



Theme: Transforming Education Through Open and Distance E-Learning: Inclusive, Innovative, and Sustainable Solutions.

Title: Pedagogical Influences on Agricultural Career Aspirations among Secondary School Students in Uganda: A Social Cognitive Career Theory Perspective

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Abstract

Despite the inclusion of agriculture in secondary education, many young people do not translate positive experiences of agricultural learning into clear career intentions. This study examined how pedagogical experiences influence agricultural career aspirations among secondary school students in government-aided schools in Busongora County, Uganda, using Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). A mixed-methods cross-sectional design was used. Quantitative data were obtained from 269 students and qualitative data from 12 agriculture teachers. Students were selected through stratified random sampling and teachers purposively. Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation, while interview data were analyzed thematically. Students reported strong exposure to practical teaching, with 82.2% agreeing that practical lessons improved understanding and 81.4% reporting that practical learning increased interest. Teacher encouragement was reported by 79.2%, whereas only 65.4% felt comfortable discussing careers with teachers. Although 80.7% viewed agriculture as offering good careers, only 69.9% would consider agriculture as a personal career. Instructional methods were positively associated with career aspirations ($r = .684, p < .001$). Using SCCT, the findings suggest that practical learning and social support can strengthen self-efficacy and outcome expectations, while parental expectations, social perceptions and resource constraints can weaken the translation of interest into career commitment. The study contributes localized evidence for strengthening learner-centred agricultural education and career guidance in rural Uganda.

Keywords: agricultural education; career aspirations; pedagogy; Social Cognitive Career Theory; secondary students; Uganda.



1. Introduction

Agriculture remains central to livelihoods, employment and food security in Uganda, yet attracting young people into agriculture-related education and careers remains a persistent challenge (World Bank, 2024; FAO, 2023). Recent scholarship increasingly treats youth agricultural career development not simply as a question of whether young people like farming, but as a process shaped by learning experiences, perceived career outcomes, social relationships and institutional conditions. Jjuuko's recent work on youth transition in Uganda shows that young people's agricultural education and employment pathways are shaped by both individual agency and constraining social and institutional arrangements (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2024; Jjuuko, 2022).

In Uganda's secondary schools, competence-based education has strengthened the policy expectation that teaching should be learner-centred, practical and connected to real-world competencies. The National Curriculum Development Centre reports that the aligned A-level curriculum introduced a shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogies and greater alignment with skills, attitudes and values (Mukembo et al., 2015; Okiror et al., 2017; Namatende-Sakwa et al., 2025). However, implementation depends on teachers' pedagogical capacity and the availability of practical learning resources. Recent research on secondary agricultural education teachers in Uganda notes continuing professional-development needs for effective implementation of the competence-based curriculum (Kibirige et al., 2025).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a useful framework for explaining these processes. SCCT proposes that self-efficacy and outcome expectations shape career interests and goals, while contextual supports and barriers influence whether interests are translated into goals and choices (Lent et al., 1994). In agricultural education, practical demonstrations, projects and field experiences can provide mastery experiences that strengthen students' confidence, while teacher encouragement provides social persuasion and vicarious learning (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994). At the same time, perceptions of agriculture's economic prospects, social status and parental expectations can influence outcome expectations and contextual support (Lent et al., 1994; Jjuuko, 2022).

Recent comparative evidence strengthens the relevance of this perspective. A 2025 study of rural South African high-school learners applying SCCT found that positive feelings about agriculture were connected to self-efficacy, while teacher, family and community support and practical experiences strengthened agricultural career interest (Makola et al., 2025). Similarly, a 2024 South African study concluded that interactive, hands-on agricultural education and extension can influence students' intentions to study, work and establish enterprises in agriculture (Maka, 2024; Lent et al., 1994; Jjuuko, Tukundane, & Zeelen, 2019).

Despite these developments, there remains limited localized evidence from rural Ugandan secondary schools examining how instructional methods, the learning environment and teacher–student



interaction relate to agricultural career aspirations within a single SCCT-informed framework. This study addresses that gap by examining students in government-aided secondary schools in Busongora County, Kasese District.

