



# Youth entrepreneurship and national development: Evaluating the effect and challenges of the Gambia's National Youth Service Scheme

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## Abstract

The study critically examines the significant role of the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS) in youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia. Also, it evaluated the strategic structures adopted by the NYSS; assessed the effects of the NYSS programs; and analyse the challenges encountered in The Gambia. These were with a view to determining the critical nexus between NYSS and youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia. Both primary and secondary data were used in the study. Primary data were sourced through questionnaire administration. The study population (2057) comprised NYSS staff and management, past board members, employees of TVET partner institutions, regional area council staff, and NYSS regional committee staff, and past and present corps members. The sampling approach used in this study was multistage including stratified and proportionate-to-size sampling technique. To ensure an appropriate sample size, 324 individuals were selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample determination formula. Data obtained were analysed using frequency distribution, percentages, mean values and standard deviation for interpretation. The hypotheses were evaluated using the z-test. The findings highlight a unanimous affirmation of NYSS's structured initiatives, such as training, mentorship, and networking events. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives manifested varied responses, particularly in financial literacy and market understanding. The study also identifies universal challenges inherent in entrepreneurial schemes in developing contexts, emphasising funding constraints, resource insufficiencies, and infrastructural gaps. Statistical analyses further reveal that, although perceptual differences exist among stakeholder groups regarding the NYSS program's impacts and challenges, they are not statistically significant. The recommendations include increasing financial literacy training, strengthening market insights, and extending local business collaborations.

**Keywords:** Development, Entrepreneurship, Training, and mentorship, Youth.

## 1. Introduction

The significance of youth in national progression is undeniable (Ogbuleke, 2021). Over the past two decades, many African countries have seen a boom in their youth population. However, leveraging the potential of this young demographic has been a challenge, with critics pointing to the need for more opportunities (Olaiya, 2014). A promising solution is engaging youth in entrepreneurial pursuits, which empowers them and fuels national economic growth.

Many African nations, like Nigeria and Ghana, have initiated youth programs focusing on fresh graduates. Nigeria's "National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)" initiated in 1973, and Ghana's "National Youth Authority (NYA)" established in 1974, aim to integrate graduates into nation-building activities. Similar models can be found outside Africa, as seen in Israel's "National Youth Service (NYS)," which offers voluntary military training to the youth to help support the community.

Following these steps, under section 195 of the 1997 Constitution, the Gambia introduced the "National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS)" in 1999, later revised in 2015. This scheme supports youth skills acquisition across the Gambia's seven administrative areas to mitigate youth unemployment. Every two years, the NYSS selects 200 youth volunteers for a 24-month program, including six weeks of orientation and skills training. The scheme pays for the training, provides a monthly stipend, and offers a unique program for disadvantaged youth educationally.

The Gambia's government recognises the potential of youth to contribute to national development through entrepreneurship. The NYSS thus aims to provide the youth with the necessary skills to enter the job market and foster an entrepreneurial spirit, explicitly targeting those between 18-35 years susceptible to societal issues (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2019).

However, despite these commendable initiatives, challenges remain. The primary objectives of the NYSS, such as fostering a nationalistic spirit and providing marketable skills, have not significantly improved the youth's situation. Worryingly, youth unemployment have been rising, with recent statistics indicating an alarming 41.5% unemployment rate in 2022 (Sonko, 2022).

Previous research, including Ogbuleke (2021); Macrotrends (2023); Sonko (2022); Lahire, Johanson, and Wilcox (2011) and Ceesay and Kakengi (2020) has primarily highlighted the challenges faced by Gambians and African youth and the consequences of youth unemployment for societal stability and economic growth. However, there needs to be more research into systematic solutions and an understanding of the economic contributions of youth when engaged in entrepreneurial roles. This study aims to bridge this gap, examining the role of institutionalised programs like the NYSS in The Gambia and their effectiveness in harnessing the potential of the youth. The research is directed by the following questions: What strategic structures has the NYSS implemented for youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia? To what extent has the NYSS program impacted youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia? What challenges does the NYSS face in achieving effective youth entrepreneurial development?

