

# An evaluation of the input, processes, and outcomes of the national youth service corps program in Nigeria

Mercy Valentine Owan<sup>1,2</sup> , Chinedu Ositadimma Chukwu<sup>1,2\*</sup> , Peter Owogoga Aduma<sup>1,2</sup> , Valentine Joseph Owan<sup>1,2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>University of Calabar, Calabar, NIGERIA<sup>2</sup>Ultimate Research Network, Calabar, NIGERIA\*Corresponding Author: [eckmanchukwu5@gmail.com](mailto:eckmanchukwu5@gmail.com)

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**ABSTRACT**

This study is an evaluation of the national youth service corps (NYSC) program of the federal government of Nigeria. It assessed the input, process and output indices of the programs to determine the extent to which the program has been successfully implemented and what it has achieved so far. To the researchers' knowledge this study is the first to comprehensively analyzed the program since its launch. A total of 19,278 Nigerian graduates who were serving and those who had served in the national service from 2012 to 2021 participated in the study, which covered the entire 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. An online survey, developed by the researchers with Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ranging from 0.87 to 0.90 across the four subscales, was used for data collection. Data collection followed a snowball approach. Descriptive statistics were used to analyzed the data collected. Among others, the findings revealed that most corps members had positive experiences during the orientation course, such as active participation, clean facilities, and access to basic needs and social activities. However, some challenges, such as inadequate bedding, limited water supply, and high costs of products were reported. At their places of primary assignment (PPA), many corps members accepted postings without objection and received regular stipends, though issues such as poor welfare, rejection without reason, and posting outside their field of study were common. Community development service (CDS) was marked by high attendance and cooperation with host communities, but corps members expressed concerns about restricted group selection and limited funding support for personal CDS initiatives. It was concluded, based on these findings, that the orientation course was viewed favorably, while the PPA and CDS components were seen as needing improvement. Based on these findings, it was recommended, among others, that the government should strengthen some of the grey areas of the NYSC scheme and consolidate on the current areas of strengths, revealed in this study.

**Keywords:** community service, corps, entrepreneurship, training program, skill acquisition, youth empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

The main thrust of the national youth service corps (NYSC) program is to foster unity and corporation, create, and build bonds/relationships amongst graduates of both national and international higher institutions of learning (Lamidi et al., 2018; Owan et al., 2022). During the NYSC program, graduates from all 36 states are sent to other states different from their state of origin and institutions attended to serve for one year. Before youths are sent out to serve in various places of primary assignments (PPA), they are made to compulsorily converge in a location known as an orientation camp for three weeks. During this period, corps members get information about the ideologies, beliefs and values of the society they are about to serve. They are also saddled with one life skill to enable them to function and improvise in any area or locality they are being sent to, as well as achieve the goal of NYSC.

In addition, before being sent to serve, corps members are also given contacts of people they can reach out to in case of any eventuality and guidance throughout their service year. They are also given by laws of NYSC to strengthen their stay and relativity further. It is believed that the NYSC program was designed to bridge the gap between national disunity and disharmony and foster cohesion and integration amongst graduates. Moreover, the program is placed highly in society. As far as Nigeria is concerned, the NYSC program has gained a lot of attention and interest from both big and small, young and old, in the sense that graduates are expected to tender their certificate of discharge or exemption. Without this, many employers make the certificate a criterion for

employment. Not only in the aspect of employment, but it is also a prerequisite for the application for further studies at almost all Nigerian universities.

One can invariably infer that the program is Nigeria's hallmark of decision-making. Despite its importance, the degree to which one can say that the program has been successful cannot be quantified (Abdulkarim et al., 2018; Owan et al., 2022; Raimi & Alao, 2011). This is because only limited studies have focused on the NYSC programs. For example, a study focused on the need to integrate the Entrepreneurship venture into the NYSC program in Nigeria (Ogundele et al., 2012). Studies have shown no significant effect between entrepreneurial ventures and graduates' attitudes towards skill acquisition (Balogun, 2018; Genty et al., 2014; Odumosu et al., 2020). Opposingly, other studies have shown a significant influence of entrepreneurial development on graduates' attitudes (Abdullahi et al., 2018; Adelakun et al., 2019; Ajetomobi et al., 2022; Chauke et al., 2021; Deebom & Daerego, 2020; Faloye, & Olatunji, 2018; Kadir et al., 2022; Muogbo et al., 2021; Ojiaku et al., 2018; Umar et al., 2022).

