

**FINAL YEAR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS AWARENESS AND
PREPAREDNESS TO ADOPT BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF
SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN EXILE IN THEIR ONE YEAR
COMPULSORY NYSC PROHGRAMME**

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Abstract

The study investigated the level of final year Christian students' awareness and preparedness to adopt the Biblical model of a life of exile/living in exile. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Multistage proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 340 final year Christian students in the tertiary institutions in Imo State. A validated researcher developed rating scale titled: Christian Students Awareness and Preparedness for Life Challenges In Exile Rating Scale (CAPLCERS) was used for data collection. The rating scale has two clusters A and B which have reliability of internal consistency established with Cronbach Alpha Statistics as 0.78 and 0.82 respectively. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions while z-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 levels of significance. Findings showed that the extent to which final year Christian students are aware of the challenges of a life of exile during their one year compulsory NYSC programme is significantly below the expected average, while the extent to which they are prepared to adopt the Biblical model of surviving and thriving in exile is significantly above expected average level. Recommendations were made which include that: tertiary institution authorities should enlighten the final year students on some of the possible life challenges

they may encounter during the one year compulsory National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) programme; the Christian associations in the campuses should also help to groom their members on the Biblical models and principles that can help Christians survive and thrive in any exile-situation; and the Christian associations or organizations in the NYSC orientation camps should help Christian corp members to integrate and seek for the welfare of the states where they are posted and learn to love and contribute to the growth of people who may appear different in terms of belief and culture.

Introduction

In Genesis 46:3 – 4 Jacob is encouraged by God to journey down to Egypt: “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you a great nation. Not only will I go down to Egypt with you, I will also bring you back here, after Joseph has closed your eyes”. The rest of the chapter details the movement of Jacob and his household from Beersheba to Egypt. Two points are apparent in the promise of God to Jacob: first, a journey away from home is not a movement out of the scope of the presence of God; second, as challenging as life outside the familiar environment could be, there are also blessings of growth and fruitfulness; finally, the presence of God in the whole enterprise guarantees the possibility of a return back to the homeland.

The rest of the chapters of the book of Genesis (i.e. 47 – 50) show how God’s presence helped to secure the fortunes of Jacob and his household in Goshem, Egypt; the early chapters of the book of Exodus (i.e. 1 – 12) highlight the growing number of the children of Jacob in Egypt, and the many challenges that they faced when the Pharaoh that knew Joseph died; the rest of the books of the Pentateuch (from Exodus 13 through the books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) narrate the story of the providential liberation of the descendants of Jacob from Egyptian slavery, and their journey back to Canaan under the guidance of God.

As the above narratives show, a journey away from home is never an easy one. Now and again life invites us to leave our comfort zones and to travel far in terrains not completely under our control. The life of exile can thus be seen as a pervasive human experience, encapsulating the myriad experiences of up-rootedness or displacement from one’s original place of embeddedness, be it imposed or by one’s choice.

The bible shows a lot of individuals, and even the nation of Israel, who experienced the life of exile. Most of the biblical stories of the Patriarchs in the book of Genesis show them often on the move: away from the father’s

inheritance in the case of Abram and following a promise of God for another land that will be shown to him (Gen,12): away from the wrath of Esau after a family feud in the case of Jacob (Gen. 27:41-45) away from the land of Canaan after a terrible famine in the case of Jacob and his household (Gen. 45:16-20; 46:1-7). Most of the main characters in the stories are depicted as strangers far away from their native lands: Hagar in the desert (Gen16); Lot in Sodom (Genesis 19) Abraham's servant in Mesopotamia (Genesis 24); Isaac among the Philistines (Genesis 26); Jacob in Haran (Genesis 29-30); Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 39-45); in Egypt too, later Jacob and his entire household (Genesis 46- Exodus 1); Moses in Midian (Exodus 2), etc.

Wiesel (1996, p. 21) is even more poignant in pointing out how the life of exile shaped the fortunes of some of these biblical characters: Abraham was the first man to be exiled for redemptive reasons. His journey would not be a one-off experience, but would predate and exemplify countless experiences of the nation that did eventually come forth from his loins. Joseph – a great grandson of Abraham – would be the first exiled youngster to strike a fortune in a foreign land. Moses, of the tribe of Levi, would be the first political exile in the Bible, forced to flee into the desert for fear of the wrath of Pharaoh. His experiences as a fugitive exiled from home came handily to his aid by the time he was given the great mission of freeing Israel from Egyptian captivity.