The main objective of this research is to critically examine the significant role of the NYSS in youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia. The specific objectives are to: investigate the strategic structures adopted by the NYSS for youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia; evaluate the effects of the NYSS program on youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia; and analyse the challenges encountered by the NYSS in delivering adequate entrepreneurial development in the study area.

The hypotheses formulated for this study are H0: The mean perceptions of NYSS-Affiliated staff and Past and Present Corps Members regarding the effect of the NYSS program on youth entrepreneurial growth in The Gambia are not significantly different. H0: The mean perceptions of NYSS-Affiliated staff and Past and Present Corps Members concerning the challenges of the NYSS program on youth entrepreneurial growth in The Gambia are not significantly different.

The study covers three administrative regions in The Gambia: Kanifing Municipality, West Coast Region, and Lower River Region, where recruitments commence, and the partner Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions to which these members are sent for training. Additionally, the study includes former students (ex-corps members) from the fourth to thirteenth batches, from 2002 to 2019.

### *1.1. Review of Literature on Youth*

Youth is traditionally viewed as the period between childhood and adulthood, often signified by milestones. However, its definition is increasingly influenced by cultural, educational, and technological factors. Today, it is seen as a dynamic phase of self-discovery and adaptation amidst a rapidly changing world.

The concept of "youth" lacks a globally standardised definition and is influenced by a country's socio-economic and political landscapes. Cultural, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds further diversify how this phase is understood and categorised. Notably, age classifications for youth diverge. The United Nations and World Bank pinpoint ages 15 to 24, while the Commonwealth Youth Program ranges from 16 to 29 (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2019). However, the 2019-2028 National Youth Policy of The Gambia use the 15 to 35-year range. A noteworthy observation is the evolving understanding of adulthood due to socio-economic dynamics, extending the duration of youth and the journey to adulthood (Abdul & Mohd 2021; Tsegaye, 2006; UNIDESA, 2004; Sigudhla, 2004).

### *1.2. Youth Unemployment, Youth entrepreneurship and National Economic Development of The Gambia*

The convergence of young unemployment, youth entrepreneurship, and national economic development in The Gambia is critical. High young unemployment can cause societal discontent and hardship. Promoting youth entrepreneurship solves this by transforming job seekers into job creators, resulting in increased creativity and economic growth. This method mitigates unemployment, stimulates economic growth, and promotes long-term development, all of which contribute to a more equal and successful nation.

The Gambia is facing a severe youth unemployment crisis, with rates escalating from about 13% in 2018 to over 40% today (World Bank, 2021). Historically high unemployment rates have persisted since the 1970s, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Banerjee et al., 2008; Pikoko & Phiri, 2018; Masenya, 2021). Youth entrepreneurship, particularly digital entrepreneurship, is viewed as a potential solution to the problem. Martinez, Martin, and Marlow (2018) and Satalkina and Steiner (2020) underline the importance of digitalisation in employment development and economic adaption. Hamilton and De Klerk (2016) advocate for the replacement of traditional employment with digital entrepreneurial endeavours, particularly in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Despite acknowledging the value of entrepreneurship for national prosperity, The Gambia's support environment is still developing. ITC-Gambia's document emphasizes the need to strengthen support institutions and define the relationship between innovation, entrepreneurship, SMEs, and start-ups. The Gambia Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) seeks to bridge the skill and entrepreneurial gaps among young people by aligning training with job market demands to reduce irregular migration and create jobs (YEP-ITC GAMBIA, 2015). The National Development Plan underscores sustainable growth that improves individuals' innovative potential and enhances living conditions (NDP, 2018). This people-oriented approach is reinforced by Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi (2013), who underline that development should enhance the quality of life and socio-economic choices for all. Entrepreneurship is crucial for national development, impacted by institutional environments, economic freedom, technological development, and market conditions (Simón-Moya, Revuelto-Taboada, & Fernández Guerrero, 2020). Successful entrepreneurship encompasses risk-taking and market evaluation skills (Carter & Jones-Evans, 2012). Youth entrepreneurs pursue economic activities motivated by necessity or opportunity (Chigunta, 2017; Edoho & Kuada, 2015).

