

THE ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION AMONG GRADUATES: EVIDENCE FROM CORPS MEMBERS IN OFFA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the role of entrepreneurial intention among NYSC graduates in Offa Local Government Area of Kwara State using a qualitative approach. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with twenty (20) respondents aged twenty (20) to thirty (30) years. The results revealed three (3) main themes: Indicators of creativity and innovativeness, Self-Efficacy, and Skill Acquisition. The study used NVivo software to analyse the themes. The study revealed that self-efficacy plays an important role in shaping the intent to become an entrepreneur, encompassing confidence, resilience, problem-solving skills, and the likelihood of pursuing entrepreneurship as a career path. It was recommended that skills acquisition programmes should be encouraged to improve competence and enhance readiness for entrepreneurship. The study concluded that graduates' intention to engage in entrepreneurship is influenced by personal decision-making.

Keywords: Creativity and innovation, entrepreneurial Intention, self-efficacy, skills Acquisition

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has been recognized over the years as a key driver of economic growth and development, contributing to employment generation and poverty reduction, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. Graduate unemployment in Nigeria is at an alarming level, with graduates roaming the streets in search of jobs to earn a living (Adamu, 2017). Entrepreneurial intention is defined as a mental state that focuses one's attention, experiences, and actions on entrepreneurship-related endeavors (Agbonlahor, 2017). The issue of entrepreneurial intention is very important for fresh graduates, particularly NYSC graduates, as it determines their readiness and willingness to pursue self-employment as an alternative to paid employment (Amaewhule et al., 2020), in line with Christian et al. (2020).

In Nigeria, societal expectations often prioritise white-collar jobs over self-employment, thereby discouraging graduates from pursuing entrepreneurship as a career path toward self-reliance. The federal and state governments and their agencies implemented reforms to mitigate graduate unemployment through entrepreneurship programs, such as the training capacity programme and youth empowerment schemes. However, the unemployment rate among Nigerian fresh graduates remains persistent (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The

Corps members face a dilemma regarding job opportunities after their service year, maybe due to a lack of entrepreneurial intention among the fresh graduates. However, some of them may have the potential to become entrepreneurs as a career pathway to success. The major challenges some fresh graduates face may include a lack of entrepreneurial capacity, socio-cultural factors, self-efficacy, skills acquisition, and access to financial resources, which significantly influence entrepreneurial intention and can result in unemployment. (Christian et al., 2020). However, entrepreneurial intention could serve as a motivating factor in mitigating youth unemployment, especially in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors influencing creativity and innovativeness among NYSC graduates in Offa Local Government, Kwara State, Nigeria
2. Is there a significant relationship between self-efficacy and NYSC graduates in Offa Local Government, Kwara State, Nigeria?
3. What is the relevance of skills acquisition among NYSC graduates in Offa Local Government, Kwara State, Nigeria?

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Concept of Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial intention is widely recognized as a key precursor to entrepreneurial behavior, defined as an individual's conscious state of mind that directs attention and action toward creating a new business (Christian et al., 2020). It reflects a person's desire and willingness to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors (Eugene et al., 2019; Costa et al., 2018) and is shaped by anticipation and choice to become an entrepreneur (Vasiliki et al., 2020). The growing attention to entrepreneurship in recent years has encouraged more individuals to consider business creation, influenced by both push and pull factors (Olawale, 2020). Entrepreneurship itself is understood as a process that involves identifying opportunities, applying creativity, and efficiently allocating resources to start and expand businesses, particularly within small and medium enterprises (Babatimilehin et al., 2024). In developing economies such as Nigeria, entrepreneurship has become vital for tackling persistent challenges, including youth unemployment and economic instability, while also fostering innovation and sustainable development (Igwe et al., 2022). With Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) students representing a significant portion of Nigeria's educated youth, attention has increasingly focused on instilling entrepreneurial mindsets in this group, viewing entrepreneurship as a career pathway to success (Barba-Sánchez et al., 2023). Furthermore, entrepreneurship has contributed to sustainable economic growth and development (Sánchez et al., 2023; Porfírio et al., 2023). which enhances employability, creates and fosters personal traits associated with entrepreneurial success (Vuorio et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2014). Creativity and innovation, in particular, are considered critical success factors in the entrepreneurial process (Melati, Arief & Baswara, 2018). Therefore, understanding the drivers of entrepreneurial intention is essential for shaping policies and interventions that encourage entrepreneurship among students. This study adopts three dimensions proposed by Peter et al. (2024), Narubodee (2020), and supported by Eugene (2019) as the framework for assessing entrepreneurial intention.

