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Otobo, Aduche L. & Salome, Emeya

Revitalisation of Young Farmers' Club in Secondary Schools for Economic Empowerment of Students in Onelga, Rivers State, Nigeria

Otobo, Aduche L. & Salome, Emeya, Ph.D

Department of Agricultural Education,

Faculty of Vocational and Technical Education

Ignatus Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

aduchelawyerotobo@gmail.com, salo_gee@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This study investigates strategies for revitalising Young Farmers' Clubs (YFCs) in secondary schools for the economic empowerment of students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area (ONELGA) of Rivers State. Three specific objectives and corresponding research questions and null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 56 agricultural science teachers and 30,529 secondary school students from 27 public secondary schools in the study area. A sample of 442 respondents, consisting of 49 agricultural science teachers and 393 students, was selected using random sampling and the Taro Yamane formula. A structured questionnaire titled Revitalisation of Young Farmers' Clubs in Secondary Schools for Economic Empowerment Questionnaire (RYFCSSEEQ) served as the instrument for data collection. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation, while the null hypotheses were tested using the z-test statistic at the 0.05 level of

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significance. Findings revealed that most respondents held mixed opinions regarding policy development and implementation. Some respondents disagreed, indicating unawareness of the existence of Young Farmers' Clubs among secondary school students in ONELGA, whereas the majority agreed that policy implementation would help revitalise the YFCs (teachers: $\bar{X} = 2.80$; students: $\bar{X} = 2.63$). Other strategies such as increased funding (Teachers: $\bar{X} = 2.90$; Students: $\bar{X} = 2.79$) and improved access to resources (Teachers: $\bar{X} = 1.70$; Students: $\bar{X} = 1.99$) were also agreed upon as essential for revitalising YFCs in the study area. Based on the findings, it was recommended that state and local governments implement policies aimed at enhancing the capacity of teachers and students involved in YFCs through training programmes on modern agricultural practices, with emphasis on hands-on and practical experiences. Furthermore, government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other relevant bodies should provide financial support to young individuals interested in agriculture through loans, grants, and related initiatives

Keywords: revitalisation, Young Farmers' Club, secondary schools, economic empowerment, ONELGA

Introduction

The agricultural sector faces a major challenge due to declining youth participation, driven by urbanisation, misconceptions about farming, and lack of exposure to modern agricultural techniques (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Development, 2021). The Young Farmers Club (YFC), an initiative aimed at engaging secondary school students in agriculture, plays a vital role in addressing this decline. Kanayo Nwanze, former IFAD President, emphasised that “the future of agriculture belongs to the youth” (IFAD, 2018), highlighting the urgent need to revitalise YFCs, especially in agriculturally rich regions like ONELGA, Rivers State. Revitalisation of YFCs involves renewing and strengthening their structures and objectives (Brown & Wilson, 2018). Studies by Ajayi

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and Bina (2017) reveal a concerning nationwide apathy towards farming among the youth. In ONELGA, where agriculture is crucial to socio-economic development, YFCs serve as platforms to develop students' interest in agriculture and home economics (Egbule, cited in Johnwest, 2017). These clubs support students' academic success, career aspirations, and personal growth through agricultural activities and community development projects.

The objectives of YFCs include equipping members with better farming skills, informal agricultural training, home-making knowledge, and fostering rural development (Ajayi, cited in Afolabi, Oba, & Shua, 2022). They also promote teamwork, proper leisure use, reduce juvenile delinquency, and restore dignity to agriculture as a career path. Furthermore, YFCs develop competent agricultural leaders and improve rural living standards.

Despite their importance, YFCs are currently underperforming. There is a direct relationship between agricultural education and the success of YFCs, indicating that revitalisation requires effective agricultural education programmes. YFCs also serve as tools for economic empowerment, providing students with practical agricultural skills, entrepreneurial abilities, and financial literacy, thereby creating self-reliant individuals. To revitalise YFCs, policy support, strategic implementation, and sustainable funding mechanisms are necessary. Providing access to microloans, grants, and financial education can further empower young farmers to start or expand agricultural ventures (Ajayi & Bina, 2017).

Against this backdrop, this research investigates strategies for revitalising YFCs in secondary schools to achieve economic empowerment among students in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State, low food production has contributed to rising poverty levels, youth migration from rural to urban areas, overpopulation, and increased living costs in cities. One major factor behind this issue is the declining interest and participation of school-age children in agricultural activities such as farming, agricultural debates, young farmers clubs, exhibitions, and field trips (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2021). The Young Farmers Club (YFC), once a structured platform where students learnt farming under the guidance of agricultural teachers, has become inactive, resulting in reduced exposure of students to agricultural practices (Idahor, 2023).