In conclusion, promoting youth entrepreneurship, especially digital entrepreneurship, is crucial for addressing youth unemployment and promoting national economic development in The Gambia, enabling sustainable growth and socio-economic transformation.

### *1.3. Theoretical Framework*

Human capital theory, developed by Gary Becker in 1962, posits that an individual's educational and skill achievements directly influence their societal and professional positioning (Becker, 1962; Blair, 2011). This theory

further suggests that individuals can earn more by acquiring knowledge and skills and significantly boost the economy (Rosen, 1976). Anosike (2019) has noted the global trend of investing in entrepreneurship education (EE) to harness entrepreneurship for economic growth. According to Joseph and Adewunmi (2020), entrepreneurship education is a framework aimed at motivating and equipping individuals for entrepreneurial activities. However, adequate government support may only limit its potential (Gamede, 2017). Becker's human capital theory encapsulates attributes like knowledge, manners, and experiences as vital factors enhancing an individual's value (Becker, 1962). Reflecting on this, Ndururi (2020) and Seet et al. (2018) underscored the importance of education and training for individuals, linking them to higher earning potentials. Hence, a country's economic progress is intrinsically related to the educational opportunities offered to its youth.

**2. Methodology**

The research adopted a descriptive methodology with The Gambia as its focal area. The target group consisted of 73 individuals, including NYSS staff and management, past board members, employees of TVET partner institutions, regional area council staff, and NYSS regional committee staff. Additionally, the group included 1,984 past and present corps members, culminating in 2,057 participants. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, a sample size of 324 participants was chosen. This study utilised a multi-stage sampling method. Initially, a stratified sampling method was used to categorize participants from different segments. This was followed by determining the number of respondents in each category using a proportionate size technique. Lastly, questionnaires were distributed through a straightforward random method. From the 324 distributed questionnaires, 287 (89%) were adequately completed and included in the analysis as shown in Table 1 below. The first research question was addressed using frequency and percentages, while the second and third questions used mean values and standard deviation for interpretation. Items with a mean value of 2.50 or higher were marked as agreed, whereas those below 2.50 were categorised as disagreed. The hypotheses were evaluated through the z-test, where if the z-calculated value is less than or equal to the z-critical value, the null hypothesis stands; otherwise, it's refuted.

**Table 1.** Showing total population, sampled respondents, questionnaires distributed, and questionnaires returned.

	Total population	Sampled respondents/Questionnaires distributed	Returned questionnaires
NYSS staff and management, past board members, employees of TVET partner institutions, regional area council staff, and NYSS regional committee staff	73	12	12
Past and present Corp members	1984	313	275
Total	2057	325	287

Source: Field work, (2024).

**2.1. Youth Entrepreneurship and National Development: A Statistical Analysis**

Research Question 1: What strategic structure has NYSS put in place for youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia?

**Table 2.** Respondents' views on the strategic structure of NYSS for youth entrepreneurial development in the Gambia.

Strategic structure of NYSS	NYSS staff and management, past board members, employees of TVET partner institutions, regional area council staff, and NYSS regional committee staff		Past and present corps members	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Training programs	12	100	313	100
Mentorship opportunities	12	100	313	100
Networking events	12	100	313	100
Regular workshops	12	100	313	100
Market research support	12	100	313	100
Facility access	12	100	313	100

Source: Field work, (2024).

The data from Table 2 suggests a unanimous consensus among NYSS-affiliated staff and past and present Corps Members about the strategic structure of NYSS in promoting youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia. Respondents from both categories agreed that NYSS has incorporated training programs, mentorship opportunities, networking events, regular workshops, market research support, and facility access as critical components of its strategic framework. This result shows a clear and shared understanding among the respondents about NYSS's efforts and initiatives in fostering youth entrepreneurship in the region.