Some studies revealed a favourable attitude between graduates and community development services (Arigbo et al., 2019; Fareo, 2020). A study focused on the country's NYSC program and security threat (Okafor & Ani 2014). Chibuike et al. (2022) have shown a significant association between job satisfaction and deployment. Studies have shown that innovation positively influences NYSC members' employability (Odumosu et al., 2020; Okafor et al., 2020). This implies that graduate education alone is not enough; thus, there are barriers to entrepreneurship employment (Ezeani, 2018). Other studies have revealed that health education influences graduates' attitudes towards sickle cell disease (Adewoyin et al., 2015; Olatona et al., 2012). A study has shown a significant association between the presence of anxiety symptoms and the age of youth corps members (Amoko et al., 2021).

Two studies analysed the experiences of corps medical doctors in Nigeria and found that 83.5 percent of respondents identified benefits such as exposure to new cultures, acquisition of clinical skills, and opportunities for personal relationships. However, 89.2 percent reported major challenges including poor accommodation, low pay, and workplace exploitation. Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their assignments and recommended that the NYSC scheme be scrapped or overhauled (Losabia, 2015; Nwachukwu et al., 2022). Similarly, two other studies assessed the skills acquisition and entrepreneurship development (SAED) program and its influence on former corps members between 2015 and 2020. Most participants reported training in areas such as education, tourism, and cosmetology, while fewer engaged in fields like horticulture, energy, and automobile services. The program was found to support youth empowerment and reduce unemployment (Gbadamosi, 2022; Moses & Egboh, 2021). A related study showed that participation in SAED dropped after the orientation camp, mainly due to poor learning environments, unmotivated trainers, and time constraints. Further findings indicated that while SAED can promote economic independence, it is hindered by funding shortages, limited training centers, and a lack of experienced facilitators (Medinat & Tomisin, 2022). Another study conducted in Ibadan Metropolis examined corps members' perceptions of the NYSC scheme. While there was no significant difference in satisfaction with welfare services, hospitality levels varied notably among respondents (Udoh, 2021).

Going by the findings above, there has not been a comprehensive evaluation of the input, process and output of NYSC. It is pertinent to understand the input because a program meant to achieve intended objectives must first consider the input that must be provided for the program to reach its end. The process comprises all activities offered to corp members to enable them to function during their service year. Whereas the output involves the quality of the program, considering its mandate, which includes; national unity, cohesion, integration, religious tolerance and so on, considering the heterogenic nature of Nigeria. Nevertheless, it has been observed that even after the completion of the National service program, many graduates are found not exhibiting these attributes and others lack the required skills to function, even when there were various forms of exposure through the NYSC SAED program. One wonders if the NYSC program empowers her youth, and if so, to what extent. Based on these issues, this study was conducted to comprehensively evaluate the various aspects of the NYSC program, including the orientation course, the SAED scheme, community development services (CDS) and corps members' behavior at their PPA. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the corps members' orientation course experiences
2. To investigate the experiences on SAED initiative of NYSC members.
3. To find out the corps members' experiences in their PPA.
4. To assess the corps members' CDS experiences

## METHODS

### Research Design and Participants

The study used a descriptive research design to gather data from 19,278 Nigerian graduates who served their national service between 2012 and 2021. The data was collected using a snowball sampling method, with participants inviting others to participate. The dataset included all 36 Nigerian states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, data collection was terminated when no more responses were received.

### Data Collection Procedures and Ethical Considerations

The researchers created an electronic questionnaire using Google Forms to gather data on former members of the NYSC program. The questionnaire was distributed online to various NYSC groups and batches, with the link shared with contacts who completed their service. The data collection aimed to evaluate the four core experience objectives of the program. Over five years,

