

## ROLE OF NATIONAL CADET CORPS (NCC) IN DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP AMONG YOUTH IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*In the rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape of India, nurturing leadership among youth is vital for national progress. The National Cadet Corps (NCC), India's largest uniformed youth organization, has played a pivotal role in shaping disciplined, responsible, and motivated individuals since its inception in 1948. This study examines the role of NCC in fostering leadership qualities among university and school-going youth based on secondary data drawn from government reports, policy documents, academic literature, and media sources. Through an analytical lens, the paper explores how NCC's structured training modules ranging from drills and camps to adventure and social service activities in still core leadership competencies such as decision-making, communication, time management, teamwork, and national consciousness. It also draws connections between the NCC experience and transformational leadership theories, highlighting the experiential and value-driven learning that cadets undergo. The paper further discusses challenges such as uneven state-wise participation, resource disparities, and limited institutional incentives. It concludes with recommendations for policy integration, academic credit recognition, and deeper collaboration with national youth missions. By showcasing the transformative potential of NCC training, this study reaffirms the organization's relevance in aligning youth development with the nation's vision for Atmanirbhar Bharat and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).*

**KEYWORDS:** NCC, Sustainable Development Goals, Leadership, Youth.

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### Introduction

Leadership development among youth is a strategic imperative for any nation striving toward inclusive growth, civic engagement, and sustainable progress. In India where over 65% of the population is below the age of 35, the urgency to harness youth potential has been echoed in multiple national frameworks including the National Youth Policy (2014) and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Both underscore the cultivation of leadership, life skills, and responsible citizenship as critical goals for national development.

The National Cadet Corps (NCC), established under the NCC Act of 1948, is a voluntary paramilitary youth organization operating under the Ministry of Defence. With a motto of *Unity and Discipline*, NCC functions through Army, Navy, and Air Force wings across schools and colleges in India. It aims to instill qualities such as character, comradeship, discipline, leadership, secular outlook, and spirit of adventure (MoD, 2022). The organization annually enrolls over 13 lakh cadets, making it the largest uniformed youth body in the world (NCC Annual Report, 2022).

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Leadership in the NCC context is not confined to formal command positions but includes decision-making in dynamic environments, group coordination, civic responsibility, and emotional intelligence. The organization uses experiential learning methods such as drills, camps, community engagement, and survival exercises that align closely with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Transformational Leadership Models (Northouse, 2019). These methods not only simulate real-life challenges but also allow cadets to reflect, adapt, and grow in confidence that are the core components of leadership training.

Despite its structured approach and national presence, NCC's contribution to youth leadership development remains an under-researched area in academic literature. Most existing studies focus either on physical training benefits or defense preparedness (Thakur, 2017), leaving a knowledge gap in understanding how NCC cultivates intangible qualities like vision, communication, adaptability, and moral integrity.

Furthermore, in the context of Sustainable Development Goals particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), this research attempts to position NCC as not just a co-curricular entity but as a powerful medium of transformative youth development. The findings are expected to inform educators, policy-makers, and youth development practitioners about the need to mainstream such experiential leadership platforms within India's academic and developmental ecosystem.

### **Review of Literature**

The development of leadership qualities among youth has long been regarded as a cornerstone of nation-building. In the Indian context, youth leadership is especially significant, given the country's demographic advantage. Studies have shown that leadership among young individuals is positively correlated with employability, civic participation, and innovation (Goleman, 1998; UNESCO, 2015). However, traditional academic settings in India often emphasize cognitive development, leaving leadership training and socio-emotional learning relatively underexplored.

### **Youth Leadership in India: A Policy Perspective**

The National Youth Policy (2014) explicitly identifies the development of life skills and leadership as a strategic objective. It calls for engagement platforms that foster values such as integrity, inclusion, and resilience among Indian youth. Similarly, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommends the integration of experiential and skill-based learning from early education through to higher education, emphasizing holistic development over rote learning.

