

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS SCHEME IN PROMOTING NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The concept of National unity and integration has been a central focus of policy of the country such that Nigeria can forge ahead on the strength of her diversity. Hence, the NYSC was created in 1973 to promote national integration and unity among the various group of the Nigerian populace. Over the years, divergent views as regards the relevance of the scheme had erupted, while some feel the scheme is relevant, others feel it had outlived its relevance. In essence, this study carried out investigation on effectiveness of the National Youth Service Corps to the nation building. The study adopted an embedded mixed method research designs. The population of the study was sixty - one thousand and fifty six (61,056) NYSC Corps members (2022 Batch C and 2023 Batch A) and other relevant stakeholders. The sample consisted of six thousand, one hundred and nine (6,109) NYSC Corps members and thirty (30) relevant stakeholders (host communities inclusive), which were selected from the six geo-political zones, one state from each zone. Results of the study showed that corps members were exposed to locations outside their geo-political zones; the promotion of inter-ethnic courtship and marriages was significant at 0.05 level of significant. The findings also indicated that there was improved common ties between corps members and other people from different ethnicity. However, corps members experienced prevailing challenges such as insecurity, insufficient allowance, lack of accommodation and language barrier. In view of the findings, the study concluded that National Youth Service Corps Scheme was effective in promoting national integration in Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that the NYSC scheme should be sustained and improved upon.

Keywords: NYSC Corps Members, Ethnic diversity, National integration.

Introduction

The Nigerian nation is a heterogeneous entity as well as a conglomeration of diverse nationalities with multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi religious groups and all these diversities have affected her positively and negatively in all the facets of the national life (Ogbogbo, 2011). Nigeria as a sovereign state is made up of over two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups, each group with its own distinct history, political structure, culture and belief system. Nigeria was a British colonial creation, resulting from the amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates in 1914. The British government amalgamated the two protectorates of Nigeria not because of any desire on their part to lay the foundations for the eventual emergence of a powerful and dynamic independent black state, but for reasons of imperial convenience and economy in colonial administration (Okpeh, 2021). Nigeria gained her independence on October 1, 1960 as an entity. However, even after independence, the different internal boundary lines of the state and the people are still visible along varying cultures, languages and ethnicity.

Since the amalgamation and the country's independence therefore, the concept of National unity and integration has been one of the central focus of policy of the country such that Nigeria can forge ahead as a complex homogeneity on the strength of her diversity. This is actually reflected in some lines of the first national anthem

*Nigeria we hail thee
Our own dear native land
Though tribe and tongue may differ,
In brotherhood we stand*

The need to eliminate every form of racial, ethnic or religious barriers to the free and unbridled interaction among Nigerians has remained a huge task in the country. Severally, people do hold on to their interest, opinion, culture, language and practice when interacting with other citizens, however, such differences when not properly managed result in disagreements, strikes, quarrels, clashes, fights between different sects, religious, tribal and ethnic groups.

The concept of national integration is a major task and project in the post-independence era and persisted even after the civil war between 1967 and 1970. According to Shona (2013), national integration is the consciousness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. This means that though people belong to different classes, religions, regions and speak different languages, they take cognizance of the fact that they are one. The significance of this consciousness in building a strong and prosperous nation cannot be overemphasized. In Nigeria, Government has established programmes tailored towards achieving national unity. Such programmes designed as national integration mechanisms in Nigeria include, among others, founding of the federal unity schools, the federal character principle, relocation of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to Abuja, revenue sharing formula/fiscal federalism policy and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme. All these are aimed at achieving national integration and national unity, which was perceived to be necessary and critical to national progress and development.

The issue of national unity and integration are essential to Government's planning and activities in the country. This is because growth and development cannot thrive in a heterogeneous nation if there is no peace or national integration. It is therefore essential to

create patriotic citizens out of such disparate, often antagonistic groups using deliberate social engineering programmes. In Nigeria, the need for unity and the curbing of all centrifugal forces after the civil war led to the formation of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) through Decree No 24 of 22nd May, 1973. The NYSC scheme was established as an instrument for national reconstruction, reconciliation and rebuilding, which forms the core element of national integration after the thirty (30) months Nigerian civil war (Adedayo, 2010).

The NYSC scheme is a programme of deliberate social engineering, or more accurately, it is a key component of what ought to be a more comprehensive package of programmes, policies, incentive structures and slogans designed to bring together Nigeria's desperate peoples into cohesive nation. The NYSC scheme was established for the purpose of reconstructing, reconciling and rebuilding the country from the ruins of the civil war. After the civil war, the country was faced with the post-civil war problems such as religious bigotry, bribery and corruption, poverty, lack of legitimacy, unhealthy cleavages, wrong conception of political parties, lopsided development; marginalization; ethnic religious conflicts; low level of political sophistication; distrust of leadership and poor followership, cultism and threats of disintegration. The country thus needed a unifying factor (Ezema, 2002).

