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Educated but Uninterested: Exploring the Attitudes of Educated Youth towards Agriculture in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the tendency of educated youth in Bangladesh to disengage from agriculture and the underlying factors contributing to it. Data were collected from scientific journals, published research papers, and reports from government and non-government organizations. The study was conducted using a qualitative, survey-based approach with thematic analysis. Data were coded into thematic categories, and interrelationships among themes were examined to develop an integrated interpretation. The study covers the period 2015-2026 within the context of Bangladesh. Primary data were obtained from participants, complemented by secondary data, to evaluate the perceptions of educated youth towards agriculture. Findings indicate that disengagement from agriculture among educated youth is multi-dimensional, influenced by social, cultural, financial, structural, technological, and policy-related factors. The education system is predominantly non-agricultural and oriented toward government and private-sector jobs, making agriculture appear risky, low-status, and physically demanding. Land distribution, technological limitations, financial uncertainty, urban migration, and gender-based social barriers further affect participation. Therefore, integrated policy measures, including curriculum modernization, technology-driven agricultural expansion, financial security, and positive shifts in social perceptions, are essential to re-engage educated youth in agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is an agriculture-dependent country, where the agricultural sector plays a crucial role in ensuring food security, generating employment, and improving rural livelihoods. The sector not only contributes to GDP but also serves as a major source of income for foreign exchange and employment, particularly for the poor population (Rahman, 2017). Education is closely linked to agriculture, as rural families in a developing country like Bangladesh invest a significant portion of their limited resources in enhancing educational opportunities (Ninh, 2021). Education is particularly important for adopting and utilizing modern agricultural technologies. Komíves et al. (2019) have shown that appropriate technology adoption in less developed countries can effectively meet the needs of local agricultural

systems. In the context of Bangladesh, M. M. Islam et al. (2024) noted that most farmers engaged in cultivation are experienced males, primarily middle-aged to elderly, with limited formal education, although the younger generation is gradually entering the sector.

However, in recent decades, youth participation in agriculture has been steadily declining, especially among educated youth. While education is generally viewed as a means of social mobility and status enhancement, it often leads to youth disengagement from agriculture. Rural populations in Bangladesh are increasingly shifting to non-agricultural sectors (Tahasin et al., 2024), influenced by proximity to urban centers and remittance income (Sen et al., 2021). Similar trends are observed in other countries, where educated youth prefer urban, office-based, or 'white-collar'

jobs, perceiving agriculture as backward, risky, and socially low-status.

Conversely, agriculture-focused education can play a vital role in equipping youth to tackle unemployment, food security, and environmental challenges (Wakiluzzaman, 2025). A significant portion of Bangladesh's population still lives below the poverty line, and agricultural growth has the most positive impact on the incomes of the poor (Christiaensen & Martin, 2018). According to FAO (2025), youth participation in agriculture is declining globally in developing countries. In Bangladesh, uncertainties surrounding agricultural work are particularly evident. Ali et al. (2024) highlighted that while rural youth engagement in agriculture is critical for sustainability and food security, their participation remains limited. Moreover, most educated youth show disinterest in agricultural work (Pervez et al., 2024). Similar patterns are evident elsewhere; for instance, in Indonesia, a large share of the agricultural workforce is aging, while younger generations increasingly migrate toward urban employment, posing challenges for agricultural production (Uddin & Antriandarti, 2025). Bangladesh faces a comparable situation, with most agricultural workers being older and youth participation limited.

In this context, the tendency of educated youth to disengage from agriculture represents a serious challenge to the country's agricultural future, food production systems, and sustainable development. Additionally, extension professionals often lack adequate knowledge and attitudes toward sustainable agriculture (Hasan et al., 2017). Although various studies have addressed agriculture previously, research focusing on the disinterest of educated youth in agriculture and its underlying causes remains limited. This study attempts to fill this significant research gap by analyzing the reasons behind youth disengagement. If current trends continue, not only Bangladesh but also other countries worldwide may face multidimensional challenges in agricultural production, food security, and sustainable development.