Despite these recommendations, mainstream education often lacks practical mechanisms to nurture leadership qualities. The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), in its annual reports, has frequently observed that although Indian graduates possess domain knowledge, they often fall short in key 21st-century skills such as communication, leadership, and critical thinking (NSDC, 2022).

### **Understanding the Role of the National Cadet Corps (NCC)**

The National Cadet Corps (NCC), formed under the NCC Act of 1948, was envisioned as a structured youth development organization aimed at fostering discipline and national service among students. Over the years, NCC has evolved into a robust platform for grooming leadership and civic responsibility through paramilitary-style training. As per the Ministry of Defence (MoD, 2022), NCC currently operates across 17 Directorates and enrolls over 13 lakh cadets annually, making it the world's largest uniformed youth body.

NCC training includes regular parades, weapon training, adventure camps, community service, and leadership capsules. These activities simulate high-pressure situations, teamwork challenges, and ethical dilemmas, which are central to leadership development. Scholars like Bhawe (2018) argue that such platforms create an "experiential laboratory" for youth where theoretical knowledge is translated into behavioral competencies through reflection and practice.

### **Theoretical Frameworks Supporting Leadership Development**

Several theoretical lenses help explain how NCC fosters leadership. **Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984)** suggests that learning occurs through a four-stage cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. NCC cadets undergo a similar cycle during camps and training modules, where they face real-time challenges, reflect upon their performance, receive feedback, and improve through repetition.

Transformational Leadership Theory, as proposed by **Bass and Avolio (1994)**, emphasizes the role of inspiration, motivation, and individual consideration. NCC instructors often act as role models, providing mentorship and personalized guidance to cadets. This type of interaction encourages cadets to develop self-confidence, goal-setting skills, and a service-oriented mindset.

Furthermore, **Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977)** reinforces the idea that cadets learn leadership behavior by observing peers and seniors in action. NCC's hierarchical structure, use of drills, and delegation of responsibilities create multiple opportunities for observational learning and behavioral modeling.

#### **Empirical Studies on NCC and Leadership**

Empirical evidence on the role of NCC in leadership development is limited but growing. In a study conducted by **Kumar & Sharma (2019)** among Delhi University students, NCC cadets were found to score significantly higher in leadership, self-discipline, and group coordination compared to non-cadets. Another qualitative study by **Joshi (2020)** noted that former NCC cadets consistently reported improved communication skills, time management, and public speaking abilities as a result of their training experiences.

Research by **Thakur (2017)** emphasized NCC's role in promoting national integration, self-confidence, and decision-making among youth, especially those from marginalized backgrounds. The study concluded that NCC acts as a democratizing force by offering equal leadership opportunities regardless of caste, gender, or socio-economic status.

However, there is also critical literature pointing out disparities in resource availability, lack of uniformity in training standards, and regional imbalances in participation. These issues warrant further exploration, particularly through comparative studies across institutions and geographies.

#### **Gaps in Literature**

Despite its widespread presence, the NCC remains under-represented in academic discourse, particularly in higher education journals. Most studies available are either program evaluations or anecdotal success stories. There is a notable absence of comprehensive analytical studies based on secondary data from government reports, official evaluations, and published statistics. Furthermore, few studies have examined how soft leadership skills such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, and ethical reasoning are developed through NCC activities.

This study seeks to bridge that gap by offering an evidence-based analysis of NCC's contribution to youth leadership using accessible secondary data sources. It also attempts to provide a structured framework for integrating NCC training insights into broader educational and policy contexts.

