

# **YOUNG ASPIRING LEADERSHIP SCHOLAR (YALS) PROGRAM**

## **2025 REPORT**



**Teens & Youth in Leadership**

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# 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Young Aspiring Leadership Scholar (YALS) program is a leadership and research development course for African undergraduates and fresh college graduates. YALS aims to provide scholars with the tools to draft, create, cite, and write about leadership theory. The goal of YALS is to minimize the gap in leadership literature among African academia.

Teens and Youth in Leadership (TYIL) hosts the Young Aspiring Leadership Scholar (YALS) program. TYIL aims to provide free academic and research-based leadership education programs to Africans. TYIL hosts different leadership and educational workshops and programs, while YALS focuses on the research and writing aspects of leadership research.

Scholars were chosen through an application process which focused on the applicant's expressed interest to learn more about academic research and leadership.

TYIL implements the YALS training model, built on four key pillars: Educate, Share, Collaborate, and Community. The Educate phase equips participants with foundational leadership theories and essential research writing skills. In the Share phase, participants present their research ideas and mini-projects to a broader audience, fostering confidence and feedback. The Collaborate component encourages teamwork as participants engage in joint research writing exercises and projects with fellow emerging scholars. Upon completion of the program, participants become part of a vibrant Community of passionate young leadership researchers.

Throughout the program, scholars attend weekly workshops on different topics within the realm of academic writing. Guest speakers and Dr. Israel Oyedare, founder of TYIL, led these sessions to paint a full picture of what contributes to a well-written and researched leadership literature.

It is important to share that 10 individuals were accepted for the 2025 program, and 6 scholars graduated based on the requirements of the program, which includes attendance in class, submission of weekly assignments, and final projects.

# 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT (CONT'D)

The final projects and their authors include:

- ★ Ayomide Kolawole: "**Decolonizing Leadership in Africa: Future of Youth Driven Governance.**"
- ★ Tijesunimi Rachael Aina: "**Catalyzing Africa's Energy Transition: The Role of Youth Leadership in Bridging the Energy Access Gap.**"
- ★ Kabira Busari: "**The Impact of Member Voice on the Development of Servant Leadership in Youth-led Non-profits.**"
- ★ Bamidele Toluwase: "**A Review of Transformational Leadership in Cultivating Active Followership.**"
- ★ Abdullahi Agbaje: "**Impact of Youth Empowerment on Economic Growth.**"
- ★ Olufela Akande: "**The Role of Community Development in Shaping Individual Leadership Principles.**"

In 2025, the following courses were taught:

- Introduction to Leadership Research and Theories.
- References and Citations.
- Research Ethics and Misconduct.
- Writing a Research Introduction.
- Writing a Literature Review and Theoretical Framework.
- Data Analysis and Methods.

Each course offered was taught by an expert in their respective fields. The YALS program worked to provide scholars with the highest quality education and resources in order to build the scholars' skills.

Alongside each workshop and guest speaker, there was an accompanied assignment in order to build skills worked on in real-time. Hands-on experience is an emphasized part of the YALS program. As posited by Oyedare *et al.* (2025), providing hands-on leadership experiences is an effective approach TYIL has consistently deployed in leadership development and learning. Meeting with and learning from thought leaders is already helpful to the scholars' academic writing journey; but when competencies are put into practice, mastery occurs. It is extremely important for the YALS program not to simply educate its scholars, but give them the opportunity to apply and excel in leadership research writing.

## **2. OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

The Young Aspiring Leadership Scholar (YALS) program aims to fulfill four criteria objectives: Education, Empowerment, Collaboration, and Community. After the completion of the program, scholars were asked questions in a one-on-one interview pertaining to each objective in order to measure success and improve YALS for future scholars. Interview-style meetings were set up with YALS scholars in order to discuss each competency.

### **2A. EDUCATION**

*Before this, I had little knowledge on research writing and ethics, I have learned so much about it and how to go about it. It has really contributed to my knowledge – A YALS 2025 Scholar*

Teaching and learning is central to the mission of YALS. Leadership, research, and writing instruction are the foundation of the success and purpose of the YALS program. Through course offerings, assignments, and program support, education is at the forefront of programming.

Throughout meetings with scholars to discuss the educational aspect of the program, all scholars emphasized the significant change and improvement of their research and writing skills. The two questions presented to scholars about education through one-on-one interviews were:

1. How has the YALS Program contributed to your educational development and understanding of the research process?
2. What was helpful about the educational sessions?

Scholars overwhelmingly mentioned their lack of previous experience in research writing, commonly noting citation and references as a weak point: “Before I joined YALS, I had a bit of knowledge on research. Until I started learning from YALS, what I knew before was not the right way to do it.” Scholars valued the opportunity to learn, one scholar describing their experience as a “period of learning and re-learning” a lot of academic writing concepts.

