



Bridging the Skills Gap: Entrepreneurship Education in Enhancing Student Agropreneurship Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of entrepreneurship education in enhancing students' agropreneurship competencies within the context of declining youth participation in agriculture and the increasing demand for sustainable food systems. It highlights the persistent mismatch between traditional, theory-oriented agricultural education and the practical, market-driven skills required in modern agribusiness. Adopting a conceptual and empirical review approach, the study develops a comprehensive hybrid framework of agropreneurship skills, comprising technical and value-chain competencies, business management and financial literacy, and soft skills embedded in an entrepreneurial mindset.

The findings reveal that entrepreneurship education plays a significant role in equipping students with the capacity for opportunity recognition, innovation, risk management, and value creation across agricultural value chains. Through experiential learning approaches such as internships, simulations, and project-based activities, students gain practical exposure that enhances their readiness to establish and manage agribusiness ventures. The study further establishes that entrepreneurship education fosters entrepreneurial consciousness, strengthens self-efficacy, and positively influences students' intentions toward self-employment in agriculture.

However, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education is largely dependent on curriculum design, institutional support, and strong collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders. The study concludes that integrating entrepreneurship education into agricultural programs is essential for developing competent agropreneurs, reversing youth disengagement, and promoting sustainable agricultural and economic development. It recommends curriculum reform, increased experiential learning opportunities, supportive government policies, and improved access to finance, land, and technology for young agropreneurs.

Keywords: Agropreneurship Skills, Education, Entrepreneurship, Student **Word counts:** 230

INTRODUCTION

The global agricultural sector stands at a critical crossroads, confronting the pressures of population growth, climate change, technological transformation, and shifting labor dynamics. Projections indicate that the world population will approach 10 billion by 2050, significantly increasing demand for food, water, and agricultural resources. Meeting this demand will require not only higher food production but also sustainable practices, efficient resource management, and resilience to climate variability. According to Umaru, Sanusi, Ukwe & Salisu (2025), agriculture remains a cornerstone of Nigeria's economy and a vital driver of inclusive economic growth. Historically, the agricultural sector has been the backbone of Nigeria's economy, employing over 35 percent of the labor force and contributing significantly to rural livelihoods (World Bank, 2024). Before the discovery of oil in the late 1950s, agriculture accounted for more than 60 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and over 70 percent of export earnings. Although the sector's contribution to GDP declined following the oil boom, it still plays a crucial role in ensuring food security, generating employment, and providing raw materials for agro-based industries. In 2023, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that agriculture contributed approximately 25.2 percent to Nigeria's GDP, underscoring its continuing importance in

economic development. Despite this, youth participation is declining a trend often described as a “generational retreat” from agriculture. The share of youth in agrifood systems fell from 54% in 2005 to 44% in 2021, raising concerns about the sustainability of the agricultural workforce (FAO, 2025).

This retreat is driven largely by perceptions of agriculture as labor-intensive, low-status, and low-income. For many educated youths, farming is seen as physically demanding with uncertain financial returns and limited social prestige. Agriculture is often considered a “last-resort livelihood” rather than a viable career, due to low productivity, unstable incomes, and limited access to modern resources (Chipfupa & Tagwi, 2021; Sithole & Olorunfemi, 2024). Urbanization exacerbates this trend, drawing young people from rural areas to cities in pursuit of education, better-paying jobs, and improved living standards. Consequently, farming populations are aging, with studies reporting that most farmers are aged 55–65, and youth participation is below 5% in some regions. According to Olayide (2019), rural youth migration has been linked to a loss in food production, agricultural and fishing activities, urban congestion, insufficient infrastructure in metropolitan regions, and other factors. According to Echebiri (2015), the exodus of young people has boosted the involvement of older men and women in agricultural labour. Boque (2012) opined that the availability of labor in agricultural production is typically a function of the population's size, composition, readiness for the labor market, and actual hours worked by an individual. Youth migration from rural to urban regions reduces the rural areas' rate of development.