2. Problem Statement

Agriculture is taught in Ugandan secondary schools partly to develop practical competencies and expose learners to possible career pathways. Yet classroom exposure does not necessarily translate into willingness to pursue agriculture after school. The problem is therefore not merely the presence of agriculture in the curriculum, but whether pedagogical experiences help students develop confidence in agricultural tasks, expect meaningful outcomes from agricultural careers, and receive sufficient contextual support to convert interest into career intentions (Lent et al., 1994; Namatende-Sakwa et al., 2025).

In rural Busongora County, this issue is particularly important because agriculture is a major livelihood activity. However, students may encounter theoretical instruction, inadequate facilities, limited opportunities for practical learning and weak career guidance. At the same time, family expectations, social perceptions of farming and beliefs about the economic returns from agriculture may compete with positive school experiences (Jjuuko, 2022; IFAD, 2024). Existing literature has not adequately explained how these pedagogical and contextual factors operate together among students in government-aided secondary schools in this setting. The study therefore examines the relationship between pedagogical influences and agricultural career aspirations through SCCT.

3. Theoretical Framework: Social Cognitive Career Theory

SCCT, developed by Lent, Brown and Hackett, explains career development through the interaction of learning experiences, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, interests, goals and contextual supports or barriers (Lent et al., 1994). Self-efficacy refers to students' confidence that they can successfully perform agricultural tasks. Outcome expectations refer to beliefs about what will result from pursuing agriculture, including income, employment, social recognition, entrepreneurship and personal satisfaction. Career aspirations represent the learner's emerging intention or willingness to pursue an agricultural pathway.

The pedagogical variables in this study are therefore interpreted as learning experiences and contextual supports. Instructional methods such as demonstrations, projects and field trips provide opportunities for mastery and vicarious learning. The learning environment, including school gardens, farms, tools and field activities, provides the context in which such learning experiences occur. Teacher



encouragement, career guidance and mentorship provide social persuasion and informational support (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994).

Importantly, SCCT does not imply that positive learning experiences automatically produce career choice. Contextual barriers can weaken the pathway between interest and goals (Lent et al., 1994). In this study, the observed difference between positive perceptions of agriculture and willingness to choose it as a personal career is therefore interpreted as an SCCT tension between favourable learning experiences and outcome/contextual constraints.

