



Assessing the Effectiveness of National Service Scheme: Exploring the Perceptions of Service Personnel in the Sunyani Municipality of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the perception of service personnel on the effectiveness of the national service scheme in the Sunyani Municipality, Ghana. One hundred National Service Persons out of the 1523 service persons deployed in 2013/2014 service year to the Sunyani Municipality were used for the study. A random sampling method (use of the simple lottery method) was used to select the sample. The study indicated that majority (74%) of the service persons got posted to stations of their choice but, 31% disagreed. The relevance of doing national service is dependent on the satisfaction with place of posting and opportunity to explore and exhibit one's full potential in the service as indicated by (Pearson Chi-square = 62.443, $P < 0.05$) and (Pearson Chi-square = 86.162, $P < 0.05$) respectively. Seventy-two (72%) of the service persons were given orientation before the commencement of their service and 74% stated that their allowance have been paid to date. The benefits gained from undertaking national service is dependent on how service persons rated their performance at work (Pearson Chi-square = 27.000, $P < 0.05$). Majority of the service persons were of the opinion that they were not assisted by the Municipal Director of national service to secure accommodation. Placement of service persons should be done in close consultation with the service persons, user agencies, as well as the developmental need of the nation. In this wise, a multi-stakeholder consultation is relevant because, it will ensure the satisfaction of the needs of all parties especially the service persons. A well-coordinated and widely consulted approach to national service will ensure that the needs of service persons such as transport, proper placement, provision of accommodation and transport are met to reduce the ever-reoccurring challenges that face the service scheme during each service year.

Keywords: National Service, Perception, Effectiveness

JEL Classifications: MOO, M1

1. INTRODUCTION

National service in Ghana, is an organized period to engage people to contribute to the society in which they live. In many cases, the national service concept is sponsored by public or private organizations, and organized and valued by society, with no or minimal monetary compensation to the participant and hence calls for patriotic citizens (Sherraden, 2001). In other cases, national service is seen as a National Youth Service programs that empowers young people to play an active role in national development. In the process, participants gain the experience, knowledge, and values necessary for employment and active citizenship.

National service has helped in promoting education to many communities, mobilized critical staff such as teachers to support education, both at rural and urban settings. In Ghana, the national service scheme (NSS) has helped the nation to save nearly 60% billion cedis that would have gone into cash remuneration for national service personnel (Baah-Wiredu, 2003). Again, Ghana National Service Scheme (GNSS) has been very proactive in helping the government achieve the millennium development goals such as improving access to education and maternal health.

However, the scheme has also been bedeviled with many challenges, of which some are institutional in nature. Perceptions on national service as well, have been diverse. Over the years,

many people from diverse backgrounds have questioned the effectiveness of the NSS, even in the phase of some achievements chalked by the scheme, including augmentation of the nation's manpower needs (Mohammed, 2010). The concerns raised have included the inability to implement all aspects of the scheme's programme, dissatisfaction by service personnel about service placements. Dissatisfaction have centered on the inability of many agencies to meet the qualification of persons, delays in payment of allowances, as well as complaints from user agencies- placement of service persons whose services they do not need, and unacceptable levels of person absenteeism. These including others, the agencies claim reduce productivity and perpetuate redundancy in institutions that source the services of service persons.

The issues relating to effectiveness of the service among others, have raised a lot of doubts about the NSS as a tool for national development. Perceptions of people are critical tools for assessing the effectiveness of many policies, including that of NSS. Quick and Nelson (1997) see social perception as the process of interpreting information about another person. What this definition has clearly highlighted is that the opinions an individual forms about another person depends on the amount of information available to them and the extent to which they are able to correctly interpret the information they have acquired.

Rao and Narayana (1998) share the view of Quick and Nelson (1997) and emphasize that perception ranks among the cognitive factors of human behavior or psychological mechanism that enable people to understand their environment. In their own words, perception is the process whereby people select, organize, and interpret sensory stimulations into meaningful information about their work environment. The literature further argues that perception is the single most important determinant of human behavior, stating that "there can be no behavior without perception. Rao and Narayana (1998) draw attention to the fact that since there is no specific strategies for understanding the perception of others; everyone appears to be left with his own inventiveness, innovative ability, sensitiveness and introspective skills to deal with perception.