## 2. OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES (CONT'D)

Although participants knew how to write well, the majority explained they had not had much research writing practice before YALS. One scholar explained, "Before this, I had little knowledge on research writing and ethics, I have learned so much about it and how to go about it. It has really contributed to my knowledge." Scholars learned a lot about research writing, despite varying levels of experience beforehand.

Guest speakers and Dr. Israel Oyedare were consistently mentioned as being helpful throughout the educational sessions. "Tutors were very patient, and the podcast helped in teaching topics from new perspectives" explained one scholar as a reflection on the YALS instruction. "Mr. Israel really helped me to participate and be present." These two quotes summarize and represent the perception of instruction, guest lecturers, and Dr. Israel's roles within the YALS program.

Learning about followership was another highlight for many scholars: "Always hearing about leadership, I learned about followership through this program. Followership exposed me to how leadership is truly done in the real world". Every student mentioned the impact of Dr. Israel Oyedare in their educational experience. Noting his consideration, encouragement, and patience as contributing factors to their educational success. Many scholars mentioned the value a personable leader has on an educational experience and outcome.

### 2B. EMPOWERMENT

*[YALS] has improved my confidence in my writing skills and pushed me out of my comfort zone with writing. I am sure in the coming days I will be writing more papers.* –  
A YALS 2025 Scholar

Creating a space for scholars to succeed academically, as well as building confidence in this area, is the second objective of YALS. By providing scholars with resources and support, participants not only build their academic writing skills, but feel comfortable practicing them after the program. The two questions presented to scholars about empowerment were:

1. How has the YALS program empowered you in your research capabilities?
2. Did the YALS program improve your confidence in research and writing, if so how?

## **2. OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES (CONT'D)**

One scholar said, "Doing the work practically has empowered me." Weekly assignments, drafting research plans, and creating literature maps were noted by many scholars as contributing to their writing confidence. Scholars consistently pointed to the practicing aspect of the program as a determining factor for their empowerment. Along with feedback on assignments, scholars felt that they were making progress and becoming better writers. Furthermore, one scholar noted how the structure and layout of the classes was impactful in their understanding of the topics and the ability of the instructors to go into detail, since each session was focused on one topic of leadership research writing.

Scholars agreed that before the YALS program, they would not have been able to complete their research projects to the same scope as after. In addition, many scholars similarly mentioned that if they were to have completed the same assignment without the YALS training, scholars likely would have been scared or anxious about the assignment. All scholars explained an improvement in both their writing and research confidence and abilities. One scholar noted, "[YALS] has improved my confidence in my writing skills and pushed me out of my comfort zone with writing. I am sure in the coming days I will be writing more papers."

### **2C. COLLABORATION**

*I would love more group work; working with other people really helped me through relating and discussing ideas on different topics. It really helped me to work on my relationships with people. – A YALS 2025 Scholar*

Building relationships and working with other young scholars is a cornerstone of the YALS experience. Throughout one of the weeks of training, scholars have the opportunity to work alongside each other on a research based project. The two questions presented to scholars about collaboration were:

1. How has the YALS program fostered collaboration within the group of scholars, and your collaboration skills?
2. What could the YALS program have done differently to improve collaboration and teamwork?

## **2. OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES (CONT'D)**

Scholars greatly valued working in groups; mainly because they enjoyed getting to know more about their fellow scholars. In many ways, collaborative efforts helped build community as well. Collaboration was a big source of connection for the scholars, as well as personal growth. One scholar mentioned, “I would love more group work; working with other people really helped me through relating and discussing ideas on different topics. It really helped me to work on my relationships with people.” Learning from other scholars and hearing their perspectives really helped students learn more. Group work was a highlight for many students.

Scholars collectively agreed that more group work would have been beneficial to the group. One scholar explained, “There was already success, but if there was more collaboration there would have been more success.” Another student offered a new framework for the program as a whole, “To improve collaboration and teamwork, each scholar could be grouped into different teams from the beginning of the program. This would help foster teamwork.”

Scholars heavily benefitted from teamwork and collaboration, and wanted more of it. Students enjoyed learning, discussing, and engaging with each other throughout the program. Especially since YALS is held in a virtual environment, these moments for connection and collaboration are even more important.

### **2D. COMMUNITY**

The role of community throughout the entirety of TYIL, not just YALS, is huge. From bringing in different instructors, to recruiting efforts, and organization—every part of TYIL is dependent on a strong community. Not only are scholars joining an academic community with peers, but they are joining a larger community and network of leadership scholars as a whole. Current scholars, alumni from previous TYIL and YALS sessions, instructors, program coordinators, and staff all make up the operation and community that is TYIL. The two questions presented to scholars about community were:

1. Has the YALS program expanded and/or strengthened your network? If so, how?
2. Does the YALS program successfully build community throughout the class and program?