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The critical question is how YFCs can be revitalised to become even more effective than before. Could the development and implementation of new policies, stronger school-community relationships, and improved access to funds play a vital role in reviving these clubs? This study, therefore, seeks to explore strategies for the revitalisation of YFCs in secondary schools to achieve economic empowerment for students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, as well as contribute to broader agricultural development in Rivers State and Nigeria at large.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study was to investigate strategies for revitalising young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for economic empowerment of students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. examine policy development and implementation strategies for revitalisation of the young farmers' clubs in the study area;
- ii. determine funding for revitalisation of the young farmers' clubs in the study area;
- iii. investigate ways access to agricultural resources could enhance the revitalisation of the young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for economic empowerment of students in the study area;

Research Questions

Based on the specific objectives of the study, the following research questions guided the study:

- I. What are the policy development and implementation strategies that could revitalise the young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for economic empowerment of students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- ii. What are the funding strategies that could revitalise the young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for economic empowerment of students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- iii. What are the agricultural resources that could revitalise the young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for economic empowerment of students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State?

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Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses, tested at the 0.05 level of significance, guided the study.

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of agricultural science teachers and secondary school students on:

- i. policy development and implementation strategies for the revitalisation of the young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for the economic empowerment of students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- ii. funding strategies for the revitalisation of the young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for economic empowerment of students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- iii. access to agricultural resources strategies for the revitalisation of the young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for economic empowerment of students in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will be useful for curriculum planners, educators, learners, the Ministry of Education, and subsequent researchers. Curriculum planners will learn things that will help them decide whether or not to include ideas about agricultural and entrepreneurial development in the secondary school curriculum. The Young Farmers' Club (YFC) initiative will help teachers discover better ways to get students involved in hands-on agricultural activities. Students will learn useful farming skills that will help them become more independent financially and improve their job prospects. The Ministry of Education will use the results to make and carry out policies that will help school-based agricultural programmes come back to life. Finally, this study will be a useful source for future researchers who want to learn more about agricultural education and youth empowerment.

Scope of the Study

This study was conducted within the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State. It focuses on strategies for revitalising Young Farmers' Clubs (YFCs) in secondary schools to promote students' economic empowerment. The independent variable comprises the strategies for revitalisation, including policy development and implementation, funding, and access to resources, while the dependent variable is the economic empowerment of senior secondary school students.

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Methodology

The study was conducted in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State, which comprises the Ogba, Egbema and Ndoni regions with a total of 64 communities. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a population of 56 agricultural science teachers and 30,529 students across 27 public secondary schools. A sample of 442 respondents (49 teachers and 393 students) was selected using random sampling and the Taro Yamane technique.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled “Revitalisation of Young Farmers' Club in Secondary Schools for Economic Empowerment Questionnaire (RYFCSSEEQ)”, based on a 4-point Likert scale (SA = 4 to SD = 1). The criterion mean was 2.50, with items scoring ≥ 2.50 considered as agreed. The instrument underwent face and content validation by two experts from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and showed a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong internal consistency.

Data analysis involved mean and standard deviation for research questions and z-test statistics at the 0.05 significance level for hypothesis testing. A null hypothesis was rejected if the calculated z-value exceeded the critical table value; otherwise, it was accepted.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Table I: Mean responses of agricultural teachers and students on Policy Development and Implementation Strategies for the Revitalisation of the Young Farmers' Club in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni LGA. Rivers State

S/ N	Items	Teacher (49)			Students (393)		
		\bar{x}_1	SD ₁	Decision	\bar{x}_2	SD ₂	Decision
1.	Provision of agricultural credit guarantees to young farmers by commercial agricultural credit guarantee scheme fund (ACGSF) can enhance the revitalization of YFC	2.35	0.99	D	2.42	0.95	D
2.	Creating a channel to access loans to young farmers by Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (ACGSF) can boost the revitalization of YFC	2.49	1.14	D	2.35	1.21	D