Creativity, defined as the ability to generate novel and practical ideas, is a crucial driver of entrepreneurial intention and behavior, enabling individuals to recognize opportunities, solve problems, and reconfigure resources to create ventures (Anjum et al., 2020; Hamidi et al., 2008; Miranda et al., 2017). It is closely tied to entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which empowers individuals to develop innovative businesses (Yıldırım et al., 2019; Nazar et al., 2020). Studies show that creative graduates are more likely to pursue entrepreneurship, with higher originality and idea quality linked to stronger entrepreneurial intentions (Rahim et al., 2018; Ali et al., 2020). Creativity manifests differently across disciplines, with engineering students favoring practical innovations while business students adopt more market-oriented approaches (Vasiliki et al., 2020). As entrepreneurship is inherently creative, intention is often shaped by perceived desirability, feasibility, and a propensity to act, as outlined in the Shapero-Krueger model (Krueger et al., 2000; Moghavvemi et al., 2011). Thus, creativity and innovativeness are vital in fostering entrepreneurial intention among fresh graduates and play a central role in venture creation and economic growth (Wennberg & Berglund, 2018; Smith et al., 2016)

Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish specific tasks, plays a critical role in shaping entrepreneurial intention (Ibidunni et al., 2020). Graduates with higher levels of self-efficacy are generally more confident and more likely to pursue entrepreneurial ventures, even in challenging contexts such as Nigeria, where economic instability often deters business start-ups (Igwe et al., 2022; Irshid, 2023; Kozlinska et al., 2020). The concept of Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE), developed by De Noble et al. (2007, cited in Peter et al., 2024), outlines six dimensions: the ability to develop new products and market opportunities, foster an innovative environment, build investor relationships, define and communicate a clear purpose, cope with unforeseen challenges, and attract or retain key human resources. Each dimension reflects the belief that entrepreneurs can not only identify opportunities but also mobilize resources, manage uncertainty, and lead teams effectively. These dimensions align with findings by Okolie et al. (2022), who emphasized that strong entrepreneurial self-efficacy provides graduates with the resilience and confidence needed to establish and sustain a new venture

Skills acquisition, defined as the process of developing technical and soft abilities needed to perform tasks and solve problems, has become a critical determinant of graduate employability and entrepreneurship (Ibrahim & Bello, 2019; Ogunyemi, 2020). Beyond vocational training, it encompasses lifelong learning and adaptability, which are essential in today's dynamic labor markets. In many developing economies, graduate unemployment is partly attributed to skill mismatches between university education and industry demands, as academic qualifications alone no longer guarantee employment (Emeh, 2012; Adebayo & Ojo, 2020; Okafor & Ugochukwu, 2021). Nigerian higher education, in particular, has been criticized for its theory-driven approach with limited practical and entrepreneurial training (Nwosu & Okafor, 2019). Study shows that graduates with entrepreneurial, vocational, and digital skills are more likely to secure jobs, pursue self-employment, or thrive in the global economy (Oladele & Fadipe, 2018; Oyesiku & Oduwaiye, 2021; Ugochukwu, 2021). Thus, skills acquisition remains central to educational reform, graduate training, and sustainable development initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

Entrepreneurial Event Model Theory

The rising unemployment among graduates in Nigeria underscores the need to reframe young people from job seekers to job creators, making entrepreneurship a vital solution. This study adopts the Entrepreneurial Event Model (Shapero & Sokol, 1982, cited in Daryal et al., 2024), which posits that new ventures often arise from significant life “displacements,” such as job loss, migration, or political change. These events trigger entrepreneurial intention when individuals perceive the venture as both desirable and feasible. While displacements may be positive or negative, research suggests that negative shocks are more influential in driving business creation. The model emphasizes that entrepreneurial intention depends not only on opportunities but also on the social and cultural contexts that shape individuals’ perceptions of viability and attractiveness. Thus, the Entrepreneurial Event Model provides a practical lens for understanding how life transitions influence graduates’ decisions to pursue entrepreneurship.

Materials and Method

The researcher used a qualitative method to investigate the role of entrepreneurial intentions among National Youth Service Corps graduates. Qualitative methods were suitable for this study because they facilitate an understanding of participants’ perceptions of entrepreneurship.

