



Christian Final Year College Student: Preparedness and Consciousness in Adopting Biblical Principles to Survive and Thrive in Exile During the One-Year NYSC Program

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the level of awareness and readiness of final year Christian students in adopting a biblical-based exile lifestyle model. Two research questions and two hypotheses were proposed to guide this study. A descriptive survey research design was employed. The sampling technique used proportional multistage stratified random sampling method to obtain a sample size of 340 final year Christian students in State-owned colleges in Imo Province. The researcher-developed assessment scale titled "Christian Students' Awareness and Readiness Scale for Facing Life Challenges in Exile (CAPLCERS)" was utilized for data collection. This assessment scale comprises two clusters, A and B, with internal consistency reliabilities measured using Cronbach's Alpha of 0.78 and 0.82 respectively. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions, while z-test was employed to test hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05. The research findings indicate that the level of awareness among final year Christian students regarding life challenges in exile during the one-year mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program is significantly below the expected average. Meanwhile, their readiness level to adopt biblical models for survival and growth in exile is significantly above the expected average. Based on these findings, the research recommends several actions: college authorities need to equip final year students with awareness of potential life challenges they may face during the one-year NYSC program; campus Christian fellowships also need to help prepare their members with biblical models and principles that can assist Christians in surviving and thriving in exile situations; and Christian fellowships or organizations in NYSC training camps need to assist Christian Corps members in integrating and striving for welfare in their placement areas while learning to love and contribute to the growth of communities that may differ in beliefs and cultures.

Keywords: *exile, students, biblical, life*

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INTRODUCTION

In Genesis 46:3 – 4, Jacob receives encouragement from God to journey 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, but I will also bring you back here after Joseph has closed your eyes.” The rest of the chapter outlines Jacob's movement with his household from Beersheba to Egypt. Two key points emerge from God's promise to Jacob: firstly, leaving home does not mean leaving the presence of God; secondly, despite the challenges of unfamiliar surroundings, there are blessings of growth and fruitfulness; ultimately, God's presence ensures the possibility of a return to the homeland.

The subsequent chapters of Genesis (47 – 50) illustrate how God's presence secures the fortunes of Jacob and his household in Goshen, Egypt. The early chapters of Exodus (1 – 12) highlight the increasing number of Jacob's descendants in Egypt and the challenges they face following the death of the Pharaoh who knew Joseph. The remaining books of the Pentateuch (from Exodus 13 through Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) narrate the providential liberation of Jacob's descendants from Egyptian slavery and their journey back to Canaan under God's guidance.

As the above narratives illustrate, embarking on a journey away from home is never easy. Life often calls us to step out of our comfort zones and traverse unfamiliar territories that are not entirely within our control. Thus, the experience of exile can be understood as a universal human phenomenon, encompassing the various forms of uprootedness or displacement from one's original place of belonging, whether imposed or chosen.

The Bible depicts numerous individuals, as well as the nation of Israel, who underwent the life of exile. Many of the biblical stories in the book of Genesis portray the Patriarchs frequently on the move: Abram leaving his father's inheritance and following God's promise to a new land (Gen. 12); Jacob fleeing from Esau's wrath after a family conflict (Gen. 27:41-45); Jacob and his household leaving Canaan due to famine (Gen. 45:16-20; 46:1-7). These characters are often depicted as strangers in distant lands: Hagar in the desert (Gen. 16); Lot in Sodom (Gen. 19); Abraham's servant in Mesopotamia (Gen. 24); Isaac among the Philistines (Gen. 26); Jacob in Haran (Gen. 29-30); Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 39-45); and later, Jacob and his entire household in Egypt (Gen. 46-Exodus 1); Moses in Midian (Exodus 2), among others.

Wiesel (1996, p. 21) eloquently highlights how the life of exile shaped the destinies of these biblical characters: Abraham, the first man exiled for redemptive reasons, would set the precedent for countless future experiences of his descendants. Joseph, Abraham's great-grandson, would be the first youthful exile to rise to prominence in a foreign land. Moses, from the tribe of Levi, would become the first political exile in the Bible, fleeing to the desert to escape Pharaoh's wrath. His experiences as a fugitive exile proved invaluable when he later undertook the monumental task of liberating Israel from Egyptian bondage.

Embarking on a journey into uncharted territory always demands a profound depth of faith and a willingness to redefine oneself beyond the confines of self-imposed limitations. In this context, exile represents the prospect of a new beginning: "exile means starting anew - elsewhere - an existence marked by ambition, apprehension, and eventual reward, amidst unfamiliar friends and adversaries" (Wiesel, 1996, p. 23).