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3.	Provision of crop production training programmes by the schools can boost the revitalization of YFC	2.98	1.13	SA	2.68	1.17	SA
4.	National Youth Farmers Scheme (NYFS) incentive provision scheme can enhance the revitalization of YFC	3.04	1.15	SA	2.52	1.16	A
5.	National Youth Farmers Scheme (NYFS) provision of agricultural resource can enhance the revitalization of YFC	2.69	0.98	A	2.87	0.96	SA
6.	National Youth Farmers Scheme (NYFS) training programmes can enhance the revitalization of YFC	2.31	1.10	D	2.38	1.16	D
7.	Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (ACGSF) introduction of grant to young farmers can help in the revitalization of YFC	3.43	0.87	SA	3.06	1.02	SA
8.	Youth Empowerment In Agricultural Programme (YEAP) introduction of livestock production training of young farmers can help in the revitalization of YFC	2.31	1.36	DA	2.24	1.20	DA
9.	Youth Empowerment in agricultural Programme (YEAP) introduction of piggery production training of young farmers can help in the revitalization of YFC	3.37	0.99	SA	2.88	1.06	A
10.	Youth Empowerment in agricultural Programme (YEAP) introduction of fishery production training of young farmers can help in the revitalization of YFC	3.06	1.09	SA	2.88	1.14	A
	Grand Mean and SD	2.80	1.09		2.63	1.10	

Source: *Field survey, 2024*

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The results in Table 1 reveal the mean responses of agricultural teachers and students regarding policy development and implementation strategies for revitalising Young Farmers' Clubs (YFCs) in secondary schools for economic empowerment in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni LGA, Rivers State. Findings show that respondents had mixed opinions on financial support strategies, such as the provision of credit guarantees by ACGSF (2.35 & 2.42) and the creation of loans and access channels through the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (ACGSF) (2.49 & 2.35). However, both groups agreed that training and resource provision were critical, including crop production training by schools (2.98 & 2.68), National Youth Farmers Scheme (NYFS) incentive provision schemes (3.04 & 2.52), and NYFS provision of agricultural resources (2.69 & 2.87). The introduction of grants by ACGSF (3.43 & 3.06) and specialised training programmes like piggery (3.37 & 2.88) and fishery production (3.06 & 2.88) under the Youth Empowerment In Agricultural Programme (YEAP) were also recognised as strong revitalisation strategies. These findings highlight that financial incentives, resource provision, and targeted agricultural training are crucial for YFC revival in the study area.

Table 2: Mean responses of agricultural teachers and students on Funding Strategy for Revitalization of the Young Farmers' Club Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni LGA, Rivers State

S/ N	Items	Teacher (49)		Decisio n	Students (393)		
		\bar{x}_1	SD ₁		\bar{x}_2	SD ₂	Decisio n
1.	Incentives designed for young farmers by government agencies could enhance the revitalization of YFC	2.94	0.94	A	2.79	1.08	A
2.	Giving grants to students can influence the revitalization of YFC	3.10	0.94	SA	2.91	1.15	A
3.	Access to financial institutions by young farmers could boost the revitalization of young farmers' club	2.69	1.16	A	2.69	1.11	A
4.	Providing soft-loans to students could enhance the revitalization of young farmers' club	2.96	1.02	A	2.70	1.10	A

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5.	Head-teachers' financial reward to students' boost the revitalization of YFC	2.67	0.97	A	2.86	1.02	A
6.	Agricultural agencies financial reward can boost the revitalization of YFC	2.49	1.23	A	2.67	1.09	A
7.	Access to microloans can impact the revitalization of YFC	3.43	0.87	SA	2.98	1.04	SA
8.	NGO's provision of financial incentive can enhance students' membership of YFC	2.98	1.11	A	2.66	1.15	A
9.	Provision of scholarship to students enhance the revitalization of YFC	2.71	1.19	A	2.75	1.12	A
10.	School awards could increase the revitalization of YFC	3.02	1.15	SA	2.88	1.03	A
	Grand Mean	2.90			2.79		

Source: *Field survey, 2024*

The results in Table 2 present the mean responses of teachers and students on funding strategies for revitalising Young Farmers' Clubs (YFCs) in secondary schools to promote economic empowerment in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA, Rivers State. The results show that both groups largely agreed that government incentives and grants for young farmers (2.94 & 2.79; 3.10 & 2.91) could enhance YFC revitalisation. Other highly rated strategies include access to financial institutions (2.69 & 2.69), provision of soft loans (2.96 & 2.70), and financial rewards from headteachers and agricultural agencies (2.67 & 2.86; 2.49 & 2.67). Additionally, access to microloans received the highest agreement (3.43 & 3.98), while NGO incentives (2.98 & 2.66), scholarships (2.71 & 2.75), and school awards (3.02 & 2.88) were also recognised as impactful funding approaches. These findings underscore the importance of financial support systems in encouraging students' participation and revitalising YFCs.