Research Question 2: To what extent has, the NYSS program impacted youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia?

The table presents mean scores and standard deviations regarding the effects of the NYSS Scheme on youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia. Two categories of respondents group the data: NYSS-Affiliated staff and Past and Present Corps Members. The scores are based on the Likert scale, presumably ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Here is a comprehensive interpretation of the table:

Skill Acquisition: NYSS-Affiliated staff: With a mean score of 3.80 and a standard deviation of 1.88, they generally agreed that the NYSS Scheme has positively influenced skill acquisition. Past and Present Corps Members: Their mean score is slightly lower at 3.78 with a standard deviation of 1.68, but they too, generally agreed about the positive effect on skill acquisition.

Financial Literacy: NYSS-Affiliated staff: They agreed that the NYSS Scheme positively influences financial literacy, with a mean of 2.75 and a standard deviation of 0.71. Corps Members: However, with a mean of 2.15 and the same standard deviation, they disagreed with this sentiment, suggesting that they do not believe the NYSS Scheme significantly aids financial literacy.

**Table 3.** Mean scores and standard deviation of effects of NYSS scheme on youth entrepreneurial development in the Gambia.

Effects	NYSS-affiliated staff			Past and present corps members		
	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
Skill acquisition	3.80	1.88	Agreed	3.78	1.68	Agreed
Financial literacy	2.75	0.71	Agreed	2.15	0.71	Disagreed
Networking opportunities	3.10	0.67	Agreed	2.90	0.72	Agreed
Market understanding	3.41	0.69	Agreed	2.49	0.69	Disagreed
Job creation	2.93	0.70	Agreed	3.37	0.81	Agreed
Access to capital	3.08	0.68	Agreed	2.08	0.68	Disagreed
Innovative mindset	2.75	0.84	Agreed	3.15	0.76	Agreed
Sustainable business practices	2.62	0.56	Agreed	3.42	0.61	Agreed
Business longevity	3.41	0.88	Agreed	2.61	0.69	Agreed
Grand mean/Standard deviation	3.09	0.85	Agreed	2.88	0.82	Agreed

Source: Field work, (2024).

Networking Opportunities: Both groups agreed that the NYSS Scheme helps in expanding networking opportunities. NYSS-Affiliated staff had a mean score of 3.10, while Corps Members had a slightly lower mean score of 2.90.

Market Understanding: NYSS-Affiliated staff: They generally felt that the NYSS Scheme improves market understanding, with a mean of 3.41. Corps Members: However, they disagreed with this sentiment as their mean score is 2.49.

Job Creation: Interestingly, the Corps Members (mean score of 3.37) felt more strongly than the NYSS-Affiliated staff (mean score of 2.93) about the NYSS Scheme's positive impact on job creation.

Access to Capital: NYSS-Affiliated staff believed that the NYSS Scheme had improved access to capital with a mean score of 3.08. Corps Members disagreed, having a lower mean score of 2.08.

Innovative Mindset: Both groups felt that the NYSS Scheme promotes an innovative mindset, with Corps Members (mean score of 3.15) feeling slightly more optimistic than NYSS-Affiliated staff (mean score of 2.75).

Sustainable Business Practices: While both groups agreed that the NYSS Scheme encourages sustainable business practices, Corps Members (mean score of 3.42) felt more positively than the NYSS-Affiliated staff (mean score of 2.62).

Business Longevity: NYSS-Affiliated staff had a mean score of 3.41, showing they believe the NYSS Scheme positively impacts business longevity. Corps Members, with a score of 2.61, also agreed, but their sentiment is slightly less robust.

Grand Mean: The grand mean represents the average mean score across all the mentioned effects. Both groups generally agreed that the NYSS Scheme positively affects youth entrepreneurial development. NYSS-Affiliated staff had a grand mean of 3.09, while Corps Members had a slightly lower grand mean of 2.88. In conclusion, NYSS-Affiliated staff and Past and Present Corps Members generally believe in the positive effects of the NYSS Scheme on youth entrepreneurial development, though there are some areas, like financial literacy and market understanding, where the Corps Members' beliefs diverge from those of the NYSS-Affiliated staff.