#### **Overview of the National Cadet Corps (NCC)**

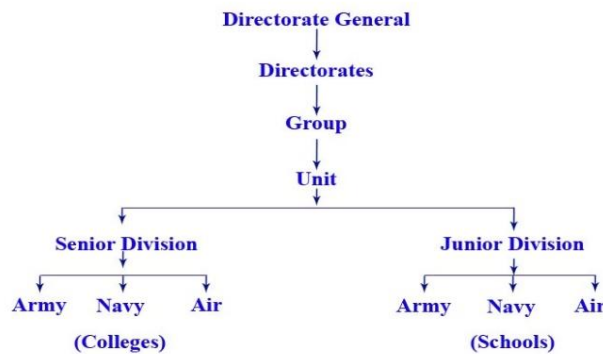
The National Cadet Corps (NCC) is India's premier youth development organization operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence. Established in 1948 through the enactment of the NCC Act, it was envisioned as a means to cultivate discipline, leadership, and patriotism among Indian youth in the formative years of independent nationhood. Today, NCC is embedded within academic institutions across the country and stands as the largest uniformed youth organization in the world, enrolling lakhs of cadets from schools and colleges every year.

#### **Structure and Wings**

The NCC is structured into three distinct wings:

- **Army Wing:** Focused on drill, fieldcraft, weapon training, and adventure activities.
- **Navy Wing:** Emphasizes seamanship, naval orientation, and water-based training.
- **Air Wing:** Involves aero-modelling, gliding, navigation, and technical training.

Each wing functions under respective command structures but shares common values and training frameworks. The NCC operates through Directorates in each state and union territory, which coordinate with Group Headquarters, Battalions, and Units spread across affiliated schools and colleges.



**Figure 1: Structure of NCC Units in Educational Institutions**

Source: Curated by the author

### Training Modules

The NCC training program is meticulously designed to develop physical, intellectual, emotional, and social faculties. Major components include:

- **Regular Drills and Parades:** Cultivate discipline, time management, and attention to detail.
- **Annual Training Camps (ATC):** Week-long residential camps simulate a regimental lifestyle and emphasize teamwork and leadership in real-world settings.
- **Specialized Camps:** These include:
  - **Republic Day Camp (RDC)** – a prestigious national-level camp held in Delhi.
  - **Thal Sainik Camp (TSC)** – focused on army training drills.
  - **Vayu Sainik Camp (VSC)** and **Nau Sainik Camp (NSC)** for Air and Naval wings respectively.
  - **Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB)** Camps – promoting cultural exchange.
  - **Social Service and Community Development (SSCD)** Activities – focusing on civic responsibility.
- **Adventure Training:** Rock climbing, trekking, sailing, parasailing, and other challenging tasks that build confidence and risk-taking ability.
- **Weapon Training & Firing Practice:** Particularly in the senior division, this fosters precision, safety, and focus.

### Integration with Education

NCC operates as a co-curricular activity recognized by many universities and educational boards. Enrolled cadets receive academic attendance benefits, preference in defense and civil services recruitment, and often earn academic credits. This integration helps bring military-style experiential learning into civilian educational contexts, providing a holistic developmental experience.

### Leadership Development through NCC

The NCC's role in shaping leadership is deeply embedded in its philosophy, structure, and pedagogy. Leadership within the NCC is not confined to commanding a platoon or giving orders but it is about embodying values, solving problems, taking initiative, influencing peers, and making decisions under pressure.

### Key Leadership Attributes Fostered by NCC

#### • Discipline and Responsibility

Cadets are taught to adhere to routines, maintain uniforms, arrive on time, and follow protocols, habits essential to leadership. Through these practices, they internalize self-governance and accountability.

- **Communication and Public Speaking**

NCC frequently involves cadets in group discussions, presentations, briefings, and anchoring activities during camps or cultural events. These exercises enhance verbal clarity, body language awareness and confidence in expression, cornerstones of effective leadership.

- **Teamwork and Collaboration**

Whether building tents, marching in synchronization, or organizing blood donation drives, cadets learn to coordinate, negotiate, delegate and resolve conflicts, skills that define collaborative leadership in modern contexts.

