

## **Nigerian Open and Distance Learning Students and the Mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme**

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### **Abstract**

The principal means of accessing admission into higher educational institutions in Nigeria is the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) carried out by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). The total number of candidates looking for admission into the different Nigerian institutions of higher learning has been on the increase over the years. The main motivation behind setting up any Open Distance Learning (ODL) institutions in Nigeria is to give a scope of chance to admittance to advanced education to students who, for one explanation or the other, really like to have their schooling in a more adaptable way. Moreover, the low admission limit of Nigerian universities for full time studies places a limit on the number of prospective learners who can be admitted into universities thereby making a monstrous hole between the people who want higher education and the framework accessible to cater for their necessities. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme is an obligatory programme set up by the Nigerian government to include graduates of Nigerian educational tertiary institutions who are 30 years and below with the aim of promoting national unity and integration as well as to contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy. However, graduates of open and distance learning institutions in the country do not take part in the NYSC programme. An attempt is made in this paper to investigate the level of preparedness and interests of ODL students and their disappointment in their exclusion from the programme. To achieve this, a descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study with a random sample of 201 respondents comprising 114 male and 87 female distant learners within the stipulated age for the NYSC scheme. A researcher-developed questionnaire was used to gather data from respondents.

Four research questions were raised and three hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data gathered were analyzed and presented using figures, simple percentages, frequency tables and the Independent T-test. The findings revealed that 98% of respondents believe that they are prepared for the NYSC scheme, while 2% of respondents are not prepared. 99% are interested and 97% are disappointed at their exclusion from the scheme. No significant gender difference was observed in the level of preparedness, extent of interest and degree of disappointment in exclusion from the scheme among respondents. The study recommends a collaborative effort of ODL institutions and their counselling units in addressing anxieties and disappointments among students. The study also advocates a review of government's policy on the NYSC scheme for possible inclusion of young graduates of ODL institutions in the scheme.

*Keywords:* Open and Distance learners, The National Youth Service Corps, Readiness, Interest, Disappointment, Exclusion, Inclusion.

### **Introduction**

The quest for university education among Nigerian secondary school graduates has tremendously increased over the years. The dream of the majority of secondary school leavers in Nigeria is to further their education by gaining admission into one of the universities in the country in pursuit of knowledge, skills, and personal growth through a lifelong journey of learning and self-improvement. The pursuit for higher education is driven by a desire for personal development, intellectual enrichment, and

often the quest of specific career or life goals. The primary pathway to gaining admission to higher educational institutions in Nigeria is through the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). UTME was introduced in 1978 and is administered by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). Over the past five years, there has been a noticeable rise in the number of individuals applying for admission to various Nigerian institutions of higher learning. The standard age range for university admission in Nigeria typically falls between 16 and 21 years.

However, it is important to note that despite the growing number of applicants, the number of students admitted remains significantly lower than the total number of applicants. Available data reveal that the number of those offered admission is far less than the total number of candidates seeking for admission. For example, between 2015 and 2023, a total of 5,661,567 male and 4,618,329 female candidates applied for admission, but 1,618,64 male and 1,572,128 female candidates were offered admission (Jamb in Commonwealth of learning, 2022).

The difficulty in securing admission to conventional universities in Nigeria can have significant negative consequences on students. This challenging situation often compels some students to retake the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination multiple times, sometimes as frequently as five or more times before securing the desired admission. This repetition does not only add to the financial burden on parents/guardians but also places considerable stress on the candidates. This is why enrollment of students in distance education programmes

at the undergraduate level has been steadily increasing over the years (Bagriacik & Karatas, 2022). Open and Distance Learning programmes are designed to cater for individuals who, for various reasons, are unable to pursue mainstream university education at a younger age and may need to start their higher education journey later in life.

The programme is also meant for those who have financial and geographical location constraints. ODL's flexibility and accessibility make it an attractive option for individuals who might have faced challenges or constraints in their educational/career development earlier in life but still aspire to pursue higher education and enhance their career prospects. Open and Distance Learning programme is an educational approach is designed for students who are geographically separated from their teachers. It involves electronic learning, facilitated through communication technologies such as computers and the internet (Wordu, 2022). Open and Distance Learning programmes serve a unique purpose in the educational landscape of Nigeria. Given that access to

traditional university education in Nigeria is highly competitive through the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination, it is not surprising that in a study carried out on the age range of ODL students in Nigeria by the Commonwealth of Learning in 2022, a significant number of ODL students in Nigeria fall within the age range of 25 and 34 years. This age group comprising almost 45% of sampled ODL students reflects the fact that ODL institutions offer alternative pathway for those who were unable to secure admission to conventional universities at a younger age. These diverse age groups in ODL programmes highlight the flexibility and accessibility of the distant learning programmes as options for individuals of varying ages who are seeking higher education. It allows both recent school graduates and matured learners to access educational opportunities, which can be particularly crucial for those who faced challenges in securing admission to conventional universities (Adamu, 2022).