Structural barriers further discourage youth engagement. Limited access to land, credit, technology, and training prevents young aspiring farmers from entering the sector. Older generations often retain farmland as economic security, making it difficult for youth to acquire land or obtain collateral for loans. Access to inputs, financial services, and technical support is similarly constrained, restricting innovation and enterprise development (FAO, 2025). Ironically, modern agriculture has become far more technologically advanced than traditional perceptions suggest. Contemporary practices leverage precision farming, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, automated irrigation, and drone-assisted crop monitoring. These innovations enhance productivity, efficiency, and sustainability, transforming agriculture into a knowledge-driven, science-oriented, and entrepreneurial sector that presents significant opportunities for youth engagement.

Entrepreneurship education provides a strategic solution to declining youth participation in agriculture by transforming perceptions and equipping students with agropreneurship skills. It reframes agriculture as an innovative, profitable, and technology-driven sector rather than a last-resort livelihood. Through practical and experiential learning, students develop competencies in opportunity recognition, business management, and value creation. Additionally, it helps them navigate structural barriers such as limited access to land and finance. Ultimately, entrepreneurship education fosters youth engagement, promotes self-employment, and supports sustainable agricultural development and economic growth in Nigeria and beyond.

Agropreneurship Skills: A Hybrid Competency Framework

Agropreneurship skills can best be understood as a hybrid set of competencies that integrate agricultural science with entrepreneurial and business management capabilities. In essence, agropreneurship represents the intersection where agricultural production knowledge (“how to grow”) meets entrepreneurial logic (“how to create value and profit”). While traditional farmers typically focus on maximizing yield per hectare, agropreneurs concentrate on maximizing value per unit of agricultural output through innovation, processing, marketing, and efficient value-chain management. This shift from production-oriented agriculture to value-oriented agribusiness has become increasingly important in modern agricultural systems where profitability depends not only on production efficiency but also on market competitiveness and strategic decision-making (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

In a country of over 200 million people, the government of Nigeria has over the years instituted various initiatives to address the issue of youth unemployment, food insecurity, and youth lack of intention/poor involvement in agriculture. However, the impact of these initiatives, programs, and policies has been minimal due to the poor and inadequate program implementation, inconsistency, changes in government, project/programs abandonment among others by successive governments. A good example is the recent N-Power program designed by the federal government to take many young youths back to agribusiness (Agropreneurship). Agropreneurship is

entrepreneurship undertakings by individuals who have the intention to create wealth by applying creative thinking and innovative skill within the agricultural sector. At the micro-level, Agropreneurship allows the individual to develop creative and innovative means in meeting the growing demand for food whereas, at the macro level, it benefits the economy by creating employment opportunities and contributing to the national income of the country (Yusoff, Ahmad, & Halim, 2015).

Scholars commonly conceptualize agropreneurship skills as a multidimensional competency framework comprising technical skills, business management capabilities, and strategic entrepreneurial attributes. These competencies enable individuals to effectively manage agricultural enterprises while responding to dynamic market demands and environmental uncertainties (Lans, Blok, & Wesselink, 2018; Abubakar, Bala, & Bello, 2022). For analytical purposes, agropreneurship competencies can be grouped into three major functional pillars: technical and value-chain skills, business management and financial literacy, and soft entrepreneurial skills with strategic mindset.

Technical and Value-Chain Skills

Technical, value-chain, business, and entrepreneurial mindset skills constitute the core competencies required for effective agropreneurship in contemporary agricultural systems. Technical and value-chain skills form the foundation, encompassing not only primary production but also downstream activities such as processing, quality assurance, and distribution. Modern agropreneurs must understand how to integrate production with value-adding processes to enhance profitability and competitiveness. Value addition, for instance, enables the transformation of raw agricultural products into higher-value goods, thereby increasing income potential, reducing post-harvest losses, and improving market access (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2022). In addition, knowledge of quality standards and certification requirements such as food safety regulations and export standards is essential for accessing premium markets and maintaining consumer trust. Effective supply-chain and logistics management further supports product quality and minimizes losses, especially given the perishable nature of many agricultural commodities (Lans et al., 2018).