METHODS

This study follows a qualitative research approach, which allows for an in-depth understanding of agricultural and socio-anthropological realities in Bangladesh through

secondary survey-based thematic analysis. Secondary data were treated as the primary source to address the main research questions. To this end, peer-reviewed scientific journals, published research papers, reports from international organizations, and publications from government and non-government institutions were utilized. Only credible and relevant sources were selected to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. The research was conducted using a survey-based approach (Participants included teachers, farmers, and educated people), and the timeframe for collecting secondary data was set from 2015 to 2026, thereby reflecting recent trends, policy changes, and structural transformations. Collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, beginning with the identification of initial insights, followed by coding and categorization into multiple thematic areas. In the final step, interrelationships among themes were examined to construct an integrated interpretation. Comparative analysis and cross-verification across multiple sources were employed to ensure consistency, enhancing the analytical rigor of the study.

This methodology enabled a systematic examination of the interactions among the education system, social and cultural perspectives, financial and structural realities, gender-based barriers, and policy weaknesses. Consequently, the study provides a coherent and reliable framework for comprehensively understanding the multidimensional factors driving the disengagement of educated youth from agriculture in Bangladesh.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education and Professional Aspirations

The education system in Bangladesh primarily encourages students to pursue non-agricultural careers. Some teacher-participants noted that the existing textbooks do not adequately include content that could attract students to agriculture. According to them, textbooks give more emphasis to the challenges of crop production rather than its profitable and promising aspects. In this context, they further mentioned that while a significant number of students prefer agricultural universities, their main goal is not to engage in agricultural work, but rather to secure good government or high-quality private jobs.

One teacher-participant stated, “Many students study at agricultural universities, but their aim is a job, not working in agriculture.” According to Wakiluzzaman (2025), the curriculum does not properly present agriculture as a modern or profitable profession. Crop production topics are associated with numerous problems. Even if the book cover changes, the core content remains largely the same, with the same problems and no solutions. Graduates from agricultural universities tend to have higher employment rates compared to other students (Wakiluzzaman, 2025), yet they prefer office jobs or opportunities abroad rather than engaging in crop production.

Successful agriculture requires educated individuals (Sarker, 2020), as education helps develop skilled human resources. Moreover, participants’ experiences indicate that education creates diverse professional opportunities for them, leading them to prioritize other careers over agriculture. One participant mentioned, “After studying, everyone wants a secure job; agriculture is too risky”. Another participant said, “My father is a farmer, but he doesn’t want me to work in agriculture; he says a job is better”.

Skills development plays a significant role in helping youth secure employment, increase income, create business opportunities, and achieve financial security (Rabbani et al., 2025). Besides agriculture, young people have multiple goals and often prioritize other professions. Although most farmers in Bangladesh remain engaged in agriculture for various reasons, they generally do not want their children to follow the same occupation due to the low earnings at the field level. Children of tea garden workers face substantial barriers in accessing higher education and urban schooling, and many leave their studies early to join the workforce (Al-Amin & Islam, 2024a; 2024b). Such circumstances push educated youth away from agricultural professions and increase their interest in alternative careers.

Youth Perspectives on Agriculture, Culture, and Career Goals

Agriculture is often perceived in society as a “last resort” profession. Some participants stated, “Although our fathers are engaged in agriculture, it is often a form of disregard. Even after strenuous work across different seasons, they do not receive fair prices due to fluctuations in crop prices”.

Among educated youth, there is a widespread belief that engaging in agriculture reduces social status while presenting uncertain financial prospects (Apu et al., 2024). Generally, people prefer less physically demanding work, especially when easier alternatives exist. Studies indicate that agriculture is associated with poverty, uncertainty, and strenuous physical labor, discouraging youth from pursuing it (White, 2012). From the perspective of educated youth, agriculture is largely labor-intensive, rural, and low-status, making it difficult to align with their desired professional identity. Structural and social challenges further reinforce agriculture as a low-prestige occupation (Consentino et al., 2023). A clear gap also exists between higher education and actual employment preparedness (Nath et al., 2025). In Bangladesh, most educated youth prioritize government jobs.