**Table 1.** Frequency counts and percentages of the orientation course experiences of participants

No	Items	n (%)	
		Agree	Disagree
1	Camp officials made efforts to ensure that everyone took an active part in activities.	18,978 (98.4)	300 (1.5)
2	Proper guidance was given to me regarding using man o' war gadgets in my camp.	16,109 (83.6)	3,169 (16.4)
3	Camp officials usually ensured that the camp environment was neat and well kept.	18,295 (94.9)	983 (5.1)
4	I was provided with a sleeping mattress while in camp.	18,295 (94.9)	983 (5.1)
5	The quality of food served in my camp was very delicious.	8,866 (46.0)	10,412 (54.0)
6	Social gatherings/events were organized in my camp for corps members.	17,908 (92.9)	1,370 (7.1)
7	I was taught a new language of the immediate environment while in camp.	14,301 (74.1)	4,977 (25.9)
8	There were no issues of electricity challenges in my camp.	10,281 (53.3)	8,997 (46.7)
9	Corps members were not allowed to dress as they liked in my camp.	15,123 (78.5)	4,155 (21.6)
10	The mami market of my camp was superb in meeting the diverse needs of corps members.	15,429 (80.0)	3,849 (20.0)
11	Corp members were allowed to take part in cooking activities in my camp.	15,642 (81.2)	3,636 (18.9)
12	It was possible to stay in my camp without doing anything.	8,530 (44.3)	10,748 (55.7)
13	Some members of my platoon did not participate in any camp activity.	13,289 (68.9)	5,989 (31.0)
14	Some man o' war gadgets in my camp were not in good shape.	7,973 (41.4)	11,305 (58.6)
15	Many foam/beds in my camp were in poor condition.	12,519 (64.9)	6,759 (35.1)
16	The number of functional boreholes/tabs were not adequate for the number of corps members in camp.	13,245 (68.7)	6,033 (31.3)
17	Meals were not served consistently, at least three times per day in my camp.	8,457 (43.8)	10,821 (56.1)
18	There were no sports activities throughout my stay at camp.	2,871 (14.9)	16,407 (85.1)
19	I did not obey any difficult camp instructions.	6,983 (36.2)	12,295 (63.8)
20	The medical center of my camp has nothing to write home about.	6,299 (32.7)	12,979 (67.3)
21	The military men on duty in my camp were highly unfriendly.	5,359 (27.8)	13,919 (69.3)
22	The discipline approaches of camp officers were very harsh on corps members.	5,179 (26.9)	14,099 (73.1)
23	Prices of goods and services in my camp were very high.	11,866 (61.5)	7,412 (38.5)
24	Sanitation activities in my camp were not carried out daily.	6,600 (34.3)	12,678 (65.7)

19,278 participants met the eligibility criteria, and the survey was shared with colleagues and NYSC groups. The data collection lasted from March 2019 to March 2021. Participation in the study was voluntary and only eligible individuals participated. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Calabar. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before their participation in the study. Participants were assured of confidentiality in non-personalization of their responses. See the full methodological details in the data article earlier published (Owan et al., 2022).

### Validity and Reliability

The researchers formulated a questionnaire based on their experiences and literature review. The initial draft was distributed to 10 members from batch B of 2014, who provided feedback and suggestions. The final draft was refined after pilot testing on 60 batch C corps members in Cross River and the FCT. The Cronbach's alpha approach was used to analyze the Likert scale items, resulting in reliability coefficients of .90, .87, .92, and .89 for the orientation course, SAED, PPA, and CDS.

### Data Analysis Procedures

Collected data was cleaned, converted into numerical forms, and recorded using MS-Excel 2019. The data was checked for potential malicious or multiple responses using time stamp meta data. The researchers also examined the order and speed of responses and response patterns based on demographic characteristics. No evidence of malicious or multiple responses was found, but it could not be guaranteed. The long and follow-up questions in the survey discouraged multiple responses or malicious intent (see Owan et al., 2022). Even if multiple attempts were made to manipulate the results, the large dataset size would not significantly impact the outcome. Longer surveys with open-ended and follow-up questions offer more protection from malicious and multiple responses due to the time required to submit fake results (Dupuis et al., 2019; Teitcher et al., 2015). The study used Safe Harbor Principles to anonymize and de-identify collected data, ensuring privacy. The questionnaire was designed to avoid collecting sensitive information, and encoded data was securely stored on the lead researcher's computer. Data was protected by a password, antivirus software, and firewall. Respondents were informed that their data would be used for academic purposes, potentially in a peer-reviewed journal report.

