

NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORP; A PARADIGM SHIFT TO PROFESSIONALISM AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT : After the Nigeria civil war, the needs for reconciliation, reconstruction, and rebuilding of the nation became a necessity that the government of that time has to create the national youth service corps (NYSC) scheme on the 22nd may 1973. To encourage and develop common ties among the Nigerian youths as well as promote national unity by creating an avenue for the young Nigerian graduates to take part in a compulsory one year national service program; with the expectation that the young Nigerian graduates will in the process get mix with other Nigerians from different ethnic groups, social and family backgrounds, and learn the culture of the local community they were posted to serve. So as to foster unity and strengthen the spirit of brotherliness among all citizens of Nigeria, capable of bridging the gap that was created by ethnicity. However some critiques of the scheme beliefs that these young Nigerians' precious solid year is wasted in an unproductive and more of a wasteful year as far as professionalism and job experience is concern. Hence this study adopted summative evaluation method in assessing relevance secondary data reflecting the national operation of the scheme, where content analysis was used in interpreting the data. And been guided by system theory, it was concluded that professionalizing the NYSC scheme through corps members' cluster field of study camping, is a noble course that needed not to be down play because of its ripple effect on both national integration and the developmental stride of the nation.

KEYWORDS: National integration, National youth service corps, Professionalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme was birthed in 1973 in an effort to reconstruct, rehabilitate, and reconcile the division created by the civil war, so as to foster the spirit of oneness among Nigerians. However, many critiques of the scheme are of the opinion that the programme is a waste of the young Nigerians' precious solid year as they view the scheme to be unproductive and more of a wasteful year as far as professionalism and job experience is concern. Because, to them many of the corps members are either posted to teach in schools which in most cases their educational or teaching background are not taken into cognizance, thereby making the experience gained to be irrelevant and counterproductive to the corps members' professionalism needs. While in other cases, some of the corps members posted to ministries, department and agencies (MDAs) are either idle or not placed where they can properly learn the rudiment of the operation in those MDAs. These and many more reasons make the call for a paradigm shift in the modus operandi of the scheme operation necessary.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In an era of increasing expectations with intense competing priorities, occasion by limited resources in meeting the professional developmental needs of the nation, youth professionalism is paramount. Nigeria as a nation does not have an all-encompassing institution that unifies the general body of knowledge acquired from the different institutions at the graduate level. And as opined by Bass (2012), A growing appreciation for the porous boundaries between classroom and life experience has created not only promising changes in learning but also disruptive moments in teaching, which calls for a unified practical platform for the various graduates of different disciplines from different higher institution of learning home and abroad to practice; in a bid to produce young professionals. At best what we have as a nation is segmented discipline unifying examination bodies such as the Nigeria bar association (NBA), Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) etcetera. And even though the National youth service corps scheme is aim at unifying the nation, advance by young Nigerian intellectuals whose professional fields ought to have been properly harness for the benefit of the nation and the professional needs of the corps members themselves, but it appear the scheme modus operandi fail short of the professional needs of these young Nigerians.

1.0 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to ascertain the professional and national integration impact of the National Youth Service Corps scheme; specifically to:

- i. Ascertain if corps members placement to the primary place of assignment is commensurate to their field of study
- ii. Assess the impact of the scheme to an individual corps member's quest for professionalism
- iii. Ascertain the scheme effort geared toward harmonizing the corps members acquired knowledge in the various discipline.
- iv. Assess the practical skill equipment in the various higher institutions of learning in the different geopolitical zones of the country.

1.1 Research Questions

This study is aim at finding answers to the following questions:

- i. Is corps member placement to their primary place of assignment commensurate to their field of study?
- ii. What is the impact of the national youth service scheme to an individual corps member's quest for professionalism?
- iii. What is the effort put in place by the national youth service scheme to harmonize the corps members acquired knowledge in their respective fields of study?
- iv. What is the available practical skill equipment in the various higher institutions of learning in the different geopolitical zones in country?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Professionalism or Professional Development

DeCenzo and Robbins (1996) as well as Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright (2000) all referred professional development as training, workplace learning, employee development, leading to development as a whole. To them any effort that is geared to improving workforce to the end that their later performance will increase productivity or advance the course of development is termed as professionalism or professional development. While Hesselbein, Goldsmith, and Beckhard (1997), viewed professional development as growth and learning, training, and executive education. By this definition, it can be summarizing that professionalism is a combine product of advance learning and training in real job-life situation rather than just theoretical learning.

