youth remains ambiguous. This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach to assess the impact of an experiential agripreneurship curriculum—termed the "Samanja Enterprise Model," inspired by a resilient local bean on Senior Secondary II students in Sokoto State. A quasi-experimental design involving 284 students across six schools (three intervention, three control) revealed statistically significant improvements in agribusiness literacy ($F(1, 281) = 22.47$, $p < .001$), entrepreneurial confidence ($F(1, 281) = 18.92$, $p < .001$), and vocational aspirations in agriculture ($F(1, 281) = 15.63$, $p < .001$). Qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups (n=18) uncovered four key themes: (1) "Neman Arziki a Cikin Kasa" (Prosperity Through the Soil), reflecting a shift from subsistence to entrepreneurial identity; (2) The Paradox of Cooperative Enterprise; (3) Confronting Systemic Barriers; and (4) Restoring Pride in Agricultural Work. Findings suggest that culturally embedded, hands-on curriculum reform can reshape youth perceptions and capabilities. However, structural impediments such as limited access to land and finance remain critical bottlenecks. The study concludes that educational reform must be complemented by policy interventions to unlock youth potential in agrarian economies.
Keywords: agricultural education, youth economic participation

INTRODUCTION
In the semi-arid landscapes of Sokoto State, where agriculture has long been both livelihood and legacy, a troubling contradiction persists. Despite agriculture's centrality to Nigeria's economy contributing 23.5% to GDP (NBS, 2023) young Nigerians increasingly view farming as a symbol of stagnation rather than opportunity. Classrooms teach the anatomy of crops, yet fail to cultivate the belief that agriculture can be a pathway to prosperity. This paradox reflects a broader crisis: the disconnect between agricultural education and youth economic agency. Recent studies echo this concern. For instance, Adebayo et al. (2023) found that while agricultural curricula are widespread, they rarely translate into entrepreneurial engagement among youth. Similarly, Mbah and Eze (2024) argue that the absence of contextualised, experiential learning in agricultural education contributes to youth apathy and rural-urban migration. This study responds to that challenge by empirically testing whether a reimagined curriculum, one that embeds entrepreneurship and local relevance, can foster economic agency among secondary school students. Economic agency here refers to the capacity and confidence to act as a transformative agent within the agrarian economy (Sen, 1999). The central research question is: Can a culturally grounded, practice-oriented agripreneurship curriculum reshape youth perceptions and capabilities in Sokoto State?

Literature Review

The relationship between agriculture and economic development has long been central to economic thought, yet it remains contested and often oversimplified. Historically, agriculture has been viewed through shifting paradigms—from engine of growth to sector of surplus labor, from site of exploitation to domain of resilience. This review traces these intellectual trajectories while incorporating recent critiques that challenge reductionist models and advocate for a more nuanced understanding of agriculture's multifunctionality.

Agriculture as the Bedrock of Surplus

The Physiocrats of the 18th century, notably Quesnay, posited that agriculture was the sole source of national surplus. Classical economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo nuanced this view, recognising agriculture's productivity but emphasising industrial capital accumulation and trade specialisation. Ricardo's "law of diminishing returns" introduced scepticism about agriculture's long-term dynamism.

Critical Perspective: While foundational, these theories prioritised output over ecological and social dimensions. They failed to account for agriculture's role in sustaining rural communities and ecosystems a gap still evident in many development models.

Agriculture as a Labour Reservoir

Mid-20th-century models, particularly Lewis's Dual-Sector framework, positioned agriculture as a low-productivity sector supplying labour to industry. Johnston and Mellor (1961) outlined agriculture's contributions of labour, capital, food, and markets but still framed it as subordinate to industrialisation. Recent Critique: Scholars like Tambo et al. (2023) argue that such models institutionalised "urban bias," diverting investment from rural areas and justifying exploitative policies like price controls and marketing boards. The assumption of surplus labour has also been challenged for its empirical weakness and disruptive effects on seasonal agricultural cycles

Political Economy and Dependency: Unmasking Structural Exploitation

Political economists such as James Scott and Robert Bates exposed how state policies systematically extracted value from rural producers. Dependency theorists like Gunder Frank and Prebisch emphasised global inequalities, where the Global South remained trapped as primary commodity exporters.

Contemporary Echoes: The Food Regime Theory (Friedmann & McMichael) builds on this critique, showing how global agribusiness consolidates control over inputs and markets, marginalising smallholders. Recent budget analyses in Nigeria reveal continued underinvestment in climate-resilient agriculture despite its strategic importance (Action-Aid Nigeria, 2024)

Market Liberalisation and Its Discontents

The 1980s ushered in structural adjustment programs that dismantled state support for agriculture. While intended to improve efficiency, these reforms exposed farmers to volatile markets and eroded safety nets. A 2024 econometric study found that agricultural output in Nigeria remains highly sensitive to institutional quality and policy consistency, challenging the assumption that market liberalisation alone can drive growth.