The Bible offers numerous examples of individuals and communities who not only navigated the challenges of exile but also flourished in it. Mathis (2023) suggests that perhaps no one understood exile better than Daniel in Scripture. The author highlights several key attributes of Daniel that contributed to his remarkable success during his time of exile. These include embracing his uniqueness, finding contentment in his distinctiveness as long as it honored his God, maintaining a life of prayer, continually meditating on the word of God while fulfilling his duties, practicing spiritual disciplines like fasting, and steadfastly upholding his faith even in the face of adversity or legal restrictions in Babylon. Furthermore, the author underscores Daniel's ability to find support and encouragement from fellow exiles like Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Mathis (2023) asserts that surviving exile, faithfully serving God, and finding fulfillment in life are impossible endeavors when undertaken alone. He encapsulates his thoughts by stating, "Faithful people do faithful things, right? Daniel inspires me to embrace my uniqueness, rely on others, cultivate spiritual nourishment, pursue excellence, and expand my vision beyond self. It's the only way to not just endure but thrive in this exile."

The Objectives of the NYSC Programme

Our aim here is to merge ancient wisdom with contemporary aspirations, seeking ways to redesign, promote, and effectively implement the youth program to nurture the maturation of these burgeoning minds. In many respects, the original aims of the creators of the national youth service year appear to be geared towards preparing young individuals for life away from home (essentially a form of exile), for grappling with the challenges of embracing diversity, and for reaping the benefits that stem from such experiences. The primary objective of the National Youth Service in Nigeria was to foster national integration and unity. Through the compulsory one-year service program, young graduates from diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds are brought together to live and work in unfamiliar regions of the country. This arrangement was envisaged to enable them to engage with people from varied cultures, languages, and traditions, thereby promoting mutual understanding and dispelling stereotypes.

To accomplish the aforementioned goals, the National Youth Service Corps encompasses a multitude of activities aimed at fostering personal growth, community involvement, and national advancement among young people. These activities are designed to provide opportunities for young adults to hone their skills, explore their interests, and make meaningful contributions to society. One of the central activities of the National Youth Service is community service. Through volunteering and participation in service projects, young individuals have the opportunity to positively impact their communities. This may involve initiatives such as cleaning up public spaces, organizing charitable events, or assisting vulnerable populations. By actively engaging in these activities, young people cultivate an appreciation for giving back and develop a sense of accountability towards their fellow citizens.

Another crucial aspect of the National Youth Service is skill development. Various workshops and training programs are offered to equip young individuals 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, young people not only improve their prospects for success but also contribute to the overall growth and prosperity of the nation.

Furthermore, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) encourages cultural exchanges and fosters appreciation for diversity through a variety of cultural activities. These may include organizing festivals or events that celebrate the different ethnicities and traditions within the country. By promoting cultural understanding and respect among young people, the NYSC contributes to building a more inclusive society where diversity is valued. Overall, the NYSC's activities are diverse and multifaceted, providing young people with opportunities for personal growth,

community engagement, skill-building, and cultural enrichment. Through active participation in these activities, youths learn to play an active role in shaping their futures while making positive contributions to society.

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme was established in 1973 by decree No. 24 of May 22, 1973, with the aim of fostering unity among Nigerian youths and promoting national development. According to Decree 51 of June 16, 1973, the following objectives of the scheme were outlined: Instilling discipline in Nigerian youths by cultivating a culture of hard work and fostering patriotism and loyalty to Nigeria in any circumstance they may encounter. Elevating their morale and exposing them to higher ideals of national achievement, social, and cultural advancement. Developing in them attitudes acquired through shared experiences and appropriate training, making them more receptive to national mobilization efforts. Cultivating common bonds among them and promoting national unity by ensuring that:

I. Youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin as much as possible.

II. Each group assigned to work together represents the country's diversity as much as possible.

III. Youths are exposed to different lifestyles across the country to eliminate prejudices, dispel ignorance, and experience firsthand the similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups. Encouraging NYSC members to seek career opportunities nationwide after their service, thereby promoting the free movement of labor. Encouraging employers, partly through their interactions with NYSC members, to readily employ qualified Nigerians regardless of their states of origin. Fostering a spirit of self-reliance among Nigerian youths.

Aijila (2023) reported that in the early days of the NYSC, the program was somewhat effective. University graduates were assigned to states different from their home states, where they were exposed to cultures and traditions distinct from their own. They had the opportunity to interact with new people and become familiar with new languages and customs (Aijila, 2023, p. 2).