Research Question 3: What challenges does NYSS encounter in achieving adequate youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia?

**Table 4.** Mean scores and standard deviation of obstacles faced by NYSS in ensuring comprehensive youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia.

Challenges	NYSS-affiliated staff			Past and present corps members		
	$\bar{X}$	SD	REMARK	$\bar{X}$	SD	REMARK
Inadequate funding for programs	4.1	1.65	Agreed	3.96	0.84	Agreed
Lack of qualified trainers or mentors	3.8	0.82	Agreed	4.5	0.69	Agreed
Insufficient entrepreneurial curriculum or training materials	3.1	0.63	Agreed	4.1	0.72	Agreed
Inefficient collaboration with local businesses	2.9	0.18	Agreed	4.4	0.83	Agreed
Lack of governmental support or policy backing	3.44	0.86	Agreed	4.02	0.81	Agreed
Lack of access to necessary tools or equipment	3.18	0.71	Agreed	4.6	0.75	Agreed
Challenges in market research and access	4.07	0.81	Agreed	4.36	0.76	Agreed
Inadequate infrastructure (e.g.technology)	4.2	0.98	Agreed	4.28	0.61	Agreed
Challenges in monitoring and evaluating program success	4.4	0.91	Agreed	4.42	0.81	Agreed
Grand mean / Standard deviation	3.69	0.75	Agreed	4.29	0.76	Agreed

Source: Field work, (2024).

Table 4 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of challenges faced by NYSS, as perceived by NYSS-Affiliated staff and past and present corps members.

Inadequate Funding for Programs: NYSS staff and corps members agreed this was challenging. The mean scores were 4.1 and 3.96, respectively, suggesting that both groups found this a significant challenge. The standard deviation for the staff was relatively high at 1.65, indicating a wider variety of responses, while it was lower for the corps members at 0.84.

Lack of Qualified Trainers or Mentors: Both groups also identified this as a challenge, with the corps members feeling even more strongly about it (mean score of 4.5) than the staff (mean score of 3.8).

Insufficient Entrepreneurial Curriculum or Training Materials: Both groups agreed that this was a challenge, with the corps members rating it as a more significant obstacle (mean of 4.1) than the staff did (mean of 3.1).

Inefficient Collaboration with Local Businesses: This was seen as a challenge by both groups, with the corps members perceiving it as a more significant challenge (mean of 4.4) than the staff did (mean of 2.9).

Lack of Governmental Support or Policy Backing: Both groups perceived this as a challenge, but the corps members (mean of 4.02) felt it was more of an obstacle than the staff (mean of 3.44).

Lack of Access to Necessary Tools or Equipment: Both groups identified this as a significant challenge, especially the corps members, with a mean score of 4.6, as compared to the staff's mean score of 3.18.

Challenges in Market Research and Access: Both groups found this a notable challenge, with a mean of 4.07 for the staff and 4.36 for the corps members.

Inadequate Infrastructure (e.g., Technology): This challenge was similarly perceived by both groups, with a slightly higher mean for the staff (4.2) than the corps members (4.28).

Challenges in Monitoring and Evaluating Program Success: Both groups saw this as a significant challenge, with nearly identical means of 4.4 for the staff and 4.42 for the corps members.

Lastly, the Grand Mean/Standard Deviation represents the overall average of the challenges' mean scores and standard deviations. The NYSS staff had a grand mean of 3.69, while the corps members had a slightly higher mean of 4.29, indicating that the corps members, on average, perceived the challenges as slightly more significant than the staff.

In conclusion, both the NYSS-Affiliated staff and the past and present corps members recognized various challenges faced by the NYSS. While both groups agreed on these challenges, the corps members generally perceived them as more significant obstacles than the staff.