2.1.2 Individual Field of Study

Individual corps member area of specialization or common interest in the general body of knowledge also referred to as Communities of practice (CoPs) by Baughman et al., (2010); Chang & Jacobs (2012), who observed that it, have become a popular professional development strategy. While Garst, Baughman, and Franz (2014), referred to communities of practice as learning circles, learning communities, study circles, or affinity groups; which emerge around areas of common interest to participate in professional development opportunities. Wenger (2000) further gave an example of professional development through CoPs to include extension education arrangement which comprised of faculty working in communities of practice on specific topic areas.

2.1.3 National Integration

Duverger (1976) defines integration as the process of unifying a society by making it harmonious city, based upon an order that its members are regard as equitably harmonious. While Philip and Jacob (1964), view it as a relationship of community of people within the same political entity. What Ojo (2009), interpreted to mean a state of mind or disposition to be cohesive, to act together, and to be committed to mutual programmes. In the same vein Morrison et al. (1972), rather referred to it as a process by which members of a social System (citizens) develop linkages and location so that the boundaries of the system persist over time and the boundaries of sub systems become less consequential in affecting behaviour. By this, one can infer that members of such social system develop with time an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation and consensus that bring about united and formidable community. Imperatively James Coleman and Carl Rosberg (1964), present integration to mean a progressive reduction in cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous political community. However to Leonard Binder (1964), integration involves the creation of a very high degree of comprehensiveness.

2.1.4 Practical Skill Equipment

Gregory (2014) refers to practical skill equipment as instructional facilities which provide sense of employable place for the student of colleges and universities both now and in the future. These facilities to him includes; general used classrooms, that can be shared by all disciplines, as well as specialized rooms such as science and engineering labs, computer labs, art and music studios, and theatres designed for specified fields. Mbotto (2010) focus on some listed institutional variables that predicated employability skill acquisition among the youth, which includes; communication skills, spiritual skills, teamwork, leadership, lifelong learning, and information

management, critical thinking, problem solving skills, entrepreneurship, ethics, morality, technological know-how, and social skills.

2.1.5 Conceptual framework of the Study

Considering the purpose and objective of this study, the conceptual framework is pattern using the identified variables as illustrated in figure 1, below. However, it is worthy of note that in the operationalization of the identified variables, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) is used as an independent variable while professionalism and national integration are the dependent variable, upon which relationship of the independent variables will be investigated. Consequentially, operationalization of each of the identified variable will be critically examined for clarification and sustenance of the study credibility.

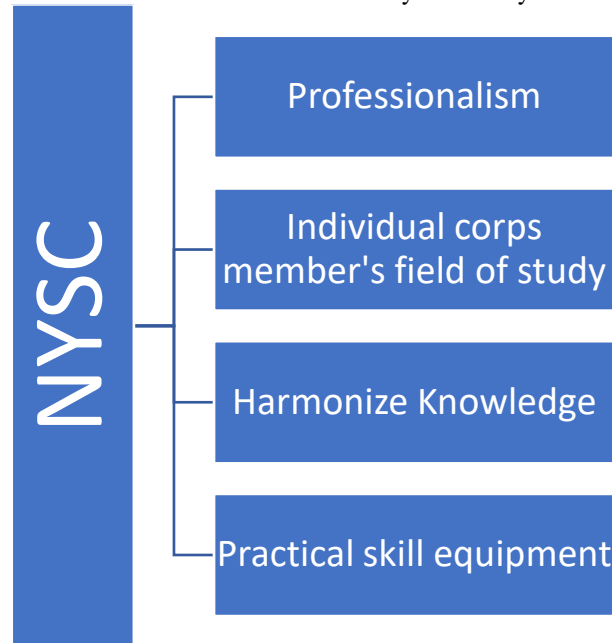


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.2 Empirical Review

Oriakhogba and Fenemigho (2017) reported that the placement of corps member is done in accordance with section 9(2) to (4) of the National youth service Act, which makes it mandatory for corps members to be deployed to such undertakings as hospitals; road constructions; farming; water schemes; survey and mapping; social and economic services; teaching; food storage and to support government efforts in eradicating pest; rehabilitating destitute and the disabled; development of sports; and all government departments and statutory corporations suitable for new graduates; as well as local council development projects and the private sector. The study further recommended that the usefulness and productivity of the corps members should be the focal point when making placement because, in the final analysis, it is the productivity of corps members that will determines the achievement of an individual corps member and the scheme as a whole. However, Udende and Salau (2011), approached the study from the relevance perspective of the scheme thereby reported that there is dichotomy of opinion in respect to people's perception of the relevance of the scheme, but on a general note the study suggested that the scheme contributed in no small measure to unity, peace and progress of the nation; thereby concluding that the scheme is still relevant. And further recommend a rigorous implementation and routine evaluation of the scheme to make it more productive. Meanwhile Obasa (1983), outlines set of criterion for corps members' deployment as follows: equality among states, ability of a state to absorb the number of participants posted, posting based on concessional considerations, that is; married women are given the opportunity to choose which of the state to be posted), posting on the bases of the demand made by various federal government establishments, special consideration in posting an in-service trainee, he equally reported that the supportive role of a government is increasingly becoming a factor in corps members' placement, as well as their academic and discipline, with majority of them ending in classrooms.

