

THE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH CORP MEMBERS IN TEACHING IN NIGERIA: MATTERS ARISING AND WAY FORWARD

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Abstract: The need to address the challenge of inadequate teachers in schools, in an attempt to improve the standard of education in the country, has made it imperative for Government to consider the option of involving many National Youth Corp members to teaching in Nigeria. This paper however examines the matters arising from their involvement in teaching, such as the use of untrained Corp members in teaching, low quality Corp members, arising from inappropriate training in tertiary institution, low commitment of Corp members to teaching, limited time being spent by Corp members in teaching, negative attitudes of Corp members in schools, lack of continuity in teaching, growing insecurity across the country. Recruitment of Corp members with teaching qualification, adequate supervision and monitoring of Corp members posted to schools, effecting discipline of Corp members that showed dereliction of duties, among others are recommended to improve the quality of teaching in schools and for effective service delivery by the Corp members involved in teaching in schools.

Keywords: Involvement, Youth, Corp members, teaching, matters arising, way forward, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, the National Youth Service Scheme was established through Decree 24 of May, 1973. This was based on the observed need to reconstruct, reconcile, and rebuild the country after the civil war that was fought in the country between 1967 and 1970. It is worthy to note that this civil war led to severe devastation of the country, particularly, the death of many citizens and destruction of many infrastructural facilities. Aside this, as a developing country, Nigeria is plagued by many challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, inadequate skilled manpower, uneven distribution of skilled manpower, inadequate socio-economic infrastructural, housing, Water and sewage facilities, road, healthcare services, as well as effective communication system. Faced with these challenges, which were compounded by the burden of the need for reconstruction after the civil war, the government and people of Nigeria deem it fit to set for the country, fresh goals and objectives, aimed at establishing Nigeria as a united country.

Programmes under the National Youth Service Scheme

There are four cardinal programmes which all Corp members in Nigeria must pass through and adhere to strictly, including the orientation course, the primary assignment, Community Development Service, and the winding up/passing out activities. Out of these activities, the primary assignment has been a major task for a Corp member. In this case, each Corper is posted out for primary assignment, which can be in any of the Local Government Area in the State. It has however been a norm to post corper to area relevant to his/her discipline.

Objectives of the National Youth Service Scheme

In Nigeria, the National Youth Service Scheme has the following as its objectives:

- To inculcate discipline in our youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work of patriotic and loyal service to the nation in any situation they may find themselves;

- To raise the moral tone of our youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about the higher ideals of national achievements and social and cultural improvement;
- To develop in our youths, attitude of mind acquired through shared experience and suitable training which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest;
- To develop common ties among our youths and promote national unity by ensuring that
 - i. As far as possible, youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin and away from their geographical, ethnic and cultural background;
 - ii. Each group, assigned to work together, is as representative of the country as possible
 - iii. The youths are exposed to modest living of people in different parts of the country, with a view of removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first hand, the many similarities among Nigerian of all ethnic groups;
- To encourage members to seek at the end of their service, career employment all over the country thus promoting free movement of labour;
- To induce employers, partly through their experience with Corp members, to employ more readily qualified Nigerians irrespective of their states of origin; and
- To enable our youths to acquire the spirit of self reliance.

Involvement of Youth Corpers in Teaching in Nigeria: Matters arising

In Nigeria, one of the features of teaching is the fact that it is a profession for every Tom, Dick and Harry due to the dearth of teachers for the teaching of pupils/students in schools. Since the inception of National Youth Service Scheme in Nigeria in 1973 however, a lot of members had been involved in the teaching of pupils/students in schools. Even though their involvement has contributed greatly to the development of the educational system, many issues at stake in their involvement, such as the:

Use of untrained Corp members for teaching: In Nigeria, the minimum qualification for teaching is Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). It is thus expected that a teacher or teacher to be would possess this basic teaching qualification. It is unfortunate that many Corp members in schools are graduates without the basic teaching qualification, having been contracted to solve the immediate problem of shortage of teachers. It is worthy to note that many Corp members with the teaching/educational qualification prefer to observe their primary assignments in banks, companies, and other establishments, rather than in schools because of the low status of teaching in Nigeria (Achimugu, 2005).