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme is a scheme initiated by the Federal Military Government of Nigerian in

1973 with the aim of promoting national unity and integration as well as engaging Nigerian graduates in nation-building and contributing to the country's development. Unlike military conscription which enforces mandatory military service for able-bodied young men, the NYSC programme required Nigerian graduates of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education within and outside the country to participate in the scheme compulsorily for a period of one year (Marenin, 1990). Also included in the scheme were qualified individuals from recognized professional associations such as Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria (CIBN). The NYSC was established in Nigeria by General Yakubu Gowon-led military administration through Decree Number 24 of May 22nd, 1973. Subsequently, in 1985, General Ibrahim Babangida-led military administration reviewed this decree by excluding the graduates of colleges of education from participating in the scheme. The scheme was further reviewed in early 1990s with the exclusion of ODL and professional graduates from participating in

the scheme. The introduction of the scheme was informed by the then military administration's desire to forge a national unity in the country after the highly devastating civil war of 1967 to 1970. Another objective of the scheme was to engage Nigerian university graduates under the age of 30 years in various nation-building activities.

The programme involves the mobilization and deployment of Nigerian youths who have graduated from institutions of higher learning to serve the country in different regions, typically outside their states of origin, for a minimum duration of one year. The NYSC plays a significant role in fostering national unity, cultural exchange, and community development while providing young graduates with valuable experiences and opportunities to contribute to the progress of Nigeria. During their service year in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, participants are posted to a variety of institutions and sectors, including Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) of the government, and private sectors of the Nigerian economy.

The diverse range of postings allows participants to gain practical experience and contribute to various aspects of national development. Upon successful completion of the service year, participants are issued certificate as a recognition of the service they have rendered to the country. This certificate holds significant importance in Nigeria, particularly for job placement. For participants who are above the age of 30 years, the certificate or a letter of exemption obtained through the NYSC office is often mandatory for securing paid employment in Nigeria. Employers in both the public and private sectors always request for this vital document as it serves as a proof of national service and eligibility for job placement. In this way, the NYSC scheme not only promotes national unity and engagement but also plays a crucial role in facilitating the transition of young graduates into the Nigerian workforce by providing them with a certificate or exemption letter that is widely recognized and valued by employers of labour across the country.

### **Literature Review**

## **Open Distance Learning Programme Students' Preparedness in terms of Standard and Quality**

To ensure that the academic aims of the government in establishing ODL institutions are considerably achieved and the standard is equated with the conventional university programmes, quality assurance checks are put in place as a way to ensure and obtain better result of the goals of ODL programmes. This was highlighted by the Commonwealth of Learning (2022), which revealed that the materials for distance learners undergo several stages of editing to ensure quality in terms of contents, languages, and instructional designs. These materials are prepared in collaboration with lecturers in the full-time programmes of various traditional universities. Key features of ODL institutions instructional materials include:

1. **Clearly Specified Learning Outcomes:** Each study session is designed with specific learning outcomes, clearly outlining what students should achieve or understand by the end of that session. These

outcomes serve as benchmarks for students' progress and understanding.

2. **In-Text Questions:** To facilitate active learning, in-text questions are incorporated in the study materials which prompt students to engage with the content, think critically, and apply their knowledge as they progress through the materials.

3. **Clearly Specified Learning Outcomes:** Each study session is designed with specific learning outcomes, clearly outlining what students should achieve or understand by the end of that session.

4. **Self-Assessment Questions:** Periodic self-assessment questions are included to allow learners to evaluate their understanding and gauge their progress. These questions help learners identify areas where they may need additional support or review.

The study materials are distributed using multiple methods to accommodate various learner preferences and accessibilities. They are made available on a Digital Versatile Disk (DVD), ensuring that physical copies can be accessed. Additionally, the materials are accessible through an online portal, providing

a digital option for learners who prefer online access or remote learning.

By incorporating these elements into their study materials and utilizing both physical and digital distribution methods, these distance learning institutions aim to enhance the quality of education provided to their students and ensure that learners have the resources and tools needed to succeed in

In some cases, face-their ODL programmes.

to-face facilitation sessions are utilized in certain courses to help students better understand their subjects at their respective study centers.