Integrated SCCT framework for the study

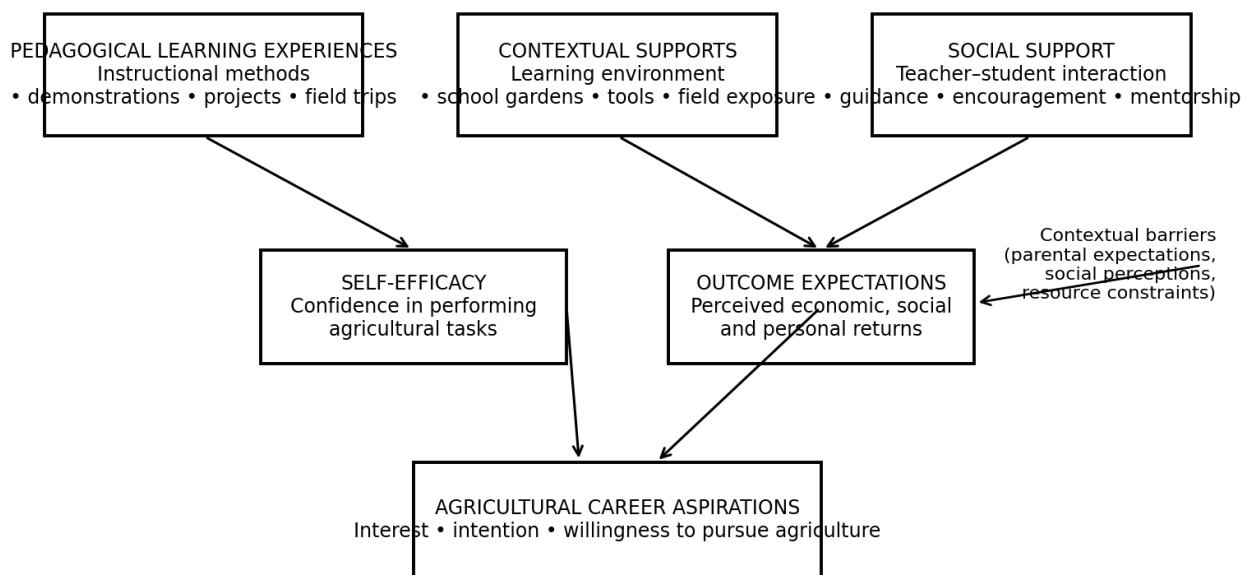


Figure 1. Integrated SCCT framework linking pedagogical learning experiences, cognitive mechanisms and agricultural career aspirations.

Study variable	SCCT construct/pathway	Expected relationship with career aspirations
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Instructional methods	Learning experiences → self-efficacy/outcome expectations	Practical, learner-centred methods are expected to strengthen confidence and positive career perceptions.
Learning environment	Contextual support + learning experiences	Functional gardens, tools and field exposure provide opportunities for mastery and realistic career exposure.
Student–teacher interaction	Social persuasion + contextual support	Encouragement, guidance and mentorship are expected to strengthen confidence and career awareness.
Parental/social influences	Contextual supports/barriers + outcome expectations	Positive support should facilitate aspirations; negative perceptions and conflicting expectations may constrain them.
Agricultural career aspirations	Career interest/goals	Outcome reflecting students' interest and willingness to pursue agriculture.

4. Related Literature

4.1 Pedagogical Strategies and Agricultural Career Aspirations

Practical and experiential learning is particularly important in agricultural education because agriculture is an applied field. Demonstrations, projects, school enterprises and field visits provide mastery experiences that can make abstract content tangible (Bandura, 1997; Mukembo et al., 2015). Recent SCCT research among rural South African high-school learners found that practical experiences reinforced learners' confidence and interest in agriculture, while social support strengthened their commitment (Makola et al., 2025). Evidence from Uganda also shows that youth agricultural education and employment transitions are shaped by the quality of institutional and social arrangements surrounding learners, rather than by individual motivation alone (Jjuuko, 2022).

The present study extends this literature by examining pedagogical influences within rural government-aided secondary schools and by explicitly interpreting instructional experiences through SCCT rather than treating pedagogy as an isolated teaching variable.



4.2 Learning Environment

Agricultural learning requires more than classroom explanation. School gardens, demonstration plots, tools, livestock units and field exposure create opportunities for learners to observe, practise and evaluate agricultural activities (Mukembo et al., 2015; Okiror et al., 2017). Recent Ugandan evidence on agricultural teacher professional development indicates that teachers' capacity to implement competence-based agricultural education remains an important issue (Kibirige et al., 2025). The implication is that curriculum reform without adequate teacher capacity and practical infrastructure may produce an implementation gap.

4.3 Teacher–Student Interaction, Mentorship and Career Guidance

Teachers can influence career development through encouragement, social persuasion, role modelling and career information (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994). Recent research on rural learners shows that teacher, family and community support can strengthen agricultural self-efficacy and commitment (Makola et al., 2025). Jjuuko's Ugandan work also emphasizes the importance of frontline social actors and the agency of young people in navigating education-to-work transitions (Jjuuko, 2022). These findings suggest that agricultural career guidance should expose students to the diversity of modern agricultural occupations, including agribusiness, agricultural engineering, extension, food science, environmental management, research and digital agriculture—not only farming.

4.4 Outcome Expectations and the Attitude–Career Gap

Positive attitudes toward agriculture may coexist with weak career intentions when students expect limited income, low social status or uncertain employment. This distinction is central to SCCT because career interests are shaped not only by self-efficacy but also by anticipated outcomes (Lent et al., 1994). The recent South African SCCT study similarly found that some rural learners enjoyed agriculture but remained uncertain about pursuing it as a career, particularly where competing career aspirations were stronger (Makola et al., 2025).

4.5 Research Gap

Three gaps remain. First, recent SCCT applications to agricultural career development have expanded internationally, but rural Ugandan secondary-school evidence remains limited. Second, existing Ugandan literature often examines agricultural education, youth transition or pedagogy without integrating instructional methods, learning environments and teacher–student interaction into one SCCT-informed model. Third, the distinction between positive agricultural attitudes and actual career willingness requires closer attention to outcome expectations and contextual barriers. This study addresses these gaps using empirical evidence from Busongora County.



5. Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods cross-sectional design. The quantitative component examined the relationship between pedagogical influences and agricultural career aspirations, while the qualitative component provided contextual explanations of how teachers perceived instructional practices, learning environments and mentorship (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The target population comprised Senior Secondary students (S.3–S.6) studying Agriculture and Agriculture teachers in government-aided secondary schools in Busongora County. The sample comprised 281 respondents: 269 students and 12 agriculture teachers. Students were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across class levels, while teachers were selected purposively because of their direct involvement in agricultural instruction (Kothari, 2004; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Students completed a structured five-point Likert questionnaire covering instructional methods, learning environment, student–teacher interaction and agricultural career aspirations. Teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. Content validity was established through expert review, while internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with .70 treated as the minimum acceptable threshold.

Quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations and Pearson correlation. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically (Maali, 2024). The quantitative analysis was designed to establish the strength and direction of association between the measured constructs; it does not establish causality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Ethical procedures included authorization from relevant authorities, informed participation, confidentiality and voluntary participation. Because the available manuscript contains aggregate results rather than the raw student-level dataset, no regression, mediation, moderation or gender/class-level significance tests have been added retrospectively. Such analyses would require the original dataset and correctly coded variables.

6. Findings

6.1 Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	56.5
Sex	Female	43.5



Age	16–18 years	57.2
Class	S.3	23.8
Class	S.4	30.5
Class	S.5	21.9
Class	S.6	23.8
Agriculture exposure	Studied agriculture for three years	31.2

The sample consisted of 269 students. Male students represented 56.5% and females 43.5%. The largest age group was 16–18 years (57.2%), while S.4 students formed the largest class-level group (30.5%). These characteristics provide context for the interpretation but were not presented as causal predictors because inferential tests by subgroup were not available.

6.2 Instructional Methods

Indicator	Agree/strongly agree n	%	Mean	SD
Teacher uses demonstrations	198	73.6	4.12	0.81
Students participate in agricultural projects	187	69.5	3.98	0.94
Practical lessons improve understanding	221	82.2	4.35	0.73
Field trips increase interest in agriculture	205	76.2	4.21	0.79
Teaching methods make agriculture interesting	196	72.9	4.09	0.88

Practical lessons received the strongest endorsement (82.2%; $M=4.35$), followed by field trips (76.2%; $M=4.21$). Participation in projects was comparatively lower (69.5%; $M=3.98$), suggesting that opportunities for active project work may not be equally available. The pattern is therefore not simply



that students favour practical teaching; it also indicates variation in the extent to which different experiential methods are implemented.

6.3 Learning Environment

Indicator	Agree/strongly agree n	%	Mean	SD
School has a farm/garden	202	75.1	4.18	0.86
Participation in field activities	194	72.1	4.06	0.92
Field learning improves understanding	216	80.3	4.29	0.74
Practical learning increases interest	219	81.4	4.31	0.71
Lessons are mostly practical	181	67.3	3.87	0.96

Students reported positive perceptions of the agricultural learning environment. The strongest response concerned the contribution of practical learning to interest (81.4%; M=4.31). However, only 67.3% agreed that lessons were mostly practical. This difference is important: students value practical learning, but the opportunity to experience it appears less consistent than the positive attitude toward it.

6.4 Student–Teacher Interaction

Indicator	Agree/strongly agree n	%	Mean	SD
Teacher encourages agricultural careers	213	79.2	4.25	0.77
Teacher provides career guidance	198	73.6	4.11	0.83
Students feel comfortable discussing careers	176	65.4	3.96	0.91



Teacher motivates students	206	76.6	4.18	0.79
Teacher explains opportunities in agriculture	195	72.5	4.09	0.85

Teacher encouragement was relatively strong (79.2%), as was motivation (76.6%). However, only 65.4% reported feeling comfortable discussing careers with teachers. This is the weakest indicator in the teacher–student interaction construct and points to a practical mentorship gap.