A large number of participants mentioned, “If I get a job, I will leave agricultural work”. Government employment ensures social security and psychological stability (Sarker et al., 2021). University students often consider competitive exams like the BCS as prestigious and desirable career paths (Tasnim et al., 2024). Since agriculture is predominantly private-sector oriented, students generally favor government employment over private alternatives (Rafi et al., 2022). Over time, such attitudes have become deeply embedded in social norms and cultural values, strengthening negative perceptions of agriculture among youth (Zhan, 2015).

Preference for Jobs or Other Professions Over Agriculture

1. Technological Challenges in Agriculture

While youth participation in agriculture has slightly increased in Africa, various challenges continue to hinder their effective involvement (Geza et al., 2022). Modern agricultural mechanization facilitates faster and easier crop production. “All the youth mentioned that due to their education, they were not directly involved in agriculture from a young age. Although our training covered the use of machinery, mechanization in actual agricultural practice has not been effectively implemented. Instead, traditional methods are still used, which has posed a significant challenge for us.”

In Bangladesh, there is significant potential for agricultural mechanization, which could play a key role in enhancing productivity and efficiency

(Islam, 2018). Modern agricultural professions increasingly require advanced ICT skills, and the sector is expected to become more complex and challenging in the coming decades (Pogorelskaia & Várallyai, 2020; Chowhan & Ghosh, 2020). Consequently, training farmers in new cultivation techniques is essential to boost production (Rahman et al., 2022). However, technological advancement in Bangladesh's agriculture is limited because most agricultural workers are uneducated, and even educated individuals show little interest in farming. Technical skills generally increase with education but tend to decline with age (Islam et al., 2023). Innovations such as artificial intelligence (AI) in soil health research have demonstrated revolutionary potential for soil management, monitoring, and understanding, contributing to sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture (Schweng et al., 2026; Sarun et al., 2026). In developing countries, measuring water use and quality in agriculture is complex, and climate variability in Bangladesh often disrupts crop production (Balasubramanya & Stifel, 2020; Kundu et al., 2020). Moreover, effective implementation of crop density and fertilizer management is critical for improving yields, yet many farmers lack awareness and knowledge (Nasrin et al., 2019; Akter et al., 2018). Therefore, educated personnel are essential for technological adoption and agricultural advancement.

2. Structural Challenges in Agriculture

The agricultural sector in Bangladesh faces multifaceted structural problems (Ratan Dhar et al., 2017). Research indicates that current curricula inadequately cover agriculture-related topics, creating long-term barriers to developing skilled agricultural human resources (Wakiluzzaman, 2025). According to participants' experiences, many small-scale farmers are compelled to lease their land to larger landholders for livelihood purposes. One participant stated, "We lease our land to bigger farmers because managing cultivation alone is impossible. However, this provides very little income stability for us".

Over time, this process has led to the emergence of a new class of influential, land-owning farmers, while the number of landless and unemployed people continues to rise (Rana & Moniruzzaman, 2021). A significant portion of farming households in Bangladesh operate with

little or no land, often relying on rented plots (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 2025). Another participant noted, "Our family has very little land, so we often work as tenants on others' plots. Even though we have the capacity to cultivate, the lack of land prevents us from farming independently".

In practice, those who own substantial land often show little interest in cultivating it themselves, while those with labor and capability lack sufficient land, creating a clear structural imbalance in the agricultural system. Participants also highlighted the impact of political instability: "Political instability frequently disrupts our cultivation. There is no coordinated or effective government support, and sometimes we even face extortion from local authorities".