Table 1: Distribution of Corps Member by Discipline in Nigeria: 2004-2008

Discipline	2004	2005	2006	2007	2007
Acct/Bus Studies	14, 890	15,988	20,898	22,509	28,949
Agric Engineering	1,120	1,203	1,572	1,693	2,178
Agric Science	3,387	3,637	16,548	5,120	6,585
Arts/Humanities	10,260	11,017	14,400	15,510	19,948
Education Arts	5,555	5,965	7,796	8,397	10,801
Education Special	2,242	2,408	3,147	3,389	4,360
Education Vocation	542	582	761	819	1,054

Education Science	5,054	5,427	7,094	7,640	9,826
Engineering	8,688	8,072	10,551	11,364	14,616
Envr Design	4,941	5,305	6,933	7,469	9,606
Food Science and Tech.	867	931	872	1,311	1,686
Human Medicine	361	388	363	546	703
Law	3,999	4,293	4,020	6,045	7,773
Natural/Applied Sc	8,974	9,635	9,020	13,565	17,448
Paramedical	1,988	2,134	1,998	3,005	3,864
Pharmacy	710	762	714	1,074	1,380
Sec. Studies	2,804	3,011	2,819	4,239	5,452
Social Science	5,358	5,357	5,014	7,542	9,700
Vet. Medicine	240	258	337	363	467
Others	5,158	7,192	7,444	10,125	31,350
Total	87,138	93,565	122,301	131,725	187,744

Source: National Youth Service Corp, in Social Statistics in Nigeria (2009).

As indicated in Table 1, the number of Corp members with specializations in Education (i.e. Education Arts, Education Special, Education Vocation, and Education Science), who are supposed to be recruited into teaching is low, compared to those in other fields. Many among those in the other fields are thus most likely to have observed their primary assignments in schools, i.e. as teachers. Ranging from dress code, use of voice, comportment in classrooms, use of Instructional materials, use of Chalkboard, the Corp members without the basic teaching qualification are deficient. Quite disturbing is that many among the Corp members do not know how to write lesson note, prepare lesson plan, as well as complete the basic records, such as Diaries, Scheme of Work, among others, due to lack of pedagogical skill in teaching. The non possession of the basic teaching qualification has thus been reflecting in low quality of teaching in schools (Ajayi & Shofoyeke, 2003; Ajayi & Adegbesan, 2007).

Low quality of many Corp members, arising from inappropriate training in tertiary institutions: It needs not be overstressed that the quality of a teacher plays key role in the effectiveness of teaching and ultimately in the academic performance of pupils/students in educational institutions. In Nigeria, it is not a gainsaying that many Corp members are of low quality, which could be traced to the low quality training received at their respective institutions. These days, a lot of factors such as incessant strikes, closure of institutions for several months due to students' unrest, strikes, cultism, limit the period for training of students in public tertiary institutions (Ige, 2012; Saint, Hartnet & Strassner, 2003). Apart from these, issues such as inadequate staff, infrastructural facilities, as well as negative attitudes of lecturers, combine to make the provision of quality education in tertiary institutions a 'mirage' in Nigeria (Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2003; Dabaleen, Oni & Adekola, 2000). It is unfortunate that many graduates of the universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education are of poor quality (Dabaleen, Oni & Adekola, 2000) and if care is not taken, such poor quality will continued to be transferred to the pupils/students in schools.

Limited time in teaching/lack of continuity in teaching: A major factor that can ensure effective teaching is continuity in teaching, in which case, a teacher supposes to spend few years with his/her pupils/students to be able to get acquainted with them, which can go a long way in enhancing the teaching effectiveness and productivity of such teacher. Unfortunately, in most cases of the use of NYSC members in many States in Nigeria, they leave after their discharge from the service, i.e. after the expiration of the one year duration. This situation, do leave most of the pupils/students

unattended to until substitute Corp members or teachers (s) are found. The situation is so grave in some areas, particularly the rural areas where the pupils/students have to be kept in limbo until the distribution of new set of Corp members to such schools.