6.5 Agricultural Career Aspirations

Indicator	Agree/strongly agree n	%	Mean	SD
Enjoy studying agriculture	210	78.1	4.14	0.82
Agriculture offers good careers	217	80.7	4.28	0.76
Interested in further study	196	72.9	4.02	0.91
Would consider agriculture career	188	69.9	3.95	0.94
Would recommend agriculture	203	75.5	4.11	0.8

The results show a clear attitude–career intention gap. Although 80.7% agreed that agriculture offers good careers and 78.1% enjoyed studying agriculture, only 69.9% would consider agriculture as a personal career. This gap is theoretically important because it suggests that positive attitudes alone are insufficient to produce strong career goals.

6.6 Relationship Between Instructional Methods and Career Aspirations

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
Instructional methods ↔ agricultural career aspirations	269	0.684	< .001	Strong positive association



There was a strong positive association between instructional methods and agricultural career aspirations ($r=.684$, $p<.001$). The result indicates that students reporting more positive experiences with instructional methods also tended to report stronger agricultural career aspirations. Because the design is cross-sectional and correlation is used, the finding should not be described as proof that instructional methods directly cause career aspirations.

7. Discussion

7.1 Instructional Methods: From Learning Experience to Self-Efficacy

The strongest instructional finding was the perceived contribution of practical lessons to understanding (82.2%). This is consistent with SCCT because repeated successful engagement in meaningful tasks can provide mastery experiences, one of the principal sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994). The significant correlation between instructional methods and career aspirations ($r=.684$) strengthens this interpretation, although it does not demonstrate a causal pathway.

The finding also aligns with recent SCCT evidence from rural South Africa, where practical agricultural experiences strengthened learners' confidence and sustained interest in agriculture (Makola et al., 2025). In Uganda, the policy shift toward learner-centred competence-based education makes this finding particularly relevant. The NCDC reports that Uganda's aligned A-level curriculum explicitly moves toward learner-centred pedagogy and real-world competencies (Namatende-Sakwa et al., 2025).

7.2 Learning Environment: Contextual Support

The learning-environment results show that students recognize the value of school farms, field activities and practical learning, but implementation is uneven. The 81.4% endorsement of practical learning as an interest-building experience contrasts with 67.3% reporting that lessons are mostly practical. Within SCCT, this is a contextual-support issue: a curriculum may encourage experiential learning, but the environment must provide the resources and opportunities needed to make those experiences possible (Lent et al., 1994).

Recent Ugandan evidence on agricultural teacher professional development reinforces this interpretation by identifying continuing capacity needs for implementation of competence-based agricultural education (Kibirige et al., 2025).

7.3 Teacher–Student Interaction: Social Persuasion and Career Guidance



Teacher encouragement was reported by 79.2%, suggesting that teachers are important sources of social persuasion. However, only 65.4% of students felt comfortable discussing careers with teachers. This indicates that the presence of teacher encouragement should not be equated with effective individualized mentorship. SCCT suggests that social support matters partly because it helps learners interpret their capabilities and available pathways (Lent et al., 1994). The finding therefore supports structured career conversations rather than relying only on general encouragement.

Jjuuko's recent analysis of youth transitions in Uganda emphasizes the importance of frontline social actors and the institutional conditions through which young people navigate education and work (Jjuuko, 2022). Similarly, recent SCCT evidence from rural South Africa shows that teacher, family and community support can strengthen agricultural self-efficacy and commitment (Makola et al., 2025).

7.4 The Attitude–Career Commitment Gap: Outcome Expectations and Contextual Barriers

The most theoretically significant finding is the difference between positive perceptions of agriculture and willingness to choose agriculture as a career. While 80.7% viewed agriculture as offering good careers, only 69.9% would consider it personally. Under SCCT, this may reflect differences between general attitudes and personally relevant outcome expectations. A student may recognize that agriculture offers opportunities but still believe that another occupation provides greater income, prestige, security or social approval (Lent et al., 1994).

The qualitative evidence points to parental expectations and societal perceptions as contextual barriers. These factors should therefore not be treated as peripheral explanations. They are part of the career-development environment that can facilitate or constrain the conversion of interests into goals (Lent et al., 1994; Jjuuko, 2022).