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, using a phenomenological perspective to understand entrepreneurial intentions amongst NYSC graduates. The study respondents included fresh graduates of the NYSC program. For the selection of informants, purposive sampling was used to select only those with pertinent information and experience in entrepreneurship. In total, 20 informants were selected for the study; they were both male and female and aged between 20 and 30 years. These informants were referred to using codes R1-R20. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, which enabled respondents to share their opinions spontaneously while keeping the conversation within the study’s scope. Thematic analysis with NVivo software was used to analyze the gathered data. Thematic analysis is conducted in a series of steps, including generating a word cloud to identify common patterns in the gathered data. From there, themes and subthemes (or nodes) were generated from recurring themes across participants’ responses. The three main themes that were identified during the thematic analysis were creativity and innovativeness, Self-efficacy, Skill acquisition, these themes can be further divided into sub-themes, such as personal, social, cultural, and institutional, in line with Bruce and Clarke (2006) procedure, to ensure the results are credible and reliable, the study remained consistent in its data collection and in the accurate interpretation of participants’ answers. The use of NVivo software made data analysis more rigorous, and participant quotes ensured the validity of the results. All ethical guidelines have been observed throughout this research. Participants’ identities have been protected through coding (R1-R20). Confidentiality has been maintained throughout the research process. The respondents participated voluntarily, and they were made aware of the nature of this study prior to the interview.

Results and Discussion

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic data of the informants

Code	Age	Gender
R1	25	Male
R 2	30	Male
R 3	30	Male
R 4	30	Male
R5	30	Male
R6	30	Female
R 7	30	Female
R 8	29	Male
R9	30	Male
R10	25	Male
R11	25	Female
R 12	30	Female
R 13	30	Male
R14	30	Male
R15	30	Male
R16	30	Female
R 17	30	Female
R 18	29	Male
R19	30	Male
R20	25	Male

Source: Field work (2026)

The table above shows the demographic data of the informants; their ages range from 20 to 30, while the majority of the informants interviewed were males, that is, 14. Only 6 informants were females. The informants were coded R1-R200 for confidentiality, in line with Creswell's (2008) suggestion that confidentiality is very important in qualitative research.

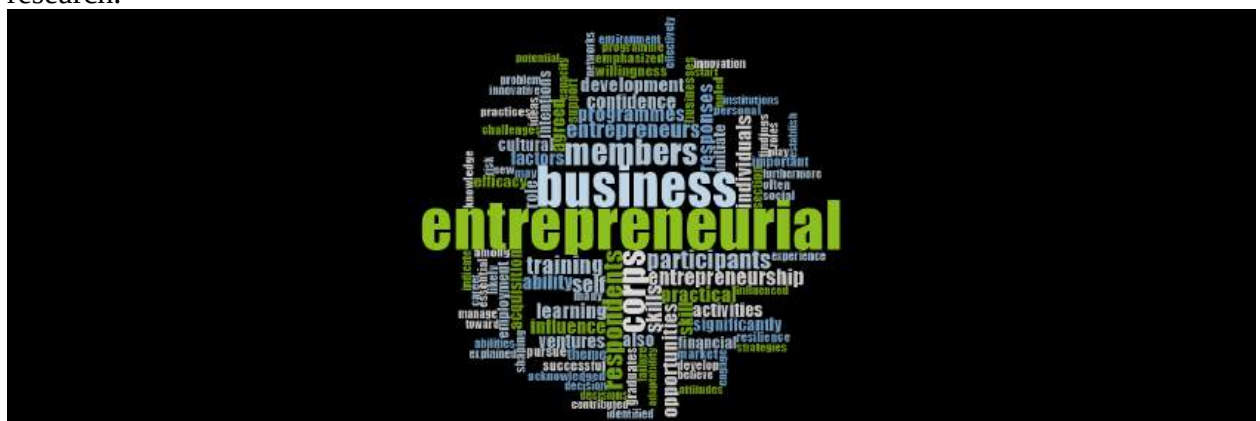
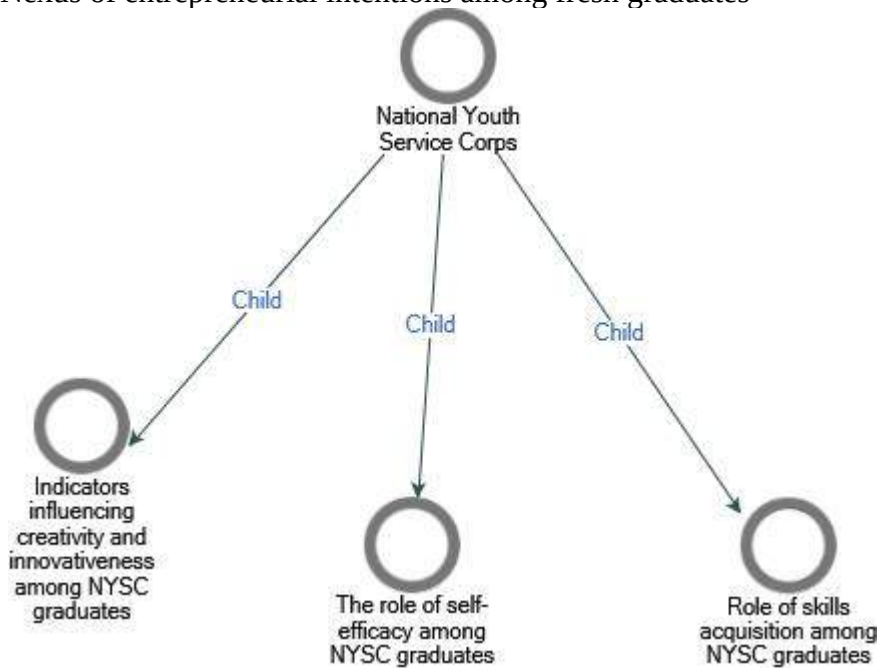