Assessment of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) students is carried out through various methods. In addition to the self-assessment exercises provided after each unit, computer-marked assessments are also employed. These assessments typically consist of sets of fill-in-the-blank questions and multiple-choice questions. The scores from these computer-marked assessments contribute 30% of the final grade for the course. The remaining 70% of the final course grade is determined by the semester

examinations which is administered at the conclusion of each semester. These examinations serve as comprehensive assessment of the students' understanding of the course material and is a significant factor in their overall performance evaluation. By using a combination of self-assessment exercises, computer-marked assessments, and semester examinations, these ODL institutions aim to provide a comprehensive evaluation of students' knowledge and skills, allowing for a well-rounded assessment of their academic progress and performance.

### **ODL Student's Interest in NYSC Scheme**

Graduates from ODL programmes desire to experience the same post-graduation experience like their counterparts in regular programmes but are excluded from this one-year mandatory service. These ODL students are not only beneficiaries of the chosen mode of instruction delivery in the current educational system in Nigeria but are also critical stakeholders whose opinion should be sought before policies of exclusion from a unifying national programme like the NYSC scheme. Students and many other stakeholders

in the ODL institutions have made several appeals to the government and the National University Commission to review the policy of preventing students who graduate through open distance learning mode of instruction to participate in the NYSC especially for students below the stipulated age of 30 years. In 2015, angry NOUN students threatened nationwide protest on their quest to participate in the scheme. Another reasons for strong interest for participating in the scheme is for the students to have equal opportunity of experiencing the purpose of initiating the scheme. The establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme in Nigeria was driven by several major reasons and objectives, including:

1. **Promoting National Unity:** The NYSC programme was initiated in the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War to foster national unity. The war had threatened the country's existence, and the program aimed to bridge ethnic, regional, and cultural divides by bringing together young graduates from diverse backgrounds.

2. **Accelerating Economic Growth:** The NYSC scheme sought to contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy by engaging participants in various productive sectors. Participants were assigned to areas of the national economy where their skills and contributions could enhance the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

3. **National Exploration and Mobility:** The programme aimed to give young people the opportunity to live and work in different parts of Nigeria. This exposure allowed participants to explore the country and choose where they would like to reside and pursue their careers.

4. **Skills Deployment:** The NYSC programme aimed to make specific skills available in areas where they were needed across Nigeria. Participants were posted to diverse locations based on their learned skills, contributing to addressing skill gaps in various regions.

5. **Inculcating Discipline and Patriotism:** Participants in the NYSC programme received training from the military, an institution known for its discipline and patriotism. This training was intended to



instill these traits in the youths, contributing to their personal development and fostering a sense of patriotism for national development.

**6. Preparation for Life after Graduation:** The stipend provided to participants in the NYSC programme serves the dual purpose of supporting them during their service year and preparing them for life after graduation. Learning to manage and save part of this stipend can be invaluable experience for graduates as they transition into job hunting or consider starting small enterprises that have the potential to grow into substantial ventures in the future.

**7. Increased Employment Opportunities:** The NYSC program has contributed to providing greater employment opportunities for Nigerian youths. Many graduates have secured long-term employment, often being absorbed into the institutions or organizations where they completed their service year (Ozeh, 2018). This employment placement helps to address the issue of youth unemployment and facilitates the transition of young graduates into the workforce.

#### **8. Participation, Inclusiveness, and Equitable Opportunities for All Youths:**

This pillar aims to address barriers that hinder meaningful youth engagement in civil and political affairs. It seeks to enhance opportunities for the constructive involvement and meaningful participation of all Nigerian youths in community and social development, political processes, and governance activities at all levels. The goal is to maximize their contributions to the extent of their abilities, aspirations, and experiences (Federal Republic of Nigeria National Youth Policy, 2019).

These strategies reflect a commitment to fostering youth participation, inclusivity, and equitable opportunities, ensuring that young people can play an active role in shaping their communities and contributing to the nation's development. Going by the above-described strategies, every Nigerian youth, given the opportunity will want to be a part of this scheme. Also, Nigeria's National Development Plan (NDP) for the years 2021-2025 represents a medium-term strategic blueprint. Its primary goal is to unleash the full potential of the country across all sectors of the economy, with

a focus on achieving sustainable, comprehensive, and inclusive national development. This plan was developed through the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders including the private sector, sub-national governments, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and facilitated by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The deliberate involvement of these diverse groups was intended to ensure inclusiveness, foster active participation, and engage citizens, leaving no one behind in the process (NDP, 2021). The study by Achiaku (2021) highlights the significant role of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in advancing education in schools and communities across Nigeria. It underscores the various roles played by NYSC members and their impacts on educational development. The study reveals that corps members make substantial contributions to the improvement of education through both formal and non-formal methods.