Political instability across the country further negatively affects agriculture. Studies indicate that in developing countries, armed conflicts, terrorism, and state instability severely disrupt crop production (Adelaja & George, 2019). Bangladesh experiences similar instability to varying degrees. Additionally, rapid population growth and the conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes, along with human-induced activities such as canal filling, lead to significant annual losses for farmers. According to participants, "Canal filling, land loss, and irregular government policies pose extreme challenges for us". Unfortunately, the government has yet to implement effective and integrated measures to address these issues.

3. Financial Uncertainty

Bangladesh's agricultural system is primarily rural-centered, where poverty remains widespread and persistent (Wickramasinghe, 2018). Some participants stated, "Due to receiving low prices for our crops, when we went to banks or NGOs to obtain loans, we were unable to secure them. Moreover, even when loans were granted, they were often disbursed late or incompletely".

As a result, agriculture is exposed to numerous financial risks. Frequent fluctuations in crop prices, natural disasters, and the lack of effective insurance make agriculture a highly risky profession. Studies indicate that agricultural commodity prices in Bangladesh are highly unstable (Ahmed et al., 2025; Pervez et al., 2024). In contrast, employment in the public sector generally provides stable income and benefits, offering financial security,

particularly during later stages of life, and reducing future-related anxieties. Although well-structured policies and credit programs could enhance agricultural productivity, household income, and national food security (Islam, 2020), many farmers are unable to secure the initial capital required for production. Consequently, they fall behind in the production process, deepening financial uncertainty. Government policies are needed to protect youth-led agricultural ventures from potential financial losses (Yunandar et al., 2019); however, such measures remain limited in practice. Furthermore, crises such as pandemics significantly disrupt livelihoods and income. Those with stable incomes are less affected, whereas daily laborers or field-based low-income populations suffer greatly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, farmers in Bangladesh faced multiple challenges affecting both their livelihoods and agricultural production (S. Islam et al., 2024). In contrast, employment in jobs generally carries less income-related risk.

Urban-Oriented Education and Migration Trends

Education is increasingly driving youth from rural to urban areas, where opportunities for engagement in agriculture are relatively limited. A significant number of participants stated that “educational opportunities are much greater in urban areas than in rural ones. They do not want to return to their villages, and even if they ever do, they will not be involved in agriculture; instead, they will engage in other occupations, particularly business, the service sector, and temporary jobs.”

Motivated by education, employment prospects, and aspirations for a better quality of life, rural populations are increasingly choosing to migrate to cities (Al-Maruf et al., 2022). The presence of higher-quality schools, colleges, and universities, along with comparatively improved living standards, intensifies the attraction toward urban life. Studies indicate that adolescents living in low-income urban neighborhoods tend to have higher educational and professional aspirations, and their parents hold elevated expectations for their children’s futures (Sultan et al., 2021). However, when these expectations cannot be fully realized due to various social and economic constraints, urban migrants generally seek alternative livelihoods within the city rather than returning to agricultural work in rural areas. This trend limits the

inflow of new labor into agriculture and has long-term implications for rural farming systems.

Policy and Institutional Weaknesses

Effective policies and institutional support are critical for the sustainable development of the agricultural sector. According to the participants, “Agricultural training, loan facilities, and technical support for youth in Bangladesh are still insufficient, which discourages their interest in engaging in agriculture”. Many participants noted that “they could have been interested in joining agriculture if they received the necessary training and support, but under the current system, such opportunities are limited”.

While project-based learning approaches have proven effective in enhancing farmers’ practical skills (Xia, 2021), the reach of such initiatives is limited. In many developed countries, widespread adoption of modern technologies and mechanization has increased productivity and transformed agriculture into a commercial and profitable sector. Modern technology and mechanization significantly enhance labor efficiency and production capacity. In contrast, most agricultural work in Bangladesh remains manual, with mechanization applied only on a limited scale (Rahman et al., 2021).

The participants believe that the lack of adequate investment, training, and easy access to technology has further intensified this limitation. Consequently, Bangladesh’s agriculture largely remains subsistence-oriented, focused on food production, with commercial and market-driven agriculture yet to reach its full potential.