Figure 1: Word Cloud of common words

Source: Field work (2026)

The figure above shows the word cloud of the words commonly used by the informants. In NVivo data analysis, the first step is to create a word cloud. The main point of creating a

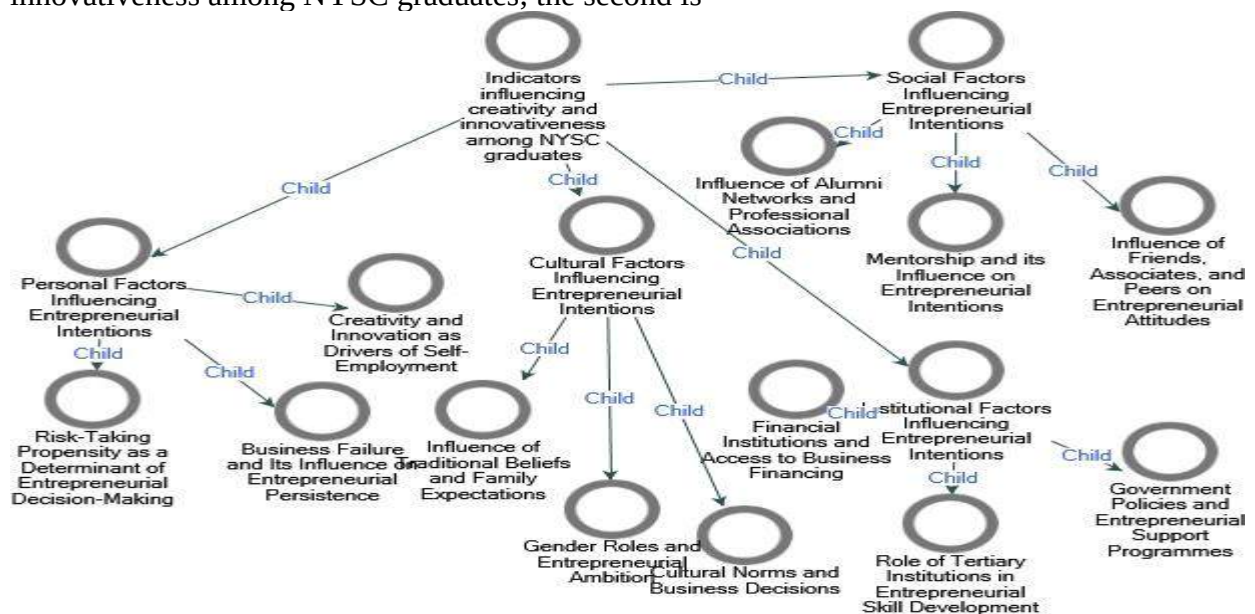
word cloud is to identify the patterns and direction in which informants speak about the Nexus of entrepreneurial intentions among fresh graduates



Source: Field work (2026)

Figure 2: Project Map on National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) on entrepreneurial intentions and decision to engage in business ventures

Figure 2, depicts a diagram that presents an analysis of information on the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) with respect to entrepreneurial intention and the decision to engage in business activity. Three themes were generated in line with the three research questions formulated in the opening chapters: the first is child themes that affect creativity and innovativeness among NYSC graduates; the second is



The Role of Self-Efficacy among NYSC Graduates; and the last is Role of Skill Acquisition among NYSC Graduates.