This suggests that Christian graduates must undergo a compulsory one-year period of exile in regions of the country that are clearly different from their own cultures and languages. This is where we believe that the biblical lessons about surviving a situation of exile can be beneficial to these Christian youths. It is anticipated that the lessons learned from the experiences of people and nations in exile in the Bible can empower them to embrace the challenges of life during the national youth service program. By appreciating the resources from their faith, they can be better equipped to thrive and enrich their lives with meaningful experiences during their time away from home. Formative assessment is necessary for providing feedback that can be used for meaningful intervention. Therefore, we undertook to investigate the level of awareness and preparedness of final year Christian students to adopt these biblical principles of 'surviving and thriving in exile' during their one-year compulsory NYSC program. This constitutes the problem of the study.

Jason (2020) has suggested that one of the instructions that will help Christian Corpers 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 aligns with the case of the 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, 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 into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

This implies that Christian Corp members should see it as their duty to contribute to the progress of wherever they are during their one-year compulsory exile. Additionally, 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, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins."

Thomson (2021) explained that living well in exile demands sobriety, whether facing suffering, experiencing prosperity, or both. This, according to the author, entails more than simply avoiding the influence of drugs and alcohol. It means strengthening one's commitment to biblical values: "It means avoiding media or Hollywood influences that distort our understanding of the world. It means developing self-control to live. It is a mindset that maintains 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 study was guided by the following research questions: What is the mean rating score indicating the level of awareness among final year Christian students regarding the challenges of life in exile during the one-year compulsory NYSC programme? What is the mean rating score indicating the level of preparedness among final year Christian students to adopt Biblical principles for overcoming the challenges of life in exile during their one-year compulsory NYSC programme?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated at a significance level of 0.05:

H01: The mean rating score of final year Christian students on their awareness of the challenges of life in exile during the one-year compulsory NYSC programme is not significantly below the expected average of 30 (i.e., 2.5×12).

H02: The mean rating score of final year Christian students on their preparedness to adopt Biblical principles for overcoming the challenges of life in exile during the one-year compulsory NYSC programme is not significantly above the expected average of 40.00 (i.e., 2.5×16).

RESEARCH METHOD

A descriptive survey research design was employed for this study. The population consisted of all final year Christian students enrolled in the nine tertiary education institutions in Imo State who participate in the one-year compulsory NYSC programme. A multistage proportionate stratified random sampling technique was utilized to select a sample size of 340 final year Christian students.

Researchers developed a rating scale titled "Christian Students Awareness and Preparedness for Life Challenges in Exile Rating Scale" (CSAPLCERS) for data collection. The instrument was structured into a four-point scale: High Extent (HE) (4-Point), Moderate Extent (ME) (3-Point), Low Extent (LE) (2-Point), and No Extent (NE) (1-Point). It comprised two clusters, A and B, with 12 and 16 items, respectively. The scale was validated by two experts in Educational Measurement and Evaluation and two experts in Christian Religious Studies. The reliability coefficient of the internal consistency of clusters A and B was estimated using Cronbach's alpha statistics, yielding values of 0.78 and 0.82, respectively.

Mean and standard deviation were employed to address the research questions, while z-test statistics were utilized to test the hypothesis at a significance level of 0.05. Both items and respondents were considered units of analysis. Items were used to assess respondents' awareness and preparedness for one year of life challenges in exile,

while the respondents' mean or observed mean, which represents the mean of the total scores of respondents on a cluster of the instrument, was used to determine the overall awareness or preparedness of final year Christian students for life challenges in exile. The expected average was calculated as the product of the mean of the four-point scale (i.e., 2.5) and the number of items in a particular cluster, either 12 or 16 for clusters A or B, respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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
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 means 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).

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 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

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 people's 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 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).

Summary Result z-test of H_0

Category of Mean	X	S	z-cal	SL	z-tab.	Dec.
Observed	43.35	3.10	16.71	0.05	1.65	H_0 is rejected
Expected	40.00					

Table 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.

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 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 reveals that final year Christian students' awareness of the life challenges they may encounter during the one-year compulsory NYSC program falls significantly below the expected average. However, their preparedness to adopt Biblical principles for survival and thriving surpasses the expected average level. It is imperative for relevant stakeholders, including tertiary institution authorities, NYSC directors, Christian associations, and the government, to utilize the insights provided by the study to improve the welfare of Corps members during their time in exile.

The benefits of the National Youth Service Program extend beyond individual growth. By integrating relevant biblical principles into the service year, the country has the opportunity to cultivate a generation deeply grounded in faith and dedicated to a life of service.

Recommendations:

Tertiary institution authorities should educate final year students about the potential life challenges they may face during the one-year compulsory NYSC program. Christian associations on campus should play a role in mentoring their members on Biblical principles that can assist Christian youths in navigating and thriving in their exile situations.

Christian associations or organizations both on campus and in the NYSC orientation camps should support Christian Corp members in seeking the welfare of the communities where they are stationed and in cultivating love for their adversaries.

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