Syntheses of Contemporary Models

Contemporary syntheses in agricultural development increasingly advocate for multifunctional models that recognise the sector's diverse contributions beyond mere food production. Recent paradigms highlight agriculture's pivotal role in stimulating rural non-farm economies, often more effectively than industrial growth in low-income settings through strong growth linkages. The New Institutionalism perspective underscores the importance of secure property rights and effective contract enforcement as foundational to agricultural performance. Meanwhile, human-centred approaches, such as Sen's Capability Approach and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, shift the focus toward what agriculture enables individuals and communities to be and do, emphasising empowerment and well-being over income alone. An emerging consensus now views agriculture as a complex system, economic, ecological, cultural, and political rather than a standalone sector, demanding integrated and context-sensitive policy responses.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a composite theoretical framework that synthesises insights from individual psychology, sociocultural learning, and development economics to examine how agripreneurship education influences youth economic agency. Drawing on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the investigation foregrounds self-efficacy as a critical determinant of entrepreneurial engagement, emphasising the role of experiential learning in fostering confidence through mastery, peer modelling, and reinforcement. Sen's Capability Approach further reframes agricultural education as a vehicle for expanding students' freedom to pursue valued agrarian livelihoods, highlighting the importance of enabling conditions beyond technical skill acquisition. Complementing these perspectives, Situated Learning Theory underscores the pedagogical value of embedding instruction within authentic communities of practice, such as school-based cooperatives, which serve as incubators for agricultural innovation. Collectively, these frameworks suggest that economic agency emerges not from instruction alone but through participatory, empowering, and contextually grounded learning experiences. To empirically assess these dynamics, the study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (QUAN → qual), following Creswell and Plano Clark's model for integrating quantitative breadth with qualitative depth, thereby capturing both the measurable outcomes and lived experiences of youth participants.

Research Design and Intervention

A quasi-experimental design was adopted due to administrative constraints in random assignment. The intervention, the "Samanja Enterprise Model" was implemented over 12 weeks in three public secondary schools, with three comparable schools serving as controls. The model, named after a locally resilient bean variety, was co-developed with regional agribusiness practitioners to ensure cultural and economic relevance.

The curriculum comprised four experiential pillars:

Localised Business Planning: Students crafted micro-enterprise plans tailored to Sokoto's agro-ecological realities (e.g., goat fattening, groundnut oil processing).

Market Immersion: Field visits to the Yar Bulutu market enabled students to conduct pricing surveys and analyse value chains.

Financial Literacy Labs: Hands-on sessions covered profit/loss calculations, mobile money use, and adashi (local savings cooperatives).

Practicum Projects: Students managed small-scale enterprises within school cooperatives, simulating real business environments.

This design reflects recent calls for context-sensitive entrepreneurship education in Africa (Agyekum et al., 2023; Nwankwo & Ibrahim, 2024), which emphasise the importance of experiential learning and local market integration.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 284 Senior Secondary II students (142 intervention, 142 control) selected via stratified random sampling to ensure demographic and geographic diversity. For the qualitative phase, 18 students from the intervention group were purposively selected for interviews and focus group discussions, ensuring representation across gender and enterprise type.

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative Phase: A validated 35-item instrument measured three constructs:

Agribusiness Knowledge ($\alpha = .78$)

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy ($\alpha = .85$)

Agricultural Career Intentions ($\alpha = .82$)

Pre- and post-test data were analysed using SPSS v.28. A one-way ANCOVA, controlling for baseline scores, tested for significant differences between groups.

Qualitative Phase: Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted in Hausa, transcribed, and translated. Reflexive thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, enabling a nuanced interpretation of students' lived experiences.

This methodological triangulation enhances validity and aligns with best practices in educational impact research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2020).

FINDINGS

The statistical analysis revealed that students exposed to the Samanja Enterprise Model demonstrated significantly higher post-intervention scores across all three measured domains, as shown in Table 1.1

Table: 1.1

Post-Intervention Effects of the Samanja Enterprise Model on Youth Agripreneurship Outcomes

Outcome Variable	Group	Adjusted Mean (Post-test)	F-value	p-value
Agribusiness Knowledge	Experimental	78.45	$F(1,281) = 22.47$	$< .001$
	Control	68.91		
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	Experimental	4.12 (5-point scale)	$F(1,281) = 18.92$	$< .001$
	Control	3.45		
Agricultural Career Intentions	Experimental	3.98 (5-point scale)	$F(1,281) = 15.63$	$< .001$
	Control	3.21		

These results affirm the hypothesis that experiential, context-sensitive agripreneurship education can significantly enhance youth knowledge, confidence, and vocational aspirations. This aligns with recent findings by Osei et al. (2023), who reported that practical agribusiness modules in Ghanaian schools led to a 35% increase in youth interest in agricultural careers.