Figure 3: Theme one Indicators influencing creativity and innovativeness among NYSC graduates
Source: Field work (2026)

Figure 3 above depicts the first research questions and the development of themes, as per the research question: indicators influencing creativity and innovativeness among NYSC graduates. The theme comprises various nodes, or sub-themes, such as personal, social, and cultural factors, among others. Details are provided below.

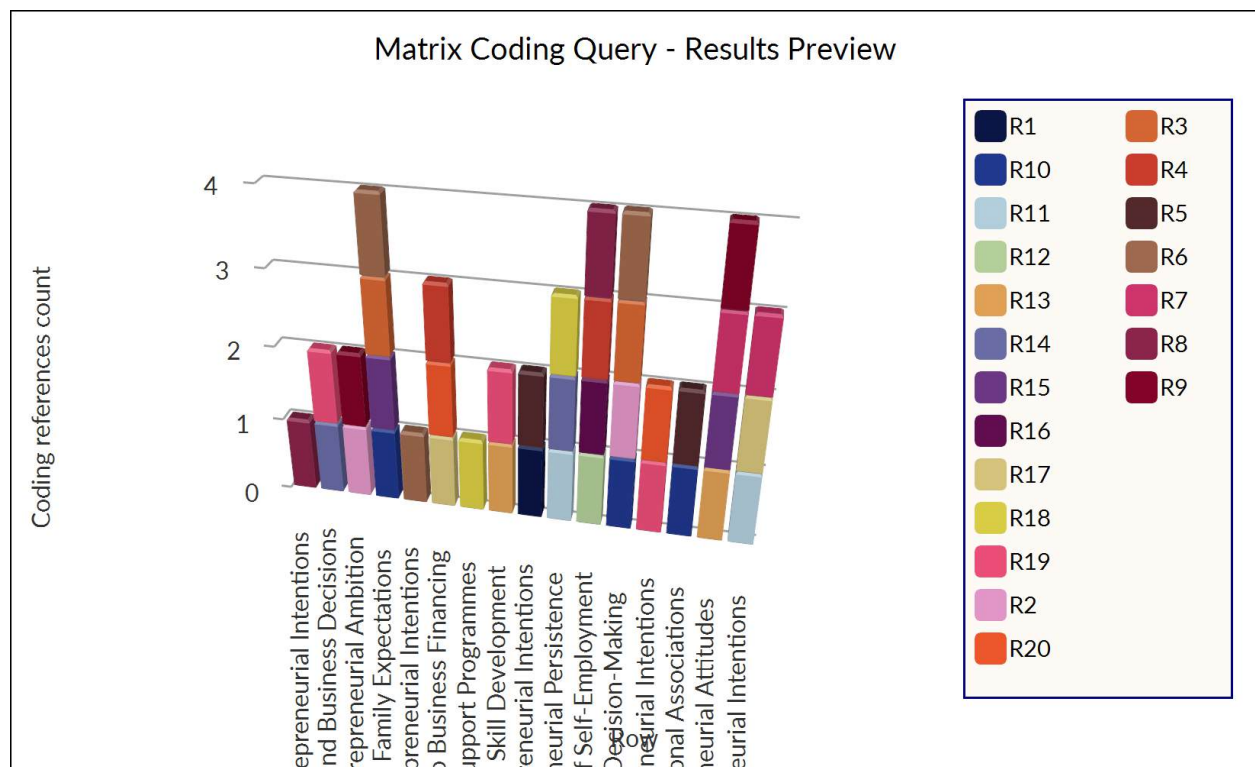


Figure 4: Matrix coding query on Indicators influencing creativity and innovativeness among NYSC graduates
Source: Field work (2026)

The diagram above displays the coding query for the matrix coding of the first theme, namely, indicators influencing creativity and innovativeness among NYSC graduates. Family expectations and entrepreneurial attitudes have the most quotations, whereas financial institutions and access to business financing come second. The colors represent informants who discussed the node. As indicated by matrix coding, indicators of family expectations and entrepreneurial attitudes have the highest number of quotations; hence, they contribute significantly to the indicators influencing creativity and innovativeness among NYSC graduates.