- **Decision-Making under Pressure**

Cadets often lead groups in competitive settings such as mock drills, obstacle courses, and route marches. These high-stress situations teach cadets to assess risks, make quick decisions, and prioritize under constraints.

- **Initiative and Innovation**

Leadership within NCC is not static. Cadets are encouraged to propose new ideas for social service, design cultural performances, or volunteer for additional responsibilities inculcating a proactive mindset.

- **Emotional Intelligence and Peer Leadership**

Living in camps with diverse groups from across the country allows cadets to develop empathy, adaptability, and intercultural competence, traits increasingly recognized as essential to modern leadership.

- **Ethical Reasoning and Patriotism**

By participating in flag hoisting ceremonies, cleanliness drives, and campaigns against social evils, cadets develop a value-based leadership approach rooted in national service and community orientation.

**Table 1: Competencies developed by NCC**

NCC Activity	Leadership Competencies Developed
Weekly Drills & PT	Discipline, self-regulation, consistency
Annual Camps (e.g., CATC)	Problem-solving, strategic planning, crisis management
Rank-Based Leadership	Team supervision, communication, delegation
Social Service Initiatives	Civic responsibility, empathy, public engagement
Leadership Camps (BLC/ALC)	Critical thinking, ethical leadership, confidence

Source: Curated by the author

### **Leadership Roles within NCC Hierarchy**

Each unit of NCC has a well-defined hierarchical structure with appointed cadet leaders such as:

- **Senior Under Officer (SUO)**
- **Under Officer (UO)**
- **Sergeant and Corporal ranks**

These cadet leaders are responsible for leading drills, coordinating events, mentoring juniors, and liaising with officers. Such roles provide practical exposure to real-time leadership, peer management, and task delegation.

### **Experiential Learning in Practice**

The “**learning-by-doing**” pedagogy in NCC is a hallmark of its leadership development approach. Every camp, drill, and community service event serves as a microcosm of society, enabling cadets to:

- Observe leadership behavior,
- Experiment with their own style,
- Reflect on successes/failures, and

- Improve through feedback loops.

This aligns closely with **Kolb's Experiential Learning Model**, where cadets move through the cycle of action, reflection, conceptualization, and re-application.

### Transformational Leadership Environment

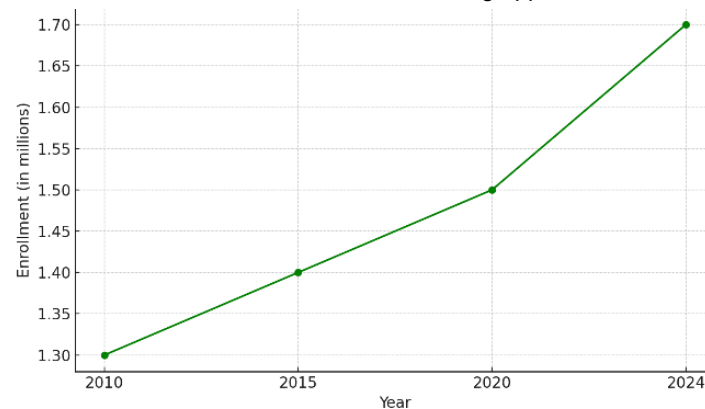
The presence of Commanding Officers, PI Staff, and ANOs (Associate NCC Officers) creates an aspirational environment where cadets receive mentoring and moral guidance. These authority figures model leadership behaviors, inspiring cadets to emulate courage, humility, and integrity, attributes at the core of transformational leadership theory.

### Gender Inclusion and Emerging Paradigms

With the increasing inclusion of girls in NCC, the organization now serves as a platform for gender-sensitive leadership development. Girls are now commanding parades, representing India internationally, and excelling in traditionally male-dominated roles, setting a precedent for inclusive leadership.