Low commitment of many Corp members to teaching: In an ideal situation, a teacher needs to be commitment to the job if he/she will achieve the desired objectives. Over the years, the issue of non commitment of many teachers to teaching has been pervasive in Nigeria (Achimugu, 2005). The same story is applicable in the case of many Corp members in schools. Because of the fact that Corp members are Government properties, they believe that they have less to contribute in schools. There is the belief that because they are not earning the normal salary and allowance from government, as applicable in the case of regular teachers (except the payment of allowances by Federal Government and some privileged States), there is less to which the schools' administrators can control them. Many among them are thus perpetual absenteeists/truants in schools and in classes.

Negative attitudes/indiscipline of many Corp members in Schools: There has been growing concern over the level of indiscipline in schools/educational institutions in Nigeria (Yarosan, 2004; Nakpodia, 2010). The role of teachers in this regard cannot however be dismissed with a wave of hand (Ajayi & Shofoyeke, 2003). Apart from the teachers, many Corp members indulge in acts of indiscipline in schools. Many are absenteeists while some take delight in having immoral relationship with school girls, as well displaying poor conduct at work. Some are contracted as mercenaries during the conduct of public examinations such as the Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE), Unified Tertiary Education Matriculations Examinations (UTME). Quite disturbing is that many pupils/students do take into these acts of indiscipline because of the influence of Corp members in their schools.

Use of Corpers for National Assignments: It has been a norm in Nigeria for Corp members to be engaged by Federal and State Governments to some national and state assignments, such as the registration of Candidates for Election, conduct of Election, and Population Census. This is being done because of the confidence Government reposed on them and the limited cost that will be involved in the payment of their wages, compared to when people are recruited externally. This is being done without considering the effect of these on teaching because many among these Corp members are teachers in schools, who have to abandon their jobs for the national/state assignments which thus create gap in teaching of the pupils/students and in most cases, affect the coverage of the syllabus, particularly those that prepare for external examinations such as the Senior Secondary School Certificate and the Junior Secondary School Certificate. It is even disturbing to note that during the conduct of year 2011 Presidential Election in Nigeria, many Corp members who were drafted to serve as election officials in the Northern part of Nigeria, lost their lives, teachers inclusive. As a result of this unfortunate incidence, many Corp members, teachers inclusive, abandoned their duty posts, to request for re-posting to their respective States in the Southern part of the country where the security of their lives can be guaranteed, a situation that created vacuum in the teaching process in the schools in that part of the country. In fact, many schools in the area were closed down for several months so as to be able to allow normalcy to return before the resumption of their duties.

Abscndment of Corpers from teaching due to growing insecurity across the country: For quite some times now, there has been growing insecurity in Nigeria. In different parts of Nigeria, there have been cases of wars, demonstrations, riots, owing to religious and political issues. The issue of 'Boko Haram', which is at present threatening the existence of Nigeria as a country, is of utmost concern. Most of these cases have been leading to the death of innocent citizens, including Corp members. It is thus certain that the death of Corp members will underscore the number of available teachers for subjects but will also create vacuum in the affected schools. Aside these, there have been cases of redeployment of teachers from the affected states, which have been causing vacuum in the teaching in schools, as well as limiting the number of teachers available in those states.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

The need to improve the quality of teaching in Nigeria is imperative. Even though a lot of Corp members are engaged in teaching in Nigeria since the inception of the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC), which is having some negative implications in the educational system, the following can be adopted for maximum benefits to be derived from their involvement:

- Authority of National Youth Service Corp Scheme, in charge of Corp members' affairs should monitor and supervise the Corp members on duty strictly. At present, it has been a norm for Inspectors to visit the Corp members at their duty posts, before the completion of their assignments. What can be noticed is a situation whereby such Inspectors visit the Corp member's seldomly i.e. once or twice. Many Corp members thus take the advantage of occasional and irregular visit by their authority to abscond from work, turn to absenteists/truants at work, while some indulge in different kinds of negative behaviors which have been having negative implications on the image of the scheme in Nigeria. Without mincing words, a lot of Corp members are highly indiscipline at work. There should therefore be regular and impromptu visit to the Corp members at their posts, so as to have first hand information about them. The report of such regular visits should however be considered before the award of certificate of completion of the service by the authority. This is necessary, rather than award certificates to those whose character have been found to be questionable by their employers.