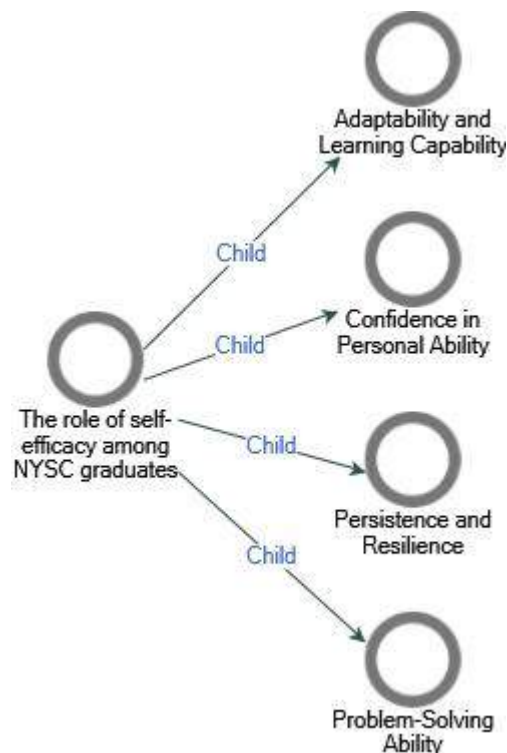


Figure 5: The role of self-efficacy among NYSC graduates
Source: Field work (2026)

Figure 5 illustrates the second research question on the topic. The informant discusses the role of self-efficacy among NYSC graduates, which comprises child nodes (subtopics). These sub-topics include: Confidence in Personal Ability, Persistence and Resilience, Problem-Solving Ability, Adaptability, and Learning Capability. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to perform specific activities and attain desired goals. In the context of entrepreneurship, self-efficacy is vital to ensuring that people pursue business ventures. From the informants' responses, it is clear that the respondents' self-efficacy levels have improved considerably

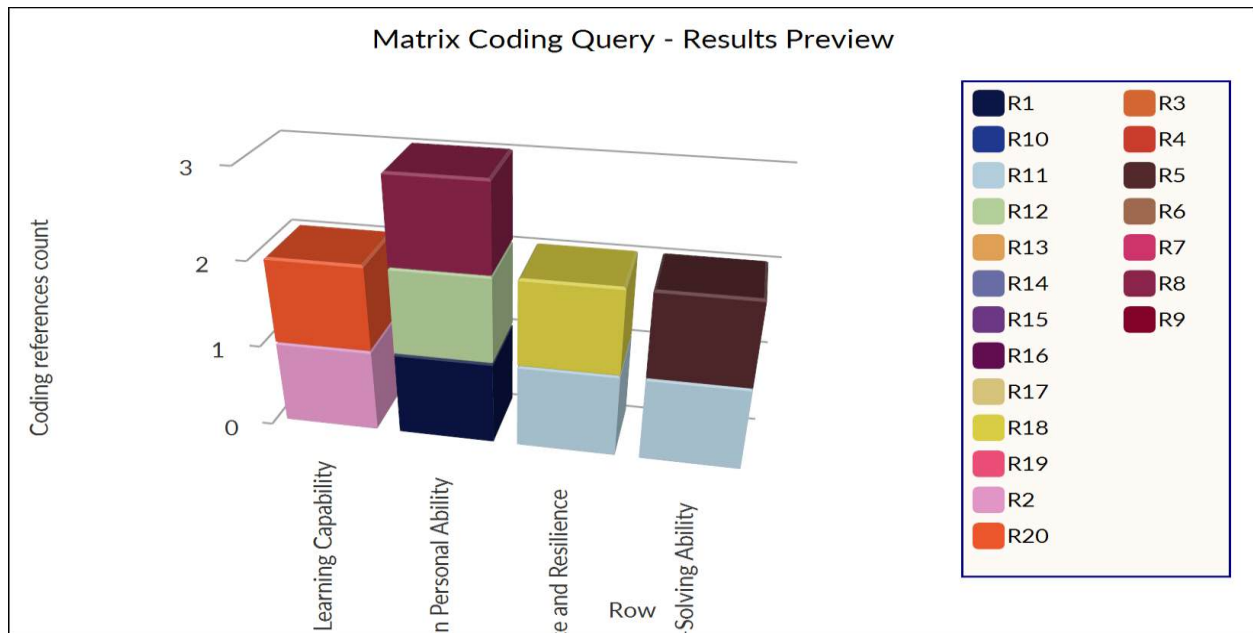


Figure 6: Matrix coding query on the role of self-efficacy among NYSC graduates
Source: Field work (2026)

This image above is the matrix coding for the second theme, i.e., The Role of Self-Efficacy among NYSC Graduates; "Confidence in Personal Ability" has the highest number of quotations, followed by "Persistence and Resilience," "Problem-Solving Ability," and "Adaptability and Learning Capability." The colour represents the informant who mentioned the node. Matrix coding identifies the theme/subtheme with the highest number of quotations reported by the informants; hence, "Confidence in Personal Ability" contributed substantially to the concept of self-efficacy among NYSC graduates.