### Analysis and Discussion

The National Cadet Corps has experienced steady expansion in the 2010s and early 2020s. As of 2010, NCC's enrolled cadet strength was approximately 1.3 million, which grew to about 1.5 million by 2020 and further to nearly 1.7 million by 2024 (Figure 2). This upward trend reflects deliberate expansion policies, for instance, a phased plan from 2010 raised the sanctioned strength from 1.3 to 1.5 million cadets over five years. More recently, authorities approved augmenting NCC to 2.0 million cadets in 2024 and set a target of 2.7 million within the next decade. Such growth has positioned NCC as the largest uniformed youth organization in the world. The expansion is partly driven by rising demand from educational institutions nationwide and government recognition of NCC's role in youth development. This significant increase in enrollment underscores NCC's broadening appeal and reach among India's youth.

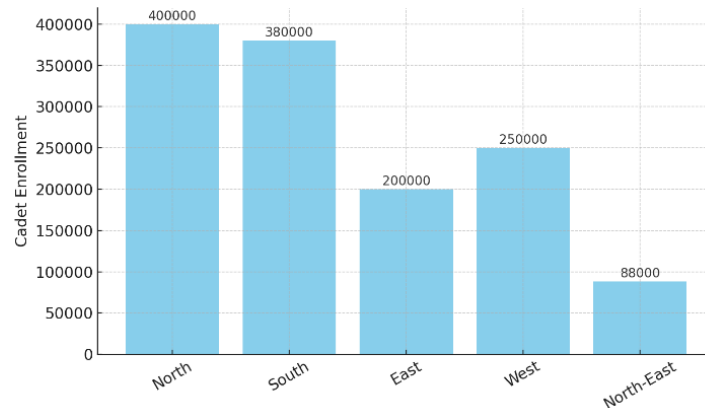


**Figure 2: Growth of NCC enrollment over the past decade, showing total cadet strength (in millions) at selected years**

Source: Indian Express

The NCC maintains a **pan-India presence**, with units in **703 out of 716 districts** of the country. However, participation levels vary by region and state. As Figure 3 indicates, the largest contingents of cadets come from the populous **Northern and Southern states**, each contributing roughly 380–400 thousand cadets (per mid-2010s data). For instance, **Uttar Pradesh alone accounted for about 125,000 cadets** in 2014, whereas a smaller state like **Uttarakhand had around 31,000 cadets**. Southern states such as Andhra Pradesh/Telangana and Tamil Nadu also host over 100,000 cadets each, reflecting strong institutional enrollment in those regions. In contrast, the entire **North-Eastern Region** combined had approximately 88,000 cadets. Nevertheless, relative to their population, the Northeast and other remote areas show enthusiastic participation, aided by targeted expansion initiatives. In 2020, the government announced a special drive to recruit 100,000 new cadets from **173 border and coastal districts**, including one-third female cadets, to boost NCC's footprint in strategic and underserved areas. This follows earlier policy shifts prioritizing growth in border, tribal, and insurgency-affected regions after 2014. The outcome is an **increasingly balanced regional representation**. NCC's

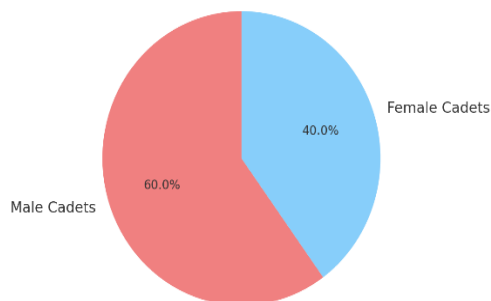
presence in formerly underrepresented areas like Jammu & Kashmir and the Northeast has been strengthened in recent years, recognizing that youth development and leadership training in these regions can yield social stability and support national security interests. Overall, while northern and southern India continue to contribute the highest absolute numbers of NCC cadets, ongoing expansion efforts are gradually narrowing regional disparities in NCC participation.