Gender-Based Barriers

Educated women face greater challenges in agricultural participation due to land ownership constraints and social restrictions (Kabeer, 2017). As a result, women are often limited to small-scale, household-based activities such as poultry, livestock, and homestead gardening (Biswas et al., 2022). Nevertheless, studies show that women are highly interested in agricultural work and are generally receptive to new technologies and training (Pervez et al., 2024). Some participants noted, “If adequate training, the removal of negative attitudes toward agricultural work, facilities, and technical support were provided for women, we could easily participate in major crop cultivation and more profitable agricultural ventures”.

Gender-based social and cultural barriers, however, limit their ability to fully engage in crop production. For example, women are often excluded from main crop cultivation because land ownership is predominantly male. Access to agricultural training, credit, and government support is also less available to women, restricting their initiative and entrepreneurial potential (Kabeer, 2017; Yunandar et al., 2019). Consequently, although women contribute to rural economies, their labor is

undervalued, and they receive unequal opportunities in agricultural extension services. Kabeer (2017) notes that agriculture remains labor-intensive and challenging for women. Enhancing women's participation through integrated policies and training programs could significantly improve household and local food security, overall agricultural productivity, and commercial potential (Islam, 2020).

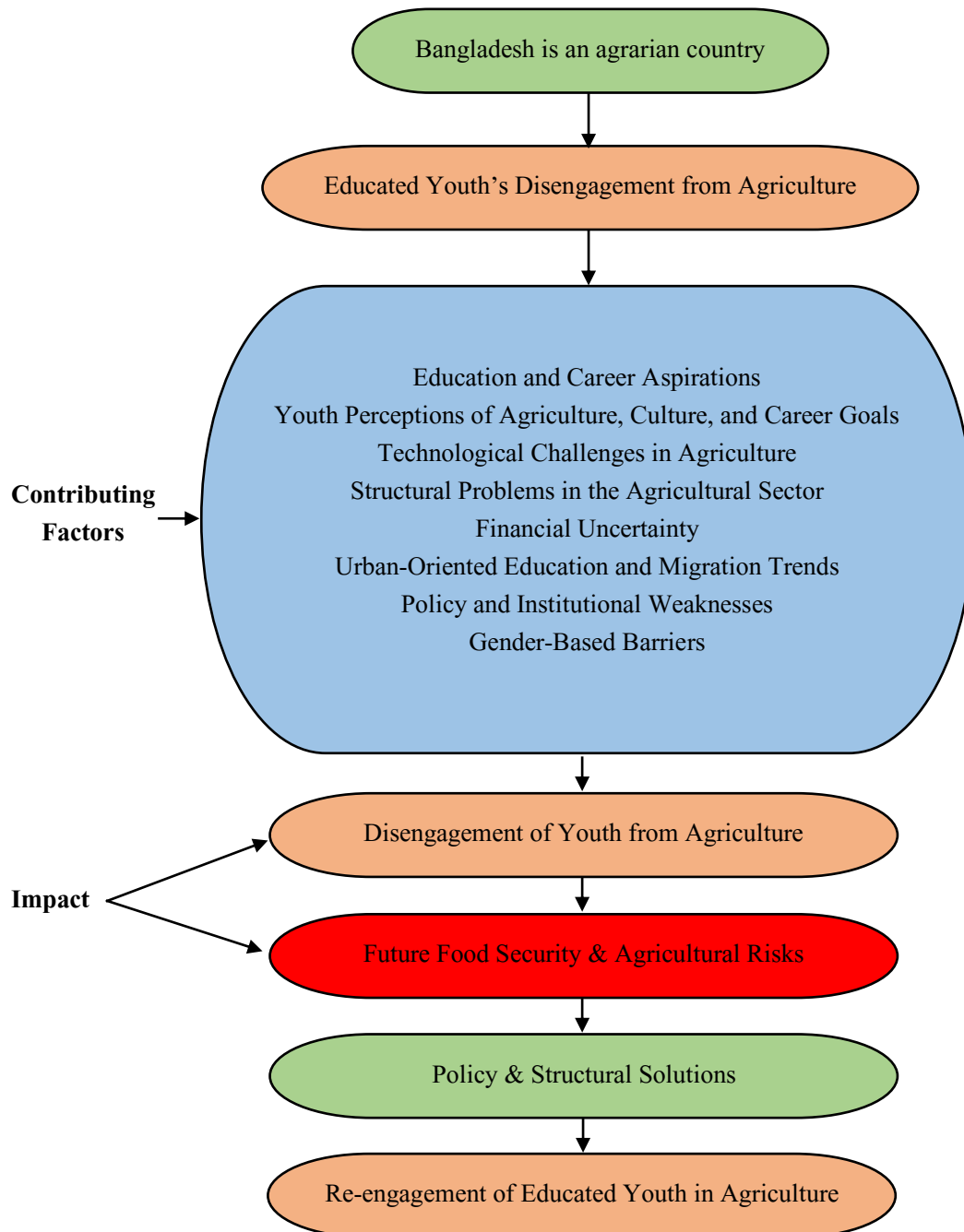


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Educated Youth's Disengagement from Agriculture in Bangladesh
Source: Author's own creation

This conceptual framework presents the key factors contributing to the disengagement of educated youth from the agricultural sector in Bangladesh. It demonstrates that educational and professional aspirations, social and cultural attitudes, technological challenges, structural and financial constraints, urban-oriented education and migration trends, policy weaknesses, and gender-based barriers collectively drive the tendency of young people to move away from agriculture. Additionally, the framework highlights the associated risks to future food security and underscores the critical importance of policy and structural interventions to re-engage educated youth in agriculture for sustainable agricultural development.

CONCLUSION