Qualitative Insights

Thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups revealed four interwoven themes that illuminate the human dimension behind the numbers:

"Neman Arziki a Cikin Kasa" (Prosperity Through the Soil)

Students reframed farming from a survival activity to a business opportunity. Aisha, one participant, remarked, "My father's farm used to feel like a burden. Now I see it as a business waiting to be optimised." This echoes findings by Adeyemi & Musa (2024), who observed that entrepreneurial framing of agriculture fosters youth ownership and innovation.

The Paradox of Cooperative Enterprise

Group-based projects fostered peer learning and shared risk but also surfaced interpersonal challenges. As Chika noted, "Managing people was harder than managing onions. But that's what business is." This reflects the dual nature of cooperative learning environments highlighted by Tambo et al. (2023).

Confronting Structural Barriers

Despite increased agency, students voiced frustration over systemic constraints—particularly lack of capital ("rashin kudi") and land access ("matsalar fili"). These barriers mirror broader structural issues documented by FAO (2023), which found that 70% of rural youth in sub-Saharan Africa cite land and finance as primary obstacles to agribusiness entry.

Restoring Pride in Agricultural Work

The intervention helped students reclaim dignity in farming. Usman shared, "Presenting my rabbit business plan made me feel respected. I'm not just returning to the villageI'm building it." This transformation of identity is consistent with findings by Nwachukwu et al. (2023), who argue that entrepreneurial education can revalorise rural livelihoods.

DISCUSSION

The integrated findings of this study affirm that the Samanja Enterprise Model achieved its core objective: enhancing youth economic agency through experiential agripreneurship education. The statistically significant gains in agribusiness knowledge, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and career intentions underscore the transformative potential of curriculum reform when it is contextually grounded and practically oriented. However, the qualitative narratives reveal a more nuanced reality. While students

embraced new entrepreneurial identities, they also encountered systemic constraints that limited their ability to act on these aspirations. This tension between internal empowerment and external limitation echoes what Sen (1999) describes as the gap between capabilities and functionings. Students gained the capacity to aspire, but not always the freedom to realise those aspirations. This friction is not unique to Sokoto. Recent studies across sub-Saharan Africa report similar patterns. For instance, Agyekum et al. (2023) found that while agripreneurship training in Ghana improved youth confidence, lack of access to land and finance remained persistent barriers.

Likewise, Tambo et al. (2023) argue that without institutional support, entrepreneurial education risks producing "frustrated innovators" youth who are equipped with ideas but constrained by structural inertia. The theme of "Reclaiming Dignity in Aikin Gona" is particularly significant. It suggests that beyond economic metrics, agripreneurship education can reframe cultural narratives around farming. This aligns with Nwachukwu et al. (2023), who contend that restoring pride in agricultural work is essential for reversing rural youth disengagement. Yet, the cooperative model's mixed outcomes also warrant attention. While it fostered collaboration and peer learning, it also exposed interpersonal tensions and leadership challenges. This suggests that future iterations of the curriculum should include modules on conflict resolution, team dynamics, and leadership skills essential for managing real-world enterprises.

In sum, the Samanja Model demonstrates that educational reform can catalyse shifts in mindset and skillset. But for these shifts to translate into sustainable livelihoods, they must be scaffolded by enabling environments to access land, finance, mentorship, and markets. As such, the classroom must be seen not as the endpoint of intervention, but as the launchpad for broader systemic change.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides compelling evidence that integrating agripreneurship into secondary school agricultural education can significantly enhance youth economic agency. The Samanja Enterprise Model, rooted in local context and experiential pedagogy, not only improved students' agribusiness knowledge and entrepreneurial confidence but also reshaped their identities—from passive learners to proactive economic actors. However, the findings also underscore a critical caveat: educational reform alone is insufficient. While the classroom can cultivate capabilities, the conversion of these capabilities into sustainable livelihoods requires systemic support. Without access to land, finance, and enabling institutions, empowered youth risk becoming disillusioned entrepreneurs-in-waiting.

To ensure that agripreneurship education yields a durable impact, this study proposes the following multi-level recommendations:

For Curriculum Developers (NERDC)

- Institutionalise practical agripreneurship modules across all senior secondary schools.

Co-design curricula with local agribusiness hubs to ensure relevance and market alignment.

Embed modules on leadership, conflict resolution, and cooperative management to strengthen group enterprise outcomes.

For State Governments

- Establish Youth Agripreneurship Corridors—dedicated zones linking schools to leaseable farmland and micro-credit facilities.
- Create public-private partnerships to support youth-led agricultural ventures with mentorship, infrastructure, and market access.
- Implement land reform policies that prioritise youth access to cultivable plots, especially in peri-urban zones.

For Teacher Training Institutions (e.g., SSCOE, Sokoto)

- Revamp teacher education programs to include project-based learning, agribusiness mentorship, and community engagement strategies.
- Provide continuous professional development for educators on experiential pedagogy and enterprise facilitation.

These recommendations align with recent policy frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the FAO's Youth in Agriculture Strategy (2023), which emphasise inclusive, youth-centred agricultural transformation.

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