Business Management and Financial Literacy Skills

Complementing these are business management and financial literacy skills, which are critical for operating agriculture as a viable enterprise. Many agricultural graduates lack these competencies due to the production-focused nature of traditional training. Agropreneurs must therefore develop risk management strategies to cope with uncertainties such as climate change, market volatility, and policy fluctuations (Abubakar et al., 2022). Techniques such as crop diversification, insurance, and climate-smart practices enhance enterprise resilience (World Bank, 2022). Financial management skills are equally essential, particularly in managing long production cycles, planning cash flow, accessing credit, and evaluating investments. The ability to prepare bankable business plans and maintain financial records allows agropreneurs to assess profitability and sustain operations (Lans et al., 2018). Furthermore, market intelligence is crucial in shifting from a production-led to a market-driven approach. Agropreneurs who understand consumer demand, price trends, and competitive dynamics are better positioned to align production with market needs and maximize returns (FAO, 2023).

Soft Skills and Strategic Entrepreneurial Mindset

The third pillar of agropreneurship skills involves soft skills and a strategic entrepreneurial mindset, which shape how individuals identify and exploit opportunities. Opportunity recognition is a key competency, enabling agropreneurs to identify unmet needs and convert them into profitable ventures, such as transforming agricultural waste into value-added products (Abbes, 2024). Resilience and adaptability are also vital, as agricultural enterprises operate in uncertain and dynamic environments. Entrepreneurs who can adjust strategies and learn from setbacks are more likely to sustain their ventures (Wardana et al., 2020). Additionally, networking and social capital development play a significant role in accessing resources, information, and markets. Strong relationships with stakeholders across the value chain facilitate collaboration, innovation, and enterprise growth (World Bank, 2022). Collectively, these competencies enhance the capacity of agropreneurs to build sustainable and competitive agricultural enterprises.

The Role of Entrepreneurship Education in Enhancing Agropreneurship Skills

Entrepreneurship Education (EE) has increasingly become an important strategy for bridging the gap between theoretical agricultural knowledge and practical agribusiness competence. In the context of modern agricultural transformation, EE aims to equip students not only with business knowledge but also with the mindset, skills, and attitudes required to recognize opportunities, manage risks, and create value within agricultural value chains. Entrepreneurship education is generally defined as the structured process of developing entrepreneurial competencies, knowledge, and attitudes that enable individuals to identify opportunities, create value, and successfully manage business ventures (Jardim, Bártolo, & Pinho, 2021). Unlike conventional business courses that focus primarily on theoretical management principles, entrepreneurship education emphasizes innovation, opportunity recognition, business model development, and proactive problem-solving. This approach helps reposition students from passive job seekers to active creators of economic value.

Esnard and Stephens (2023) asserted that entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged as a catalyst for economic development at the macro level and for promoting financial independence and socio-economic empowerment at the individual level. Recognizing its potential, policymakers across the globe have prioritized the development of entrepreneurship as a strategic imperative. Exposing individuals to entrepreneurship education (EE) has gained significant attention due to its efficacy in fostering entrepreneurial intentions and ultimately encouraging behavior that leads to entrepreneurial careers (Bahaw et al., 2024; Fröhlich & Welpel, 2024; Nabi et al., 2017). In response, universities, non-governmental organizations, and public and private sector entities have begun to integrate EE into their educational or training frameworks, offering programs ranging from full degrees to shorter courses and, more recently, micro-credentials (Eager & Cook, 2019; Morselli, 2024). In addition, entrepreneurship education significantly influences students' entrepreneurial intentions and attitudes toward self-employment. Empirical studies indicate that exposure to entrepreneurship training positively affects students' career aspirations and increases their likelihood of engaging in entrepreneurial activities after graduation. For instance, entrepreneurship education strengthens students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship and improves their perceived ability to manage business ventures (Alam et al., 2022). Within agricultural education specifically, entrepreneurship-oriented training programs have been found to enhance students' confidence in managing agricultural enterprises and developing innovative agricultural solutions. Hands-on entrepreneurial experiences allow students to plan agricultural enterprises, generate business ideas, and manage agricultural production more effectively (Amadi & Gibson, 2024).