To journey far into an uncharted territory always calls for a depth of faith, and a willingness to reconceive oneself beyond the strictures of one's self-creation. In this sense exile connotes the possibility of a fresh start: "exile means beginning again –elsewhere – an existence filled with ambition, anxiety and accessional reward, in the midst of new friends and adversaries" (Wiesel, 1996, p. 23)

The Bible is filled with object lessons about individuals and groups who successfully negotiated the challenges of a life of exile and even thrived in it. Mathis (2023) reported that it seems most probable that Daniel in the scripture understood exile more than anyone else. The author outlined some of the salient features of Daniel that made him very successful in his time of exile. They include: making peace with being different; being content to be different as long as it was done in order to honour his God; being prayerful; always mediating on the word of God while doing his duties; practicing spiritual disciplines like fasting, upholding his faith even when it was difficult or illegal because of his legal status in Babylon. In addition the author identified Daniel's ability to enjoy the support and encouragement among some of his fellow exiles like Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Mathis (2023) maintained that one cannot survive exile,

serve God well, or enjoy one's life, if one is doing it alone. He summarizes his thoughts thus: "Faithful people do faithful things right? Daniel pushes me to get moving by making peace with being different, learning on others, becoming a self-feeder, doing good work and elevating my vision beyond myself. It is the only way to survive, even thrive in this exile."

The Objectives of the NYSC Programme

Our intention here is to find a way to blend ancient wisdom to contemporary aspirations, to discover ways in which the youth programme can be redesigned, promoted, and implemented effectively to enhance the maturity of these growing minds. In several ways, the original intentions of the originators of the national youth service year seem to be tailored towards preparing the youth for a life away from home (= a life of exile), for a confrontation with the challenge of being different, and for the blessings that accrues therefrom. The primary purpose of the National Youth Service in Nigeria was to promote national integration and unity. Through the mandatory one-year service program, young graduates from different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds are brought together to live and work in unfamiliar regions of the country. This experience was envisioned to allow them to interact with people from diverse cultures, languages, and traditions, fostering mutual understanding and breaking down stereotypes.

To achieve the above objectives the National Youth Service Corp encompasses many activities that aim to foster personal growth, community engagement, and national development among young people. These activities are designed to provide opportunities for young adults to develop their skills, explore their interests, and contribute to society in meaningful ways. One of the key activities of the National Youth Service is community service. Through volunteering and engaging in service projects, young people get the chance to impact their communities positively. This can involve cleaning up public spaces, organizing charity events, or assisting vulnerable populations. By actively participating in these activities, young people learn the value of giving back and develop a sense of responsibility towards their fellow citizens.

Another important aspect of the National Youth Service is skill-building. Various workshops and training programs are offered to equip young people with practical skills to enhance their employability and prospects. These workshops may cover areas such as leadership development, entrepreneurship, communication skills, or vocational training. By acquiring these skills, the young

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people not only improve their chances for success but also contribute to the overall growth and prosperity of the nation.

Furthermore, the National Youth Service Corp encourages cultural exchanges and diversity appreciation through various cultural activities. This can include organizing festivals or events that celebrate different ethnicities and traditions within the country. By promoting cultural understanding and respect among young people, the National Youth Service can help to build a more inclusive society where diversity is valued. Overall, the activities of the National Youth Service are diverse and multifaceted. They provide young people with opportunities for personal growth, community engagement, skill-building, and cultural enrichment. By actively participating in these activities, the youths learn to play an active role in shaping their futures while contributing positively to society.

The National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) scheme was introduced in 1973 with the decree No. 24 of 22nd May 1973 which stated that the NYSC is being established with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among youths of Nigeria and promotion of national Unity. According to Decree 51 of 16th June 1973, the following objectives of the scheme were outlined as:

- To inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and patriotic as well as loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves.
- To raise their morale tone giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievements, social and cultural improvement
- To develop in them attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest.
- To develop common ties among them and promote national unity by ensuring that:
 - I. As far as possible, youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin.
 - II. Each group, assigned to work together, is as representative of the country as possible.
 - III. The youths are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of the country with a view to removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance

and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups.