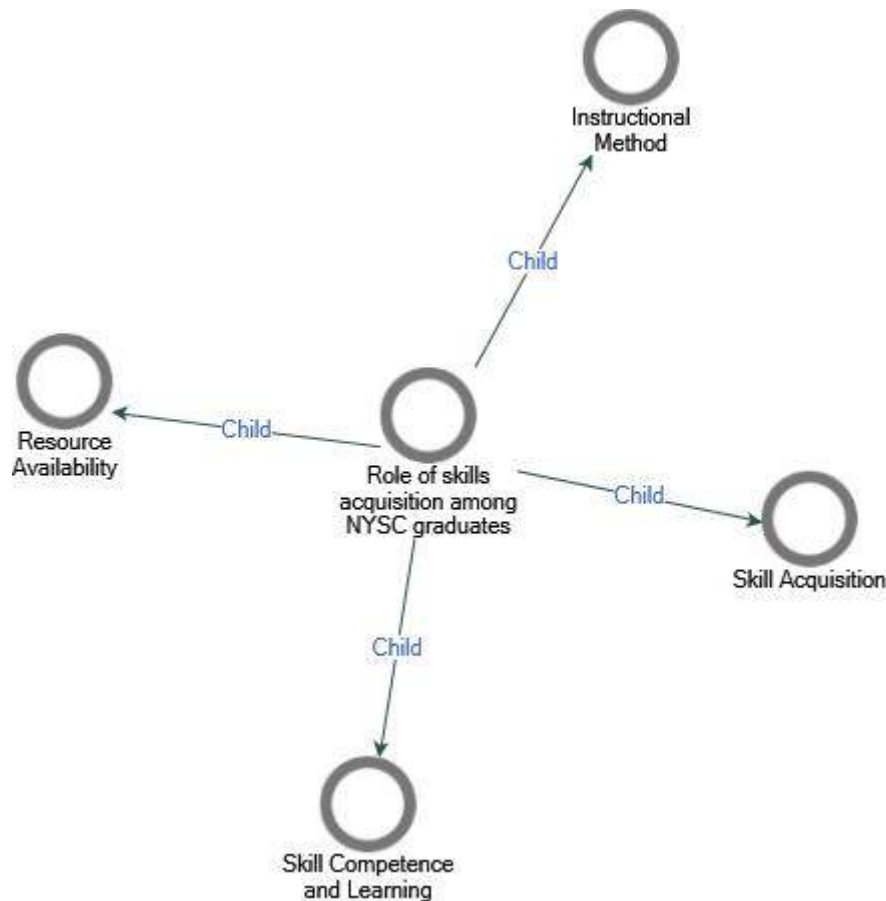


Figure 7: Role of skills acquisition among NYSC graduates

Source: Field work (2026)

Figure 7: The above explains the third research question, from which a theme, Role of skills acquisition among NYSC graduates, was constructed, along with child themes discussed by the informant, such as Skill Acquisition, Skill Competence and Learning, Instructional Method, and Resource Availability.