## RESULTS

### Orientation Course Experiences

The orientation course experiences of corps members was examined and the result is summarized in **Table 1**. The results in **Table 1** indicate that most corps members reported positive experiences during their orientation camp. Specifically, 98.4% agreed that camp officials made efforts to ensure everyone participated actively in camp activities, while 83.6% confirmed that they received proper guidance on using man o' war gadgets. A large proportion (94.9%) agreed that the camp environment was kept clean, and that sleeping mattresses were provided.

In addition, 92.9% of respondents stated that social events were organized, and 74.1% reported being taught a local language spoken in the area. Over half of the participants (53.3%) noted that there were no electricity challenges during their stay.

**Table 2.** Respondents' experiences on the SAED exercise

No	Items	n (%)	
		Agree	Disagree
1	There were adequate seats in the multi-purpose hall of my camp for SAED lectures.	12,898 (66.9)	6,380 (33.1)
2	NYSC provided sources of loans for corps members to access funds to start their businesses.	9,859 (51.2)	9,419 (48.8)
3	There were no SAED lectures in my camp.	15,631 (81.0)	3,647 (19.0)
4	Many corps members in my camp often sit outside the hall while SAED lectures are going on.	5,042 (26.2)	14,236 (73.8)
5	The SAED lectures in my camp were more theoretical than practical.	7,191 (37.3)	12,087 (62.7)
6	I did not acquire any practical skills through the SAED lectures.	12,336 (64.0)	6,942 (36.0)
7	My SAED lecturer was not competent in presenting clear lessons.	13,281 (68.9)	5,997 (31.1)
8	There were inadequate facilities for every corps member in my SAED venture to conduct practical with.	6,508 (33.8)	12,770 (66.2)
9	The duration of the SAED training was too short for me to acquire the requisite skills for my venture.	4,667 (24.2)	14,611 (75.8)
10	I was charged additional fees to advance my skills in my chosen trade after camp.	7,024 (36.4)	12,254 (63.6)
11	The SAED lectures enable me to acquire a new set of skills.	12,713 (65.9)	6,565 (34.1)
12	I am currently using the skill you acquired during service to support your livelihood.	3,987 (20.7)	15,291 (79.3)

Furthermore, 78.5% agreed that corps members were not allowed to dress as they liked, while 80.0% found the mami market sufficient for meeting corps members' needs. About 81.2% confirmed they were allowed to participate in cooking, and 68.9% indicated that some platoon members did not take part in camp activities. Other experiences reported by more than half of the respondents include beds or foam being in poor condition (64.9%), an inadequate number of functional boreholes or taps (68.7%), and high prices of goods and services within the camp (61.5%).

On the other hand, a majority of respondents disagreed with having certain negative experiences. For instance, 54.0% disagreed that the food served in the camp was very delicious. Similarly, 55.7% disagreed with the idea that it was possible to remain in camp without engaging in any activity. A total of 58.6% did not agree that man o' war gadgets were in poor shape, and 85.1% disagreed with the statement that there were no sports activities during their stay. Moreover, 63.8% of respondents denied disobeying difficult camp instructions. Another 67.3% disagreed that the medical center was in poor condition, while 73.1% did not find the disciplinary approaches of officers to be very harsh. Lastly, 65.7% disagreed that sanitation was not carried out daily in the camp.

These findings suggest that the orientation camp was generally well managed, with efforts made to ensure order, hygiene, participation, and basic amenities. Most corps members indicated positive experiences in key areas such as engagement in activities, provision of basic facilities, and exposure to local culture. Based on the responses, the orientation camp appears to remain a meaningful and structured part of national youth service in Nigeria.

### Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development

Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the experiences of the participants during their engagement with the SAED initiative of NYSC. **Table 2** reveals that there were mixed experiences among corps members regarding the SAED initiative of the NYSC. A majority of respondents (66.9%) reported that there were enough seats in the multi-purpose hall for SAED lectures. Just over half (51.2%) agreed that the NYSC provided access to loan sources to support business start-up efforts. A substantial proportion (81.0%) indicated that SAED lectures were held in their camps, suggesting that the initiative was widely implemented. However, 64.0% stated that they did not acquire any practical skills during the sessions, and 68.9% expressed concerns about the lecturers' ability to present lessons clearly. Nonetheless, 65.9% still agreed that the SAED lectures enabled them to learn a new skill.