On whether corps members' placement to their respective primary place of assignment is commensurate to their field of study? Udende and Salau (2011), reported that the corps members typically work in sectors that urgently require graduate expertise like in rural farms, hospitals, and schools. In other word the urgency of the human need at a time supersede the professional fitting of an individual corps member placement to his or her primary place of assignment.

While on the scheme effort toward harmonizing the corps members acquired knowledge in the various disciplines Onyishi (2011), opined that the NYSC programme has for many years facilitated regular and effective distribution of skilled manpower, steady breaking of social and cultural barriers as well as the building of friendly bridges across ethno-linguistic boundaries. As well as promote values of national unity and development and rekindled interest in neglected but vital areas of national development like agriculture and promoted leadership qualities in youths.

Okafor and Ani (2014) reported that the corps members mobilized for schemes are trained for three weeks in the different orientation camps. At the end of which, they would be posted to their respective areas of primary assignment, where they would stay and work for the remaining part of the service year.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The theory supporting this study is the system theory as advocated by Wehrich et.al (2008), The theory emphasizes the harmonious working or operation of different components to achieve a common goal. This theory presented a System to be made up of different independent components or parts that functions as a whole. With each of the component been independent of the other and each subsystem is vital to the effective running and wellbeing of the whole (Asaju and Adako, 2024). This implies that all the subsystems are important and none could be undermined for the other. In application, National integration and youth professionalism should not exist in isolation of each other; that is, none of the two goals above should be rated above the other, as they both are cogent goals that the country (Nigeria) is striving to assiduously achieve through numerous policies; National youth service corps scheme inclusive. As a general norm, all organizations whether closed or open, receive inputs from the environment, transform them, and export the outputs back to the environment. Wherefore, National Youth Service scheme is a vital integral parts of national development effort. And because the scheme takes input from the environment in terms of young Nigerian graduates with the requisite knowledge and skills in various fields of human endeavor that when harness will ginger change and bring about sustainable national development in Nigeria, a paradigm shift in the mode of the scheme operation therefore, is a necessity.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized summative evaluation method in assessing relevance secondary data reflecting the national operation of the scheme, where content analysis was used in interpreting the data.

IV. THE NEW PROFESSIONAL NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS

The new national youth service corps scheme is expected to be a scheme that create platform for the young Nigerian graduates to be better equip professionally by harnessing their skill, potentials and utilizing same for a more productive year that will impact positively to national development and better equip participants with the needed professional experience in their fields of practice. In line with the objective of the scheme to contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy, the new ideas will Fas tract the achievement of the goal through cluster professional field camping /zoning.

Under the new arrangement, corps members will after their three weeks orientation camp be posted to different camps within the geopolitical zone in accordance to each individual corps member field of study, for a minimum of six and maximum of eight months professional training in their respective fields. The camps in each state shall be equip with materials for a specific cluster of professional field of practice as may be determine in the geopolitical zone, the relevance camp with the available necessary resources for such allotted field.

By this arrangement every geopolitical zone shall ensure that the camps within their member states are adequately equip with the necessary practicing equipment that cut across all major fields of human endeavour. Such fields as Agriculture, Art, Education, Engineering, Medicine, Social/management science with the relevance ICT/AI for such field can each be allotted a camp in the different states within the geopolitical zone.

For instance, using the northeast geopolitical zone for illustration: The states in the zone are Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. Each of these states has a camp. Hence the camp in Adamawa for instance can be equip with engineering equipment and all corps members posted to the zone who study engineering related courses will after their three weeks orientation camp in their posted state within the zone be redeploy to Adamawa for a six to eight months professional training/practice. While in this camp the corps members shall be sub – grouped into the various engineering sub – fields such as civil, mechanical, electrical, metrological etc. to harness their knowledge in the field and be further train as a body of potential young professionals. Who shall through various training and practice be exposing to the different dimension of the profession. The Centre can through these young professionals embark on governmental project executions in the zone that are within the peavey of the young professional.