Similarly, Shahzada et al. (2023) report that students who participate in entrepreneurship education programs demonstrate higher levels of entrepreneurial competence and a stronger intention to start businesses than those who do not receive such training. This suggests that entrepreneurship education can positively influence students' career choices by encouraging them to view entrepreneurship as a viable alternative to wage employment. However, despite its growing importance, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education remains a topic of academic debate. Some scholars argue that entrepreneurial behavior is largely influenced by inherent personality traits such as creativity, risk-taking propensity, and internal locus of control, suggesting that education alone may have limited impact on entrepreneurial capability development (Respati et al., 2023).

Conversely, another perspective views entrepreneurship as a learnable discipline that can be systematically developed through education and training. From this standpoint, structured entrepreneurship education can cultivate entrepreneurial competencies by exposing students to experiential learning environments, mentorship opportunities, and real-world business challenges. Studies support this view by showing that entrepreneurship education enhances competencies such as opportunity identification, strategic thinking, and venture creation skills (Jardim et al., 2021; Abbes, 2024). Modern entrepreneurship education frameworks increasingly emphasize experiential and practice-oriented approaches, including business simulations, startup incubators, collaborative projects, and field-based learning. These methods enable students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts and strengthen their problem-solving abilities, teamwork, and innovation capacity (Makai & Döry, 2023).

Overall, entrepreneurship education provides a critical pathway for addressing the skills gap in agricultural education and strengthening students' agripreneurship capabilities. By fostering entrepreneurial mindsets, enhancing practical competencies, and promoting opportunity-driven thinking, EE can empower students to

transform agricultural knowledge into sustainable agribusiness ventures. However, its effectiveness depends on curriculum innovation, experiential learning opportunities, and strong collaboration between universities, industry stakeholders, and agricultural development institutions.

The Problem: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice

One of the major challenges limiting youth participation in agriculture is the mismatch between academic training and the practical demands of modern agribusiness. In many higher education institutions, agricultural education has traditionally focused on the scientific and technical aspects of farming, such as crop production, soil science, and animal husbandry. While these areas remain fundamental to agricultural productivity, they often do not equip students with the entrepreneurial, managerial, and market-oriented skills required to operate successfully in today's agribusiness environment. As a result, a gap has emerged between the theoretical knowledge students acquire in classrooms and the practical competencies needed to establish and manage profitable agricultural enterprises (Jardim et al., 2021).

This imbalance reflects a broader structural weakness within agricultural education systems, particularly in developing countries where curricula are still largely oriented toward traditional production-based agriculture rather than market-driven agribusiness models. Research indicates that many agricultural training institutions continue to emphasize theoretical instruction while offering limited opportunities for experiential learning, innovation, and commercial decision-making. Consequently, graduates often leave university programs with a solid understanding of agricultural production processes but lack essential skills in business planning, financial management, marketing, and value-chain integration, all of which are crucial for entrepreneurial success in agriculture (Wardana et al., 2020; Alam, Kousar, & Rehman, 2022).

The absence of practical entrepreneurial training significantly affects young graduates' ability to transition from academic learning to real-world agribusiness ventures. Studies on youth engagement in agripreneurship show that limited exposure to entrepreneurial competencies and agribusiness environments restricts young people's capacity to manage risks, respond to market changes, and address supply-chain challenges associated with agricultural enterprises (Amadi & Gibson, 2024). Without adequate preparation in these areas, many youth-led agricultural startups struggle to survive in competitive markets, leading to high rates of business failure and discouraging further youth involvement in the sector. Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa also indicates that the limited integration of entrepreneurship education within agricultural programs contributes to a persistent skills gap among young agripreneurs. Although many young people express interest in agricultural careers, they often lack the competencies required to transform farming activities into profitable agribusiness ventures. The absence of business-oriented training reduces youth participation in agriculture and weakens the sustainability of youth-led enterprises (Abbes, 2024). As a result, many agricultural graduates encounter difficulties in translating their academic knowledge into viable business opportunities within agricultural value chains.