In contrast, several items received a majority of disagreement. For instance, 73.8% disagreed that many corps members often sat outside the hall during SAED lectures, suggesting that participation within the hall was generally satisfactory. In addition, 62.7% disagreed that the lectures were more theoretical than practical, indicating that there was some balance in the training content. Furthermore, 66.2% disagreed with the claim that facilities for practical training were inadequate, and 75.8% did not believe the training duration was too short. Also, 63.6% stated they were not charged additional fees to continue learning after camp, and 79.3% reported that they were not currently using the skills acquired during service to support their livelihood.

The responses reflect a limited impact of the SAED initiative in practical terms. While most respondents confirmed the availability of lectures and facilities, many indicated that the training did not result in useful, applicable skills. Only a minority reported using the acquired skills after service. These results suggest that the SAED initiative may require improvement in its practical delivery, duration, and post-camp support for it to contribute more effectively to the livelihood of corps members.

### Respondents' Experiences at their Places of Primary Assignment

The experiences of corps members at their respective PPA are reported in **Table 3**. As shown in **Table 3**, respondents reported a range of experiences during their placement at their PPA under the NYSC scheme. A majority of respondents (88.7%) agreed that they accepted their PPA placements without questioning them, and 77.6% reported that they were never issued a query throughout their stay. About 62.0% indicated that they received all their stipends from their PPA or state government. More than half (56.8%) noted that their PPA did not provide accommodation.

In contrast, a larger proportion of respondents disagreed with several negative experiences. Specifically, 67.6% disagreed that they were posted to PPAs outside their area of specialization, and 69.7% denied delaying their report to the PPA to avoid mistakes. A vast majority (92.2%) disagreed with being rejected at their PPA without explanation, while 70.7% reported that their workload was not too difficult to bear. Furthermore, 87.1% denied travelling without approval from the state coordinator, and 95.4%

**Table 3.** Respondents' experiences at their PPA

No	Items	n (%)	
		Agree	Disagree
1	I was posted to a PPA outside my area of specialty.	6,249 (32.4)	13,029 (67.6)
2	It took me some time to consider my PPA before reporting to avoid mistakes.	5,833 (30.3)	13,445 (69.7)
3	I was instantly rejected at my PPA for no apparent reason.	1,500 (7.8)	17,778 (92.2)
4	The workload assigned to me at my PPA was too unbearable.	5,652 (29.3)	13,626 (70.7)
5	There was no accommodation in my PPA.	10,959 (56.8)	8,319 (43.2)
6	I travelled each time I liked without the approval of the State coordinator.	2,482 (12.9)	16,796 (87.1)
7	I was paying PPA officials to give me monthly clearance letters due to my busy schedule.	900 (4.6)	18,378 (95.4)
8	I changed my original PPA to another PPA with better welfare.	2,865 (14.9)	16,413 (85.1)
9	Some corps members in my PPA were rude to the organization's leadership.	5,700 (29.5)	13,578 (70.5)
10	Some corps members in my PPA were persistently late to work.	7,100 (36.8)	12,178 (63.2)
11	Distance from PPA prevented many corps members from attending work on time.	6,938 (35.9)	12,340 (64.1)
12	I was reported to the LGI/LI by my PPA only on a few occasions.	1,583 (8.2)	17,695 (91.8)
13	I accepted my PPA without any question.	17,096 (88.7)	2,182 (11.3)
14	My PPA consistently pays monthly stipends to her corps members.	9,173 (47.6)	10,105 (52.4)
15	I was never queried in my PPA throughout my time with the organization.	14,945 (77.6)	4,333 (22.4)
16	I seldom absent myself from duties at my PPA without prior permission from the management ...	4,194 (21.8)	15,084 (78.2)
17	I was paid all my stipends by my PPA/state government.	11,950 (62.0)	7,328 (38.0)