- Youth Corp members should turn over a new leaf, by being committed to work. They should imbibe positive and good virtues and serve as role models to the pupils/students. They should shun negative attitudes that are capable of lowering the image of the scheme, their dignity as well the educational system.

- Use of Corp members for national or state assignments, which have been a norm in Nigeria, needs to be curtailed because of its negative implication on teaching and the quality of education in the country. Rather than drafting Corp members to such assignments, Governments should recruit people within the society, although there has been the argument that the cost of utilizing them is low but when viewed critically, the cost of the negative implication on teaching in schools, cannot be dismissed with a waive of hand.

- Government should enforce the posting of Youth Corp members with teaching qualifications to schools, rather than to banks and other non relevant organizations because experience has shown that many Corp members wish to be posted to juicy places rather than into teaching because of their desire to garner money for their survival during the service and even after the service year, due to their lingering unemployment in the country.

- Poor quality of many Youth Corp members is evident in Nigeria, which is a direct reflection of the falling standard of education in the country, particularly the low quality education they received from their respective institutions. There is thus the need for Government to take proactive steps to ensure that there is improvement in the quality of training in the various tertiary institutions. The role of student unrest, strikes and cultism in this regard, cannot be overemphasized, which have been leading to closure of institutions and limited time for training of students. Government should take steps to control these menaces in the tertiary institutions.

- Government, through the National Youth Service Corp, should punish Corp members found to have shown dereliction of duties. Experience has even shown that it is a norm over the years for certificates of those found wanting to be withdrawn/seized. However, many Corp members have also been treated as 'sacred cows' because of what can be regarded as 'God fatherism' in Nigeria. Government thus needs to be strict in enforcing the discipline of erring Corp members, so as to serve as deterrent to others.

-. Authority of National Youth Service Scheme should reduce the time of involvement of Corp members teaching in schools in Community Development Service, as well as in other activities that have been limiting the time they spend for the teaching pupils/students in schools. Experience has shown that the Community Development Service do comes up in a particular day during the week. Apart from this, meetings of Corp members in each Local Government Area, among others, are often fixed for some days in a week. All these do limit the time being spent by Corp members in schools and classes. Authority of NYSC can thus fix the Community Development Service for evening i.e. after the closing period in schools, so that those Corp members in schools will have time to teach their pupils/students in their respective schools.

- In view of the low quality of some Corp members. Schools' administrators should screen/conduct interview for Corp members being posted to them, so as to ascertain their quality before they are assigned to classes. Those found to be of low quality should be rejected. It is also necessary for schools' administrators to appoint an experience teacher in each subject for each Corp member, so as to be supervising and monitoring him/her in the discharge of the duties, as well as ensure that quality education is provided for the pupils/students. The schools' administrators, particularly the Head Masters, Assistant Head Masters, Principals, Vice Principals, Head of Departments, should move round classes daily, so as to supervise the Corp members in classes, check their records, as well as orientate them on how to achieve effectiveness in the discharge of their duties in schools.

III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, teaching is facing many challenges, one notable among these being the issue of inadequacy and low quality teachers, which over the years has been having many serious implications on the production of quality products from the educational system. Arising from the need to stem the tide of the shortage of teachers in the educational system, the idea to inculcate the members of the National Youth Service Scheme in teaching, particularly at the primary and secondary school levels, has been ongoing. In spite of the advantages inherent in this step, many issues are at stake in their involvement, which had been discussed in this paper. In order to provide solution to these issues, improve the quality of teaching in schools, as well as the standard of education in the country, measures discussed above such as the regular supervision and monitoring of youth Corp members in schools, have been recommended. It thus behooves on Government, the National Youth Service Corp, the schools' administrators, as well as the Corp members to strive to make efforts to address these issues, to improve the state of teaching in schools in Nigeria. It is thus hopeful that if these measures are adopted and implemented, teaching will improve from the *status quo*, notwithstanding the fact that Corp members are used for this in schools.

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