## 2. OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES (CONT'D)

All scholars said the YALS program expanded their network. Many students explained that they pursued professional connections through LinkedIn after an educational session, as well as making professional and personal connections throughout the scholar class. Not only were scholars expanding their network, but they were following up and building on professional connections outside of YALS. One scholar explained that although they may not currently be working with the people they met, they may work with the connection in the future.

Scholars frequently cited Dr. Israel Oyedare and structure of the program as the biggest contribution to the sense of community throughout. Students very much enjoyed group work and engaging with each other, which also contributed to community within this cohort.



### **3. REFLECTION OF RESULTS**

Overall, the YALS program completed and met its target objectives. Students reported high outcomes for all criteria and were happy with their personal gain and results from the program. Moving forward, there are a few adaptations to the program that could increase student satisfaction, community, and collaboration within the program.

First, an increase of group related work and projects. Students consistently reported that they would have enjoyed more group work for the purpose of connection, network, and community. Students reported the group work that took place during the program building their collaboration skills and network, but desired more group work. Notably, with the virtual nature of the YALS program, it is not as simple to connect over zoom meetings and Whatsapp as it is to connect during an in-person session. Therefore, it would be beneficial for the program to include more group work and interactive group activities through zoom meetings focused on community building and collaboration.

Another method of promoting community and connection through the program would be to lead a more individually focused onboarding meeting. During the onboarding meeting for this session, the students were asked to introduce themselves. Although some students did come forward with self-introductions, many stayed quiet unless called upon. One approach to achieve this could be to have students prepare a short presentation or introductory video of themselves beforehand, and present to the class during the onboarding session. Not only would this allow for students to learn about and connect with their classmates, but it would also start the program off with getting into the motion of preparing materials before class sessions.

Lastly, hosting online discussion posts through Google Classroom or Canvas relating to the topics covered in that week's session could be a way for scholars to both reflect on what has been learned, but also observe their classmates' perspectives and thoughts. Requiring responses to discussion comments would allow for students to engage virtually and thoughtfully with their peers. Facilitating community in an online program is crucial for engagement, retention, and learning outcomes. These recommendations are aimed to both improve outcomes and the scholar experience within TYIL and YALS.

## **4. PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM YALS 2025 PROGRAM ASSISTANT, ELLIE BOWMAN, AN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AT VIRGINIA TECH, USA.**

After observing the YALS program, I have learned so much about the process of running an extra-curricular instructional program. Coming from a place of addressing a real need as opposed to a perceived need has been a development concept I have become very passionate about. YALS perfects this concept by providing African youth with the research skills they need to advance and are more than capable of implementing.

Many students reported not having background knowledge of citation and referencing, which are crucial skills to success in academic and research fields. Providing students with the opportunity to write and publish a paper on leadership is not only transformational to their skill set, but allows them to put into practice what they have learned throughout the program. The YALS program has perfected the balance between education and practice. Scholars are not sitting on Zoom calls and hearing information on research writing; they are putting these skills into practice and applying them deeply.



Ellie Bowman touring Bambey University in Senegal with Dr. Ousmane Kane

## 4. CONCLUSION

The Young Aspiring Leadership Scholar (YALS) program delivered on its four main objectives: Education, Empowerment, Collaboration, and Community. Scholars left the program having grown as an academic writer, built a greater confidence in their writing, made connections, and expanded their network. The YALS program gave opportunities for students to learn more about research writing, practice, and master it.

Scholar projects are a large aspect of the program. The work done by the students incorporates every aspect of what they have learned throughout the program, and allows scholars to showcase their talents as marketable and employable skills. The final research project conducted by the scholars cut across sectors including political leadership and governance, energy and youth leadership, and community-based leadership. The YALS program is a successful program in-part due to those who have contributed and dedicated their time to it. Facilitators include Titilope Oloredede, Wura Olawale, Adekola Gbolagade, and Kory Trott. Organizers of the program include Israel Oyedare, Program Lead, and Ellie Bowman, Program Assistant. The Advisor for the YALS program is Dr. Eric Kaufman.



### Additional Resources and References

Oyedare, I. O., Kaufman, E., & Council, A. (2025). Building the future: a practice-based approach to youth leadership development. *Journal of Leadership Education*.



# TEENS AND YOUTH IN LEADERSHIP

## Young Aspiring Leadership Scholar (YALS) Program 2025



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### Additional Resources and References

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