In the light of this, the Government of General Yakubu Gowon established the NYSC scheme in 1973 to foster unity among the factionalized ethnic groups in the country. The Decree No. 24 stated that the NYSC scheme was established with a view to properly encourage and develop common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity (Aremu, 2018). After 20 years of its existence, the 1973 Decree was repealed and replaced with No.51 of 16th June, 1993, now referred to as the National Youth Service Corps Act, Cap N84, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004. The Act is preserved by Section 315 (5) (a) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), thereby making the NYSC ACT part and parcel of the constitution.

According to Section 1 (3) of the NYSC Act, the objectives of the NYSC Scheme are to:

- a. Inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to the nation in any situation they may find themselves.
- b. Raise the moral tone of our youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement and social and cultural improvement.
- c. Develop in our youth the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest.
- d. Develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration.
- e. Remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups; and
- f. Develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.

In order to achieve the objectives stated above, Section 1(4) of the NYSC Act provides that the Scheme shall ensure:

- a. The equitable distribution of members of the service corps and the effective utilization of their skills in area of national needs;

- b. That as far as possible, youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin;
- c. That such groups of youths assigned to work together as representative of Nigeria as far as possible;
- d. That the Nigerian youth are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of the country;
- e. The Nigerian youth are encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences;
- f. That the members of the service Corps are encouraged to seek at the end of their one year service, career employment all over Nigeria, thus promoting the free movement of labour;
- g. That employers are induced partly through their experience with members of the service corps to employ more rapidly and on a permanent basis, qualified Nigerians, irrespective of their states of origin.

Okafor and Ani (2014) opined that the summary of the objectives of NYSC scheme is to develop a sound and result-oriented institution that is committed to the realization of national unity and even development among all ethnic groups. It is an organ that is capable of bringing out the best qualities in the youth and imparting in them the right attitude and value for nation building. These values serve as a catalyst to national development and a sense of pride and fulfillment of the participating graduate youths. However, despite the efforts of the Government to establish and finance a programme of social integration like the NYSC, the issue of national integration has become a serious concern for the nation in the recent years.

Consequently, after Fifty (50) years of establishing the NYSC scheme, protests occasioned by security challenges are threatening the existence of the scheme. Protests by Corps members deployed to states threatened by insecurity have resulted in fears that the NYSC scheme might have outlived its relevance (Banji, 2012). The suggestion to scrap the NYSC scheme has remained on the headlines of national dailies in recent times. The northern part of Nigeria has gradually slipped into structural anarchy because of terrorist attacks while in the South, militancy and kidnappings dominate the zone (Amuta, 2014, Majeed 2021). Recent events had led to questions on whether the NYSC can operate in these zones of undeclared and unsolicited wars. In addition, the Nigerian society had witnessed deaths of some corps members in the states that they were posted to serve through violent killings (Okoro & Ani, 2011). Similarly, Onyishi (2011) opined that the programme is prone to interference of stakeholders; pointing out parental influence on the choice of state of deployment of their wards.

When a programme like the National Youth Service Corps starts to encounter divergent views on its relevance and existence, there is need to clarify the extent to which the National Youth Service Corps has achieved its objectives over the years. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to investigate the effectiveness of NYSC Scheme in promoting national integration in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

After fifty (50) years of operation, the prevalent challenges in the country such as ethnic distrust, kidnapping, insecurity, religious intolerance, inter-ethnic violence and other social ills that exist appear to put the activities and the integration and national unity component of the objectives of NYSC scheme in doubt among Nigerians. Based on these challenges, calls

had been made from various quarters of the country in recent years, ranging from an abortive Bill by some lawmakers to amend the 1999 Constitution to stakeholders in the country to scrap the NYSC scheme. While a number of stakeholders have assessed and scored the NYSC high in contributing to national integration and cohesion in Nigeria, many people have assessed the NYSC otherwise.

The NYSC programme has been in existence since 1973 and the question that is now posed is: To what extent has the NYSC enhanced national integration? Integration in this study means the extent to which the NYSC has enhanced National patriotism, inter-ethnic marriage, mobility of labour as well as the cultural understanding among Nigerian educated youths. Specifically, this study sought to investigate the effectiveness of the NYSC Scheme for promoting National integration in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the attitude of National Youth Service Corps members at the beginning of their service year in terms of their:
 - a. Disposition to National patriotism?
 - b. Disposition to other ethnic groups?
 - c. Disposition to other religious groups?
 - d. Disposition to mobility of labour.?
2. Is there any significant difference in the attitude of the NYSC members between the pre and post NYSC exercise?

Research Design

The Research design used was the embedded mixed method design. An embedded mixed method design is a type of research design that involves nesting or embedding one or more forms of data (qualitative and quantitative mode of inquiry) within a larger design (of qualitative and quantitative mode of inquiry) (Creswell, 2014).