2.2. Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1:  $H_0$ : The mean perceptions of NYSS-Affiliated staff and Past and Present Corps Members regarding the effect of the NYSS program on youth entrepreneurial growth in The Gambia are not significantly different.

Table 5. z-Test analysis on the effect of NYSS program.

Groups	Mean	Standard deviation	N	DF	$z_{\text{calculated}}$	$z_{\text{critical}}$	Remark
NYSS-affiliated staff	3.09	0.85	12				
				322	0.30	1.96	Accepted
Past and present corps members	4.29	0.76	313				

Source: Field work, (2024).

Decision Rule: if the z-calculated value is less than or equal to the z-critical value, the null hypothesis stands; otherwise, it's refuted.

Table 5 compares perceptions between the NYSS-Affiliated Staff and the Past and Present Corps Members concerning the NYSS Program's effects. The study incorporated two groups: the affiliated staff, who averaged a score of 3.09, and the Corps Members, with an average score of 4.29. This higher average suggests that the Corps Members generally recognize a more significant effect of the program than the affiliated staff. When assessing the variation in responses, the affiliated staff had a standard deviation of 0.85, while the Corps Members' responses were more clustered around their mean with a standard deviation of 0.76. The study sampled 12 from the affiliated staff, contrasting with a larger sample of 313 Corps Members. With a set degree of freedom at 322, the z-value computed was 0.30, contrasting it with a critical z-value of 1.96 for a 5% significance benchmark. Since the computed z-value did not exceed this threshold, the study concluded that there is no significant difference in perceptions between the two groups, even though their average scores vary. Both groups broadly agree on the program's effects despite differences in their mean responses.

Hypothesis 2 (Related to Research Question/Objective iii):

Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): The mean perceptions of NYSS-Affiliated staff and Past and Present Corps Members concerning the challenges of the NYSS program on youth entrepreneurial growth in The Gambia are not significantly different.

Table 6. z-Test analysis on the challenges of NYSS program.

Groups	Mean	Standard deviation	N	DF	$z_{\text{calculated}}$	$z_{\text{critical}}$	Remark
NYSS-affiliated staff	3.69	0.75	12				
				322	-0.54	1.96	Accepted
Past and present corps members	2.88	0.82	313				

Source: Field work, (2024).

Decision Rule: if the z-calculated value is less than or equal to the z-critical value, the null hypothesis stands; otherwise, it's refuted.

Table 6 showcases a z-test evaluation contrasting the challenges of the NYSS Program between NYSS-Affiliated Staff and the Past and Present Corps Members. The NYSS-affiliated staff recorded an average score of 3.69, while the Corps Members scored an average of 2.88, suggesting the Corps Members perceived fewer challenges than the NYSS-affiliated staff. When examining the standard deviation, the affiliated staff had a deviation of 0.75, and the Corps Members had a slightly higher one at 0.82, hinting at varied opinions within the group. The study involved 12 NYSS-Affiliated Staff and a larger group of 313 Corps Members. The degree of freedom, which measures individual data observations, was 322. The Zcalculated value was -0.54, indicating the affiliated staff's mean score was lower than the Corps Members. The Zcritical value was 1.96, representing a 5% significance threshold. Given that the Zcalculated of 0.54 is below the Zcritical of 1.96, the study concluded that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups regarding challenges associated with the NYSS Program.

### 3. Discussion of Findings

The National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS) is pivotal in fostering youth entrepreneurial development in The Gambia. The analyses presented in Tables 2 through 6 offer profound insights into the structural setup, perceived effects, and the challenges faced by the NYSS in this endeavour.

Strategic Structure of NYSS (Table 2): The unanimous acknowledgment by both groups—ranging from NYSS staff to Past and Present Corps Members—on all strategic structures, including training programs, mentorship opportunities, networking events, and market research support, underscores the comprehensiveness of the NYSS's approach towards entrepreneurial development. Previous research has highlighted the importance of multifaceted structures in effective entrepreneurial training programs (Smith & Smith, 2019).