- To encourage members of the service corps to seek at the end of their corps service, career employment all over the country thus promoting the free movement of labour.
- To induce employers, partly through their experience with members of the service corps, to employ more readily qualified Nigerians irrespective of their states of origin and,
- To enable Nigerian youths to acquire the spirit of self-reliance.

Aijila (2023) has reported that: “in the early days of the NYSC the programme was effective to some extent. University graduates were posted to states different from their home states where they were exposed to cultures and traditions different from theirs. They were able to interact with new people and also get acquainted with new languages and cultures” (Aijila 2023, P,2).

This means that Christian graduates must experience compulsory one-year in exile in regions of the country which are clearly different from their cultures and languages. And this is where we think the Biblical lessons about surviving a situation of exile can be of help to these Christian youths. It is expected that the lessons learnt about people and nations in exile in the Bible can empower them to embrace the challenges of life during the national youth service programme. By appreciating the resources from their faith, they can be better equipped to thrive and enrich their lives with meaningful experiences in the time away from their homes. And since formative assessment is necessary for providing feedback that could be used for meaningful intervention, we undertook to investigate the level of final year Christian students’ awareness and preparedness to adopt these biblical principles of ‘surviving and thriving in exile’ during their one year compulsory NYSC programme. This constitutes the problem of the study.

Jason (2020) has pointed out that one of the instructions that will help Christian Corpers to succeed in their one year compulsory exile is that they should sincerely seek and work for the good of the city where they are posted. This according to the author is in tandem with the case of Israelites as pointed out in Jeremiah 29:4 – 7: “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives for your sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you for the welfare of the city where I have

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sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find tour welfare.”

This implies that the Christian Corp members should see it as a point of duty to contribute to the progress of wherever they are during their one-year compulsory exile. Also, according to Thomson (2021), the Letter of Peter was addressed to Christians – both Jewish and Gentile – who were suffering persecution for their faith in a mostly pagan environment. Peter’s advice is potent in helping Christian youths to survive and live well in their exile situations. This advice is clearly indicated in 1 Peter 4:7 – 8: “the end of all things is at hand, therefore be self –controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all love one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins”. Thomson (2021) explained that living well in exile demands sobriety, either when we face suffering, or when things are going well, or even both. This according to the author means many things besides avoiding the controlling influence of drugs and alcohols. It means becoming strong in upholding the biblical views: “It means avoiding media or Hollywood influences that confuse our understanding of the world. It means developing the self-control to live. It is a mindset that keeps perspective and is always ready to act for Christ.”

Final Year Students and their level of awareness and preparation for the challenges of the NYSC Programme

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the mean rating score on the extent final year Christian students are aware of the challenges of life in exile of the one year compulsory NYSC programme?
2. What is the mean rating score on the extent final year Christian students are prepared to adopt the Biblical principles of overcoming the challenges of life in exile in their one year compulsory NYSC programme?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and at 0.05 levels of significance

H₀₁: The final year Christian students mean rating score on the extent they are aware of the challenges of life in exile of the one year compulsory NYSC programme is not significantly below the expected average (30 i.e. 2.5 X12)

H₀₂: The final year Christian students mean rating score on the extent they are prepared in to adopt the Biblical principles of overcoming the challenges of life in exile of the one year compulsory NYSC programme is not significantly above the expected average (40.00 i.e. 2.5 X 16)

Method

Descriptive Survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprises of all final year Christian students who are in the 9 tertiary education institutions in the Imo State that graduate students who go for one-year compulsory NYSC programme. Multistage proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 340 final year Christian students. Researchers developed rating scale titles: Christian Students Awareness and Preparedness for Life Challenges in Exile Rating Scale (CSAPLCERS) was used for data collection. The instrument was structured into a four point scale of: High Extent (HE)(4-Point); Moderate Extent(ME)(3-Point); Low Extent (LE)(2-Point); and No Extent(NE)(1-Point). It is made up of two clusters A and B which are made up of 12 and 16 items respectively. It was validated by two experts Educational Measurement and Evaluation and two experts in Christian Religious Studies. Cronbach alpha statistics were used to estimate the reliability coefficient of the internal consistency of the cluster A and B of the instruments as 0.78 and 0.82 respectively. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the z-test statistics were used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 levels of significance. Both items and respondents were used as units of analysis. Items were used to determine the respondents awareness and preparedness for one year life challenges in exile, while the respondents mean or observed mean which is the mean of the total scores of respondents on a cluster of the instrument was used to determine the overall awareness or preparedness of the final year Christian students for life challenge in exile. The expected average is the product of the mean of four point scale (i.e. 2.5) and number of items in a particular cluster which in this case were either 12 or 16 i.e. for cluster A or B instrument for data collection respectively.