### **Disappointment of ODL Students Over their Exclusion from NYSC Scheme**

The disappointment among students of the ODL institutions especially National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) students in their exclusion from National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme was observed in their threat to go on nationwide protest in the year 2015 as reported by PMNEWS of 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2015. These students expressed their frustrations and disappointment over the fact that they were not allowed to participate in the NYSC scheme. However, the Federal Government of Nigeria through the NOUN Act as amended on Dec. 4, 2018 has instructed NYSC authorities to include NOUN graduate in its programme. Unfortunately, this instruction has not been implemented by the NYSC till date. Even though the above amended act did not include graduate of other ODL institutions, all the students of distant learning institutions in the country, led by their fellow students at NOUN have put the following grievances forward:

1. **Discrimination:** Distant learners felt marginalized and discriminated against after graduation by the society, particularly at the labour market where they were viewed as half-baked university graduates as a result of the

type of certificate (exemption certificate) issued to them especially those below the age of 30 years. They also suffered discrimination in the hands of students in mainstream or full-time programs. They believed that they were unfairly perceived as second-rate students, leading to feelings of exclusion and social stigma.

**2. Inconsistency with NYSC Principles:** The students argued that the exclusion of distant learners from the NYSC scheme contradicted the principles of the program. They pointed out that the NYSC scheme was designed to be inclusive, and it was unfair to exclude a particular segment of the student population based on their enrollment status. This disappointment and frustration expressed by distant learners at NOUN highlight the need for equitable treatment and opportunities for all students, regardless of their mode of learning. It also underscores the importance of addressing these concerns to ensure that education policies and programmes align with principles of inclusivity and fairness (Achiaku, 2021).

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has explained the exclusion of its graduates from participating in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program by pointing to the enabling laws that govern the operation of the NYSC scheme. According to the former Vice Chancellor of NOUN, Prof. Abdalla Uba-Adamu, the NYSC issues three different types of certificates as follows:

- 1. Participatory Certificate:** This certificate is for individuals who actively participated in the NYSC program.
- 2. Exemption Certificate:** The exemption certificate is designated for individuals who are already serving the nation in roles such as the armed forces or secret services. They are considered exempt from the NYSC program due to their existing service commitments.
- 1. Excluding Certificate:** The "excluding certificate" is exclusively for graduates of distance learning institutions like NOUN. NOUN is classified as a distance learning institution because of its open and distance learning approach to education. As a

result, all students who graduate from NOUN receive an "excluding certificate."

Furthermore, graduates of NOUN can obtain a certificate of exclusion from NYSC, which is considered equivalent to the participatory certificate in the job market. Employers are legally obligated to accept candidates with an "excluding certificate." Any employer who rejects candidates solely because they possess an "excluding certificate" is in violation of the law (NAN, 2020). Although this explanation appears to clarify the unique categorization of certificates by the NYSC and the legal status of NOUN graduates in the job market, there are still dispelling misconceptions (as a result of first-hand undocumented experiences with employers of labour among NOUN graduates) and concerns regarding their eligibility for employment.

From the above discussions, it appears that the NYSC authorities have little understanding on the level of preparedness of ODL graduates for the NYSC scheme, their interests in the scheme and their level of disappointment as a result of exclusion

from the programme. It is against this backdrop that this study is conducted to seek the opinion of ODL students, their interests and, preparedness for the NYSC Scheme as well as their level of disappointments in the exclusion policy of the scheme.

### **Research Objectives**

The aim of this study is to:

1. Investigate the extent of ODL students' preparedness in terms of standard and quality of the programme.
2. Evaluate the extent of interest of ODL students in the NYSC scheme.
3. Ascertain the extent of disappointment of ODL students as a result of exclusion from the NYSC scheme.
4. Examine the gender difference on all the variables.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the extent of ODL students' preparedness in terms of standard and quality of the distant learning programme?
2. What is the extent of interest of ODL students in the NYSC scheme?

3. What is the extent of disappointment of ODL students as a result of exclusion from the NYSC scheme?

4. What is the gender difference on all the variables?

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in the readiness of male and female students in the NYSC scheme.