Michener et al. (2004) asserts that social perception is about constructing an understanding of the social world from the data obtained from the senses. "Senses" in this context deals with the means of data collection where authors place emphasis on its perception component, which is addressed by Quick and Nelson (1997). Perception therefore refers to the process by which we form impressions of other people's traits and personalities.

The need to enhance the effectiveness of the NSS to better meet the ever-growing manpower needs of our economy is the prime motivation for this study. This study seeks to determine the perception of service persons with respect to the effectiveness of the GNSS in the Sunyani Municipality.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Area

The research is set in the context of the Sunyani Municipality, the regional capital of the Brong Ahafo Region. It is 1 of the

22 administrative districts in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. It lies between Latitudes 7° 20'N and 7° 05'N, and Longitudes 2° 30'W and 2° 10'W. The municipality shares boundaries with Sunyani West District to the north, Dormaa East District to the west, Asutifi District to the south, and Tano North District to the east. Sub-municipals under the Sunyani Municipality are namely; Sunyani, Chiraa, Nsoatre, Odumase, Antwikrom, Abesim and Fiapre. The municipality has a total land area of 829.3 km² (320.1 square miles).

2.2. Population Size, Growth Rate and Density

In 2000 the population of Sunyani Municipality was 101,145. Currently, with a growth rate of 3.8%, the estimated population is 147,301 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012).

The population density of the municipality is 122 persons/km² (MPCU Computation, 2010). In comparing this to the population density of the nation 76/km², the municipality is densely populated with a high demand for land.

The male female ratio in the municipality shows a ratio of 50.4 females to 49.6 males; the sex ratio of the municipality is 1 male: 1.01 females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012).

2.3. Study Design

The research employed the descriptive observational study with a focus on the cross-sectional descriptive study-the approach is useful in assessing and describing how service persons perceive the effectiveness of the GNSS.

2.4. Study Population

In this study, the target population was the National Service Personnel in the Sunyani Municipality. The service persons deployed each year within the Municipality is about 1523.

2.5. Sample Size

A sample size of 100 service persons was employed for this study.

2.6. Sampling Technique

The simple random (lottery approach) sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study. Powell (1997), describes simple random sampling as a probability sampling effective for assessing perceptions of people.

2.7. Data Collection Instrument

A questionnaire was designed to capture data from National Service Persons on the perception of the GNSS in the Sunyani Municipality.

The questionnaire instruments covered both open and closed ended questions that were constituted into four sections. Section A was composed of socio-demographic variables, Section B was of variables for the perception and effectiveness about the NSS, Section C dealt with variables assessing the challenges faced by service persons, and Section D on variables that determine the strategies to improve the activities of the NSS.

2.8. Method of Data Analysis

Data entry and analysis was completed with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20.0). In this study,

the statistical significance, dependence and association level was chosen to be 5% (i.e., $P \leq 0.05$). This means that, results that showed a $P \leq 0.05$ was considered to be statistically significant while otherwise was considered not to be statistically significant.

Chi-square test of independence was used in testing two tailed hypotheses such as the perception of the NSS, and respondent's socio-demographic characteristics to determine whether there is an association between them.

Also, quantitative data was used to generate simple descriptive information by the use of proportions and frequencies useful in evaluating and making comparisons between the different variables of the study.

3. ANALYSIS OF DATA

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of Service Persons

Out of a 100 respondents the following socio-demographic characteristics were obtained. Majority (65%) of respondents were males as depicted in Table 1. A larger percentage (38%) of respondents were between the ages of 26-30 years, 29% for 20-25 years, 31-35 years represented 22%, and the least being 11% for 35-40 years group.

Under educational attainment, 41% were Higher National Diploma holders, 6% for 2nd degree holders and the majority (53%) representing people with Bachelor degrees. In all, the majority (59%) of respondents were deployed to Ghana Education Service, 33% to the Ministries, Department and Agencies, and the least (8%) deployed to Private Agencies.