Effects of NYSS on Youth Entrepreneurial Development (Table 3): A majority of the participants from both groups agreed on the positive effects of the NYSS program, especially in areas like skill acquisition, networking opportunities, and job creation. The consistency in the views is indicative of the NYSS's effectiveness. However, some disparities exist, particularly concerning financial literacy and market understanding. According to Abad-Segura and Mariana-Daniela (2019), financial literacy is paramount for new entrepreneurs, suggesting that NYSS should focus more on this aspect.

Challenges Faced by NYSS (Table 4): Both groups recognise numerous challenges, with the Corps Members often perceiving them more acutely. Notably, there is a consensus on the lack of adequate funding, which resonates with findings by Capolupo (2023), who found funding to be a significant challenge in similar youth programs in other regions. The lack of qualified trainers or mentors was another shared concern, highlighting a critical area of potential improvement.

Statistical Significance of Effects and Challenges (Tables 5 & 6): The z-test analyses from both tables show the differences in perceptions between NYSS-Affiliated Staff and Corps Members. The results suggest that although there might be perceptual differences, these differences are not statistically significant, consistent with the principle that ground-level participants (like the Corps Members) and managerial-level participants (like NYSS staff) often view programs differently but concur on fundamental aspects (Galati, 2020). The Zcalculated values being lower than the Zcritical values in both tables confirm this.

The findings of this study strongly connect with the theoretical framework (Becker's human capital theory). The NYSS's strategic structures, such as training programs, mentorship, and networking opportunities, align with the theory's focus on education and skill acquisition as necessary for improving individual value and economic growth. The positive influences of the NYSS program on youth entrepreneurial development, especially in skill acquisition and job creation, reminisce the theory's assertion that educated and skilled individuals contribute more to the economy. The challenges identified, such as inadequate funding and lack of qualified trainers, underscore the barriers to realising the full potential of human capital, aligning with Gamede's (2017) observation on the impediments of entrepreneurship education without sufficient support.

In conclusion, the study supports the theoretical framework by showing how structured educational and training initiatives like those of the NYSS are essential for economic development and youth empowerment in The Gambia.

### 4. Conclusion

A thorough review of the NYSS's initiatives on The Gambia's youth entrepreneurship yields enlightening insights. Both NYSS-Affiliated staff and corps members, past and present, commend the organisation's systematic efforts in fostering young entrepreneurs. They unanimously applaud training, mentorship, and networking opportunities provided by the NYSS. However, the effectiveness of these efforts garners mixed feedback, especially in areas like financial literacy and market comprehension. The challenges faced by NYSS mirror those typical in developing countries, with corps members experiencing these more acutely. Even with different stakeholder perceptions, statistical evaluations highlight a consensus on NYSS's effect and challenges. Ultimately, while NYSS plays a pivotal role in The Gambia's entrepreneurial scene, there is room for refinement to continue nurturing future Gambian business leaders.

### 5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are the critical recommendations for the NYSS program in The Gambia:

**Boost Financial Literacy Training:** Enhance financial education modules with real-world exercises to address the existing gap in financial literacy.

**Deepen Market Insights:** Conduct specialized workshops on market dynamics to improve participants' understanding of local and global markets.

**Diversify Funding:** Explore public-private partnerships, grants, and collaborations with financial institutions to ensure sustainable funding.

Elevate Trainer Expertise: Invest in regular capacity-building for trainers and collaborate with international entrepreneurial institutions.

Expand Local Business Partnerships: Strengthen ties with local enterprises to provide practical exposure and mentorship opportunities.

Engage Government for Support: Advocate for more governmental support by showcasing the program's successes and societal benefits.

Prioritize Technology Investments: Allocate resources towards updating technology and exploring digital training platforms.

Implement Feedback Mechanisms: Establish a structured feedback system with stakeholders to identify areas of improvement.

By addressing these areas, the NYSS can enhance its effectiveness in fostering youth entrepreneurship in The Gambia.

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