2. There is no significant difference in the interest of male and female students in the NYSC scheme.

3. There is no significant difference in the disappointment of male and female students as a result of exclusion from the NYSC scheme.

### **Methodology**

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. A sample of 201 ODL students who met the criteria for selection (18-30 years, Distance Learning Institute students) in the University of Lagos was selected using a simple random sampling technique to provide the best information for the study. A research instrument constructed by researchers, was used to collect data both manually and

electronically from respondents in the Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos. The DLI Students and the NYSC Scheme Questionnaire (DSNSQ) assessed demographic data of respondents such as, gender and age range of respondents and qualitative analyses of questions on readiness, interest and level of disappointment of respondent in the NYSC scheme. For easy and prompt response from respondents (due to the fact that they were on campus for end of session examination), the DSNSQ comprise statements to assess level of preparedness, interest in the NYSC scheme and level of disappointment in exclusion from the NYSC scheme. DSNSQ has a Cronbach alpha measure of internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.77. Analyses of data was done using simple percentages, frequency counts for the research questions and the Independent T-test were used to analyze the hypotheses.

### **Results**

#### **Research Questions**

1. **Research Question 1**  
What is the extent of ODL students' preparedness in terms of standard and quality for the NYSC Scheme?

**Table 1: ODL students’ preparedness in terms of standard and quality for the NYSC scheme**

State of readiness	N	%
Prepared	197	98
Not prepared	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 revealed that a preponderance of students (98%, n=197) believe that they are prepared for the NYSC Scheme while only 2% (n=4) are not prepared to be involved in the scheme.

**Research Question 2:** What is the extent of interest of ODL students for the NYSC scheme?

**Table 2: Extent of interest of ODL students for the NYSC scheme.**

	N	%
Interested	199	99
Not interested	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5: Independent T-test Analysis on readiness in the NYSC scheme based on gender**

Variables	Mean	SD	N	DF	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
Male	16.52	1.69	114	199	-1.14	1.96	Accept $H_0$

Table 2 revealed that a majority of students (99%, n=199) are interested in the NYSC Scheme while only 1% (n=2) are not interested in the Scheme.

**Research Question 3:** What is the extent of disappointment of ODL students as a result of exclusion from the NYSC scheme?

**Table 3: Extent of disappointment of DLI students for exclusion from the NYSC scheme**

	N	%
Disappointed	195	97
Not disappointed	6	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 revealed that most students (97%, n=195) are disappointed as a result of exclusion from the NYSC scheme while only 3% (n=6) are not disappointed.

**Hypotheses Testing**

**Hypothesis one:** There is no significant difference in the readiness of male and female students in the NYSC scheme.

Female            **16.77**            **1.38**            **87**

The result in table 5 shows a calculated t-value of -1.14 as the difference in readiness in the NYSC scheme based on gender. This calculated t-value is not significant since it is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 given 199 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is

retained. This implies that there is no significant difference in readiness in the NYSC scheme among male and female DLI students.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference in the interest of male and female students in the NYSC scheme.

**Table 6: Independent T-test Analysis on interest in the NYSC scheme based on gender**

Variables	Mean	SD	N	DF	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
Male	<b>17.18</b>	<b>1.47</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>-0.04</b>	<b>1.96</b>	<b>Accept Ho</b>
Female	<b>17.18</b>	<b>1.42</b>	<b>87</b>				

The result in table 6 shows a calculated t-value of -0.04 as the difference in interest in the NYSC scheme based on gender. This calculated t-value is not significant since it is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 given 199 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is

retained. This implies that there is no significant difference in interest in the NYSC scheme among male and female DLI students.

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant difference in the disappointment of male and female students in the NYSC scheme.

**Table 7: Independent T-test Analysis on Disappointment in the NYSC scheme based on gender**

Variables	Mean	SD	N	DF	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
Male	<b>8.35</b>	<b>1.52</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>-0.27</b>	<b>1.96</b>	<b>Accept Ho</b>

Female                    **8.41**                    **1.72**                    **87**

The result in table 7 shows a calculated t-value of -0.27 as the difference in disappointment in the NYSC scheme based on gender. This calculated t-value is not significant since it is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 given 199 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is retained. This implies that there is no significant difference in disappointment in the NYSC scheme among male and female DLI students.