3.2. Perception of Service Persons on the Effectiveness of the NSS

Majority (74%) of respondents were posted to the region of their choice but, a few (26%) did not have secure their choice of region to undertake service. In all, 43% were somewhat satisfied with where they were posted but, 31% showed dissatisfaction, and a further 26% were very satisfied the service posting. Out of a total of 100%, 43% of the respondents commended that the GNSS had the service persons interest at heart while 57% disagreed to this assertion.

Table 2 further shows that, 15% strongly agreed that NSS gives them the opportunity to reach their full potential while serving the nation, 32% agreed to this assertion, 18% strongly disagreed and 35% of the service persons disagreed to this.

A Chi-square test was conducted with these hypotheses, H_0 (Null Hypothesis): Relevance of doing national service is independent of the satisfaction with place of posting and reaching of full potential by service persons (Table 3).

Research hypothesis (H_R) being: Relevance of doing national service is dependent on the Satisfaction with place of posting and reaching of full potential by service persons. The result indicated a very strong evidence of dependence between these two based

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of service persons

Item	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Female	35 (35.0)
	Male	65 (65.0)
	Total	100 (100.0)
Age	20-25	29 (29.0)
	26-30	38 (38.0)
	31-35	22 (22.0)
	36-40	11 (11.0)
	Total	100 (100.0)
Level of education	1 st degree	53 (53.0)
	2 nd degree	6 (6.0)
	Higher national diploma	41 (41.0)
Sector deployment of personnel	Total	100 (100.0)
	Ghana education service	59 (59.0)
	MDAs	32 (32.0)
	Private agency	9 (9.0)
	Total	100 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 2013. MDA: Ministries/departments/agencies

Table 2: Posting of personnel to a region of choice

Perception	Response	Frequency (%)
Posting to region of choice	Yes	74 (74.0)
	No	26 (26.0)
Satisfaction with place of posting	Very satisfied	26 (26.0)
	Somewhat satisfied	43 (43.0)
	Dissatisfied	31 (31.0)
Personnel interest at heart	Yes	43 (43.0)
	No	57 (57.0)
NSS providing opportunity to reach full potential	Strongly agree	15 (15.0)
	Agree	32 (32.0)
	Disagree	35 (35.0)
	Strongly disagree	18 (18.0)

Source: Field Survey, 2013. NSS: National service scheme

on (Chi-square = 62.443, $P < 0.05$) and (Chi-square = 86.162, $P < 0.05$).

3.3. Effectiveness of the National Service

For personnel to have a fair idea about what they would do at their place of postings, it is important they are oriented on the objectives and activities of the scheme as well as their responsibilities at their place of work.

Out of a 100 respondents, 72% agreed to receiving some form of orientation before starting the national service but, 28% answered negative to receiving any form of orientation (Table 4). On the issue of rating the performance at work of the service persons, 13% representing the least rated their performance as fair, 51% as good, and 36% as excellent.

A Chi-square test was conducted with the H_0 being: The benefits gained from doing service are independent of how service persons rated their performance at work and the H_R being: The benefits gained from doing service are dependent on how service persons rated their performance at work (Table 5).

The results indicated (Table 5) a strong evidence of relationship or dependency between the benefits gained from doing service and how service persons rated their performance at work based on (Chi-square = 27.000, $P < 0.05$).

Table 3: Chi-square computations between relevance of doing national service and satisfaction with place of posting and reaching of full potential

Variable	Categories	Relevance of doing national service				Total	Chi-square	P value
		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree			
Satisfaction with place of posting	Very satisfied	20	6	0	0	26	62.443	0.000
	Somewhat satisfied	7	0	17	19	43		
	Dissatisfied	14	10	0	7	31		
	Total	41	16	17	26	100		
Reaching of full potential	Strongly agree	1	0	11	3	15	86.162	0.000
	Agree	29	2	0	1	32		
	Disagree	6	10	6	13	35		
	Strongly disagree	5	4	0	9	18		
	Total	41	16	17	26	100		

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 4: Perception on effectiveness of the national service scheme

Perception	Response	Frequency (%)
Orientation to service persons	Yes	72 (72.0)
	No	28 (28.0)
Rating of performance at work	Fair	13 (13)
	Good	51 (51)
	Excellent	36 (36)

Source: Field Survey, 2013

3.4. Challenges that Service Persons Face in Discharging the National Service

Table 6 provides the results on the perception of respondents on the challenges faced by service person in the discharge of their duties.