**Table 4.** CDS experiences of respondents

No	Items	n (%)	
		Agree	Disagree
1	I was not allowed to choose my CDS group at the secretariat.	13,400 (69.1)	5,878 (30.9)
2	I belonged to more than one CDS group while serving.	1,486 (7.7)	17,792 (92.3)
3	I was not able to carry out a personal CDS while serving.	11,385 (59.1)	7,893 (40.9)
4	My personal CDS activities affected my effectiveness in my PPA.	0 (0.0)	19,278 (100)
5	The CDS supervising officer did not sometimes sign my clearance card.	0 (0.0)	19,278 (100)
6	I was unable to contribute to my group CDS because I was busy with my PPA work.	0 (0.0)	19,278 (100)
7	There was a poor response from the host community to funding projects initiated by my CDS group.	8,140 (42.2)	11,138 (57.8)
8	There was no cooperation in my CDS group towards initiating viable projects.	2,835 (14.7)	16,443 (85.3)
9	I did not miss any of my group CDS activities.	15,150 (78.6)	4128 (21.4)
10	There was active collaboration between my CDS group and members of the host community.	15,981 (82.9)	3,297 (17.1)

disagreed with paying officials for clearance letters. Also, 85.1% did not switch from their original PPA to another based on welfare concerns.

Regarding peer behavior, 70.5% disagreed that corps members at their PPA were rude to management, and 63.2% disagreed that members were persistently late. Similarly, 64.1% denied that long distances prevented timely attendance, and 91.8% said they were seldom reported to local inspectors. Just under half (47.6%) agreed that their PPA consistently paid stipends, while 78.2% reported they did not absent themselves from duty without permission. The findings suggest that most corps members complied with placement guidelines and behaved responsibly at their PPAs. While some challenges existed (such as a lack of accommodation and inconsistent stipend payments), many respondents indicated that their time at their PPA was largely orderly and without serious misconduct or logistical problems.

#### Corps Members' Community Development Service Experiences

The CDS activities and experiences of corps members were analyzed and the results are presented in **Table 4**. According to **Table 4**, the experiences among corps members during their CDS under the NYSC scheme varies. A majority of respondents (69.1%) reported that they were not allowed to choose their CDS group at the secretariat. In addition, 59.1% indicated that they were unable to carry out a personal CDS during their service year. Most respondents (78.6%) stated that they did not miss any group CDS activities, and 82.9% agreed that there was an active collaboration between their CDS group and members of the host community.

On the other hand, 92.3% of the respondents disagreed that they belonged to more than one CDS group while serving, suggesting that most were assigned to a single group throughout their service. All respondents (100.0%) disagreed with the claims that personal CDS activities interfered with their PPA, that their supervising officer failed to sign clearance cards, and that they could not contribute to their CDS group due to PPA commitments. Furthermore, 57.8% disagreed that there was poor financial support from the host community for CDS projects, and 85.3% denied that there was a lack of cooperation within their CDS group when initiating group projects.

These results suggest that while some structural limitations existed, such as restrictions in selecting CDS groups and challenges in conducting personal projects, corps members generally participated fully in group activities and experienced strong engagement with their host communities. The unanimous disagreement with issues related to clearance, absenteeism, and interference with PPA responsibilities indicates that CDS duties were well integrated into the overall NYSC experience. The high level of agreement regarding collaboration also points to positive interactions between CDS groups and host communities.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined corps members' experiences during the NYSC scheme in Nigeria. It focused on four areas: the Orientation Camp, the SAED initiative, the PPA, and CDS. The results showed participants viewed these components and their perceived effectiveness. For orientation courses, more than 80 percent of the respondents agreed that the NYSC Orientation Camp was a useful and engaging part of the program. Activities such as physical participation, access to sleeping materials, a clean environment, communal cooking, and organized social events were widely accepted. The mean score of 14.44 supported this agreement. This finding is consistent with earlier studies that described the Orientation Camp as a key platform for preparing corps members for national service through teamwork and exposure to new cultural and social experiences (Abdulkarim et al., 2018; Owan et al., 2022; Raimi & Alao, 2011). Although previous studies noted the lack of comprehensive evaluation of NYSC's effectiveness, the current findings suggest that the Orientation Camp has continued to provide value in terms of structure, routine, and early social bonding. Maintaining this segment may help strengthen initial commitment and group cohesion.

Regarding SAED, a contrasting evidence was documented. More than 80 percent of corps members disagreed that the SAED initiative added practical value to their camp experience. Many believed the lectures lacked substance and did not provide real-world skills. The mean score of 63.99 suggests that this component may require major revisions or should be replaced. This finding is different from the one reported in previous studies that described a positive connection between entrepreneurial training and youth engagement in business ventures (Ajetomobi et al., 2022; Chauke et al., 2021; Kadir et al., 2022; Muogbo et al., 2021; Umar et al., 2022). The negative views from this study may reflect weak delivery, inadequate planning, or limited follow-up after the camp phase. Thus, improving the quality of trainers, ensuring access to practical tools, and linking participants to funding opportunities may increase the relevance of this initiative.

