

Demographic Attributes and Perceived Self-Employability Prospect among Corps Members in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This investigation aimed at finding the influence of demographic attributes on perceived self-employability prospect among Corps members. It adopted survey design and was guided by three null hypotheses. The population of the study was 1,501 batch A stream 2 corps members posted to Cross River State for 2026 service year. Cluster and simple random sampling techniques were used for the study. A sample of 632 respondents was drawn. The researchers-developed instrument titled: Demographic Attributes and Perceived Self-employability Prospects Questionnaire (DAPSPQ) was employed for data collection. It was validated by two experts, and Cronbach alpha was used to establish reliability coefficient of .84. 619 (97.94%) copies of the instrument were retrieved and used for analysis with 13(2.05%) attrition. The data collected from the field was analyzed using One-sample t-test, One-way Analysis of Variance and Independent t-test at .05 level of significance. The findings showed, among others, that perceived self-employability prospect among corps members is significantly high. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that NYSC and relevant agencies should build on corps members' strong confidence by providing concrete post-service support such as access to micro-credit, and incubation spaces to help translate intention into actual ventures.

Keywords: Cross River State, corps members, demographic attributes, Nigeria, perceived self-employability prospects.

Introduction

One of Nigeria's most prominent economic problems is youth's joblessness. The National Bureau of Statistics as cited in Faloye and Olatunji (2018) lamented that the extent of unemployment is rising in Nigeria. Statistics has shown that in April 2018, the degree of joblessness in the country was 18.80%. This digit is moderately rocketing when juxtaposed

with economies such as India (3.4%), Mexico (3.20%), Indonesia (5.50%), Turkey (10.40%), and Brazil (12.60%). Dike as cited in Olanipekun et al. (2021) further deplored that despite the inauguration and discovery of venture creation as panacea to minimize joblessness among young Nigerians through the initiation of business venture education into the course of study of Nigerian universities, it is disheartening to note that about 80% of these young Nigerians are jobless as about ten percent (10%) are under-utilized; with 7 out of 10 Nigerian degree holders being idle and under-utilized. Educational economists then wonder what could have been responsible for such ugly trend in Nigeria.

Graduates' unemployment is primarily a depressed labour demand, as there are limited existing jobs for skilled youths (Ruhl, 2011). Large number of tertiary institution graduates without corresponding job provisions to cater for them could be the crux of joblessness in Nigeria (Surajo & Karim, 2016; Otonkue & Amoramo, 2026). Babyetsiza (2019) revealed that the disparity between what employers need and what tertiary institutions provided is worsening unemployment, especially as the labour market shifts and technology changes rapidly.

In some emerging economies such as Nigeria, governments and strategists are gradually experiencing difficulty in effectively managing the menace of youths joblessness. This extraordinary degree of redundancy may be credited to the dearth of sufficient employment opportunities in the pecuniary blueprint, the rapid expansion of academic enrolment coupled with uneasy craving of young Nigerians to attain higher qualification regardless of area of specialty and curriculum contents. As a result, the quantity of proficiencies learnt from the tertiary institution seems non-practical and immaterial (Okafor, 2011). It is well documented that youth's quest for paper qualification without the requisite skills leads to joblessness. Increased joblessness has adversely affected Nigeria on economic, administrative and social bases, such that when young people are not profitably engaged in fruitful endeavours, they resort to criminality or turned to hired political thugs, abduction, pipeline sabotage, and other socially aberrant behaviours (Ackah-Baidoo, 2016; Ogbunaya & Udoudo, 2015).

For Nigerian degree holders to be more imaginative and independent minded, the Federal Ministry of education injected venture creation studies into the curriculum of the tertiary institutions through their oversight agencies: the National Universities Commission, the National Board for Technical Education and the National Commission for Colleges of Education. This became necessary with a view to giving a more sustaining approach to resolving the systemic menace of joblessness confronting Nigeria. Therefore, venture creation studies become an essential course for all undergraduates in their third year of

university education not minding the students' area of specialization (Yahya, as cited in Afolabi et al., 2017).

It is on this basis, that the National Youth Service Corps was launched through Decree 24 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1973 (National Youth Service Corps as cited in Arubayi, 2015). This Statute was subsequently amended to Decree 51 of 1993 which later changed to National Youth Service Corps ACT, Cap. 84 of 2004 (National Youth Service Corps, 1993, 2014), with oversight function provided by the Federal Ministry of Youth Development (Federal Ministry of Youth Development, 2013). This was instituted to promote national cohesion: this post-civil-war strategy focused on connecting Nigerian youths across regional and ethnic lines (Bodley-Bond & Cronin, 2013).