Results

Extent of FYCS Awareness of the Possible Life Challenges in One Year Compulsory NYSC Programme

S/N	Item Statement: Possible life challenges in exile	X	S	Dec
1	Lack of adequate food	1.75	0.43	LE
2	Lack of availability of locally prepared favorite food	2.59	1.07	ME
3	Suffering from diseases and ailment peculiar to the place of exile	1.61	0.49	LE
4	Harsh climatic conditions one is not used to	2.26	1.01	LE
5	Difficulty to find Christians of the same faith for worship	1.82	0.71	LE
6	Language problem	3.83	0.37	HE
7	Security threats to like kidnapping, raping etc.	3.83	0.37	HE

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8	You could be hated/intimated because of your ethnicity or religion	2.54	1.01	ME
9	You may be influenced into idolatry	1.23	0.42	NE
10	You place of exile could undermine your religious loyalty to God	1.18	0.38	NE
11	You could be easily killed by the ‘ unknown gunmen’, bandits, Boko Haram etc depending where you are spending your exile	3.21	0.74	ME
12	Getting decent accommodation	3.83	0.37	HE
	Observed Mean & Standard Deviation	29.67	2.67	BEAL

BEAL= Below Expected Average Level

Table 1 showed the mean and standard and deviation of the on the level of final year Christian students awareness on the possible challenges in their one year compulsory NYSC programme. The table indicated that each of the items with serial number: 1,3,4 and 5 has mean rating score of approximately 2 (i.e to the nearest whole number) hence indicated low extent. Also each of the items with serial number 2,8 and 11 obtained mean of approximately 3 which indicated Moderate Extent. Items with serial 6,7 and 12 has mean of 4 while that of 9 and 10 has mean of approximates 1 which indicted High Extent and No Extent respectively. The observed mean and standard deviation were 29.67 and 2.67 respectively which indicated Below Expected Average Level (BEASL) of 30.00 (i.e. 2.5×12).

Table 2 Summary of Hypothesis One

Category of Mean	X	S	z-cal.	SL	z-tab.	Dec.
Observed	29.67	2.67	1.93	0.05	1.65	H_{01} is rejected
Expected	30.00					

Table 2 showed among others that the z-calculated value (1.93) is greater than the z-tabulated value of 1.65 at 0.05 levels of significance of one tailed test hence, the null hypothesis one is rejected and the alternative accepted

Table 3 Extent of FYCS Preparedness in Adopting Biblical Principles for Overcoming Possible Life Challenges in One Year Compulsory NYSC Programme

S/N	Item Statements	X	S	Dec
1	Seeking the welfare of your exile city	1.63	0.91	LE
2	Supporting each other in being different	2.16	1.03	LE
3	Praying for your selves and others around you	3.18	0.38	ME
4	Making peace with being different	2.16	1.03	LE

5	Seeking the good of your enemies	1.17	0.37	NE
6	Being a blessing to everyone	2.88	0.98	ME
7	Meditating on the word of God always	2.88	0.98	ME
8	Praying for those in authorities	2.16	1.03	LE
9	Faithfully submitting to God	2.59	1.01	ME
10	Being sober-minded	2.88	0.98	ME
11	Having self control	2.88	0.98	ME
12	Avoiding the influence of hard drugs and alcohols	2.54	1.01	ME
13	Loving one another earnestly	2.83	0.37	HE
14	Respect for other peoples religion	2.22	0.75	ME
15	Self spiritual discipline like fasting and praying	2.25	0.83	ME
16	Fellowship together with other Christians	3.83	0.37	HE
	Observed Mean & Standard Deviation	43.35	3.10	AEAL

AEAL= Above Expected Average Level; FYCS=Final Year Christian Students

Table 3 showed the level of preparedness of final year Christian students on adopting the Biblical principles of coping with the life in exile. Each of the items 1,2,3 and 8 has mean of approximately 2 which indicated Low Extent while each of the items with serial number: 3,6,9,9,10,11,12, 14 and 15 has mean of approximately 3 which indicated Moderate Extent. Only the item number five has area of approximately one which indicated no extent and also each of the items with serial number 13 and 16 obtain mean of approximately 4 (i.e. to the nearest whole number) which indicated High Extent. The observed mean and standard deviation were 43.35 and 3.10 respectively which indicated Above Expected Average Level of 40(i.e. 2.5×16).