Another dimension of this challenge is the limited exposure students receive to real-world agribusiness ecosystems during their formal education. Many agricultural programs provide few opportunities for internships, agribusiness incubation, industry partnerships, or practical entrepreneurial projects. Consequently, students rarely gain hands-on experience in areas such as supply chain coordination, product branding, agrifinance management, and market analysis. Without such practical experiences, graduates often struggle to apply theoretical knowledge effectively in real business contexts (Makai & Dóry, 2023). The consequences of this skills gap are evident in the high failure rate of youth-led agricultural enterprises. Although many young individuals possess enthusiasm and technical farming knowledge, the absence of entrepreneurial competencies such as risk management, financial forecasting, strategic planning, and market intelligence often results in poorly managed businesses that cannot withstand economic or environmental uncertainties. Over time, repeated failures reinforce the perception that agriculture is a high-risk and low-profit sector, discouraging youth from pursuing agribusiness careers (Alam et al., 2022).

Addressing this challenge requires a deliberate transformation of agricultural education systems. Integrating entrepreneurship education, experiential learning, and industry collaboration into agricultural curricula can help students develop both technical and entrepreneurial competencies necessary for modern agribusiness. Educational institutions must also strengthen partnerships with agribusiness industries, research organizations,

and innovation hubs to provide students with practical exposure through internships, mentorship, and business incubation programs. Such initiatives can help bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry demands while preparing a new generation of innovative and resilient agripreneurs.

Entrepreneurial Consciousness among Students

Entrepreneurial consciousness refers to the awareness, mindset, and internal motivation that encourage individuals to recognize entrepreneurial opportunities and view entrepreneurship as a viable career path. It represents an important psychological and cognitive foundation that shapes students' attitudes, intentions, and behaviors toward entrepreneurial activities. In recent years, scholars and policymakers have increasingly emphasized the development of entrepreneurial consciousness among students as a strategy for addressing youth unemployment, promoting innovation, and stimulating economic growth. When students develop entrepreneurial consciousness, they become more aware of the role of entrepreneurship in economic and social development and are more motivated to explore entrepreneurial opportunities (IEMETC, 2023).

Entrepreneurial consciousness can be understood as an internal driving force that shapes students' understanding of entrepreneurship and encourages them to engage in entrepreneurial activities. It involves a combination of awareness, entrepreneurial knowledge, confidence, and the willingness to pursue entrepreneurial initiatives. Students who possess strong entrepreneurial consciousness tend to view entrepreneurship not only as a business activity but also as a pathway for personal growth, value creation, and societal contribution. This awareness helps students recognize opportunities in their environment and motivates them to consider entrepreneurship as a meaningful and achievable career option. Within higher education institutions, entrepreneurial consciousness is closely linked to the development of an entrepreneurial mindset. An entrepreneurial mindset refers to the ability to identify opportunities, take calculated risks, innovate, and solve problems creatively. It influences how students interpret challenges and opportunities within their environment. Students who develop this mindset are more likely to approach problems proactively and demonstrate resilience when facing obstacles. Studies indicate that individuals with a well-developed entrepreneurial mindset often exhibit higher levels of confidence, initiative, and determination in pursuing entrepreneurial activities (Fajrillah, 2020; Gunawanin, 2021).

Entrepreneurial consciousness is also closely associated with entrepreneurial intention, which refers to an individual's conscious plan or commitment to start a business in the future. Entrepreneurial intention is widely recognized as a strong predictor of entrepreneurial behavior. Research suggests that students who develop entrepreneurial awareness and self-efficacy are more likely to identify market opportunities and express a willingness to establish business ventures (Rahman, Tan, & Othman, 2022; Martins, Lima, & Correia, 2022). In this sense, entrepreneurial consciousness serves as an important precursor to entrepreneurial intention and eventual entrepreneurial action. Educational environments play a crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial consciousness among university students. Higher education institutions contribute to entrepreneurship development by integrating entrepreneurship education into academic curricula, organizing training programs, establishing startup incubators, and providing mentorship opportunities. These initiatives help students develop creativity, innovation capabilities, and opportunity-recognition skills. Research indicates that supportive educational environments can significantly enhance students' entrepreneurial awareness and encourage them to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career pathway (Indriyarti, Christian, & Dewi, 2025; Duong et al., 2024; Haddoud et al., 2024).