The ethos of this corps scheme is to orientate youths toward national norms and customs to prepare them for active citizenship (McBride, as cited in Arubayi, 2015). Hence, National Youth Service Corps is compulsory in the socio-political economy of certain countries such as Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya (Bodley-Bond & Cronin, 2013) for young graduates within the age of 30 years while those above 30 years can be issued with certificate of exemption. The objective of this organization (National Youth Service Corps) is to instill in young graduates the basic skills that will make them to be self-employable. Lees (2002) further stressed that employment and employability are different. Being employed refers to currently holding a job, while being employable refers to possessing the proficiencies, know-how and traits that qualify one to get, maintain and advance in work; but most times, the two concepts are used interchangeably. For higher institutions, employability is centred on graduating students equipped for work, and this goal shapes both academic delivery and extra-curricular offerings. Employability can be self-oriented or public service oriented.

Self-employability involves individual initiating and managing their own business decisions rather than working under an employer. As Abdulkarim (2012) and Citizens Information as cited in Afolabi et al. (2017) note, it refers to working for oneself and earning income directly from customers, clients or other originations. It can be deduced that self-employability is when graduates resolve to work for themselves instead of being hired employees.

Some empirical studies established that scholarly achievement, individuality traits, interactive competences, teamwork and solution-oriented mindset strongly and meaningfully enhance marketability of Bangladeshi degree holders while leadership motivational skills and technical skills have positive but insignificant influence on overall

graduate employability (Hosain et al., 2021); self-employed had better life fulfilment than people who are wage-employed or retirees (Alden & Hammarstedt, 2017); conversely, the self-employed do not essentially benefit advanced inclusive life fulfilment as a result of heterogeneous nature of self-employment (Binder & Blankenberg, 2021).

Further research has proven that MBA studies enhance building of employability traits among students. Results obtained in seven employability skills categories confirmed improvements in aptitude while gender-wise perception had no significant difference across samples. Statistically significant differences were, however, observed in the skills possessed by male and female students before commencing the MBA and upon nearing completion of the programme (Dhanawade & Bhola, 2020). On the contrary, the findings reveal moderate differences in how stakeholder groups perceive the relative importance of various employability skills. Statistically significant differences emerged between graduating students and employers in the remarkable prominence of interactive competences, collaboration, and group aptitude. While recruiters demonstrated optimism with the aptitudes of graduating entrepreneurial students, a substantial gap remained in view of the level to which steadfastness, idea, and willingness to take calculated risks stood cultivated (Mainga et al., 2022).

Additional findings on self-employment and poverty in developing countries were viewed in two folds. The pros of the findings showed that most workers in small- and average-income nations are self-employed; as many employees are self-employed since they have no other alternative. While the cons of the findings revealed that absolute indigence is not mainly a predicament of unemployment, but a problem of low labour market incomes among the employed; self-employment is not synonymous with entrepreneurship, nor is self-employment inexorably easy-going (Fields, 2019).

On the basis of demographic attributes, findings revealed that individual characteristics, self-worth, age and innovation were significantly and positively related with self-employment intention (Norhazlin et al., 2013); The employability prospect of a person appreciates with age, attains optimal level at the age of 40 and then remains constant (Bates as cited in Uike, 2019). Economically, self-employability prospect can offer one a holistic individual satisfaction. The more one's employability influence, the larger the likelihood of being self-employed (Evans & Leighton as cited in Wan, 2017). Ree and Shah as cited in Wan (2017) argued that when self-employability satisfaction is more than the satisfaction of salary engagement or non-engagement, people will opt to be independently employed. The influencing factors of self-employability prospect mainly include individual characteristics, such as marital status, age, and gender.

In terms of age, Wan (2017) opined that those who are relatively older than the younger ones are more likely to make better self-employability prospect. The possible reasons are that self-employability prospect is concerned with setting up business venture, and frequent capital accumulation by the self-employed. But in theory, the influence of age on individual employability prospect likewise has two dimensions: increased age for more venture experience is more supportive of self-employed viewpoint; secondly, increased age reduces the overall risk outcome.