Table 4: Summary Result z-test of H_{02}

Category of Mean	X	S	z-cal	SL	z-tab.	Dec.
Observed	43.35	3.10	16.71	0.05	1.65	H_{02} is rejected
Expected	40.00					

Table 4 showed among others that the z-calculated value (16.71) is greater than the z-tabulated value of 1.65 at 0.05 levels of significance of one tailed test hence, the null hypothesis one is rejected and the alternative accepted.

Discussion of Results

Despite the effort of the Federal government to ameliorate the life challenges of the Corp members, during the one year compulsory NYSC programme, some of them still persist. The result showed that the extent to which

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final year Christian students are aware of the life challenges of their exile situation during the one year compulsory NYSC programme is significantly below the expected average level. However, the finding showed two critical areas the students are not aware of the fact that challenges in exile could influence them into idolatry or even undermines their religious loyalty to God. These two areas are critical to their Christian faith. Secondly it showed that the extent to which the Christian students are prepared to adopt the biblical principles of surviving and thriving in exile especially according to Thomson (2023) and Jason (2021) was significantly above expected average level. This means that the religious organizations are making serious efforts in teaching their members the right ways to live despite the prevailing circumstances of life, especially that of exile.

However, there are still specific areas they have still to cover in terms of grooming their members, areas that include: seeking for the welfare of the city of their exile, seeking for the good of one's enemies and making peace with being different. It means that leaders and teachers of Christian religious institutions still have to put more effort in these areas. They must also continue grooming their members on the best ways to live, survive and thrive in exile situation where a youth is lacking the security of home or of language or customary ways of life of his ethnic group.

The Israelite's exile experience is a significant event in biblical history that holds valuable lessons for us today. By examining this period, we can uncover principles that can be applied to the National Youth Service Programme. One of the key principles we can draw from the Israelite's exile is the importance of community and unity. During their time in exile, the Israelites were forced to come together as a community and rely on one another for support. They had to set aside their differences and work towards a common goal – survival and preservation of their identity.

Similarly, the National Youth Service can serve as a platform for young people from diverse backgrounds to come together, learn from each other, and work towards a shared purpose.

Another principle we can glean from the Israelite's exile is the value of service. In exile, the

Israelites were called to serve their captors while still holding onto their faith and values. This

teaches us that even in challenging circumstances, it is possible to make a positive impact

through service. The National Youth Service Programme provides an opportunity for young people to engage in meaningful service projects that benefit their communities and society at large. By applying these biblical principles from the Israelite's exile experience, we can enhance the effectiveness and impact of the National Youth Service program. It allows us to foster unity among young people from different backgrounds while instilling in them a sense of purpose and commitment to serving others.

Conclusion

The study has shown that the extent to which final year Christian students are aware of the life challenges they may face during the one year compulsory NYSC programme is significantly below the expected average. However the extent to which they are prepared to adopt the Biblical principles of surviving and thriving is significantly above expected average level. It is essential for all the relevant stakeholders, tertiary institution authorities, NYSC directors Christian associations, and the government, to utilize the information highlighted in the study to enhance the welfare of the Corp members during their time in exile.

The benefits of the National Youth Service Programme extend far beyond individual growth. By incorporating the relevant biblical principles into the service year, the country may have the opportunity to shape a generation deeply rooted in faith and committed to a life of service.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and their implications, the following recommendations were made

1. Tertiary institution authorities should enlighten the final year students on some of the possible life challenges they may encounter during the one year compulsory NYSC programme.
2. The Christian associations in the campus should also help to groom their members on the Biblical principles that can help Christian youths survive and thrive in their exile situations.
3. The Christian associations or organizations in the school campus and in the NYSC orientation camp should help Christian Corp members to seek for the welfare of the city where they are and learn to love their enemies.

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