Target Population

The target population for the study was sixty one thousand and fifty six (61,056) serving corps members (2022 Batch C and 2023 Batch A) across the selected states from the six geopolitical zones and relevant stakeholders such as members of the host communities.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study comprised six thousand, one hundred and nine (6,109) NYSC Corps members and thirty (30) relevant stakeholders. (host communities inclusive). Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select NYSC Corps members for the purpose of quantitative inquiry. The first stage involved the selection of sample states in the six (6) geopolitical zones. The state in the country was stratified based on their geopolitical distribution. One state per geopolitical zone was selected using stratified random sampling technique. The states were Ogun (South West), Rivers (South South), Anambra (South East), Adamawa (North East), Sokoto (North West) and FCT (North Central). According to Wikipedia and the outcome of the Supreme Court judgment of the 2023 elections, it justifies the FCT belonging to the north central zone and it is deemed to be a state accordingly.

The second stage comprised of the selection of two thousand four hundred and fifteen (2,415) newly deployed (2023/2024, Batch A Stream 1 and 2) Corps members to NYSC scheme. A determined proportion of 10% of the newly deployed Corp members and 10% of the Corp members already deployed in each selected state were involved. Finally, three thousand six

hundred and ninety - four (3,694) (2022/2023, Batch C) Corps members on primary assignment were selected in each of the selected states using a determined proportion of 10% of the population of Corp members in each selected state.

Research Instruments

- a. Corps Members Attitude of mind Questionnaire (CMAQ) was administered on all the selected Corps members. Batches C and A.
- b. Corps Members Assessment Interview Guide (CMAIG) was administered on Corps members on primary assignment in a face to face interview. The process was the same as the administration of CMIIG Results.

Research Question 1:

What is the attitude of National Youth Service Corps members at the beginning of their service year in terms of their disposition to National patriotism, disposition to other ethnic groups, disposition to other religious groups, disposition to mobility of labour?

Table 1 Attitude of NYSC Members at the beginning of their service year

Dimensions of disposition	No. of items	N	Sum of responses				Sum	Mean	Remark
			SD	D	A	SA			
Disposition to National patriotism	8	2415	293	1350	8986	8691	64715	3.35	positive
Disposition to other ethnic groups	11	2415	995	2571	11796	11203	86337	3.25	positive
Disposition to other religious groups	11	2415	683	1544	12868	11470	88255	3.32	positive
Disposition to mobility of labour	10	2415	962	3716	11198	8274	75084	3.11	positive
TOTAL	40		2933	9181	44848	39638	314391	3.25	Positive

Criterion Mean= 2.5

Table 1 indicates the results of the dispositions of corp members to national patriotism, other ethnic groups, religious groups and mobility of labour. As indicated in the table, the responses included Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree, using a criterion mean of 2.5. Corps members have a positive disposition to National patriotism (3.35), other religious groups (3.32), other ethnic groups (3.25), and mobility of labour (3.11). Based on the analysis, Corp members at the beginning of their service year had positive attitude (3.25) in terms of their disposition to National patriotism, disposition to other ethnic groups, disposition to other religious groups and disposition to mobility of labour.

Research Questions 2

Is there any significant difference in the attitude of the NYSC members between the pre and post NYSC exercise?

Table 2 t-test result of difference in the attitude of National Youth Service Corps

NYSC corps members	n	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Attitude at the Beginning of NYSC	2415	130.18	12.355	10.832	6107	0.001
Attitude at the End of NYSC	3694	133.84	13.228			

Table 2 presents the significant difference in the attitude of National Youth Service Corps members at the end of their service year in terms of their Disposition to National patriotism, other ethnic groups, other religious groups, and mobility of labour. From the study, the result showed a significant outcome (t= 10.832, df= 6107, p< 0.05). It means there is a significant difference in the attitude of corps members at the beginning and end of the programme.

Furthermore, the mean attitudinal score (133.84) of the corps members at the end of NYSC programme is statistically and significantly higher than the attitudinal mean at the beginning (130.18). This means NYSC programme significantly improved the attitude of Corps members in terms of their disposition to National patriotism, other ethnic groups, other religious groups, and mobility of labour. The prevailing challenges experienced by NYSC Corp members during their service year are insecurity, insufficient allowance, lack of accommodation and language barrier, which was caused by poor state of the nation, corruption and inflation.

Conclusion

In view of the findings, the study concluded that National Youth Service Corps Scheme was effective for promoting national integration in Nigeria because the attitude of the corps members at the commencement of the service year *Visa viz* their attitude towards the end of the service year improved, corps members got exposed to locations outside their geo-political zones, inter-ethnic courtship and marriages improved, common ties between corps members and other people from different ethnicity also improved.

Recommendations

Consequent upon the research findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be continuity of NYSC programme in the country as it has been serving as effective integration tool in nation building.
2. Inter-ethnic courtship and marriage and religious tolerance should continuously be encouraged among corps members.
3. NYSC should encourage Corps employers to provide accommodation for Corps members posted to them as this would reduce burden on the Corps members.

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