### Discussion of Findings

The study revealed a high level of ODL students' preparedness for the NYSC programme (98%, n=197). The students believe that they are prepared for the NYSC Scheme while only 2% (n=4) are not ready to be involved in the scheme. This shows a very high level of preparedness among distant learners in Nigeria. Responses of participants are in line with the outcome of a comprehensive study of the status of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions in Nigeria by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) (2022) which revealed that materials

for distance learners undergo several stages of editing to ensure quality in terms of content, language, and instructional design. These materials are prepared in collaboration with lecturers in the full-time programmes of various traditional universities.

The study also revealed that the majority of distant learners (99%, n=199) are interested in the NYSC scheme while only 1% (n=2) are not interested in the scheme. The result of this study is supported by the actions of students and many other stakeholders in the ODL institutions when they made several appeals to the government and the National Universities Commission to review the policy preventing students who graduated through open distance learning mode to participate in the NYSC programmes especially for students within the stipulated age bracket. Also, the 2015 threat by angry NOUN students to embark on nationwide protest on their quest to participate in the NYSC scheme shows the level of interest of ODL students in the programme. Another reasons for the distant learners' strong interest in the scheme is for the students to



have equal opportunity of experiencing the benefits of the scheme.

The study also revealed that most of the respondents (97%, n=195) are disappointed in their exclusion from the NYSC scheme while only 3% (n=6) are not disappointed by their exclusion from the scheme. The disappointment among students of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) by their exclusion from the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme was demonstrated in their 2015 threats to federal government to embark on nationwide protest. These students expressed their frustrations over the fact that they were not allowed to participate in the NYSC scheme. Their grievances centered on several points such as discrimination and inconsistency with NYSC principles. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has explained the exclusion of its graduates from participating in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme by pointing to the enabling laws that govern the operation of the NYSC scheme.

### **Conclusion**

According to the World Population Review (2023) around the globe, approximately 85 countries have implemented either compulsory or elective military and community service programmes for individuals aged 18 to 45 years old. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme in Nigeria, while not without its challenges, has played a crucial role in fostering unity, a sense of belonging, and a spirit of brotherhood among the nation's youths, transcending cultural and social backgrounds. A thorough examination of the history of the scheme reveals its far-reaching impact on various aspects of Nigerian society, including the economy, education, social fabrics, culture, and even the psychological well-being of participants. The NYSC has effectively instilled discipline and nurtured patriotism among Nigerian youths, emphasizing the importance of selfless service to the community, notably through the Community Development Service (CDS) component (Ajila, 2021).

However, despite these positive aspects, there are notable challenges stemming from the dominant social constructs related to age and transition patterns within the NYSC scheme,

and the exclusion of certain categories of youths, for example, ODL students who are within the NYSC age limit. These challenges can hinder the effective utilization of youth capabilities to address national development issues. It is highlighted that limited support structures during the educational pathways leading up to the NYSC and a lack of opportunity structures during the NYSC service itself contribute to restricting the full potential of youth capabilities in sectors that are crucial to national development. In the light of these observations, Arubayi (2015) recommends a reevaluation of the current deployment strategy of the NYSC programme to align more effectively with the narratives and goals of national development. This suggests the need for reforms or adjustments that can better harness the capabilities of young people (irrespective of their mode of study), in addressing the pressing challenges and developmental needs of the nation.

One of the pressing challenges faced by Nigeria's education sector is a shortage of qualified teachers, which hinders the

country's pursuit of providing quality education to all Nigerian children. The government has increasingly focused on deploying NYSC members to work in schools as a means of addressing this shortage, instead of emphasizing the recruitment and training of credentialed teachers. Given Nigeria's economic and security challenges, it becomes crucial to assess the effectiveness of corps members in providing educational support and understand their perception of well-being in the context of these broader issues (Agbaji, 2022). This discussion underscores the vital role that NYSC members play in the education sector in Nigeria and the need for comprehensive evaluations of their contributions, as well as considerations for the challenges they face, particularly in light of the country's educational and socio-economic landscape.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends a review of the NYSC scheme and the inclusion of all eligible youths in Nigeria in the NYSC scheme irrespective of their mode of learning. The study also recommends a collaborative effort of school

management of all ODL institutions and their counselling units with regard to reducing the level of disappointment and frustration faced by distant learners as a result of exclusion from the scheme, while the proposals for amendment of NYSC exclusion policy are being presented to the relevant authorities for necessary action. Since the NYSC programme has made significant contributions to Nigeria's social cohesion, personal development of youths, and various sectors of national life; addressing the limitations of the scheme and enhancing its alignment with national development objectives are critical considerations for maximizing its impact in the future.

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