This study, analyzing the causes of agricultural disengagement among educated youth in the context of Bangladesh, reveals that this trend is not the result of a single factor. Rather, it reflects the combined influence of the education system, social and cultural values, professional aspirations, financial uncertainty, structural weaknesses, technological limitations, urban-oriented migration, and policy and institutional gaps. The education system, which primarily emphasizes non-agricultural and government-private sector career paths, has led agriculture to be perceived by educated youth as a low-status, risky, and labor-intensive occupation, whereas government jobs offer relative financial security, social recognition, and future stability. At the same time, unequal land distribution, shrinking farmland, weak market systems, price volatility, lack of effective insurance and financial support, and political and climatic risks have rendered agriculture an uncertain livelihood. Although modern technology, mechanization, and artificial intelligence offer the potential to transform agriculture into a knowledge-based and profitable sector, this potential remains underutilized due to the shortage of skilled and educated human resources. Urban-oriented education and migration further deprive the rural agricultural system of the next generation's labor and leadership, while gender-based social and institutional barriers limit the full participation of educated women in agriculture.

Overall, the analysis indicates that the disengagement of educated youth from agriculture is a socially constructed and structurally entrenched reality. Unless the sector is transformed into a modern, technology-driven, and stable profession, the shortage of skilled human resources in agriculture will deepen, threatening food security, rural livelihoods, and national development. Therefore, making agriculture youth-friendly and attractive requires curriculum reform, market-oriented and technology-based agricultural expansion, youth- and gender-sensitive policies, financial security mechanisms, and positive changes in social perceptions toward agriculture. Only through integrated, long-term, and context-specific policy interventions can educated youth be re-engaged in agriculture, which is crucial for the sustainability and future development of Bangladesh's agricultural sector.

As the study is entirely qualitative and area-specific, the personal experiences, attitudes, or direct reasons for disengagement from agriculture among participants may not fully represent the entire population. Moreover, the agricultural perspectives of educated youth may vary across different regions of Bangladesh, so the full diversity of all regions was not completely captured in the study. Furthermore, the absence of direct observation of government policies and training programs imposes limitations on assessing their practical effectiveness.

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