With respect to the payment of allowance, 74% said they have outstanding allowance but, 26% of respondents agreed that some of their allowances were outstanding. Again, the question sought to illicit from respondents whether their qualification met the job description they are assigned and posted to undertake. The results showed that, majority (62%) of the respondents did not have a job placement matching their qualifications. Meanwhile 38% affirmed that their qualification did match their job description (Table 6).

Table 7 shows that 17% of the respondents agreed that they were assisted by the Municipal Director of National Service in securing accommodation while 83% insisted that no support was offered in securing accommodation while undertaking the national service. With respect to encountering problems in discharging duties, 59% stated that they encounter problems in the discharge of their duties at work but, 49% did not agree to facing challenges during their national service.

With regards to the rating of these problems encountered as indicated in Table 8, 5% rated these problems as of very low effect on the discharge of their duties, 13% rated it as low, 26% said it was average, 14% rated it as high and a percentage rated it as very high. Again, 41% represent those who asserted that they don't encounter any problems as demonstrated in Table 7.

Chi-square computation between rating of condition of service and the matching of qualification with job at posting was conducted and shown in Table 9.

The hypotheses for the Chi-square test conducted were H_0 : The rating of conditions of service has no relationship to how service persons qualifications match their job at posting and the H_R being: The rating of conditions of service has a relationship to how service person's qualifications math their job at posting. The result indicated a strong evidence of relationship between the two based on (Chi-square = 35.979, $P < 0.05$).

Again, respondents were asked question on the perceived challenges facing the GNSS. The results are shown in Figure 1.

The results in Figure 1 indicated that, insufficient monitoring and supervision was a problem facing the sheme contributes to 35% of the challenges facing GNSS, 25% for lack of communication to the public about the scheme's importance and effectiveness, and 40% representing lack of evaluation of the scheme's effectiveness as the problems facing the GNSS.

3.5. Strategies to Improve the Activities of the NSS

As a way to proffer remedies to the challenges stifling the GNSS, respondents were made to offer their perceptions on how to address such challenges (Figure 1).

Table 8 shows that, 86% of the respondents affirmed that monitoring can improve the effectiveness of the NSS while 14% did not agree to the fact that monitoring can in effect, improve the effectiveness of the GNSS.

On the frequency of monitoring for effectiveness of GNSS, Table 8 showed that 32% of the respondents stated that monitoring should be conducted twice every week, 23% for once every month, 13% for twice every month, 12% for thrice every month and 6% for once every 2 months. However, 14% of respondents were of the view that monitoring is not needed to improve the effectiveness of the GNSS.

Respondents also provided their views on strategies to improve the effectiveness of the GNSS. It came out that, 19% support the use of monitoring and supervision as a strategy to improve the schemes activity, 25% the use of motivation to support service persons who accept postings to deep villages, 16% for the provision of transport for monitoring and supervision, 21% for the evaluation of the schemes effectiveness, and 19% also suggesting the use

Table 5: Chi-square computation between benefit gained from doing service and rating of performance at work

Variable	Category	Benefit gained from doing service			Total	Chi-square	P value
		Gained practical skills and experience	Explored other cultures and society	Assurance of being maintained after service			
Rating of performance at work	Fair	13	0	0	13	27.000	0.001
	Good	34	16	1	51		
	Excellent	18	6	12	36		
	Total	65	22	13	100		

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 6: Perception on challenges faced by service persons

Perception	Response	Frequency (%)
Payment of allowances to date	Yes	26 (26.0)
	No	74 (74.0)
Matching of qualification with job description	Yes	38 (38)
	No	62 (62)