However, gender differences shape the factors and mechanisms that drive self-employability prospects. Males are more inclined to engage into self-employment in high-technology sectors, whereas women, particularly married women, tend to enter low-technology sectors. Women who are self-employed place greater emphasis on family considerations, while men prioritize financial returns from self-employment (Boden as cited in Wan, 2017). Still on the basis of sex, empirical findings showed that flexibility is a stronger forecaster of individual venture status for women than for men, even though men show a greater overall preference for self-employment (Bari et al., 2021; Ajayi & Anyidoho, 2017). Contrarily, individual characteristics including one's respect does not account for the sex disparities in job seekers' ambitions and expectations regarding self-employment (Ajayi & Anyidoho, 2017). However, Xavier et al. (2012) established that women in Ghana tend to be highly inclined than men in the engagement of new entrepreneurial activity that encompasses individual employment. Ajayi and Telli (2013) also asserted that Ghanaian girls in secondary schools are less inclined in career choice compared to their boys counterparts.

Nevertheless, most of the empirical studies reviewed established that communication skills, academic performance, teamwork, problem solving skills, age and gender are determinants of graduate employability; though some disagreed with this assertion. To the knowledge of the researchers, none of the studies focused on self-employability prospects of corps members in Nigeria. It was on this basis that the researchers resolved to explore on the demographic attributes of corps members to determine their self-employability prospects in Nigeria in order to contribute to knowledge bank, considering the daunting nature of unemployment among graduates. Hence, the following poser was raised: do demographic attributes influence self-employability prospects among corps members in Nigeria?

Statement of the problem

Youth idleness remains a pressing question in Nigeria, with thousands of graduates entering the labour market every year through the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

scheme. Faced with limited formal job opportunities, self-employment has increasingly been positioned as a viable alternative for moderating joblessness and fostering fiscal advancement. However, the decision to pursue entrepreneurship is not solely dependent on external opportunities; it is also shaped by personal belief in their own capacity to start and manage a business, known as perceived self-employability. Despite the growing emphasis on entrepreneurship during NYSC orientation and skill acquisition programmes, there is limited empirical evidence on how corps members perceive their own self-employment prospects and what factors influence this perception. Age and sex are commonly assumed to shape entrepreneurial confidence, with the belief that older graduates may feel more prepared, and that males may be more inclined toward business creation than females. Yet, these assumptions have not been adequately tested within the Nigerian corps member population.

This gap is problematic because if self-employment programmes are designed based on incorrect assumptions about age or gender differences, resources may be misallocated and certain groups may be under-served. Furthermore, without understanding the current level of perceived self-employability among corps members, policymakers cannot assess whether existing interventions are building the necessary entrepreneurial mindset to translate post-service intentions into actual ventures. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the level of perceived self-employability among corps members in Nigeria and to determine whether age and sex significantly influence this perception. Addressing this problem will provide evidence to guide the design of more effective, inclusive, and targeted entrepreneurship support within the NYSC framework.

Purpose of the study

This investigation aimed at finding the influence of demographic attributes on perceived self-employability prospect among corps members in Cross River State, Nigeria. Explicitly, this study aimed at unearthing the:

1. perceived self-employability prospect among corps members.
2. influence of age on perceived self-employability prospect among corps members.
3. influence of sex on perceived self-employability prospect among corps members.

Hypotheses

Three null hypotheses were articulated to direct the study:

Ho1: Perceived self-employability prospect among corps members in Nigeria is not significantly high.

Ho2: Age does not significantly influence perceived self-employability prospect among corps members.

Ho3: There is no significant influence of sex on perceived self-employability prospect among corps members.

Methodology

This study adopted survey research design. This design is apt since the research sought to obtain information from respondents so as to establish the influence of demographic attributes on perceived self-employability prospect among corps members in Nigeria. The study was restricted to Cross River State, Nigeria. The population of the study was 1,501 (801 female and 700 male) batch A stream 2 corps members posted to Cross River State for 2026 service year (National Youth Service Corp, Calabar, 2026). Cluster and simple random sampling techniques were used for the study. A sample of 632 respondents was generously drawn using Yamane (1967) sample determination formula.

The researchers-developed instrument titled: Demographic Attributes on Perceived Self-employability Prospect Questionnaire (DAPSPQ) was employed for data collection. The instrument contained 12 items: the age item was categorized into three, sex item was classified into two and self-employability prospect with 10 were developed on a Likert four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree with weight 4, 3, 2, and 1 for all positively worded items and weight 1, 2, 3 and 4 for all negatively worded items. The draft copy of the questionnaire was presented to two experts who are lecturers in the Departments of Business Education and Educational Psychology of University of Calabar, Calabar for face and content validation. A pilot test was conducted on 63 Corps members at orientation camp in Rivers State, Nigeria. The data collected were subjected to measure of internal consistency using Cronbach alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of .84.