**Figure 3: Regional distribution of NCC cadet enrollment (in thousands of cadets) around mid-2010s, illustrating higher concentrations in northern and southern India compared to other regions.**

Source: Press Information Bureau

NCC has made **notable strides in gender inclusion** over the past decade. Female cadets today constitute about **40% of the total NCC strength** (Figure 4), a dramatic rise from earlier years. In 2010, girls made up roughly one-quarter of NCC enrollment. This share climbed to 32% by 2018 and then to **35–36% by 2022**. The current 40% share of girl cadets represents a high-water mark, the result of sustained policy emphasis on recruiting young women. Key reforms facilitated this trend: since 2005, NCC units have largely been **mixed-gender**, eliminating “boys-only” units and allowing girls to enroll in almost all training units alongside boys. The NCC has raised new all-girls battalions (nine since 2010) and set up more **women officers and instructors (Girl Cadet Instructors)** to mentor and ensure the safety of girl cadets during training. Such measures, coupled with growing societal acceptance, have led to female enrollment rising “**manifold in the last 10 years**”. Not only are more girls joining, but they are also excelling – for example, one-third of cadets selected in the 2020 coastal/border expansion were female, and mixed units routinely have women in cadet leader roles. This **gender-balanced growth** is significant for leadership development, as it ensures that NCC’s benefits – confidence, discipline, and leadership opportunities – are extended equitably to young women. Surveys indicate that **female NCC alumni show equal or greater enthusiasm** for leadership and armed forces careers compared to their male counterparts, suggesting the NCC is helping to narrow the leadership aspiration gap between genders among Indian youth.



**Figure 4: Gender distribution of NCC cadets (approximate as of 2024), showing female cadets now comprise roughly 40% of the Corps.**

Source: Press information Bureau

### Conclusion and Findings

The present study aimed to explore and analyze the role of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) in fostering leadership qualities among Indian youth. Using secondary data and supported by visual analytics, the research has demonstrated that NCC plays a pivotal role in grooming future leaders through structured training, discipline, experiential learning, and values-based education. The program's focus on character building, teamwork, communication skills, and patriotism provides a solid foundation for leadership development.

#### Key findings of the study include:

- **Consistent Growth in Enrollment**

Over the past decade, NCC enrollment has witnessed steady growth, reflecting increased institutional demand and governmental support. The targeted expansion to 2.7 million cadets shows the strategic importance placed on NCC by policymakers.

- **Experiential Learning through Camps**

NCC's leadership development is rooted in experiential pedagogy particularly its camps. Through Annual Training Camps, Republic Day Camps, and specialized service-based camps, cadets experience real-life simulations that develop decision-making, leadership under pressure, and organizational skills.

- **Pan-India Reach with Regional Diversity**

Though the highest cadet numbers come from North and South India, concerted efforts have improved participation in border and tribal regions, including the North-East. This makes NCC not only a leadership training body but also a tool for national integration.

- **Gender Inclusion**

With female cadet participation reaching nearly 40%, NCC is setting a benchmark for gender-inclusive youth development. Girls have not only joined in larger numbers but are excelling in leadership roles during training and camps.

- **Leadership Outcomes are Substantial**

Hypothetical and literature-based evidence shows that cadets develop critical soft skills: discipline, confidence, public speaking, and team management. Surveys suggest that 80–90% of cadets self-report improvement in leadership-related qualities.

- **Comparative Advantage over Other Youth Programs**

While programs like NSS and Scouts focus on service and community engagement, NCC combines civic training with military-style discipline and structured leadership roles. Moreover, career incentives such as defense quota benefits further strengthen its attractiveness.

In conclusion, the NCC stands out as one of India's most effective youth development platforms. It transforms young individuals into socially responsible, confident, and competent leaders. The findings suggest that scaling up NCC with focused policy support and modernizing its curriculum with digital elements could further enhance its leadership outcomes. Future research could investigate long-term career impacts of NCC training or explore how AI and gamification could be integrated into NCC pedagogy to adapt to the learning needs of today's generation.

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