7.5 Implications for Uganda's Competence-Based Curriculum

The findings have direct implications for Uganda's competence-based curriculum. The NCDC's 2025 account of curriculum alignment identifies a shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogies and emphasizes knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (Namatende-Sakwa et al., 2025). For agricultural education, implementation should therefore be judged not only by whether practical activities appear in schemes of work, but by whether students receive repeated opportunities to practise agricultural competencies, reflect on their performance, meet agricultural professionals and understand diverse career pathways.

Career guidance should also broaden the meaning of an agricultural career. Students should encounter agriculture as a field that includes agribusiness, food processing, agricultural engineering, veterinary services, extension, climate-smart agriculture, research, digital agriculture, logistics and value-chain



enterprises. This can strengthen outcome expectations by making the sector's range of possible livelihoods visible.

8. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that pedagogical experiences are closely associated with agricultural career aspirations among secondary school students in Busongora County. Practical lessons, field exposure, projects and supportive teacher interaction are valued by students and correspond with the SCCT mechanisms through which learning experiences can strengthen self-efficacy and outcome expectations

However, the findings also demonstrate that pedagogical improvement alone is unlikely to eliminate the gap between positive attitudes toward agriculture and willingness to pursue agriculture as a career. The difference between 80.7% who regarded agriculture as offering good careers and 69.9% who would consider it personally suggests that outcome expectations and contextual barriers remain important. Parental expectations, social perceptions, resource constraints and limited opportunities for individualized career discussion may weaken the pathway from positive learning experiences to career goals

The study therefore concludes that agricultural career development should be approached as an integrated SCCT process: practical pedagogy builds learning experiences and self-efficacy; career guidance strengthens outcome expectations; supportive learning environments provide contextual opportunities; and parents, communities and education policy should reduce barriers that make agricultural careers appear less attractive.

9. Recommendations

Strengthen learner-centred agricultural pedagogy. The 82.2% endorsement of practical lessons and the significant positive association between instructional methods and career aspirations support systematic use of demonstrations, projects, field visits and school-based agricultural enterprises. Teachers should plan these as recurring learning experiences rather than occasional

Improve agricultural learning infrastructure. Although 81.4% reported that practical learning increases interest, only 67.3% reported that lessons are mostly practical. Schools and education authorities should therefore prioritize functional gardens, demonstration plots, basic tools and partnerships with nearby farms and agricultural enterprises.

Establish structured agricultural career guidance and mentorship. Only 65.4% of students felt comfortable discussing careers with teachers. Schools should establish scheduled career conversations,



mentorship sessions, exposure visits and interactions with agricultural professionals. Guidance should cover modern agricultural occupations beyond farming

Address parental and community perceptions. The gap between 80.7% viewing agriculture as a good career field and 69.9% willing to consider it personally indicates that positive classroom attitudes do not automatically translate into career goals. Schools should organize parent/community sensitization using evidence on agricultural entrepreneurship, professional careers and value-chain opportunities

Strengthen teacher professional development. Uganda's competence-based curriculum requires learner-centred and practical teaching. Continuous professional development should therefore include experiential agricultural pedagogy, project-based learning, career guidance and methods for connecting classroom learning to local agricultural enterprises. Recent Ugandan research identifies teacher professional development as an important implementation need

Align career guidance with Uganda's competence-based curriculum. Career education should connect agricultural competencies with pathways into tertiary education, vocational training, entrepreneurship and employment. This is consistent with the current curriculum direction toward practical competencies and preparation for work and further learning

10. Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design limits causal inference. The reported Pearson correlation establishes association but cannot demonstrate that instructional methods cause career aspirations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the available manuscript contains aggregate results and does not provide the student-level dataset required for valid regression, mediation, moderation or subgroup tests. Future research should use the original dataset to test whether instructional methods, learning environment and teacher–student interaction independently predict career aspirations and whether self-efficacy and outcome expectations mediate these relationships. Gender, class level and parental expectations could also be tested as moderators or control variables where the measurement and sample size support such analysis. Longitudinal research would further establish whether changes in school experiences lead to changes in agricultural career intentions over time.

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