The instrument was administered on the sample in the orientation camp at Obubra LGA of Cross River State. Out of 632 copies of the questionnaire, 619 (97.94%) copies were retrieved and used for analysis; indicating 13 (2.05%) attrition. The data collected from the field was analyzed using one-sample t-test, one-way analysis of variance and independent t-test at .05 level of significance with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.

Presentation of results

Ho1: Perceived self-employability prospect among corps members in Nigeria is not significantly high.

To test this hypothesis, one sample t-test analysis was carried out. The computed mean for perceived self-employability prospect was compared with its corresponding expected or population mean, estimated for the measurement sub-scale. The results obtained are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: One sample t-test of the extent of perceived self-employability prospect among corps members (N=619)

Variable	Mean	Df	SD	Std. Error	Expected mean	t-value	p-value
Perceived self-employability prospect	29.42	618	3.42	.13751	29.42	213.977	.000

The results in Table 1 showed that the computed mean for perceived self-employability prospect among corps members ($\bar{x}$ =29.42) is slightly higher than the expected mean (μ =29.42). The slight difference may be occasioned by chance. The p-value (.000) associated with the computed t-value (213.977) for perceived self-employability prospect among corps members is less than .05. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that the perceived self-employability prospect among corps members in Cross River State, Nigeria is significantly high.

Ho2: Age does not significantly influence perceived self-employability prospect among corps members.

To test this hypothesis, one-way analysis of variance was used. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: One-way analysis of variance on influence of age on perceived self-employability prospect among corps members

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
18-21 years	49	29.51	4.05
22-25 years	286	29.31	3.26
26 years & above	284	29.51	3.47
Total	619	29.44	3.57

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	5.871	2	2.935	.250	.779
Within groups	7227.234	616	11.733		
Total	7233.105	618			

Significant at .05 level

The results in Table 2 showed that corps members between 26 years and above and those between 18-21 years were perceived to demonstrate the best self-employability prospect ($\bar{x} = 29.51$) while those between 22-25 years were perceived to demonstrate the least self-employability prospect ($\bar{x} = 29.31$). This implies that age does not influence perceived self-employability in a straight-line way. Instead, there's a U-shaped pattern: corps members aged 26 and above appear most confident about starting their own ventures, likely due to greater maturity and life experience, while the youngest group, 18–21, also show relatively high prospects, possibly from optimism and flexibility. The 22–25 age group, however, shows the lowest perception, which may reflect a phase where many are still focused on securing formal employment rather than entrepreneurship. The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed that the p-value (.779) associated with the f-value (.250) was greater than .05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means that age does not significantly influence perceived self-employability prospect among corps members in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Ho3: There is no significant influence of sex on perceived self-employability prospect among corps members.

To test this hypothesis, independent t-test analysis was adopted. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Independent t-test analysis of significant influence of sex on perceived self-employability prospect among corps members

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	T	Sig
Male	289	29.40	3.42	-.125	.832
Female	330	29.44	3.43		

The results in Table 3 revealed that the female corps members were perceived to be slightly inclined to self-employability prospect ($\bar{x} = 29.44$) than male corps members ($\bar{x} = 29.40$). The findings in Table 3 further revealed that the p-value (.832) associated with the t-value (-.125) is greater than .05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. This means that there is no significant influence of sex on perceived self-employability prospect among corps members in Nigeria. The slight observed difference between female and male corps members inclination is attributed to random variation of data rather than sex. Hence, there is no evidence of real difference in perceived self-employability.

Discussion of the findings

Finding from the hypothesis one that perceived self-employability prospect is significantly high among corps members in Cross River State, Nigeria suggests that, as a group, they are confident in their ability to start and manage their own ventures. This reflects a positive entrepreneurial mindset, likely shaped by high youth unemployment, exposure to skill acquisition programmes during service, and growing awareness of self-employment as a viable career path. Such high self-perception is encouraging because belief in one's own capability is a strong precursor of actual venture behaviour. It implies that many corps members may be willing to pursue self-employment after service, provided they have access to capital, training, and supportive structures. However, high perception does not automatically translate to action – the gap between intention and reality will depend on the economic environment and available opportunities. Overall, the result points to untapped potential for entrepreneurship within the NYSC population.

This result supported Alden and Hammarstedt (2017) who revealed that self-employed had better life fulfilment than people who are wage-employed or retirees. This result further corroborated with Hosain et al. (2021) who established that scholarly achievement, individuality traits, interactive competences, teamwork and solution-oriented mindset strongly and meaningfully enhance marketability of Bangladeshi degree holders while leadership motivational skills and technical skills have positive but insignificant influence on overall graduate employability. Ree and Shah as cited in Wan (2017) argued that when self-employability satisfaction is more than the satisfaction of pay engagement or non-engagement, people will choose to be individually employed. The influencing factors of self-employability prospect mainly include individual characteristics, such as, marital status, age, and gender.