Both personal and contextual factors also influence the development of entrepreneurial consciousness. Internal factors such as motivation, self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and entrepreneurial self-efficacy play important roles in shaping students' awareness and attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Students who believe in their ability to manage business ventures are more likely to develop entrepreneurial consciousness and pursue entrepreneurial careers (Nwibe & Ogbuanya, 2024). In addition, external influences such as family background, social networks, institutional support, and exposure to entrepreneurial role models can strengthen students' entrepreneurial awareness and intentions (Widyastuti et al., 2023). Experiential learning further contributes to the development of entrepreneurial consciousness. Through internships, business competitions, startup projects, and other practical experiences, students gain hands-on exposure to entrepreneurial processes. These experiences help them develop confidence, innovation skills, and problem-solving abilities required for entrepreneurial success. Studies on Generation Z students suggest that entrepreneurial awareness often develops through a

combination of internal motivation, reflective learning experiences, and supportive social environments (Iqbal et al., 2025).

Despite its importance, many students still demonstrate limited awareness of entrepreneurship as a viable career option. In several developing countries, students often prioritize traditional wage employment due to perceived risks, limited entrepreneurial skills, and lack of access to resources. These challenges highlight the need for stronger educational interventions that promote entrepreneurial awareness and cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets among students (Mensah, Khan, & Mwakapesa, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The global agricultural sector is experiencing major changes due to population growth, technological advancement, and increasing demand for sustainable food systems. Despite its importance for economic development and food security, youth participation in agriculture continues to decline because many young people perceive the sector as labor-intensive, low-income, and lacking social prestige. In addition, structural challenges such as limited access to land, credit, and modern technologies further discourage youth involvement, leading to rural-urban migration and an aging farming population. Modern agriculture has evolved into a dynamic agribusiness sector that combines technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship. As a result, agropreneurship skills have become essential for students. These skills integrate technical agricultural knowledge with business management abilities and entrepreneurial mindset competencies, enabling individuals to create value through value addition, supply-chain management, financial planning, and market-oriented production.

However, a major challenge in agricultural education is the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical agribusiness skills. Many universities focus mainly on scientific agricultural training while providing limited opportunities for experiential learning, entrepreneurial development, and industry engagement. This often produces graduates who lack the entrepreneurial competencies needed to establish successful agribusiness ventures. Entrepreneurship education is therefore a key strategy for addressing this skills gap. By integrating entrepreneurial training, practical experiences, and innovation-driven learning into agricultural programs, universities can enhance students' entrepreneurial competencies, self-efficacy, and interest in agribusiness careers. Additionally, entrepreneurship education helps develop entrepreneurial consciousness, encouraging students to recognize opportunities and pursue agribusiness ventures. Strengthening entrepreneurship education and practical training within agricultural education is essential for developing skilled agropreneurs, promoting youth participation in agriculture, and supporting sustainable agricultural development and food security.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussions presented in this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Higher education institutions should redesign agricultural curricula to incorporate agribusiness and entrepreneurship education.
- ii. Universities should adopt experiential learning strategies such as agribusiness simulations, project-based learning, internships, and field-based training.
- iii. Educational institutions should strengthen collaborations with agribusiness companies, agricultural research institutes, and government agencies.
- iv. Governments and financial institutions should develop policies that improve young people's access to land, credit facilities, agricultural inputs, and modern technologies. Providing youth-friendly agricultural financing schemes and startup grants can encourage graduates to establish agribusiness ventures.
- v. Tertiary institutions should organize entrepreneurship workshops, business competitions, mentorship programs, and guest lectures from successful agropreneurs. These initiatives can inspire students, strengthen entrepreneurial consciousness, and encourage them to consider agribusiness as a viable career path.

- vi. Educational institutions should promote the integration of digital technologies such as precision agriculture, drone technology, artificial intelligence, and agricultural data analytics into agricultural education. Technology-driven agriculture can enhance productivity and attract youth to the sector.
- vii. Governments should develop supportive policies that promote youth participation in agriculture through training programs, innovation grants, and agricultural entrepreneurship development initiatives. Policy interventions should aim to create an enabling environment for youth-led agribusiness enterprises.

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