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Table 3: Mean responses of agricultural teachers and students on Access to Agricultural Resources for Revitalisation of the Young Farmers' Club Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni LGA. Rivers State

S/N	Items	Teacher (49)			Students (393)		
		\bar{x}_1	SD ₁	Decision	\bar{x}_2	SD ₂	Decision
1.	Young farmers access to agricultural land help in the revitalization of YFC	1.88	1.18	SD	2.00	1.19	SD
2.	Provision of seeds to young farmers can enhance the revitalization of YFC	2.02	1.16	D	2.25	1.24	D
3.	Access to tools and implements by students can enhance the revitalization of YFC	1.80	1.04	SD	2.01	1.14	D
4.	Regular utilization of agricultural extension services can boost the revitalization of YFC	2.02	1.30	D	2.26	1.33	D
5.	Access to cassava stem by young farmers can enhance the revitalization of YFC	1.63	1.09	SD	1.90	1.19	SD
6.	Access to machines can enhance the revitalization of YFC	1.59	1.00	SD	1.98	1.22	SD
7.	Access to high -tech equipment by young farmers can enhance the revitalization of YFC	1.86	1.31	SD	2.31	1.36	D
8.	Provision of livestock as a starter pack can enhance the revitalization of YFC	1.49	1.02	SD	1.83	1.20	SD
9.	Access to modern drones by students can serve to enhance the revitalisation of YFC	1.35	0.75	SD	1.64	1.01	SD

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Otobo, Aduche L. & Salome, Emeya

10. Access to innovative ideas to young farmers can enhance the revitalization of YFC	1.39	0.86	SD	1.76	1.09	SD
Grand Mean	1.70			1.99		

Source: *Field survey, 2024*

The results in Table 3 highlight the mean responses of teachers and students regarding access to agricultural resources as strategies for revitalising Young Farmers' Clubs (YFCs) in secondary schools for economic empowerment in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA, Rivers State. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents disagreed with most resource-related strategies. For instance, access to agricultural land (1.88 & 2.00), provision of seeds (2.00 & 1.16), and access to tools and implements (1.80 & 2.01) were considered insufficient for revitalising YFCs. Similarly, low ratings were recorded for access to cassava stems (1.63 & 1.90), agricultural machines (1.59 & 1.98), and high-tech equipment (1.86 & 2.31). Other strategies like the provision of livestock starter packs (1.49 & 1.83), access to modern drones (1.35 & 1.64), and innovative ideas (1.39 & 1.76) also received weak support. This suggests that respondents perceived resource access alone as inadequate for effective YFC revitalisation, emphasising the need for integrated approaches combining resources with training, funding, and policy support.

Table 4: z-test result of the Responses of Teachers and Students on Policy Development and Implementation Strategy for the Revitalisation of the Young Farmers' Club in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni LGA

Categories	N	\bar{x}	SD	α	DF	Z-cal	Z-crit	Decision
Teachers	49	2.80	1.08	0.05	440	1.03	1.96	Accept
Students	393	2.63	1.10					

Source: *Field survey, 2024*.

Table 4 shows that teachers had mean and standard deviation scores of 2.80 and 1.08, while students had 2.63 and 1.10, respectively. The z-cal value was 1.03, while the z-crit was 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance. This result shows that z-cal was less than t-crit, which means that the null hypothesis was accepted. This shows that there is no

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Volume 1 Issue 1, September 2025 - ISSN: 3092-9431

Otobo, Aduche L. & Salome, Emeya

significant difference in the mean responses of agricultural science teachers and secondary school students on policy development and implementation strategies for the revitalisation of young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for the economic empowerment of students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 5: z-test result of the Responses of Teachers and Students on Funding for Revitalisation of the Young Farmers' Club in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area

Categories	N	\bar{x}	SD	α	DF	Z-cal	Z-crit	Decision
Teachers	49	2.90	1.06	0.05	440	0.68	1.96	Accept
Students	393	2.79	1.09					

Source: *Field survey, 2024.*

Table 5 shows that teachers had mean and standard deviation scores of 2.90 and 1.06, while students had 2.79 and 1.09, respectively. The z-cal value was 0.68, while the z-crit was 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance. This result shows that z-cal was less than z-crit, which means that the null hypothesis was accepted. This shows that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of agricultural science teachers and secondary school students on funding strategies for the revitalisation of young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for the economic empowerment of students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 6: z-test result of the Responses of Teachers and Students on Access to Agricultural Resources for Revitalisation of the Young Farmers' Club in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area