In addition, the finding is in agreement with Fields (2019) whose part of findings showed that most workers in small- and average-income nations are self-employed; as many employees are self-employed since they have no other alternative. While the cons of the findings revealed that absolute indigence is not mainly a predicament of unemployment, but a problem of low labour market incomes among the employed; self-employment is not synonymous with entrepreneurship, nor is self-employment inexorably easy-going. Conversely, Binder and Blankenberg (2021) stated that the self-employed do not essentially benefit advanced inclusive life fulfilment as a result of heterogeneous nature of self-employment.

Result from the hypothesis two that age does not significantly influence perceived self-employability among corps members suggests that confidence in starting a venture is not

tied to how old someone is within this group. It challenges the assumption that older corps members would naturally feel more prepared for self-employment due to greater experience or maturity. Instead, factors like personal motivation, exposure to entrepreneurship training, or economic necessity may matter more than age in shaping self-perception. Practically, this means entrepreneurship programmes during NYSC should not target only older or younger cohorts. Since perceived self-employability is spread evenly across ages, interventions can be broad-based, focusing on skills and mindset rather than age categories. It also hints that younger corps members may already see themselves as capable of entrepreneurship, which is a positive signal for youth enterprise development in Nigeria.

This result is at variance with Wan (2017) who opined that those who are relatively older than the younger ones are more likely to make better self-employability prospect. The possible reasons are: self-employability prospect is concerned with setting up business venture, and frequent capital accumulation by the self-employed. Theoretically, the influence of age on individual employability prospect has two dimensions: increased age for more venture experience and amassment, is more supportive of self-employed viewpoint; as well as increased age, reduces the overall risk outcome. This result does not align with Bates as cited in Uike (2019) who maintained that the employability prospect of a person appreciates with age, attains optimal level at the age of 40, and then remains constant. This finding also differed from Norhazlin et al. (2013) whose results showed that individual characteristic, self-worth, age and innovation were significantly and positively related with self-employment intention.

Finding from the hypothesis three that sex does not significantly influence perceived self-employability among corps members suggests that male and female participants hold similar levels of confidence in their ability to start and run a business. This points to a growing parity in entrepreneurial mindset within the NYSC population, where gender does not appear to limit how capable one feels as a potential entrepreneur. It challenges traditional stereotypes that portray entrepreneurship as more male-oriented, and instead reflects a shift toward equal self-perception among young Nigerian graduates. For policy and programme design, it means entrepreneurship training and support during service can be offered in a gender-neutral way, since both sexes show comparable readiness. This result is encouraging for women's economic participation, as it suggests female corps members are just as likely to see self-employment as a viable path after service.

This result is in corroboration with Ajayi and Anyidoho (2017) who stated that individual characteristics such as one's regards does not account for the sex disparities in job seekers'

ambitions and expectations regarding self-employment. This result differed from the empirical findings of Bari et al. (2021) and Ajayi and Anyidoho (2017) which showed that flexibility is a stronger forecaster of individual -employability status for women than for men, even though men show a greater overall preference for self-employment. Also, this result did not support, Xavier et al. (2012) who established that women in Ghana tend to be highly inclined than men in the engagement of new entrepreneurial activity that encompasses individual employment. Ajayi and Telli (2013) also asserted that Ghanaian girls in secondary schools are less inclined in career choice compared to their boys counterparts.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings show that corps members in Nigeria hold a strong belief in their ability to pursue self-employment, and this confidence cuts across both age groups and sexes. Age and sex do not meaningfully shape perceived self-employability, suggesting that entrepreneurial mindset within NYSC is not limited by demographic differences. Instead, corps members appear broadly optimistic about starting their own ventures, pointing to untapped potential for youth entrepreneurship after service.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. NYSC and appropriate government organizations should build on corps members' strong confidence by providing concrete post-service support such as access to micro-credit, business mentorship, and incubation spaces to help translate intention into actual ventures.
2. Since age does not influence self-employability, entrepreneurship programmes during service should be delivered to all corps members regardless of age cohort, focusing on practical skills, financial literacy, and opportunity identification rather than targeting specific age groups.
3. With sex showing no significant effect, training and funding opportunities should be designed to be fully inclusive, ensuring that both male and female corps members have equal access to resources, role models, and networks that support business creation.

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