For PPA, the findings of this study is that more than 80 percent of corps members accepted their PPA postings without objection. However, many questioned the relevance of their assigned roles, and the mean score of 11.03 suggests general dissatisfaction with the experience. Previous studies have shown that job satisfaction among NYSC members is connected to how well the placement matches their academic background and interest (Amoko et al., 2021). Graduates often face employment barriers despite their qualifications, partly due to gaps between academic training and job demands (Adewoyin et al., 2015; Olatona et al., 2012). The findings here suggest that deployment decisions may not always consider corps members' competencies or career plans. Strengthening the process of assigning roles, offering more support in the workplace, and ensuring regular feedback may help address these concerns.

For CDS, this study found that 82.9 percent of corps members agreed that there was active cooperation between their CDS group and the host community. Many also reported steady involvement in group activities. However, responses indicated some dissatisfaction with issues such as poor community funding support and project coordination. The mean score of 6.45 reflected this imbalance between engagement and outcomes. This finding is similar to reports from Chibuike et al. (2022) and Okafor and Ani (2014), which found that corps members usually maintain a positive attitude towards CDS. Where funding or cooperation is lacking, the success of CDS projects may be limited. Improving collaboration between NYSC officials and host communities could improve the outcomes of group-led initiatives.

Generally, the findings suggest that the Orientation Camp and CDS remain valuable aspects of the NYSC program. These segments continue to provide meaningful engagement for corps members. However, SAED and PPA require stronger planning and monitoring. Improvements in these areas could enhance the relevance of NYSC for skill development and employment readiness. Future revisions of the program should include feedback from corps members and align more closely with national goals for youth empowerment and job creation.

### Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

This study has several strengths that add to its academic value. It used a large, nationwide sample, which improved the generalizability of the findings across different NYSC locations in Nigeria. The study covered all major aspects of the NYSC scheme, including the orientation course, SAED, primary assignment, and CDS. Moreover the study focus on the direct experiences of corps members and provides detailed information that are often missing in program reviews. However, some limitations must be acknowledged to the extent to which our results can be interpreted and used.

First, the study depended on self-reported responses, which are often influenced by personal bias, recall issues, or the desire to give socially acceptable answers. To address this limitation, future research should consider using information from multiple sources, such as official records or supervisor feedback, to strengthen the findings. Secondly, although the study included data from corps members who served between 2012 and 2021, it did not assess the long-term outcomes of the NYSC program. Given that the scheme is designed to last for only one year and is typically experienced once in a lifetime, the study focused mainly on immediate or recent views. A longitudinal study is therefore needed to follow former corps members beyond their service year to understand how their experiences may influence employment, skill application, and civic involvement over time. Thirdly, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to assess how the experience of the program may vary across different batches. Future studies could adopt a cohort approach to compare corps members' experiences over different service years, so as to determine whether improvements or declines have occurred in the delivery of the program. Lastly, the findings may not fully reflect regional, cultural, or institutional variations in the NYSC scheme. Further research could disaggregate data by region, type of camp, or socio-economic background to provide a more detailed comparison of corps members' experiences.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the experiences of corps members across three cardinal components of the NYSC program in Nigeria. The findings suggest that while the Orientation Camp and CDS remain positively received and widely supported by corps members, the SAED initiative and PPA postings require significant improvements. Weaknesses in practical training, unclear deployment strategies, and a lack of follow-up support were reported as major concerns. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing evidence from a large-scale evaluation of a national service program from the perspective of participants. The study is therefore valuable for program reform and policy development since it has successfully identified the strengths and weaknesses of the NYSC program. This study is useful to the Federal Government of Nigeria, and the NYSC and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Although the study is focused on Nigeria, the relevance of this work extends to other countries seeking to promote youth engagement, national integration, and employment through structured service schemes. The results can inform the design, delivery, and review of youth programs in developing countries and other settings similar to Nigeria, particularly those facing high graduate unemployment and social integration challenges.

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**AI statement:** The authors stated that no AI technologies were used in any part of this study.

**Declaration of interest:** No conflict of interest is declared by the authors.

**Data sharing statement:** Data supporting the findings and conclusions are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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