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 7: Availability of accommodation and whether service persons face challenges encountered at the work place

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Assistance by employer in securing accommodation	Yes	17 (17.0)
	No	83 (83.0)
Encountering of problems in discharging duties	Yes	59 (59.0)
	No	41 (41.0)
Rating of problems at work	Very high	1.0 (1.0)
	High	14.0 (14.0)
	Average	26.0 (26.0)
	Low	13.0 (13.0)
	Very low	5.0 (5.0)
	Non applicable	41.0 (41.0)

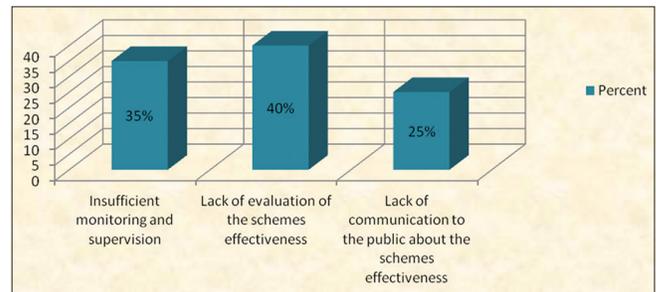
Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 8: Monitoring of job can improve effectiveness of NSS

Variable	Response	Frequency (%)
Monitoring of job can improve effectiveness of NSS	Yes	82 (82.0)
	No	18 (18.0)
	Total	100 (100.0)
Frequency of monitoring	Once every month	23.0 (23.0)
	Twice every month	32.0 (32.0)
	Thrice every month	12.0 (12.0)
	Once every 2 months	19.0 (19.0)
	Not applicable	14.0 (14.0)
Strategies to improve the activities of the GNSS	Monitoring and supervision	19 (19)
	Motivation for personnel's who accept postings to deep village	25 (25)
	Providing transport for monitoring and supervision	16 (16)
	Evaluation of the Schemes effectiveness	21 (21)
	Effective communication to agencies, personnel's and the public	19 (19)

Source: Field Survey, 2013. NSS: National service scheme, GNSS: Ghana National Service Scheme

Figure 1: Perceived problems facing the Ghana National Service Scheme



Source: Field Survey, 2013

of effective communication to agencies, service persons and the public as a strategy to improve the activities of the scheme (Table 8).

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1. Perception of Service Persons on the Scheme

Inferring from Okeowo (2009) it can be argued that, there is always the need to ascertain the rating of the current situations by the public to be able to determine an appropriate step and intervention by government or management. Ascertaining public attitude may therefore be undertaken through the use of a survey or interview. In this study, the views of service persons on the perception of the NSS were sought through a survey.

In the study, it was proved that, majority of people that undertake national service in Ghana are posted to places of their choice. This is supported by the fact that, the relevance of undertaking national service is significantly related to satisfaction with place of posting and the ability to reach the full potential of the service person. It is quite clear that majority of service persons in the Sunyani Municipality are satisfied with their place of posting and also, are able to attain their full potential during the national service period. The study is relevant and provides key knowledge in work satisfaction as supported by Okeowo (2009). The need to post service persons to places of their choice is also supported by Eberly (2002) whose study added that most parents do not want their wards to undertake national service in places farther away from their places of residence.

The result of the study is complemented by Eberly (2002) that assessed the perception of students and their parents/guardian on the NSS because, in many cases, parents and their wards that

Table 9: Chi-square computation between rating of conditions of service and the matching of qualification with job at posting

Variable	Category	Rating of conditions of service				Total	Chi-square	P value
		Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent			
Matching of qualification with job at posting	Yes	0	9	29	0	38	35.979	0.000
	No	21	19	13	9	62		
	Total	21	28	42	9	100		

Source: Field Survey, 2013

undertake national service are unable to join the labor market. As a result, they are unable to pay back their investments by assisting the family or at least relieve the family. Eberly (2002) assertion was confirmed in the study as 52% of service persons argued that the service scheme fails to provide the needed opportunity for persons to reach their full potentials.