Categories	N	\bar{x}	SD	α	DF	Z-cal	Z-crit	Decision
Teachers	49	1.70	1.07	0.05	440	1.76	1.96	Accept
Students	393	1.99	1.20					

Source: *Field survey, 2024.*

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Otobo, Aduche L. & Salome, Emeya

Table 6 shows that teachers had mean and standard deviation scores of 1.70 and 1.07, while students had 1.99 and 1.20, respectively. The z-cal value was 1.76, while the z-crit was 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance. This result shows that z-cal was less than z-crit, which means that the null hypothesis was accepted. This shows that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of agricultural science teachers and secondary school students on access to resources and strategies for revitalisation of young farmers' clubs in secondary schools for economic empowerment of students in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that respondents disagreed that the provision of credit guarantees to young farmers by the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (ACGSF) could enhance the revitalisation of Young Farmers' Clubs (YFCs). They also disagreed that creating channels for young farmers to access loans through ACGSF would boost the revitalisation of YFCs. However, respondents agreed that the provision of crop production training programmes by schools could promote YFC revitalisation, that the Nigerian Young Farmers Scheme (NYFS) incentive provision scheme could enhance YFC revitalisation, and that the NYFS's provision of agricultural resources could contribute positively to YFC revitalisation. Conversely, they disagreed that NYFS training programmes could improve YFC revitalisation but accepted that the introduction of grants to young farmers by ACGSF could help revitalise YFCs. Respondents further disagreed that the Youth Employment in Agriculture Programme (YEAP) initiatives, such as livestock, piggery, and fishery production training, could help revitalise YFCs. These findings align with those of Johnson (2020), who observed that not all formulated policies within programme executions are effectively implemented. This may explain why most respondents in the study area were unaware of the existence of Young Farmers' Clubs among secondary school students despite their societal importance.

The findings in Table 2 show that the majority of respondents agreed that government agencies' existing incentive schemes for young farmers could enhance YFC revitalisation. They also agreed that providing grants to students, improving access to financial institutions, and offering soft loans could strengthen the revitalisation of YFCs. Furthermore, respondents acknowledged that financial rewards from head teachers or agricultural agencies, access to microloans, and NGO-provided financial incentives could encourage student participation and revitalise YFCs. The provision of

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scholarships to students was also identified as a motivating factor. These findings are consistent with the studies of Ajayi and Bina (2017) and Akamavi and Yenyi (2018), which highlighted that access to microloans, grants, and financial education can support young farmers in starting or expanding agricultural enterprises, thereby revitalising YFCs. Similarly, incentives such as awards and recognition programmes for outstanding young farmers were recognised as effective motivational tools.

The findings presented in Table 3 reveal that respondents in the study area disagreed that young farmers' access to agricultural land could help revitalise YFCs. They also disagreed that the provision of seeds, tools, and implements; regular utilisation of agricultural extension services; access to cassava stems, machines, and high-tech equipment; provision of livestock starter packs; access to modern drones; or access to innovative ideas could enhance YFC revitalisation. These findings align with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2019), which emphasised that equitable access to agricultural resources remains a significant challenge. This may account for the mixed responses observed regarding whether access to resources could effectively revitalise YFCs in secondary schools within the study area.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the majority of respondents were not aware of the existence of Young Farmers' Clubs (YFCs) among secondary school students in the study area, except as a topic taught under Agricultural Science. This lack of awareness has contributed to the decline of YFCs over time. However, most respondents agreed that certain policies, if effectively implemented, could enhance the capacity of teachers and students involved in YFC activities. Furthermore, making funds available to club members through loans, grants, and incentives could significantly contribute to the revitalisation of the YFC programme in the study area.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

1. The government should implement policies aimed at enhancing the capacity of teachers and students involved in Young Farmers' Clubs (YFCs) through training programmes on modern agricultural practices, with emphasis on hands-on and practical experiences.

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Volume 1 Issue 1, September 2025 - ISSN: 3092-9431

Otobo, Aduche L. & Salome, Emeya

2. Government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other relevant bodies should provide financial support for young individuals interested in agriculture through the YFC initiative.
3. Government agencies, NGOs, and other organisations should improve access to essential agricultural resources such as land, improved seeds, tools, and implements and should provide regular extension services. In addition, they should offer in-service training opportunities for YFC coordinators, teachers, and students to strengthen agricultural skills and participation.

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