Borno can camp medically inclined corps members who shall equally be sub – group into the various disciplines in the field for training and practice. While Yobe shall camp Art, Gombe, management/ social sciences, Bauchi, education and Taraba, Agriculture respectively. Corp members in the various camps shall not only be rendering services limited to the hosting state but shall extend their services to the states in the zone.

4.2 Facilitation/Training

The facilitation/training of the corps members in the various professional camping shall be undertaken by practitioners and professional bodies in the field who shall not just train but use practical and day – to – day experiences in developing and equipping the participants for practice as well as guide them in implementing set targets by the National youth service corps management, who shall be in charge of coordination, equipment soliciting and supply, while the professionals shall spearhead training and practice as well as implementation of proposed project by the managements.

The military shall still be fully in charge of the three weeks orientation camp, while the NYSC management shall still be saddle with coordinating the corps members' activities with the professional/practitioner concern only with training and practice.

At the end of the training the corps members shall either be guided to continue with their professional community service as a group or be attach to a ministry, department, or Agencies (MDAs) for the remaining service period. Meanwhile, it is at the description of the management to either continue with the corps members in rendering professional governmental/community services or redeploy them to individual Places of Primary Assignment (PPA). In terms of feeding the orientation camp feeding arrangement shall continue but after the three weeks, the corps members shall be using their allowance for such needs and where the hosting state or the benefiting project state feels the need to appreciate their efforts.

4.3 Government Responsibilities

The federal government in collaboration with the geopolitical commissions such as North East Development commission and the Niger Delta Development commission can supply sophisticated equipment for practice to the geopolitical zones in the country while state government can contribute in areas of needs as well as utilize the scheme for subsidize project implementation.

Where government either Federal, State or Local government are embarking on a capital intensive project that requires higher professionalism and more sophisticated equipment, the government can opt for a collaboration between the contracted firm and the National service scheme. By that, the participants can gain more knowledge and it will help government to slash down the project cost as well as build the professionalism of the young Nigerians.

4.4 Benefits of the Ideas

The benefits of the new professional national youth service corps are enormous both to the government and to the corps members. Some of these benefits include;

- i. It will lead to professionalism among young Nigerian graduates.
- ii. It will harness by unifying the body of knowledge acquired in similar field from different institutions home and abroad among young Nigerians leading to professionalism.
- iii. Corp members will no longer see the scheme as a waste of time and energy rather it will be a true criteria for practice and employment.
- iv. It will serve as a better avenue for utilizing potentials which will lead to invention and creativity.
- v. It will facilitate development by improving the quality of the scheme impact to hosting communities.
- vi. It will increase state participation both at the zonal and state level.
- vii. It will reduce cost of projects implementation by government.
- viii. It will pave way toward Nigeria self-sustenance by building teams of Nigerian professionals in various fields.
- ix. It will help in making available resources for practice.
- x. It will help in utilizing government funds as well as serve as a motivation for corps members.
- xi. Geopolitical commissions can better serve their zone by providing the needed equipment for professional practice that will impact positively the member states through the developmental activities of the corps members.
- xii. Corp members' skills can equitably be match with practice thereby providing them with the needed experience for future practice.
- xiii. It will automatically register corps members with their professional bodies among many other benefits.

4.5 End of the Service Year

At the end of the corps members' service year, the scheme shall send them off to an automatic absorption into the professional service centres at their respective local government where they can use the resources at the centres for gainful engagement. There by, bringing home national practice in serving as agents of change in their local communities. The participants can as well opt out for personal practice, employment or start a group professional firm or company by creating alliance among them.

V. SUMMARY/ CONCLUSION

In spite of the divided opinions regarding the relevance of the scheme; one undisputable fact is the scheme's impact in fostering national integration. However, since that is not the only goal of the scheme or that of the nation, couple with the fact that the needs of the younger Nigerians championing the course need to be taken care of, as they sacrifice to the nation. Professionalizing the National Youth Service Corps scheme therefore, is a noble course that shouldn't be down play for whatever reason. Because of its ripple effect on national integration and developmental stride of the nation which requires new and innovative model in addressing the longstanding and well-documented concerns about the relevance of the scheme, particularly in advancing the professional needs of the corps members as well as better utilize the resources meant for this all importance integration program; alongside improve synergy and collaboration between the scheme and the regional agencies/ higher institutions of learning such as Universities and research institutions.

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