Sherraden (2001) concludes that the participants in national service have special intrinsic expectations during the service period and these include acquisition of new skills and experience, which enhances employability, self-confidence building and moral satisfaction. This assertion was also confirmed by this study as majority of the respondents agreed that NSS is relevant in helping persons to acquire the needed skills and competences for future engagement in life. But, the relevance is dependent on the satisfaction of service persons with the place of posting, and opportunities offered at the placement to help them reach their full potential (Pearson Chi-square = 62.443, $P < 0.05$) and (Pearson Chi-square = 86.162, $P < 0.05$) respectively.

4.2. Effectiveness of the National Service

According to Richard (2009), assessing organizational effectiveness is defined and measured by appropriate outcomes as a key element for understanding effectiveness within an organization. More so, assessing organizational effectiveness is linked to the strategies and initiatives that align, promote and encourage the improvement of a department to meet the mission of the organization, and also to fully maximize the capacity of the workers to make positive and lasting contributions to the organization. The study provided some important contributions to knowledge by showing that the effectiveness of the GNSS is influenced by the provision of orientation for service persons for easy entry and adjustment to the community, and how quickly the National Service Secretariat facilitates the payment of allowances due service personnel (Sunyani Municipality Annual Report 2009). It is therefore notable to state that the majority of service persons in the Sunyani Municipality stated that the NSS is effective since majority of them are provided with some forms of orientation before the service period and also, able to pay their allowances on time.

4.3. Challenges Encountered by Service Persons of the NSS

Majority of service persons face challenges such as difficulty in securing accommodation. Other challenges faced by service persons include the inability to match qualification with job description, lack of monitoring and supervision, inadequate logistics, lack of motivational packages for Service Personnel's, lack of evaluation of the scheme's effectiveness, and lack of communication to the public about the scheme's importance and

effectiveness: Rating of conditions of service has a relationship to how service person's qualifications match their job at posting (Pearson Chi-square = 35.979, $P < 0.05$). The results is supported by Seyi (2009) which asserts that, although invaluable gains can be reaped from the service scheme, members face trying periods due to factors which include rejection, lack of accommodation and potable water, as well as cultural intolerance. Mohammed (2010) also affirms the results of the study by adding that lack of accommodation, frequent absenteeism of NSP to work, meager allowance, inadequate logistics and lack of motivational packages for service personnel posted to country side are among the many challenges faced by service persons in the discharge of their duties. According to Gambilla (2003), lack of means of transport for effective and efficient monitoring and follow-ups to see if personnel are at post is a big problem to the scheme.

4.4. Strategies to Improve the Activities of the NSS

In meeting the challenges of development in society, Edema (2007) argues for the need to determine what to do, how to do it, who are those concerned with the doings, where to do it, when to do it and why especially, should it be done. In can be confirmed from this study that, the majority of service persons agree that monitoring of service persons is an important strategy for improving the activities of the NSS. In effect, monitoring should be once every month, twice a month, or once in 2 months. Motivational packages such as the provision of transport for monitoring and supervision, regular interaction with user agencies, provision of reports on the activities of service persons, effective communication between agencies and NSS officials, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the service scheme should be applied to motivate service persons who accept postings to deprived communities.

5. CONCLUSION

Although, the GNSS seeks to provide service to all sectors of the economy and support growth and development in Ghana, it is important that the process is also carried out with the objective of meeting the needs and aspirations of the service persons. Placement of service persons should be done in close consultation with the service persons, user agencies, as well as the developmental needs of the nation. In this respect a multi-stakeholder consultation is relevant because, it will ensure the satisfaction of the needs of all parties including, the service persons.

A well-coordinated and widely consulted form of national service will ensure that the needs of service persons such as transport, proper placement, provision of accommodation and transport are met to reduce the ever-reoccurring challenges that face the service scheme during each service year.

Some challenges of the service scheme such as dissatisfaction in posting, difficulty in accessing proper accommodation, adjusting to new culture are eminent but, many of these challenges can be addressed with a concerted effort that seeks to provide leverage; such as supervision, orientation of service persons, providing constant touch with service persons, and liaising with local institutions that see to the welfare of service persons.

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