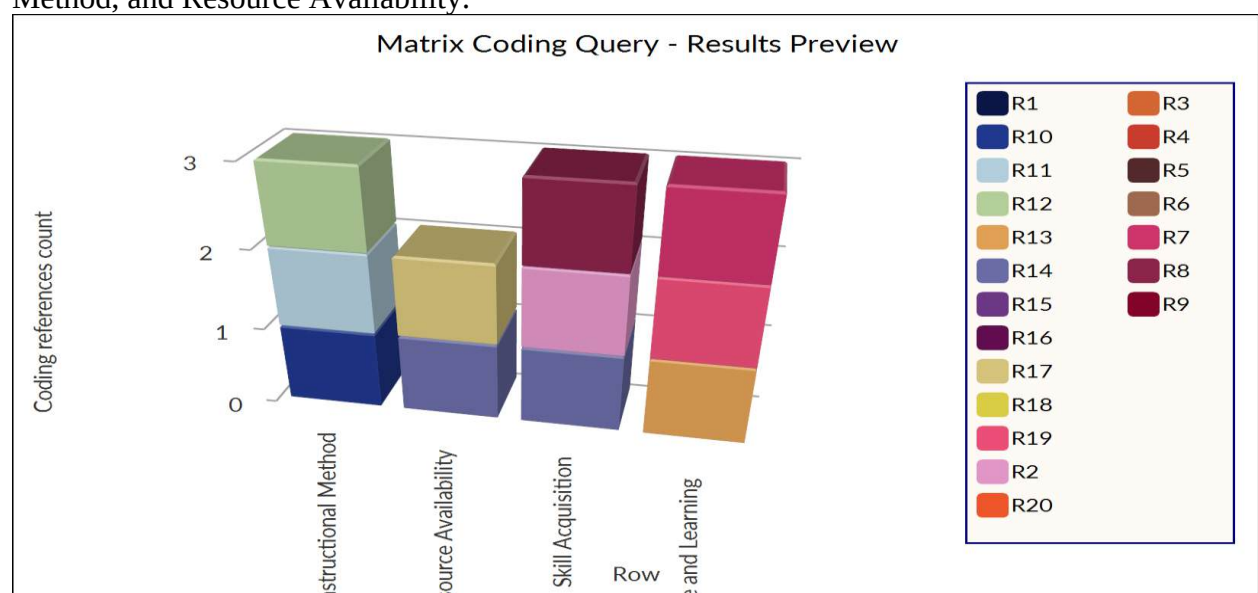


Figure 8: Matrix coding query on the role of skills acquisition among NYSC graduates

Source: Field work (2026)

Figure 8 shows the matrix coding query for the third theme, Role of skill acquisition among NYSC graduates: Skill acquisition, skill competence, and learning & instructional methods have the most quotations, while resource availability ranks second. The colours indicate which informant refers to the particular node. In matrix coding, the nodes with the most quotations are indicated, as provided by the informants. Hence, skill acquisition, skill competence, and learning and instructional methods have the largest number of quotations, thus significantly contributing to skill acquisition among NYSC graduates

Discussion of Findings

These research results align with the existing literature on entrepreneurship, particularly the notion that entrepreneurship results from a range of personal, social, cultural, and institutional influences. Personal influences, particularly the readiness to take risks and engage in innovative activities, reinforce the view that entrepreneurship is largely a result of personal attributes and attitudes. Indeed, the finding that graduates who were ready to take risks were more likely to become entrepreneurs fits well with existing entrepreneurial theory, since risk-taking is one of the most important characteristics of an entrepreneur. The same applies to the personal attribute of creativity and innovation. It becomes apparent from the above findings that some graduates become demotivated to pursue entrepreneurship due to fear of failure, whereas others view it as a learning curve. Both attitudes towards failure correspond to the concept of entrepreneurial resilience.

Another significant implication for entrepreneurs refers to the importance of social factors, including peer influence and mentorship. As found, the process of forming entrepreneurial intentions is rather dynamic. It requires interacting with other people, thereby improving access to information and networking opportunities. Networking and mentorship help entrepreneurs gain better access to resources and learning opportunities. From a cultural perspective, the high expectations placed by family members and the role of societal standards can be seen as further confirmation of culture's importance. The importance of gender-related issues underscores cultural barriers that can limit entrepreneurial engagement among certain segments of society, such as women. The above-mentioned finding regarding the role of institutional factors underscores the importance of creating conducive environments for entrepreneurial development. Policies, access to finance, and educational programs can have a significant positive impact. At the same time, there seems to be an inconsistency between the intentions of governments

Conclusion & Recommendations

Conclusion

The study concluded that the entrepreneurial intentions of NYSC fresh graduates are influenced by various factors, including personal factors, the social and cultural environment, institutional support, skills acquisition, and self-efficacy. Risk-taking, creativity, and perseverance have proved very important in this study, while the social environment also positively affects entrepreneurial intention through peer support, mentoring, and networking. On the other hand, the cultural environment plays an influential role, whether positive or negative, through variables such as family expectations and gender norms.

Recommendations

The study recommends strengthening entrepreneurship training by increasing practical exposure and promoting mentorship and networking opportunities to enhance graduates' self-efficacy. The study also emphasizes improving access to finance through supportive policies and affordable funding schemes. Furthermore, a cultural reorientation is needed to encourage entrepreneurship and reduce gender barriers. Integrating entrepreneurship education across disciplines and providing adequate training resources will better prepare graduates for entrepreneurial activities.

Implication

The study suggests that entrepreneurial intention among NYSC graduates is shaped by a combination of personal abilities, social influences, cultural norms, and institutional support. Theoretically, it strengthens existing entrepreneurship models by highlighting the importance of self-efficacy and contextual factors. Practically, it underscores the need for more skills-based training, mentorship, and confidence-building initiatives. From a policy perspective, it calls for improved access to finance and stronger support systems for young entrepreneurs. Overall, a holistic approach that integrates education, policy, and societal support is essential to promote entrepreneurship among graduates.

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